

arts and humanities

Andreas Hofer as a motto for memory in Tyrol

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Abstract

Tyrol is a region where memory is particularly celebrated. Many of the celebrations have undoubtedly to do with its beloved folk hero, Andreas Hofer, who is the inspiration and motto for political, historical and social manifestations. One cannot detach the remembrance of the hero from the Tyrolean desire for independence from Italy, for example. The core issues of Tyrol, specially the longing for independence, use the figure that the majority of the people respect and, conversely, the exercise of memory takes place around his life, legacy and legend. Our aim is to depict some of these manifestations and to show how they contribute to the union of a region, to the revival of memory and to the affirmation of identity.

Memory seems to be an individual phenomenon, something relatively intimate, related to the person itself. However, in the 1920's and 1930's, Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1939) had already claimed that memory must also, or above all, be understood as a collective and social phenomenon, i.e., as a collectively constructed phenomenon, subject to fluctuations, transformations and constant changes. Once one emphasizes this fluctuating and mutable characteristic of memory, one should remember that in the majority of memories there are relatively changeless hallmarks. It is as if both in an individual life story and in collectively constructed memories there are irreducible elements in which the process of solidification of memory takes place. Michael Pollack (1992) claims there are individual and collective elements of memory. The former are the ones which have been individually lived, the latter are the events lived by the group or collectivity which a person belongs to. In this case, although the person or the group did not directly participate it is often acknowledged that the event gains such relevance in the imaginary that is almost impossible to identify if the individual or the collectivity have taken part in them or not. One may go even further and consider that events that do not situate themselves in a person's or in a group's time and space may join in the memory-making process. By means of political or historical socialization there may occur a phenomenon of projection or of identification with a determined past that is so powerful that one can talk about inherited memory. There are regional events that either traumatized or marked a region or a group so that their memory may be transmitted for centuries with a high degree of identification. That is the case of the figure of the freedom fighter Andreas Hofer, an example of this cult of the collective memory in the Tyrolean region. The regional anthem - *Das Andreas Hofer Lied* (The Andreas Hofer Song) tells the story of the hero and is commonly sung. Several times a year there are Hofer celebrations in the form of tributes, processions, religious services and street parades. Museums are being frequently restored, conferences regularly take place, workshops for children and adults are organized around the figure of the hero, all contributing for what Hans Heinss in 'Grote and Siller' (2011) calls *Hochgefühl von Gemeinschaft* - a strong feeling of community and communion. Candau (2001) claims that "through retrospection, man learns how to endure temporality: he gathers the remnants of what he used to be to construct a new image of who he is which can help him face his life in the present". Furthermore, and in the words of Jan Assmann (1995), "what remains is only that which society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference". Tyroleans have their culture (customs, rituals, eating habits, language, creeds and myths) in a treasure trunk that resists temporality. They open it up to signify their legacy, imprinted in memory and in identity, once these two concepts, mingle into one another, in a collective memory manifestation. The continuity and repetition of commemorative events, for example, does not mean that these traditions are untouchable; on the contrary, it means that these may go through processes of innovation with a basis on the original traditions, which look for authenticity in the roots of the past. The trend to refer to Hofer in modern art, in all sorts of advertising and memorabilia is a clear evidence of that. It is as if Tyroleans are constantly making an artistic collage of past and present, of lived culture, that prevents forgetfulness and fosters in every individual the role of witness in the history-making process.

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