

How to negotiate history democratically? The example of DOMiD, Cologne

A case study by Leonie Meyer

1. Question of research

The main questions of my research on *DOMiD e.V. – Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany* in Cologne is: To what extent does an archive like DOMiD contribute to the idea of a collective memory of the German migration society since the 1950's? What is the significance of a collection like the DOMiD Archive for the idea of a shared cultural heritage? And what function do these objects and their stories have in a museum of their own - politically as well? My research will focus on the archive and the idea that people with similar experiences create a culture of remembrance and create a kind of common narrative through the personal objects.

2. DOMiD in Cologne

DOMiD is a Documentation Centre and Museum on Migration in Cologne, Germany. It was founded in 1990 as an association of former guest workers and is, today, an archive that collaborates with various German cultural and educational institutions, such as cultural offices, museums, universities and schools. A goal of DOMiD is it to affect the collective memory and to integrate the perspective of migrants into the major discourse on culture and history in Germany – a perspective that is still missing in many collections and exhibitions in museums on cultural history or history. The archive of DOMiD is collecting documents and objects of migrants in Germany in order to preserve the heritage of so called guest workers; most of the objects are individual memorabilia. By offering this heritage for research and education, the archive is committed to create a shared culture of memory.

Besides that, the association has planned its own museum since 2003. This idea was approved by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia in 2019 in the context of space conversions. The museum is to be opened in 2023, as a "house of the immigration society", and will show a permanent exhibition.

3. Research and Methodology

In my research, I am interested in the motivation of migrants to share their heritage. Why do people with migration experiences want to share their heritage in the country they decide to live? To what

extent is it possible to share this kind of heritage? The idea of a shared heritage can also include conflicts: Who has the of sovereignty of interpretation of the exhibits, who creates their narratives?

Against this background, I will divide my main research into the following individual aspects:

- How do people with migration experience create their cultural memory?
- How is the understanding of a concept of culture that is not based on ethnic characteristics, but on the common feature of immigration created by those who give their objects of memory to an archive like DOMiD is?
- What function has an archive for this understanding of collective, cultural memory? Especially in view of the fact that the museum is equipped by people with migration experience and should contribute to create a new understanding of migration – and thus shared memories, shared narratives and, in the end a shared heritage?

DOMiD offers various information about the archive's history, the aim of the museum and its exhibitions. As a basis and in order to put the museum's work into context, this literature will be used. Besides my document analysis, I will interview an expert, Beate Rieple, the archive director.

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