

Törnquist-Plewa, Barbara (ed.): Whose Memory? Which Future? Remembering Ethnic Cleansing and Lost Cultural Diversity in Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe.

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A quarter century after the collapse of the Soviet Union and over a decade after a historical enlargement of the European Union eastwards, a shared European memory remains a highly debated issue. While the centrality of the Shoah is more or less consensually accepted, regionally salient legacies of Stalinism, colonialism or forced migration have competed in destabilizing the quest for a consensual mnemonic canon. Parallel to the obvious significance of this debate for further integration in Europe, students of memory have sought concepts and perspectives that overcome the limits of the nation state and facilitate transnational analyses and comparisons.

Engaging the concept of “ethnic cleansing” as an overreaching category, the volume edited by Barbara Törnquist-Plewa takes a less well used path. The book forgoes reconstructions of reconstructions of past violence or documenting survivors’ retrospective accounts thereof and focuses instead on the present ways in which “vanished ethnic groups [are] remembered, acknowledged or blamed” (p. 5) in their former hometowns. Building on case studies of cities profoundly shaped by expulsions, mass murder and the Holocaust, the book manages to both offer deep insights into the changing discourses and contestations of local memory, and at the same time capture transnational processes typically flying below (or above) the radar of national overviews. The studies go beyond a static semiotic reading of representations to discuss the role of different memory agents of local memory arenas. The strongest asset of the book, however, is the comparative perspectives it opens on the analogous developments and different dynamics of coping with painful urban legacies.

The introduction sketches a concise, yet well-informed and contemporary theoretical frame through which to read the six case studies, profitably blending inspirations across social sciences and humanities. Throughout the volume, the introductory conceptual palette is, however, not systematically used, and thus serves mainly as a priming device for independent comparative musings of the reader. The studies included in the book deploy largely eclectic methodologies combining, to different extents, elite interviews, analyses of media and historiographic accounts, participant

observation and ethnography. Although the resulting differences in the construction of cases limit their comparability, the plurality showcases the breadth of available roads and may thus serve as inspiration especially to beginners in the discipline.

The first chapter on Wrocław by Igor Pietraszewski and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa reconstructs phases of “adopting an alien city” (p. 19) and shows how for the intellectual elites German heritage offered an opportunity to claim an identity and future beyond the constraints of national politics. While highlighting transnational and national influences, the authors also emphasize the existential significance of such identity constructions and problematize a strict distinction between instrumental and transformative approaches to multiculturalism.

Looking at the actors and legitimizations behind four memorials erected to Germans murdered in the course of their expulsion from the Bohemian lands, Tomas Sniegon asks in his study if these can be read as signs of Czech mourning. Sniegon concludes this can be said only of the one case based on a grass-roots initiative (also the most recent one); the rest are mainly concessions to international or elite agendas. In the third section, Eleonora Narvselius gives a complex overview of the contested memory of the radically diminished Polish population of Lviv. Untangling disputes revolving around a memorial to murdered Polish professors, the establishment of a “Polish National House” or contested church property, she observes that several versions of heritage exist for different audiences in a post-Soviet arena, where nationalism trumps pluralism.

In the following case study, Niklas Bernsand focuses on the representations of local history in newspapers triggered by the 600th anniversary celebrations of the Ukrainian Chernivtsi. Beyond an instrumentalization of the nostalgic notion of “Bukovinian tolerance” and the occasional criticism from nationalist press, Bernsand mostly notes systematic avoidance of conflict and a “conservative” approach to multiculturalism, which likes to keep ethnic cultures segregated. Tea Sindbæk Andersen’s contribution maps the different cultural presence of Zadar’s expelled Italians in the institutionalized and the more transient forms of local remembering. Showcasing the selective approach of both categories of mnemonic media, the author documents the appropriation of useful industrial heritage and the simultaneous confrontation of Italian victimhood with a counter-memory of Croatian victims.

The last and likely the most gripping case study included in the volume offers an ethnographic account of the recent commemoration of ethnic war and mass murder in the Bosnian town Višegrad. In his analytical description of two memorial gatherings of radically different content occurring within only 48 hours, Dragan Nikolić teases out the tensions of denial, as well as some hopes for reconciliation of the traumatized community. On the whole, one can say that the assortment of cases presented in the book provides a decent measure of plurality in terms of population size, the extent of destruction as well as political and cultural backgrounds, while at the same time offering meaningful comparative points of view.

The meanings of material heritage, whether preserved or ruined, is surely one of the traditional analytical comparative templates. Based on a transversal reading of the studied examples, the editor observes that the link between material traces of lost populations and the way and extent these are integrated in local memory is all but

straightforward. As the contrasting cases of Wrocław and Lviv show, less erasure of built heritage does not automatically secure more remembering, nor the other way around. Things can be ignored or invented and relationships built or denied based on political, economic or existential expediency. Landscapes and material remnants are a valuable resource for strategic agents, but have no real significance or power without them.

Another obvious comparative perspective is the interaction of local, national and transnational mnemonic agendas on city level and the salience of cosmopolitan attitudes in its midst. While European cultural policies often consciously aim below the national level to decentralize sense of belonging, multicultural imaginaries allow agents – individuals and city administrations alike – to get a strategic head start in comparative westernization. The volume's cases show a variety of constellations, in which local authorities and civic agents pragmatically yield to (Czech towns), enthusiastically adopt (Wrocław), creatively disembowel (Chernivtsi) or effectively counteract (Lviv) pressures towards genuine regret and openness to plural interpretations of the past. The studies included in the volume exemplify a variety of problematic takes on "multiculturalism" – they can be conservative (excluding certain minorities), backward-looking (affirming difference rather than overcoming it), competitive (in terms of the historical moral capital of different groups), self-exculpating (manifestly appreciative of diversity, yet ignorant of the past suffering of the other), or outright superficial (boastful of past minority icons, while marginalizing that minority in the present). At the same time, the plurality of agents suggests that while these may seem to be dominant trends, genuine transformative models of action and interpretation can and do exist alongside them.

The introductory ambition to shed light on the relation between individual and collective levels of remembering is, in my view, only partially fulfilled. It is true that several of the chapters include revealing insights about the existential resonance of place-bound memory as well as the capacity of individuals with strong vision, reputation or influence to shape collective practices. Yet the resulting image of how the intimate feeds into the politically engaged and vice versa leaves much to be desired. On the other hand, the discussion of the structural similarities and differences, which leans a typology of memory agents and mnemonic regimes recently developed by Bernhard and Kubik, provides a solid and informative overview of the varieties of agent configurations across cases.¹

While none of the studied cities is a mnemonic battleground today, "profound tension" (p. 220) of varying degree permeates all of them. The book manages to bring to light a fair share of the injustice, inconsistency and ignorance present in local memory politics today and to the extent that this can "contribute to more ethical approaches" (p. 11) in the handling of past ethnic cleansing, the book does very well. At the same time, it shows several "small acts of repair" (p. 222) that put the absence of "predecessors" in context and pioneer inclusive public narratives of acknowledgement, regret and reconciliation.

¹ *Bernhard, Michael/Kubik, Jan: Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration. Oxford 2014.*

Exploring a new avenue the study of cultural trauma, *Whose Memory? Which Future?* provides an original, timely and singularly stimulating contribution to several subfields of memory studies. Besides rigorous editorial work, this also speaks of a fruitful project cooperation at the Lund Memory Studies research program as well as the cluster's sustained interest in the topic. Owing to its strong comparative dimension, the book will serve as a sound conceptual, methodological and critical springboard to scholars working on post-conflict memory and cultural trauma but also to students of urban heritage management or post-socialist political cultures. The book fruitfully deploys the concept of ethnic cleansing as an inclusive comparative platform capable of relating processes, structural challenges and political agendas across considerable cultural and spatial distances. By selecting diverse cases in terms of ethnic groups and states concerned and, not least, by bringing together Scandinavian and Central-, Eastern- and South-European authors, it also helps to "de-Germanize" the scholarship of expulsion and forced migration and promote it as a universal European issue. Besides the potential benefits for the cultivation of an integrating European memory discourse, the volume's contribution to the comparative study of cultural memory in Europe is thus hard to overstate.