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People have to see and hear, what is happening to individuals

Erich Maria Remarque – A Global Icon for Resilient Peace

One of the pillars of the peace city concept of the city of Osnabrück/Germany was and still is the German author Erich Maria Remarque. Remarque was born in Osnabrück in 1898, served on the Western Front during World War I, and published his anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929. The book became a world-wide success, so far unseen in global literary history. Together with the famous 1930 filming of the book by Lewis Milestone, today, *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a global icon of pacifist culture as is Picasso's painting *Guernica* or Robert Capa's Spanish Civil War photography *Fallen Soldier*.

Throughout his lifetime and in all of his works, Remarque was committed to pursue peace, understanding and dialogue, and he was an intransigent opponent of oppression, manipulation, barbarism and any political or cultural attempt to diminish civilizing values, civil rights and the freedom of the individual. Moreover, in his writings Remarque pointed out, that the individual is responsible for his deeds and its consequences, and that this responsibility cannot be prolonged to any authority, be it the church or religion, a political party or movement or any ideology. In this respect, Remarque's thoughts are a blueprint for humanity and the individual's role and value in contexts of war, crisis, migration – and everyday life.

Remarque's works have been translated into at least 65 languages, and originally published in more than 90 states. But the exceptional and outstanding point with the reception of Remarque on a global level is, that the writings were not only translated as a product of a different culture, but assimilated and integrated into the culture of the translations' target languages. In this respect, Remarque lost his original status as a German author or a representative of the »other«, non-fascist, non-barbarian Germany, but became a Russian, Albanian, Korean or Vietnamese

author, respectively. In any case, this process mirrored the political, social or economic situation at times, when Remarque's books were first published.

After Stalin's death in 1953 for example, Remarque's works became a »mirror to Europe« for the Soviet people, in contradiction to restrictive Cold War propaganda. In 1959, Remarque's novel about a German soldier in World War II, *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, became a huge success in Korea because this soldier's story mirrored the experiences of ordinary soldiers during the Korean War. Therefore, on a global level, there exists not only one author Remarque, but many Remarques, created by history, politics, censorship in many cases, and culturally shaped values and preferences. But what all these Remarques have in common are then global values and ideas of peace, understanding, empathy and responsibility. Or, as Remarque himself named it in 1946:

People have to see and hear, what is happening to individuals, because their imagination cannot cope with the overall facts; it cannot count. A catastrophe claims 5 Million casualties, and that means nothing, the figure is empty. But, if I present to you one single human being in his perfection, his faith, his hopes and his problems, and if I then present to you how he dies, it will be inscribed to your memory for ever.

This overall humanitarian statement of Remarque reduces complex political, social, and economic processes to the level of the individual, regardless of political parties or ideologies. The statement favors contexts of civilization, humanity, interpersonal relationships, and, last but not least, complexity, and thus opposes manipulation, oversimplification and prejudicial thinking. In Remarque's short version, as a credo: Independence, tolerance, humor.

For Remarque was born in Osnabrück, and for the city has a long tradition of interreligious tolerance and dialogue, Remarque's statement and conviction could and can serve as an ideal vehicle to promote peace on official and NGO levels. Remarque's international reputation and image, on the other hand, constitute a basis – a door opener – for several and various activities and impacts in political, social, economic, educational or research contexts on local, regional or international levels.

And this is the point, where our, the Remarque Peace Centre's work within the framework of the peace city of Osnabrück is situated. The Peace Center was founded in 1998 on behalf of Remarque's 100th birthday and as a successor of an archive, situated at the University of

Osnabrück. The Peace Center today is run both by the city and university of Osnabrück, and is presenting a permanent exhibition on the life, work and international reception of Remarque. Beyond we are presenting up to six special exhibitions each year which deal with the representation of war in the media, of historic conflicts or present art focusing on war and peace. In addition the center houses the worldwide leading archive of material related to Erich Maria Remarque. We have about 30.000 visitors each year, coming in from all five continents. Their main interest lies in information on Remarque, his life and writings. The archive is open to the broad public, and is visited by some 2.000 people each year who are doing mainly research work or seek help and information for book, film, art or other facilitation projects.

Beyond this normal program we are engaged in widespread co-operation projects to prolong the peace issue:

On a local level with the promotion of Remarque's work and thinking in schools and universities. We cooperate with other local institutions and NGOs in activities, which are dedicated to historical, intercultural or peace topics in order to prolong the idea of a peaceful society within an urban civil society. These activities include projects with the local schools and universities, exhibitions, workshops, seminars etc.

On a broader level, our research work focuses on Remarque's life and work, but take these topics as a starting point for research in the field of the representation of war and peace in the media in the 20th and 21st centuries. How are media (i.e. literature, film, photography, art, graphic novel etc.) were and are part of warfare. What is their relevance in preparing for war or shaping the image of war in post-war periods? What kind of media competence the individual needs in times of an overall media coverage of actual conflicts and information warfare? How can this media competence be educated to civic societies?

These questions leads us to the global level, where they are discussed in a floating network of different organizations, institutions, and individual researchers, and where the scientific community is set in a continuing discussion process with teachers, artists, civilians, and last but not least, soldiers.

The Remarque Peace Center is a member of national and international networks of institutions committed to the peace issue, such as the German network »Places of the Democracy's History«, the »International Network of Peace Museum« formerly headed in Amsterdam, now

Kyoto, the »Workgroup peace research« situated in Germany, and the Center together with the University of Sheffield and the Forum for Contemporary History, Oslo/Norway, is co-founder of the European Network of Peace Historians.

These networks result in programs of international relations, cooperation, knowledge exchange and cooperative projects such as conferences, publications, exhibitions, art projects, developing internet resources. All these measures aim at the scientific community as well as at the broad public.

Aiming at the scientific community of peace historians, conflict and peace research is our periodical *War and Literature*, established in 1989, which is not only focusing on literature but discussing the role of all media in times of war and conflict. The journal offers researchers from all countries a platform to discuss their topics and latest results of their research work. In addition since 1989 we have been organizing conferences and workshops, mainly in co-operation with other related institutions on these topics. The conferences have been taken place not only in Osnabrück, but at cities in the USA, Great Britain, Spain, France, Russia, Poland, Slovakia, Colombia, and, in 2019, Bolivia and China.

Aiming at the broad public we have established several travelling exhibitions on Remarque, his work and thinking, which have been presented since 1989 in more than 130 places throughout the world. Nearly all presentations have been accompanied by activities such as workshops, school projects, round tables, lectures and/or art projects.

All these activities, projects, co-operations (and much more) are based on Erich Maria Remarque's global reputation and the thoughts inherit in his works, his thinking and his international image as an icon of peace: The belief in humanity, in growing understanding by discussion and exchange, tolerance, and last but not least empathy for the other, in whom we recognize ourselves.

A growing network of international institutions which are committed to the peace issue could intensify the international dialogue on a scientific level as well as – and much more important – on a level aiming at the broad public. In our times of growing nationalism, racism, and xenophobia as a simplifying reaction to a complex world, in our times, in which such values like humanity, tolerance, multilateralism and understanding seem to be suddenly endangered and attacked much more than we ever imagined in our deepest nightmares, in these times we

do urgently need such affiliations, networks and co-operations – not only in order to disseminate the ideal of a more peaceful world, but more than that in order to assure ourselves of our common values and ideas and to stand together as an upright community.