Pehe, Veronika/Wawrzyniak, Joanna (eds.): Remembering the Neoliberal Turn. Economic Change and Collective Memory in Eastern Europe after 1989.

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This edited volume provides interesting insights into the diverse landscape of memories concerning the economic upheavals of the 1990s in Eastern and Central Europe. The editors, Veronika Pehe and Joanna Wawrzyniak, innovatively combine memory studies with research on the economic dimension of post-socialist transformation. The book shows that the collective memory of the 1990s continues to be a work in progress: Dominant patterns of interpretation of the decade are still emerging before our eyes. The rise of populist parties, which often instrumentalize dissatisfaction with the transformation process, is only the most prominent example of the continuing social and political significance of the ways in which the decade after 1989 is remembered.

The volume brings together a variety of perspectives by looking at official discourses, individual views, and artistic interpretations of the 1990s to provide a comprehensive understanding of the memory of neoliberal change. The editors have succeeded in providing a clear and convincing structure for this diversity. Under the title "Founding Myths and Counter-Narratives of Transformation", the first part presents the narratives with which political, economic, and academic elites influence the collective memory and partly justify the disruptions of the 1990s. Florian Peters, for

example, discusses the case of Poland, where the Balcerowicz Plan and the 'shock therapy' it prescribed are still defended by many members of the intellectual transformation elite. As a result, the plan has become a dominant myth that continues to provoke critical counter-narratives. According to Peters, the emotional intensity of these debates often causes more nuanced memories of the 1990s to be suppressed. As Thomas Lindenberger argues, the same is true of the memory of transformation in East Germany, which he considers to be guided by a knowledge regime characterized by West German dominance, self-deception, and insincerity.

In the second part, "Vernacular Memories and Biographical Narratives", the focus shifts to the individual and everyday experiences of different social groups, making personal life stories and subjective memories visible. Occupational groups such as the East German and Czech care workers examined by Till Hilmar have their say, as do Hungarian industrial workers disadvantaged by privatization in Tibor Valuch's contribution. Jill Massino takes a female (memory) perspective on the years of transformation in Romania. Taken together, these contributions illustrate how much individual and group memories (especially in their omissions or gaps) sometimes deviate from the myths of elite memory examined in the first part of the volume.

The third section, "Cultural Memory of Economic Change", investigates how economic changes of the 1990s are processed in art and popular culture. Saygun Gökariksel examines the 1992 Polish cult film *Psy* (Dogs) and its contribution to a "masculine" image of the 1990s centred on banditry and criminality. Ksenia Robbe similarly uses Aleksej Ivanov's novel *Nasty Weather* (Nenast'e) to develop an image of a decade characterized by destructive masculinity. This section of the volume also shows that the neoliberal turn of the 1990s did not become a focus of artistic productivity in all national contexts (as shown in the contribution by Joanna Jabłkowska and Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska on East German literature and the study by Olga Gontarska and Veronika Pehe on Ukrainian film).

In the introduction and the concluding chapter – both of which are recommended reading for all researchers interested in cultures of memory – the editors provide a comprehensive explanation of their research perspective. These chapters are convincing thanks to their careful argumentation emphasizing the innovative potential of the chosen topic. The appeal of studying the memory of the neoliberal turn lies not only in the fact that the economic dimension of social life has rarely been addressed in memory studies. In addition, the memory of the post-socialist 1990s can be used as an example to show how societies remember processes of longer duration. Indeed, the focus of memory studies has often been on the commemoration of events such as wars, revolutions, and natural disasters. By contrast, this volume succeeds in analysing the memories of a process of change that unfolded over a longer period of time – a process the editors understand as "liminal" since it produced an "unfinished" situation in which established norms and rules no longer seemed to apply.

Some of the arguments presented in the introduction and the concluding chapter invite further reflection. This includes, for example, the editors' idea of applying the concept of "regions of memory" to the remembrance of the post-socialist 1990s – a concept targeting forms of memory that transcend national borders, but without

achieving universal status.[1] The post-socialist transformation was undoubtedly a process that took place in parallel in different countries, was shaped by transnational actors and institutions, and was also informed by global trends such as deindustrialization extending far beyond the region. The contributions to this volume show, however, that the commemoration of these developments often takes place within a national frame of reference: In retrospect, processes of change that took place across borders are often seen in terms of their national repercussions. It seems that in many cases, the structural similarities in the transformation processes of some post-socialist countries have not translated into a shared memory that transcends national borders.

My main point of criticism does not concern the issue of memory but rather the way in which the editors characterize the 1990s in post-socialist countries in general – namely their idea that the "neoliberal turn" describes the essence of the changes the region underwent during this period. Pehe and Wawrzyniak interpret the neoliberal turn as a process in which ideas about how the economy should function were translated into institutional structures and practical measures, all anchored in the principle of the free market. Their account paints an image of the 1990s as an era distinguished by economic policy, with other aspects such as political and cultural change – along with socialist legacies – tending to fade into the background or being explained as "economy-driven social phenomena" (p. 298). For example, organized crime, prostitution, and poverty are attributed to "social and cultural effects of economic restructuring and deregulation" (p. 10-11). My argument is not that neoliberalism is unrelated to such phenomena, but rather that other factors – including longer genealogies of what came to be termed "neoliberal" after 1989 – play a more significant role than the editors assume.

Nevertheless, this criticism does not detract from the fact that this is an excellent book which significantly enhances our understanding of the 1990s and their ongoing relevance today. It is a well-argued volume that should serve as a key reference for scholars interested in the history of post-socialist transformation. Moreover, with its focus on the memory of processes rather than events, it makes a significant contribution to an emerging field of inquiry within memory studies.

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[1] *Lewis,* Simon et al. (eds.): Regions of Memory. Transnational Formations. Cham 2022.