H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Katharina Hall, Kathryn Jones, eds. *Constructions of Conflict: Transmitting Memories of the Past in European Historiography, Culture, and Media.* Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011. viii + 274 pp. $56.95 (paper), ISBN 978-3-03911-923-3.

Reviewed by Aleksandra Ubertowska (Gdansk University)
Published on H-Ideas (November, 2013)
Commissioned by Magdalena Zolkos

From Memory to "Memobile": How the Memory of Conflict is Constructed, Mediated, and Contested

"Constructions of conflict matter" (p. 88). This sentence from the article by Mary Fulbrooke may serve as an appropriate introduction to this review of the volume edited by Katharina Hall and Kathryn N. Jones, *Constructions of Conflict: Transmitting Memories of the Past in European Historiography, Culture and Media.* This book provides a broad and very interesting spectrum of views on the issue of memory, to which scholarly attention has been paid for nearly twenty years.

The scholars who have contributed to this publication have benefited from memory studies as an established research field, ranging from the conceptions of such "founding fathers" of this interdisciplinary realm as Maurice Halbwachs and Marc Bloch to the recent, widely discussed works of Yoshua Yerushalmi, Jeffrey Olick, Marianne Hirsch, Pierre Nora, and Jan and Alleida Assmann. Many authors of the reviewed volume refer to the ground-breaking distinctions, notions, and ideas coined by the aforementioned scholars, such as "private/collective memory," "collective/collected memory" (Olick), "cultural/communicative memory" (Assmann), "sites of memory" (Nora), and "postmemory" (Hirsch), attaching to them new, more particular meanings. Thus the volume seems to fill a gap in the current research on memory, concentrated either on too-abstract terms and distinctions or on only a single cultural realm (Jewish, German, American, Holocaust-centered memory). Previous to the publication of this volume, the field remained to some extent underresearched, especially in regard to the problem of local and historical forms of remembrance, which were barely discussed at all.

The volume consists of eleven case studies considering various forms of commemoration, rituals, artifacts (memorabilia), and media embedded in local cultures (Spanish, Italian, German, British) or involved in common practices of day-to-day life. Although the studies have been divided into three sections ("Private and Public Discourses of Memory," "Counter-Memories," "Commemorative Practices"), they seem to be structured around the "local/global" axis that underlies most of the texts. To put it another way, there are two groups of papers in the volume: those connected with transnational technical development and devices (mobile telephones, photos), and those taking into account national frameworks of memory.

The former group includes Anna Reading's very insightful study, "Global Witnessing: Mobile Memories of Atrocity and Terror from London to Iran." The author explores the new memory realm created by mobile media (especially the mobile phone and the camera), called "globital." Reading argues that the mobile phone can be used as a new form of witnessing and even so-called citizen journalism. As the author claims, during the terrorist attack in London in 2005 as well as in the protests in Iran in which Neda Salehi Agle Soltan was killed, mobile camera photos were the first images to be broadcast on world television channels. Using the concept of "assemblage" (developed by Félixe Deleuze and Gilles Guattari), Reading shows how mobile witnessing intersects and connects heterogeneous fields (body, social processes, media, technology) and constitutes the memory mode as "transmedial discursive formation" (p. 88).

As an example of the second group of papers, we may take the article by Claire Gorrara entitled "Conflicted Masculinities: Figures of Resistance in French Crime Fiction," in which the author considers the "resistance" myth as an essential element in French collective postwar memory. According to Gorrara, despite the fact that male identity was called into question during the war, when gender boundaries were continually criss-crossed, French postwar politicians sustained the image of the "male resister" (*maquis*) as a key figure in the idealized version of the wartime past in France. A more complicated view of war attitudes illuminated the novels of Jean

Meckert, Andre Helena, and Gilles Morris, representatives of the "low genre," *roman noire*. These crime stories, in which resisters were usually ex-prisoners, thieves, or common criminals, reveal the unwanted truth of the moral ambiguities and compromises connected with the French wartime past.

Almost all the authors are preoccupied with the issue of how memory is constructed, transmitted, and shaped in local environments; how it is structured and limited by various kinds of censorship. All seem to share the view that we cannot gain access to "how it happened"; hence they focus on the layer of representation of the past. In this context the article by Jennifer Cameron, "Categorially Complicit. Generation Discourse in Contemporary German Literature," deserves special mention. The author shows how the concept of "generation," inextricably connected with the typical German literary genres *Väterliteratur* (fathers' literature) and *Generationenroman* (generation novel), makes it possible to explore the issue of the complicity of ordinary Germans in the Nazi regime and the impact of the past on the political choices and activities of younger generations (such as the involvement in a leftist student movement of the storyteller in Stephan Wackwitz's novel *Ein unsichtbares Land* [The Invisible Country], 2003).

The other axis, which overlaps with the former, focuses on conflict, on the struggle between various, mostly contradictory versions of the past; "conflict," "struggle," "counter-memory," and "contest" seem to be the key words of this volume. Some contributors attempt to explore how various "counter-narratives" tried to oppose the hegemonic, "mainstream" views of the past in Italy and Germany. John Foot describes the history of the famous massacre of civilians crowded into the cathedral of San Miniato (Tuscany) in 1945, and the historical representations of this event. As the author points out, this dramatic event has been interpreted in contrasting ways, underscoring either German or American responsibility for the deaths of Italians. Similar controversies arose over the death of the young activist of the no-global movement, Carlo Giuliani, during Genoa 8, to which the study by Monica Jansen and Inge Lanslots is devoted. The researchers convincingly show that for the organizers of the summit, Giuliani's death was a part of the disorder created by anti-global protest, whereas for young people and the media, it symbolized instead the violence and injustice inflicted on citizens by a global economic order.

Noel D. Cary, in the study "Memory Games," explores the legacy of the Nazi past in Germany, and the attempts to come to terms with this heritage, by examining the discourse of discontinuity that dominated during the preparations for the Olympic Games held in Munich in 1972. This event revived memories of the former German Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, notorious for the ubiquitous Nazi atmosphere and racial propaganda directed against "non-Aryan" athletes such as the African American runner Jesse Owens. The German organizers of the Munich Olympics attempted to underline the contrast between the two events in various fields of public life, from non-monumental architecture to the multicultural and open climate that ruled in Germany. However, criticisms were voiced in the radical leftist and GDR press, which drew attention to national chauvinism and reduced the political credibility of West Germany.

The publication *Constructions of Conflict* is highly recommended to scholars and students concerned with problems in contemporary memory studies. It not only offers provocative insights into the processes of fabrication of collective memory in neglected, marginalized realms, but also provides very useful conceptual tools and inspiring interpretative modes that enhance the relationships between academic disciplines.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Aleksandra Ubertowska. Review of Hall, Katharina; Jones, Kathryn, eds., *Constructions of Conflict: Transmitting Memories of the Past in European Historiography, Culture, and Media.* H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. November, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38329

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.