

wurde die Kommission doch 1998 ins Leben gerufen, um auf internationale Kritik an in Lettland vorherrschenden Geschichtsbildern zu reagieren und kritische Diskussionen im eigenen Land anzuregen. Zudem soll die Historikerkommission auch zur Schaffung neuen Lehrmaterials für die Schulen Lettlands beitragen.⁴ Ob dies schon gelungen ist, wäre eine naheliegende Frage gewesen, auf welche die Autoren jedoch auch in dem eigentlich recht gelungenen Kapitel zu den sowjetischen Massendeportationen als Unterrichtsthema in den Schulen Lettlands nicht eingehen.

Wirklich alle Faktoren der im Zusammenhang mit der vorliegenden Monografie durchgeführten Untersuchung zum Gedenken an die sowjetischen Massendeportationen zu berücksichtigen, hätte wohl den Rahmen von 191 Seiten bei Weitem gesprengt. Etwas mehr Genauigkeit wäre an einigen Stellen dennoch wünschenswert gewesen. Der Wert der Monografie von Mārtiņš Kaprāns, Olga Procevska, Laura Uzule und Andris Saulītis besteht daher vor allem darin, einen ersten Überblick über ein noch kaum untersuchtes Themenfeld und wertvolle Hinweise für dessen weitere Erforschung zu liefern.

Ron Hellfritsch, Jena

- 4 Vgl. Walter M. Iber, Peter Ruggenthaler: Drei Besetzungen unter zwei Diktaturen. Eine vorläufige Bilanz der Forschungsarbeiten der internationalen Historikerkommissionen in Lettland, Litauen und Estland, in: Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung 15 (2007), S. 276-296; Eva Claritta Onken: The Politics of Finding Historical Truth: Reviewing Baltic History Commissions and Their Work, in: Journal of Baltic Studies 38 (2007), H. 1, S. 109-116; Darstellung der Historikerkommission Lettlands auf der Seite des lettischen Staatspräsidenten: http://www.president.lv/pk/content/?cat_id=7 [letzter Zugriff: 07.07.2015].

Małgorzata Pakier: The Construction of European Holocaust Memory. German and Polish Cinema after 1989, Frankfurt a.M.: Lang 2013, 192 S.

Małgorzata Pakier's book uses the medium of contemporary film as a window onto broader debates on Holocaust memory in Poland and Germany. The book is built around three case-study chapters dedicated to Holocaust comedy, Holocaust melodrama and the portrayals of "ordinary people" in recent Polish and German cinematography. Attempting both to offer an in-depth analysis of selected post-1989 Polish and German productions devoted to the theme of the Holocaust and to paint a wider context in which these films were received, the author points towards a broader conclusion on the nature of the European memory of the Holocaust.

Opening with a chapter containing a theoretical discussion on European Holocaust memory, collective memory and the role of image in the representation of the Holocaust, the author begins the empirical part of the book with the genre of comedy, taking Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa* (1990) and its reception in Poland and Germany as a case study. Pakier discusses here the implications of the use of humour in popular filmic representations of the Holocaust (referring also to the notable example of Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*), listing arguments both in favour and against it. Pointing to laughter as a self-defensive survival strategy of Holocaust victims and quoting some critics' opinion that the genre of comedy might offer audiences a way of demonstrating empathy with the victims and of manifesting shared moral values within a community, Pakier also remarks that Holocaust comedies have

met with severe criticism as escapist works, and have even been discarded as a form of Holocaust denial.

Apart from sketching a more philosophical debate on the permissibility of humour in the representations of genocide, Pakier devotes a lot of space to the discussion of the historical context portrayed in Holland's film. Her reading of the work elucidates not only crucial references to historical events within the plot, but also the role certain myths and stereotypes, such as that of Judeo-Communism, play in the national reception of the films. Quoting reviews of *Europa, Europa* in Poland and Germany, Pakier notes that while prevalently critical German audiences saw the film as unsophisticated and melodramatic, lacking the micro-scale narrative, Polish viewers enjoyed the broad brushes of Holland's "philosophical tale", judging the genre as appropriate for portraying the universal fate of man in the age of totalitarian regimes. Pakier interprets the diverging reception of *Europa, Europa* in the two countries as indicative of different mnemonic perspectives and "cultures of remembrance" in Poland and Germany.

The following chapter on melodrama concentrates on Max Faerberbox's *Aimée and Jaguar* (1999) and Jan Jakub Kolski's *Far Away from the Window* (2000), analysing both works through the lens of a common theme of everyday life and war-time drama enclosed in the private space of a home. Pakier gives an overview of film critiques in both countries and teases out aspects that require further contextualization, such as the myth of the Polish mother, or that of the German-Jewish symbiosis. In conclusion, the author states that while *Aimée and Jaguar* presents an "escape from history" and provides a symbolic closure of the past, *Far Away from the Window* pictures the "enslavement by history" and a past that continues to haunt (p. 102). Comparison of the two films, however, allows the author to introduce the recent Polish and German debates about anti-Semitism and philosemitism, identify the changing paradigms of Holocaust representation in the post-1945 cinematographic production in both countries, and reflect on the popular image of Jewish women in film.

Chapter four, entitled "Collective Portraits of Poles and Germans," is a comparative analysis of three films: Jan Łomnicki's *Just Beyond this Forest* (1991), Jan Jakub Kolski's *Burial of a Potato* (1990) and Didi Danquart's *Jewboy Levi* (1999). The works become a lens to look both at the genre of the *Heimatfilm* and at the historical discussion over the category of "ordinary" Holocaust gainers. The author situates the category of "ordinary people" within the wider historiographical shift which, originating in the 1990s with works like Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, put "ordinary perpetrators" more into the focus of research. Although the Goldhagen debate resonated in Germany in a particular way, Pakier also points to similar developments in Poland, listing recent Polish research on the so-called blue police, collaboration and plunder of Jewish property. An interesting hypothesis she puts forward is that films like Łomnicki's *Just Beyond this Forest* and Kolski's *Burial of a Potato*, breaking with the rhetoric of Polish victimhood in the Second World War, should be seen as "precursory" to scholarly involvement with the topic of Polish complicity in the Holocaust, which gathered momentum in particular after the publication of Jan T. Gross' *Neighbors* in 2000 (p. 132).

In the concluding chapter of the book, Pakier seeks to map the way in which national memories of the Holocaust have been reformulated into "European" ones after 1989. But although she points to transnational developments, such as the rising popularity of oral

history, the focus on perpetrators and bystanders of the Holocaust and the growing interest in the experiences of “ordinary people,” it remains open whether a comparative analysis of the Polish and German case allows us to draw conclusions about a *European* paradigm of Holocaust memory. The German and Polish debates on the Holocaust might bear some semblance to each other and arguably have a leading role in shaping a wider, transnational culture of memory. However, any attempt to define a “European Holocaust memory” would have to factor in all the diverse historical experiences of the Second World War – both in the European countries spatially removed from the Holocaust sites, say Great Britain or Portugal, and in those Eastern European countries at the epicentre of the Holocaust, like Belarus, which still cherish the dominant narrative of the Second World War as a glorious victory and marginalize the Holocaust in the national memorial culture. Without taking into consideration these tensions, differing viewpoints and often incompatible narratives, we cannot speak of outlining any truly “European” paradigm of memory.

Another debatable issue is the question of proposing 1989 as a universal caesura for European collective memory processes. While the fall of Communism brought a shift in the memorial culture of some former Communist countries, like Poland, the year 1989 might have been less meaningful, for example, in the case of (West) Germany, where 1968 constituted a much more significant caesura for the processes of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*; or for countries like Belarus and today’s Hungary where, even twenty-five years after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the significance of the Holocaust for the national memory is heavily contested.

Małgorzata Pakier’s claim that the year 1989 triggered a “democratization of the past” in Europe, turning the lens of historians on the stories of everyday life and ordinary people and overcoming “any particular national framework” (p. 153), likewise seems to be very optimistic in the face of the recent rise of nationalism and xenophobia in many European countries. Is Holocaust memory really an element of a shared European memory? And has the rise of what the author terms, leaning on Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei, a “negative memory”, i.e. the memory of the suffering we inflicted on the European “Others”, a truly Europe-wide phenomenon? And has this narrative of guilt really replaced the national discourses of historical innocence? Alone the turbulent and embittered discussions following the publications of Jan T. Gross’s *Neighbors* (2000), *Fear* (2006) and *Golden Harvest* (2012) in Poland suggest that the need for a positive collective identity and self-exculpating “patriotic memory” is not losing its prominence yet.

But although the conclusions of *The Construction of European Holocaust Memory* might not be equally applicable to the whole of Europe, the book offers a comprehensive and succinct comparative overview of the contemporary debates concerning Holocaust memory in Poland and Germany which, accompanied by its in-depth film case-studies, might successfully be used as a companion in academic courses on Holocaust studies. And although the analysis itself lacks a bit of the author’s own voice and her own positioning in the debates she is describing, the combination of the micro-scale analysis of selected films with the broad strokes she uses to explain the background debates on the past in Poland and Germany makes the book a valuable contribution to interdisciplinary Jewish studies.

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