

## Step 2 Part 2: “Difficult History” as a global and local phenomenon

### Introduction

This lesson serves as a link between the history of the conflict and the research students do on their own.

### Lesson Objective

- Students learn about several examples of “difficult history” and discover that it is not something unique to Bosnia but a global phenomenon which primarily generates conflicts on a local level.

### Preparation and materials

- Connects with the first and second lesson -> needed as preparation
- Screenshots from the short video clip “Bosnia/Difficult history”
- Prepare texts (see Learning Materials) on this lesson for group work. As a teacher, feel free to choose other examples of “difficult histories” you know about and that match the interests and needs of your students.

### Planning Grid

- 1) Introduction:
  - a) Projection of 1 or 2 screenshots from the initial video clip.
  - b) Students are asked to briefly explain what is meant by “difficult history”  
(*review activity about Bosnia*)
- 2) Students in groups of 4 or 5 choose one topic from the list and read the respective text from the learning materials.
  - a) In their group they answer the following questions:
    - i) What part of history was “silenced” because they it was difficult to talk about?
    - ii) By whom? And why?
    - iii) Who made the story public? Why?
    - iv) What were the consequences of the public discussion?
  - b) Students mix groups. In each new group there is one (expert) student for a different text/topic. They present and compare the results of the first group activity by trying to answer the following questions:
    - i) Why did people try to silence history?
    - ii) State if these initiatives were successful. Why or why not?

3) Conclusion:

- a) Are there difficult histories/events in our own community and how can we discover them? (introduction to local research)

4) Homework:

- a) Tell students to:
  - i) Look for stories of “difficult history” in your country or even known cases in your town, region or state.
  - ii) Ask your parents, teachers and/or local journalists if there is any initiative in your school town or in the region to commemorate a historical event that is not yet officially recognized? Look for recent demonstrations, flyers, posters, graffiti in the streets, etc.”

**Learning Materials**

List of possible topics:

1. Madres of the Plaza de Mayo (Argentina). Information sources
2. Secret protocols brought to light by singing: Baltic way
3. Holodomor: Memories of Ukraine's silent massacre (Ukraine/Russia)
4. Torture during the Algerian War of Independence (France / Algeria)
5. A forgotten story of Dutch decolonization and Indonesian brutality (Netherlands/Indonesia)
6. The history of the EL-DE-House (Cologne, Germany)

## 1) Madres of the Plaza de Mayo (Argentina)

Forty years later, Argentina's bravest mothers keep marching.

[...] Forty years ago, 14 women gathered in a Buenos Aires square known as Plaza de Mayo. They were looking for their children, who had disappeared at the hands of the military dictatorship. They were scared, but their desire to find their loved ones was stronger than their fear. They spontaneously decided to join forces in order to force the military junta to give them some answers.

None of them could have imagined at the time that they were planting the seeds of a movement that would never be eradicated from the square, and which would grow to be known the world over.

These days, the capital of Argentina is organizing music festivals, photography exhibitions, symposiums and documentary screenings as a tribute to the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the brave souls who became a symbol of resistance against the horrors of the regime.

At first, they would sit on the benches and talk, using their knitting as a cover to throw off the uniformed guards who stared at them suspiciously. Any gathering of three or more people was forbidden under the state of siege, and at one point a police officer told them to keep moving. The women got up and began circling the monument to Belgrano and then the Pirámide de Mayo, across from the government palace known as Casa Rosada. "When he told us to keep moving, he triggered an endless dance," says Nora Cortiñas, whose son Carlos Gustavo Cortiñas was kidnapped, never to be seen again, 15 days before the creation of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.

Just like him, men and women who were members of guerrilla groups, political organisations and unions were being dragged out of their homes and plucked from the streets and taken to clandestine detention centers. Because no charges were ever brought against them, nor their location disclosed, the people who were "sucked up" in this way became *los desaparecidos*, or the disappeared.

The list of crimes perpetrated by the state included kidnappings, torture, baby theft from women who gave birth while in prison, and forced disappearances that took many forms, including the "death flights" in which detainees were drugged and weighed down before being thrown off aircraft and into the River Plate.

"At first we had high hopes of finding them alive," explains Hebe de Bonafini, president of Madres de Plaza de Mayo. "We were certain that we would find them, and that is why we put all our energy and love into that effort."

“We couldn’t imagine that it was going to be so brutal,” adds Mirta Baravalle, whose daughter Ana María was kidnapped in 1976, when she was five months pregnant. The state repression had begun in 1974, but it surged after the military coup of March 24, 1976. In just a few months, the *desaparecidos* could be counted by the thousands. At police precincts and prisons, women ran into other women looking just as downcast as themselves, and asked: “You too?”

“There were 14 mothers at first; when I joined we were already 20, and the number grew by the week,” recalls Cortiñas. A few months later they began wearing white headscarves – originally these were their children’s cloth nappies – and the head covering quickly became the symbol of their struggle.

The regime wrote them off as “those crazy women,” but they didn’t care. Week after week, they marched around the central monument on Plaza de Mayo to demand that their children be returned to them alive and given a proper trial if it turned out that they had committed any crimes. The movement did not peter out even when three of its members were kidnapped in late 1977, including founder Azucena Villaflor. They were betrayed by a former navy captain, Alfredo Astiz, who infiltrated the group after passing himself off as the brother of a missing man. [...]

The association celebrated Argentina’s return to democracy in 1983 and the trial of junta members who were sentenced to life in prison. But they kept on fighting against the impunity that was encoded into laws by the Raúl Alfonsín administration (1983-1989) and the government pardons awarded by Carlos Menem (1989-1999) to the regime leaders. Their demands for justice and for the preservation of the memory of the 30,000 people who disappeared under the military regime were bolstered by the derogation of amnesty laws under the Kirchners. Hundreds of trials have since been reopened, turning Argentina into a global role model.

Now mostly octogenarians, the Mothers keep going to the square every Thursday. They have been divided since 1986, when a splinter group broke off and founded Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Línea Fundadora due to disagreements over state compensation and the identification of remains. But there are still more things uniting them than dividing them. “30,000 disappeared, present!” they all chant out from both sides of the square, as though challenging the new administration of President Mauricio Macri for daring to question that figure.

“Mothers of the square, the people embrace you,” they often hear from passersby. In the meantime, the Madres cling to the belief that they will one day find out what happened to all the missing victims of the repression and to the hope that new generations will carry on their fight.

Taken from [https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/05/01/inenglish/1493637018\\_186924.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/05/01/inenglish/1493637018_186924.html)  
[05/15/2019]

## 2 Secret protocols brought to light by singing: Baltic way

The Baltic Way was a peaceful political demonstration that occurred in August 1989 in the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The protest was designed to draw attention to the desire for independence from the Soviet Union of each of the Baltic countries, an independence that was lost in 1940. More than 2 million people stood holding hands and sang songs along the Baltic way, a road connecting the three Baltic capitals Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius.

What happened?

Between the two world wars the Baltic countries were independent states. In 1939 the German and Soviet foreign ministers von Ribbentrop and Molotov concluded a treaty of non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The pact included secret protocols dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence between themselves. This resulted in the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States in 1940.



source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ribbentrop-Molotov\\_Pact.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ribbentrop-Molotov_Pact.jpg)

After the Second World War, the Soviet Union had always denied the existence of the secret protocols. From 1985 on Mikhail Gorbatsjov initiated his policies of glasnost and perestroika ("reconstruction" and "openness" or transparency).



A commission of investigation was installed. In 1989 the commission concluded that the protocol had existed. Both successor-states of the Treaty, Germany and the Soviet Union declared the protocols to be invalid from the moment they were signed.

Within a year of the protests on the Baltic way the three states regained their independence in 1991.

In 2009, the European parliament proclaimed 23 August to be the anniversary of the Molotov-von Ribbentrop Pact, as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism.



The Singing Revolution

(source: <https://www.ststworld.com/the-baltic-way-when-two-million-people-formed-a-human-chain-demanding-freedom/>)

### 3) Holodomor: Memories of Ukraine's silent massacre

Nina Karpenko, an energetic 87-year-old, demonstrates what it took to survive Ukraine's Stalin-era famine, known as the Holodomor, or "death by hunger". Some cheap cornmeal, wheat chaff, dried nettle leaves and other weeds - this was the essence of life during the horrific winter and early spring of 1932-33 in Ukraine. [...] "There was a deathly silence," she says. "Because people weren't even conscious. They didn't want to speak or to look at anything." [...]

Ukrainians mark a Holodomor Remembrance Day every year on the fourth Saturday of November. Some historians, like Yale University's Timothy Snyder, who has done extensive research in Ukraine, place the number of deaths at roughly 3.3 million. Others say the number was much higher. Whatever the actual figure, it is a trauma that has left a deep and lasting wound among this nation of 45 million. Entire villages were wiped out, and in some regions the death rate reached one-third. The Ukrainian countryside, home of the "black earth", some of the most fertile land in the world, was reduced to a silent wasteland. Cities and roads were littered with the corpses of those who left their villages in search of food, but perished along the way. There were widespread reports of cannibalism.

But the pain of the Holodomor comes not only from the unfathomable number of deaths. Many people believe the causes were man-made and intentional. A genocide. They say that Joseph Stalin wanted to starve into submission the rebellious Ukrainian peasantry and force them into collective farms. The Kremlin requisitioned more grain than farmers could provide. When they resisted, brigades of Communist Party activists swept through the villages and took everything that was edible. "The brigades took all the wheat, barley - everything - so we had nothing left," says Ms Karpenko. "Even beans that people had set aside just in case. "The brigades crawled everywhere and took everything. People had nothing left to do but die."

As the hunger mounted, Soviet authorities took extra measures, such as closing off Ukraine's borders, so that peasants could not travel abroad and obtain food. This amounted to a death sentence, experts say. "The government did everything it could to prevent peasants from entering other regions and looking for bread," says Oleksandra Monetova, from Kiev's Holodomor Memorial Museum. "The officials' intentions were clear. To me it's a genocide. I have no doubt."

But for others, the question is still open. Russia in particular objects to the genocide label, calling it a "nationalistic interpretation" of the famine. Kremlin officials insist that, while the Holodomor was a tragedy, it was not intentional, and other regions in the Soviet Union suffered at that time.

Kiev and Moscow have clashed over the issue in the past. [...] Mr Baley, an American composer who was born in Ukraine, supports efforts to have the Holodomor recognised internationally as genocide. "You have to admit that it was done, if you want to have any kind of human progress," he says, "you can't wrap it up and say that it wasn't."

Excerpts taken from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25058256> [05/15/2019]



#### **4) Torture during the Algerian War of Independence**

During the 1954-62 war, which claimed 1.5 million Algerian lives, French forces brutally cracked down on independence fighters in the then colony, which was ruled by Paris for 130 years.

The French state has never previously admitted that its military forces routinely used torture. During the war the government censored newspapers, books and films that claimed it had used torture, and after the war the atrocities committed by its troops remained a taboo subject in French society.

In 2018 France has officially acknowledged for the first time that it carried out systematic torture during Algeria's independence war – a landmark admission about conduct in the conflict which ended 56 years ago [1962] and that has been shrouded in secrecy and denials. The president, Emmanuel Macron, said France instigated a “system” that led to torture during the Algeria conflict, and the past must now be faced with “courage and lucidity”.

Macron used the case of the mathematician Maurice Audin, a Communist pro-independence activist who disappeared in 1957, to make a far-reaching comment about France's sanctioning of torture, going further than any previous president. The Elysée said Macron would acknowledge in a letter to be presented to Audin's widow and family on Thursday afternoon that Audin “died under torture stemming from the system instigated while Algeria was part of France”.

[...] Audin's family has for years been seeking the truth over his disappearance. An assistant professor at the University of Algiers, Audin was 25 when he was arrested at his home by French paratroopers and accused of harbouring armed members of the Algerian Communist party. He was tortured repeatedly in a villa in the Algiers neighbourhood of El Biar.

His widow, Josette, was told 10 days later that the mathematician had escaped while being transferred between jails. This remained the official version of events until 2014, when Macron's predecessor François Hollande acknowledged that Audin died in detention.

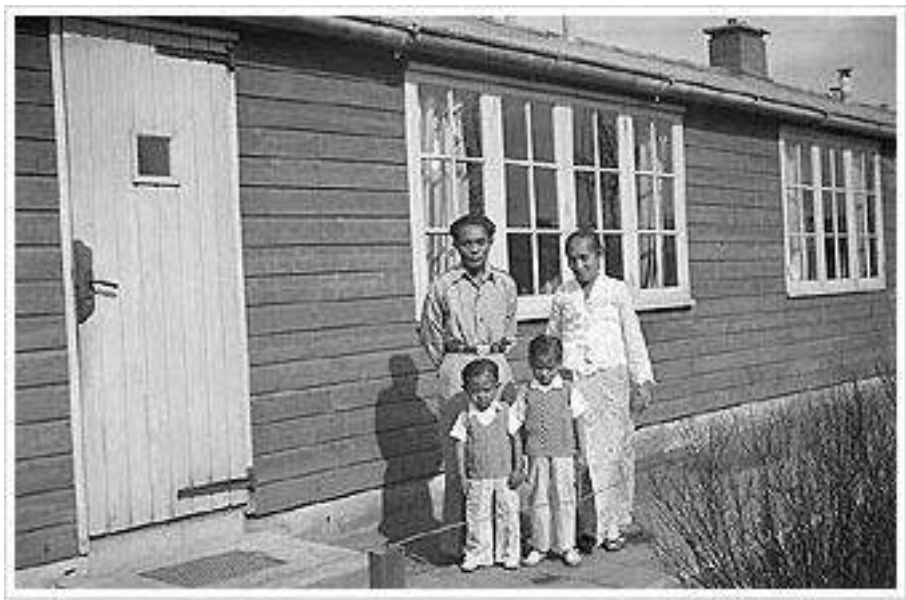
Macron's office said he would detail a system of arrest and detention legally put in place by parliament and decree in the late 1950s that allowed forces to hold and interrogate suspects, leading to “acts that were sometimes terrible, including torture.” Macron will announce that archives will be fully opened up to historians,

families and organisations seeking the truth about the large number of disappeared civilians and soldiers, both French and Algerian, whose bodies have never been found.

Excerpts taken from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/13/france-state-responsible-for-1957-death-of-dissident-maurice-audin-in-algeria-says-macron> [05/15/2019].



Upon arrival these loyal soldiers were immediately and unceremoniously discharged. They and their families were housed in two former concentration camps and left stateless and unemployed. They lived among themselves, quite separated from Dutch society, 'forgotten' by the government.



*Moluccans in front of their barracks in The Netherlands (source: Het geheugen van Nederland)*

From the seventies on a new generation of young Moluccans tried to attract attention to the plight, unfortunate situation, of their parents and themselves. The idea of an independent Moluccan republic still existed against the will of the Indonesian government. After the execution in Indonesia of one of their leaders in 1966, Moluccan youths stormed the Indonesian embassy in The Hague. The following years more radical protests culminated in 1977 in the hijacking of a train and the occupation of a school, taking children and adults as hostages. These actions were ended by the Dutch army after a standoff of nearly three weeks. Six Moluccans and two hostages were killed.

In 2017 the Kingdom of The Netherlands stood accused of killing wounded and unarmed Moluccan hijackers. The judge decided the Dutch state had withheld information about the violent ending of the hijack. As a consequence, the government announced independent historical research into the use of violence by the Dutch in this case *and* during the Indonesian War of Independence.

The Dutch were not alone in employing so called 'ethnic soldiers' in their colonial army. The English recruited Ghurkhas from Nepal, the French had Harki's in the Algerian colonial forces.

Like the Moluccans, Gurkhas and Harki's too found themselves in an awkward situation after the independence from Nepal and Algeria. Having fought in the colonial army, loyal to the former colonial master, they were forced to go to England and France. And they too were not welcome in the country of their once colonial masters. They were housed in camps, separated from society, their children raised in poverty and without adequate education. Only during the last decades their position has attracted some attention of the authorities, but the lives of these families are still difficult. The return to their homelands is hardly possible. The service in the colonial army of their fathers or grandfathers still is a reason of much reproach.

## 6) The History of the EL-DL-House

The EL-DE House (pronounced: L-D-House) owes its name to the initials of the building owner Leopold Dahmen. The Catholic wholesaler of gold articles and clocks lived with his family on Appellhofplatz 21, from where he also ran his business. In order to build the house next door, he had two residential buildings torn down on the corner lot on Elisenstraße. Then, during 1934/35, a larger house with both residential and commercial space was built. [...]

After a delay in the construction work, the unfinished house was seized by the Gestapo in the summer of 1935. Existing rental agreements had to be terminated; the new tenant was the Third Reich. For the Gestapo, the representative building right at the heart of the city provided an excellent location. It was virtually around the corner from the Police headquarters on Krebsgasse, the court building and the Klingelpütz central prison. The Gestapo had the building converted according to its purposes: the living space was turned into offices and the house prison with its ten cells was installed on the upper basement level. On 1 December 1935, the Cologne Gestapo branch started to operate from there and only ceased working on 2 March 1945, a few days before the arrival of the American troops on 6 March 1945. It seems a particular irony of history that this house remained standing after the war whilst most other surrounding buildings had been destroyed.

In terms of the history of its construction, the house only acquired its bulky appearance after the war when numerous extensions were added. During the years 1947 to 1949, annexes were added on Elisenstraße, replacing the destroyed residential building of the Dahmen family and one other house next to it, completely merging with the surviving Gestapo house [...]. Only because of the additions after 1945, does the EL-DE House reflect the image of the feared, all-dominating Gestapo by way of its dimensions.

The carefree approach that was adopted to the history of the house, and to its NS past after the war, becomes apparent in other ways. The house was used by tenants again immediately after the end of the war, mostly by the City of Cologne. The Occupation Office, the Pricing Authority, the Office for Defence Expenses, the Registry, the Pension Office and the Legal and Insurance Authority had their offices there. Some of the people who had been interrogated and tortured by the Gestapo in these very rooms had to get married or submit their pension applications there.

Initially it was one lone fighter, Sammy Maedge, a gilder of weather-cocks for Church spires, who mounted public campaigns to draw attention to the history of the EL-DE House in the mid-1960's. The reputed exhibition of the Cologne History Archive 'Resistance and persecution in Cologne 1933–1945' highlighted in detail for the first



time, essential parts of the NS history of the City of Cologne. The story of the EL-DE House however, was only mentioned in passing. It was only subsequent to the US-American television series 'Holocaust' and the trial of Kurt Lischka and other NS perpetrators at the courthouse across the street that EL-DE House began to garner national attention. Maedge succeeded in triggering a bigger response to his activities in 1979. Around the same time, the teacher Kurt Holl and the photographer Gernot Huber hid in the basement of the EL-DE House and had themselves locked in after the municipal Legal and Insurance Office closed for the day in order to take pictures of the cells and the inscriptions during the night and then present them to the public. Finally, the request to turn the former Gestapo house prison into a memorial came to fruition and the City Council gave its permission in late 1979. The inscriptions the prisoners had written on or carved into the walls were carefully uncovered, restored and painstakingly deciphered before being masterfully edited by an archivist of the Cologne History Archive, Manfred Huiskes. Furthermore, a double cell that had been used as a coal cellar after 1945 was turned into a room for a small exhibition about the history of the Cologne Gestapo and the general history of National Socialism in Cologne. Photographs of inscriptions were reproduced, translated and mounted on relatively simple boards in the aisles of the former prison. On 4 December 1981, the former Gestapo house prison was finally opened for the public as a memorial.

Excerpts taken from: <https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=715> [05/15/2019] and <https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=724> [05/15/2019]

HINT: You will find a 360° visit to the centre and memorial here: [https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/medien/rundgang.aspx?nr=0\\_0\\_1&lang=uk](https://museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/medien/rundgang.aspx?nr=0_0_1&lang=uk)