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Eric Lagenbacher, Bill Niven and Ruth Wittlinger, eds., *Dynamics of Memory and Identity in Contemporary Europe*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2012. vi + 248 pp. Index. \$75.00/£46.00. (hb). ISBN 978-0-85745-577-2.

Review by Marion Demossier, University of Southampton.

Since the seminal publication by Maurice Halbwachs of *La mémoire collective* in 1950, the field of memory studies has flourished to the extent that it has become difficult to be kept abreast of a vast field.[1] Both the humanities and the social sciences have grappled with the concept, questioning the relationship between individuals and groups or examining the politics of memory in the new global order. Despite academics such as Marek Tamm asking whether or not it has become a confused or flawed term or if it has really resulted in a paradigm shift, a new memory industry of policymakers, curators and mediators has proliferated in contemporary Europe.[2] The recent conference organised in July 2013 at the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford, funded by the European Commission and involving ten major European ethnographic museums, illustrates both the growing institutionalisation of memory in museum settings and the crisis museums have encountered as mediators of culture and the past. At several levels, museums encapsulate the complexity and challenging nature of the expansion of the field of memory studies.

The present volume arises from the proceedings of a conference, “The Dynamics of Collective Memory in the New Europe,” held between 13 and 15 September 2007 and hosted by Nottingham Trent University and Durham University (UK), and the subsequent publication in 2008 of a special issue of the journal *German Politics and Society* entitled “Dynamics of Memory in Twenty-first Century Germany.”[3] These interdisciplinary initiatives brought together an international group of scholars, and the papers considered the concept of collective memory from the perspective of a wide range of European countries, including Austria, Britain, France, Poland, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, and the former Yugoslavia. In this publication, the editors have adopted a broad historical, geographic and political framework which makes it a challenging and attractive volume. They also propose a new research agenda embracing both European integration as the political backbone to the explosion of memory studies and the geographic shift of Western memory to encapsulate the eastward expansion of the increasingly contested European Union. The result is a wide-ranging, inspiring and original discussion of memory.

Edited by academics from different disciplinary backgrounds, the volume engages in an innovative fashion with the dynamics of memory and identity in contemporary Europe by bringing tensions around collective memory into focus, while also addressing the state of memory theory itself. According to the editors, the majority of the chapters in this volume are based on the assumption that—as scholars of collective memory will no doubt readily acknowledge—discussions and notions of the “new Europe” are incomplete without reference to, and acknowledgement of the “old Europe.” If the European Union provides the historical and political context to the rise of memory studies, the question of European identity that underpins it is far from being solved and the recent Euro crisis demonstrates its continuing fragility.

The book itself includes a substantial introduction, followed by twelve chapters and an open conclusion. Setting out the parameters of their argument in the introduction, the authors emphasise the need for scholarship that explores not only the formation, forms and processes of collective memory through the evidence of empirical case-studies, but also the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpin them. They argue that, due to the global increase in the attention paid to the concerns of collective memory, research has tended to neglect both policies and theories. According to the editors, the contemporary academic field is still under-developed and debates still fragmented, and they advocate an infusion of social scientific theories, methods and epistemologies which is what they have opted for here. Finally, they share the view that the current international situation (for example, the ongoing political contest in the Ukraine) requires a better understanding of history. In order to engage with the re-conceptualisation of memory they identify three major changes, namely the passing of totalitarian theory, the Europeanization/globalization of Holocaust memory and an ever-more urgent need for a more self-critical memory or a new form of critical autobiography which is defined by an individual engagement towards the act of remembering. These historical changes have led to a change in emphasis in memorialization and commemoration. This is what this book sets out to explore under its many guises.

Three theoretical and conceptual chapters contribute to shifting the theoretical framework by discussing often neglected, but central themes of collective memory. They look at generational background of memory in Europe, gender as an analytical category, and the potential bias of data used in memory studies. The generational dimension is often one of the keys to unleashing the dynamic process of memory and its transmission. Harald Wydra, in her comparative analysis of East and West, covering Spain, Italy, Poland, Russia and Germany, focuses on cohort formation and how the notion of memory is instrumental to different generations. Putting emphasis on socio-economic structures and “ruptures” in cohort formation, Wydra looks at how political power and historical interpretations shape narratives of memory and public history. She argues convincingly that their interpretations of history form part of their life “which includes the phenomenological background of their inventory experience, but also the habit memory they acquire” (p. 35). The issue of memory is therefore central to the generational debate about experiences of conflicts in both Eastern and Western Europe. What is at the heart of her argument is the need to include Eastern Europe in a new European historical remembering.

Another area largely invisible in contemporary research on memory is that of gender. The chapter written by Helle Bjerg and Claudia Lenz brings a fresh and welcome perspective to issues of memory and its gender dimension. Both authors emphasise the intricacy of the dynamics between gender and family in the collective remembering of World War II. By following three generations of Danish and Norwegian families, they are able to study the historical consciousness and the formation of cultures of memory through gendered narratives which played an important role in structuring the basic national narratives in occupied Western Europe between 1940 and 1945. Their case studies offer fascinating examples of how new generations use the stories told by their grandparents to replace traditional notions of heroism and patriotism with more universalistic values and a growing tendency towards moralisation, if not victimisation.

Finally in chapter three, Mark A. Wolgram looks at what he coined “the Memory-Market Dictum,” examining in a critical fashion the different data sources used in the study of collective memory and concluding convincingly that their construction is a social process and not merely a social object. Wolgram starts with the premise that the process of collective memory needs to be examined through the interrelationships of three main factors: the individual as embedded in a network of social relations; representations seen under various forms which are representative of a generation and its political struggles; and finally the memory’s social, political and cultural context, which is crucial for its broader understanding. Finally, he argues that by studying patterns in mass consumption of representations of the past as presented on TV and in films, it is possible to demonstrate that they fit the views of the individuals who consume them (what he refers to as the Archer-Kansteiner assumption). Taking the

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examples of several television and film productions in postwar Germany, Wolgram captures what he defines as identity and collective memory formation at the European level.

If these three key areas are essential to any analysis of collective memory and are well-presented, it is nevertheless frustrating to have no theoretical background to the complex field that is memory studies, especially given the relatively recent publication of several handbooks and anthologies which would have helped to locate their argument more precisely. The divide between cultural analysis and socio-political studies of memory remains a major analytical hurdle and the editors have not fully engaged with it.

Memory studies as a field of research is “notorious for its ability to raise ever more questions, find new perspectives and offer ingenious concepts.”[4] After setting out the theoretical premises, in chapter four, Gudehus raises the important question of how World War II in Europe has been remembered. This constitutes an important part of the discussion at the centre of this book, as it questions both the existence of a European collective memory and Europe as a key to its conceptualisation. This is a very useful starting point for any serious discussion of European memories and the author clarifies the various issues at stake when engaging with the concept itself.

In chapter five, entitled “Ach(tung) Europa,” Hans-Joachim Hahn focuses on German literature and the role of writers in the establishment of a cultural memory of Europe. As the field of cultural memory has been largely dominated by German and French scholars, this chapter brings a welcome perspective to the debate on European culture and identity. Using mainly a wide range of German materials, he shows how German literature resisted any political instrumentalisation during the Cold War period and how it felt uneasy with Western capitalism. He concludes that, even if the mood is changing, the cultural memory of our European vision is more stable than assumed.

Mark Wagstaff, on the other hand, adds another layer to the analysis of the ambiguous concept of European memory by discussing national identities and their legacy in transnational processes of European identification. The story of the European Union is presented as a political formation shifting from an attempt to ensure that the experience of Fascism was not repeated in Europe to a more activist body promoting pan-European interests and identity, a kind of new supra-national European identity. This is, after all, a political enterprise and Wagstaff reminds us of its changing nature. This resonates with Europe seen as a form of new political imperialism, as suggested by a few Eastern European scholars.[5]

The remaining chapters offer a series of interesting, innovative and original case studies in postwar Europe spanning from France to Eastern Europe, the former Yugoslavia and Germany. This is the part of the book I enjoyed the most because of the originality and novelty of the material presented and its anthropological dimension. The richness of the material covered is eloquent and persuasive. These six chapters deserve to be read separately even if they share common conclusions or interests. The philosophical debate about the reality of the past, the present, and the future serves as the basis for their discussion of a memory in Europe which is shaped by historical shifts which have enabled the re-enactment of local memories through more transnational and global processes (chapters seven, eight, eleven, and twelve).[6] These shifts have seen the crumbling of historical hegemonic narratives, as in the former Yugoslavia (see Radonic’s essay, “Transformation of Memory in Croatia: Removing Yugoslav Anti-Fascism”) and contemporary Germany (see Wittlinger’s essay, “Shaking off the Past? The New Germany in the New Europe”), the opening of victimhood discourse to Eastern Europe (see Niven’s essay, “German Victimhood Discourse in Comparative Perspective”) and a new political resonance offered by the European Union. The European Union offers the prospect of exciting fieldwork for any analysis of European memories and more work needs to be done before we can appreciate its full complexity. These case studies remind us, as well, of the necessity of a contextualised

approach to theories of memory and identity and how the slippery concept of memory reveals to be *sans fin*.

The volume is well-structured and the individual chapters are put together in a coherent fashion. The material they cover is extremely engaging and is new to the English-speaking audience, especially where the French and German literature is concerned. They also add richness to a debate already characterised by its increasing politicisation. This is, therefore, a valuable volume and I particularly enjoyed reading the case studies, as they demonstrate eloquently the difficulties both of bridging disciplines and understanding how individuals and groups within a specific historical and political context make sense of a shared past despite their perspectives. This book will appeal to a wide range of scholars and students from humanities and social sciences disciplinary backgrounds, from history to anthropology as well as memory scholars. It also provides food for thought at a time when a better understanding of Europe's past, present and future is a political imperative and an incentive for future research.

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## NOTES

- [1] Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).
- [2] Marek Tamm, "Beyond History and Memory: New Perspectives in Memory Studies," *History Compass* 11/6(2013): 458-473.
- [3] "The Dynamics of Memory in Twenty-first Century Germany," *German Politics & Society* 26/4(Winter 2008): 1-163.
- [4] Tamm, "Beyond History and Memory," *History Compass* 11/6(2013): 460.
- [5] See Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire. The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Other scholars have also adopted this critical framework, such as Herfried Münkler, *Imperien. Die Logik der Weltherrschaft* (Bonn: Lizenzausgabe für die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005).
- [6] For an interesting discussion of Europeanization as a transnational process, see: Rebecca Friedman and Markus Thiel, eds., *European Identity and Culture: Narratives of Transnational Belonging* (London: Ashgate Studies in Migration and Diaspora, 2012).

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