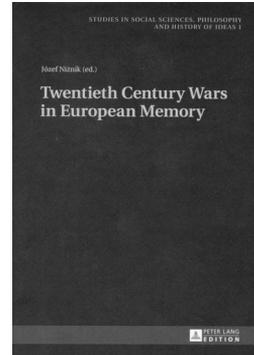


BOOK REVIEW

Studies in Social Sciences, Philosophy and History of Ideas

Józef Niznik (ed.), *Twentieth Century Wars
in European Memory*

Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 288.
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Twentieth Century Wars in European Memory is a book intended for social scientists with a special interest in the studies of memory in the context of European integration and unification.

This volume is a collection of selected papers from the international conference on “War and memory: artistic and cultural representations of individual, collective and national memories in twentieth-century Europe at war”, which was jointly organized by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Queen’s University of Belfast in 2012. Contributions to this volume explore the cultural and aesthetic effects of World War I and the Second World War on Europeans. Authors examine the diverse space of war legacies viewed through the lens of their representations in visual art, literature, cinema and other acts of public memorialization. The Preface is written by the editor of the volume, Józef Niznik, and the introduction is authored by Jay Winter, author of *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the 20th Century*, a masterful volume on remembrance and war in the twentieth century.

Over the last two decades, studies on collective memory have become an increasingly important aspect of social research. Until recently, however, the situation in collective memory studies was reflective of the traditionally West-centric writing of European history. Memory studies had been divided along the traditional East-West division line, inherited from pre-1989 epoch. The book *Twentieth Century Wars in European Memory* provides an example of the overcoming of this division, and is a result of joint efforts of both Eastern and Western scholars, and the countries in focus evenly represent the West and East of the European continent.

Changing political, cultural and ideological frameworks of the collective memory construction in Eastern European countries after the fall of communist regimes, and the confrontation of Eastern European national historical narratives with those formulated by Western European states within enlarged and newly integrated Europe, created new conditions and new challenges for studying collective memory. As the editor Józef Niznik writes in the Preface,

[it] opened a completely new context for the problems of collective memory, in that Europeans struggle with the memory of hostilities between the very states which are now engaged in cooperation aimed at a common future (p. 11).

However, the new European integrative paradigm of the construction of collective war memories aimed at the discovery of common ground for the better future of European nations comes together with the fragmentation of cultural and political fields produced by democratization. As a result, new paradoxes and new tensions come into being, serving both as a symbols of a new historical epoch and a reflection of its complexity. The collapse of a state ideology and the dismantling of the elaborate state domination produced a continuous impact not only on individual and collective identities, but also on modes of social exchange and forms of symbolization. The set of the essays collected in *Twentieth Century Wars in European Memory* displays a diversity of these symbolic forms in the sphere of collective memory construction.

The book is divided into five parts and each part focuses on a certain aspect of collective memory construction and adaptation of war experience and its representation in a new political and cultural realm.

Part I “Symbolism of Material Objectifications of the Memory of War”, is devoted to sites of war memory in France and Portugal. Analyses of war memorials enables authors to look not only at the symbolic meaning ciphered in the material objects called to transmit particular versions of memory on past events, but also explores the the changing status of these memorials throughout their history. Thus, Bertram M. Gordon shows how the symbolic value of the Maginot Line, system of fortification, constructed during the 1930s along the border between France and Germany, changed from the representation of a visionary achievement of modernity in France before the 1940s to the symbol of defeat or to “all that went wrong in 1940” (p. 26), and gradually transformed into a tourist site, attracting people by the idea of the promotion of French and German reconciliation. The essay by Helen E. Beale, “Resonant Commemoration and the Trope of the Wall: Time and Memory Echoes in 20-th Century French Resistance”, addresses the issue of interpretations of historical sites and the crucial role of the political and cultural environments, which provide contemporaries with a corresponding “orientation” that they need in the reading of memorials. Using examples of several sites of French war memory, Helen E. Beale describes the “making memory” as a process of adjusting their presentation over the years in order to “bridge lengthening gaps in human memory or in the capacity for apprehension of new generations” (p. 82). The process of inevitable correlation between the status and the meaning of the sites of memory and the dominating political regime and its ideology is analyzed by Silvia Correia in her essay, “Forgotten Places of Memory: First World War Memorials in Portugal, 1919–1933”.

Two of the essays included in Part II “Visualizing Memory”, focus on the strategies and means of visual representations of the historical events. They deal with old photographs, discovered by chance (Julia Winckler) which in themselves can be viewed as a “traces” of the past with their own history worth studying, or with a broad range of images including photographs, documentaries, cinematography and paintings (Karina Dilanian-Pinkowicz). Two cases of traumatic memory of national disaster—of Jewish experience of the Holocaust and Armenian genocide—developed differently as far as their perception and acknowledgement by the outside world. This fact is reflected in the way in which the visual representations of the traumatic events function. Old

photographic archives discovered by Julia Winckler serve as “reminders” and therefore provide tools for remembrance, defined by Aleida Assmann as a “singular and disparate acts of reconstructing and reclaiming individual experience” (p. 91). Images related to the history of Armenian genocide, analyzed by Karina Dilanian-Pinkowicz, are first and foremost “extremely important pieces of evidence of the crimes”, unveiling fragments of a cruel reality. These documentary images acquire particular meaning in the context of trauma, complicated by the world’s 50 yearlong amnesia regarding the genocide. A somewhat different and rare aspect of the “visualization” of war experience is studied by Marjorie Gerhardt in “Walking Reminders of the War: The Case of Facially Disfigured Veterans”. Gerhardt explores the symbolic meaning of facial injuries in the process of remembrance after the Great War through the lens of the novel, *L’homme qui mourut deux fois* (Dumas, 1943). Visually exposed evidence of war trauma represented by facially disfigured veterans provokes uneasy questions not only about the rupture which occurred in the soldiers’ lives and their never ending experience of war in daily life after the war is over, but also questions other people’s response to their appearance as walking reminders of the war.

Part III “Memory for Sale”, includes three articles which describe remembrance activity accompanied by commercialization and transformation of memorial sites into tourist attractions. In the essay by Vicky Davis, one particular case of war memory, the myth of “Malaia zemlia”, has been studied against the background of the complex interaction between national and local agencies in the context of a changing ideological environment. Urszula Jarecka reveals multiple paradoxes and moral dilemmas behind the phenomenon of war tourism, when the atrocities and horrors of war turn into a tourist attraction. In her study, Jarecka provides deep insight into the understanding of what determines the pleasure in tourism that “feeds” on the horror of war (p. 157). Paradoxically, she discovers that along with such aspects of human experience as the wanting to experience something unique, an opportunity to touch history, a chance to commemorate and the chance to create one’s own historical characteristic for tourists, there exists a specific sort of hedonism associated with consumption, even if it concerns consuming information and evidences of atrocities and human suffering. A parallel study of war tourism in Poland and Germany gives Jarecka an opportunity to show how shared experience of World War II has first been separated by historical policies and interpretations and how it has now been reconceptualized in response to the new political reality of integrated Europe. One of the paradoxes, which the book *Twentieth Century Wars in European Memory* reveals, is related to the lasting and inescapable importance of the national framework for the memorialization of war. It is illustrated by the study of the political instrumentalization of the Martyred Soldier in nationalist Flemish politics by Karen Shelby.

Part IV “Memory within Geographic Space”, includes several essays united by their interest to collective memory in the context of changing or moving political borders, which imply closeness and increased significance of Others. Cases of shifting collective or political frameworks—from Yugoslavia to Slovenia (Petra Svoljsak), from East Prussia to Poland (Małgorzata Karczewska), or issues of “matrioshka collectivity”—such as Jewish presence in the Polish identity (Małgorzata Włoszycka), or

the Czechoslovak diasporas' war experience in alien surroundings in Britain during the World War II (Jana Buresova)—prove to be fertile ground for the studying of the dependence of memorialization on national historical narratives as well as cultural and political frameworks of war experience.

Barbara Szacka's concluding essay, "Memory of War and Sex Difference", proposes a change of focus in approaching war memories. Instead of collective actors in a war—country's or nation's—Barbara Szacka's main concern are female individuals whose personal perception of war offers a quite different perspective, both from the memory transmitted by national narratives and from the war experience encountered by men. Drawing on interviews with women fighting in the Red Army, conducted by a Byelorussian writer Svetlana Alexievich, as well as Polish research on memory of the Second World War, Szacka argues that except for "the obvious variation in the war memory connected with sex, there are also differences resulting from various perceptions of the very same situations by men and women in the precisely same social roles and also differences in the mode of narrations caused by the cultural requirements of the cultural patterns of femininity and masculinity" (p. 276). One of the most interesting and unexpected findings of this essay is the discovery that the female perspective on war experience developed into a particular type of war memory, but these sex and gender-dependent differences "fade away in the post-memory of the successive generations" (p. 287).

According to the editor's note, one of the questions remaining in the background of this publication is whether we can "make Europeans' without European collective memory transgressing national perspectives" (p. 11). While suggesting that the answer to this question cannot be affirmative, this book demonstrates that so far Europeanness failed to become a compelling factor in constructing narratives of war memories. Belonging to common Europe still remains a far less essential point of reference in composing strategies of memorialization than that of national state. At the same time, contributions to this book demonstrate that both memorialization and remembrance can now be perceived and studied not so much as purely instrumental political devices, but as an activity aimed at adapting historical legacy to the formats and conventions of a new period with all its complexity and openness to Others, unknown in previous life. Emphasis on the material objectification of memory made in this publication enables one to look at the artistic representations as an imaginative investment in the relics of wars, and as a step made toward better understanding for both current and future generations of Europeans.

In addition to specialists on the politics of memory, readers with interests in the cultural and historical framing of the European war experience and its impact on national and cultural identity will also find food for thought in this book.

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