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Nikolay Koposov. *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 338 pp. \$29.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-108-41016-8.

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Nikolay Koposov's book explores the "changing forms of historical consciousness and political legitimation" (p. 6) in contemporary Europe and Russia through a comparative historical analysis of "memory laws." These laws typically concern past tragedies like genocides or "crimes against humanity," and involve their memorialization and protection by criminalizing certain statements about them, especially denials. This terrain of law and memory, as Koposov's book cogently shows, is full of tensions. Some of them result from the conflicts between different legal rights in liberal democracies (freedom of speech vs. the right to human dignity and public order), some from different understandings of history and politics, and some from the agonistic discussions regarding the efficacy of those laws, whether they can really protect human dignity or prevent fascism. Koposov specifically focuses on the following question: how is it that the memory laws, which were initially formulated to promote or "maintain peace," have recently transformed into a manipulative instrument of memory wars across Europe, particularly in post-Soviet Eastern Europe (p. 9)? This is a crucial question for anyone concerned with the politics of history and memory in the early twenty-first century. And Koposov offers useful insights into the historical conditions that make memory malleable and instrumentable, especially by authoritarian nationalist politics, at our current conjuncture.

The book is organized in six chapters, structured around the usual division of Europe into Western Europe and Eastern Europe. The first half of the book gives an historical overview of memory laws in those regions while the second half concentrates on two national case

studies, Ukraine and Russia. One of the most innovative parts of this book is the historical problematization of the concept of memory law. The first chapter sets the main theoretical and historical context for this problematization. It suggests that the following interrelated developments in the 1970s and 1980s influenced the emergence and dissemination of memory laws: "the end of the era of class struggle, the formation of the new culture of victimhood," the rise of human rights; "the democratic revolution in historiography, the decay of 'master narratives,' and the rise of memory; and the fall of communism, the end of the postwar social-liberal consensus, and the emergence of neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and ethno-populism" (p. 25). All these developments, suggests Koposov, mark the end of universalistic, "history-based," "future-oriented ideologies" and their displacement by an increasing preoccupation with particularistic identities and event-centered memories (pp. 57-59). For Koposov, this trend of fragmentation of memory makes memory laws susceptible to their nationalist appropriation into exclusionary identity politics. While this account of global historical shifts is overall illuminating, it also has important shortcomings, as I briefly discuss below, especially with regard to its dubious claim about the end of class struggle and the contrast it implies between class (struggle) and questions of memory and subjectivity.

In the next chapter, Koposov offers a rich overview of the development of memory laws in Western Europe, from antifascist legislations of the late 1940s and early 1950s and antiracist legislations of the 1960s to the Holocaust denial laws initiated in West Germany (1985) and

the Gayssot Act (1990) in France, commonly accepted as the first memory laws. Holocaust memory and its protection against far-right groups and neoconservative anticommunist historical revisionism, suggests Koposov, have been at the center of memory laws and the European Union's general approach to memory. One of the most stimulating discussions of the chapter concerns the implications of Holocaust-centered memory for the legal and moral assessment of other genocides and mass violence (and their memories) such as the Armenian Genocide and colonial violence. This issue of the plurality of genocides and "multimemorism" is far from being settled, Koposov underscores. Apart from national and European courts, many historians, especially in France and Germany, have been heatedly engaged in the public discussions on memory laws, opposing the blatant political instrumentalization of history, as for instance in the Mekachera law that aims to highlight the "positive effects" of French colonialism (p. 121).

The following chapters focus on the legal strategies and moral-political frameworks employed by memory laws in postsocialist Eastern Europe. While tracing the sources of those laws to socialist-era antifascist and antiracist legislations, Koposov also underscores the key influence of the European Union's memory policies, especially the criminalization of the Holocaust negationism. De-communization laws of the 1990s and 2000s have had a key impact on the formulation of memory laws in the region, embodying the common strategy of equating communism with fascism as a criminal totalitarian rule. These laws typically shift the responsibility for communism to some alien forces, treating the communist period as a foreign, "Russian occupation" (p. 131). This exoneration of responsibility fuels the nationalist instrumentalization of memory and finds supporters across the entire political spectrum, including liberal and conservative nationalists.

The chapters on Ukraine and Russia highlight even more boldly the way memory laws have become a field of struggle structured around the nation-state and larger geopolitical relations in Eastern Europe. The discussion of the Russian case shows vividly the instrumentalization of memory laws as part of neo-imperial, authoritarian, and nationalist strategies, especially under Putin. Ukraine has been a central focus of Russia's memory wars (together with Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia). The Russian expansionism toward Ukraine (its recent annexation of Crimea) decisively shapes the memory politics in the country, especially the debates around fascism, Europeanization, and Ukrainian nation-

hood. But Russia's policy toward Ukraine is also an integral part of the internal political struggles in Russia. Fueling nationalist sentiments through the war in Ukraine helps Putin repress his opponents. In the same vein, antifascism in Russia, Koposov shows, has largely become a nation-state ideology and a keyword used by Putin to demonize his enemies inside and outside of the country. World War II, what Stalin called the "Great Patriotic War," is revived to articulate this antifascism and invent the national origins of post-Soviet Russia. Putin's memory laws aim to establish the "cult of war" and protect the memory of the Stalin regime against the memory of its victims. It nationalizes the USSR as an imperial Russian power while purifying Soviet history of its communist component. Only the failures of the USSR and Soviet state violence are attributed to communism, which is treated as a foreign thing.

Yet, this nationalist instrumentalization of memory laws, Koposov rightly suggests, should not be understood as some kind of Eastern European anomaly or perversion. Rather, it reveals already existing tensions within the memory laws, which Koposov discerns in the broad historical shifts mentioned above—the decline of master narratives, the end of the era of class struggle, the "crisis of global history" (p. 49), and the rise of memory and particularistic identity politics based on victimhood. This discussion is certainly useful and gives a suggestive context for further research. But it also needs to be complemented and even challenged on certain points. Indeed, the book overall falls into the usual division between culture and political economy. The reader learns little about the material conditions of memory laws and wars, their social worlds, and the antagonisms underlying them, beyond party-political struggles. Whose memories and which memories are nationalized or institutionalized by the law, and which ones are not? I suspect that the book's relative obliviousness about these issues partly results from its hurried assumption about the so-called end of the era of class struggle (do class relations of power cease to exist in memory laws and wars?), which then disables a richer understanding of the social-material dynamics fueling nationalist memory wars.[1] Instead, further research on memory laws might benefit from employing a more expansive and relational notion of class that takes class as a social-historical formation that is in the making and intimately related to questions of memory, subjectivity, and the law (e.g., Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson) and to gendered, racialized, and other social forms of inequality and oppression.[2]

Moreover, future research might delve further into

the uneven historical relations of power and domination between and within Western and Eastern Europe. These centuries-long relations decisively prepare the symbolic and material ground for the instrumentalization of memory to bolster national sovereignty, for instance, in Eastern Europe vis-à-vis the European Union. Finally, Kopusov's focus on Europe might be complemented with research on memory laws and politics in other parts of the world, especially in the global South. By engaging more directly with long-standing colonial and capitalist structures of power, their legacies and contemporary articulations, this research might bring a fresh perspective on the memory laws and wars surging across the world today.

Notes

[1]. The advent of neoliberalism and the “political failure of the Left” and organized labor in the 1970s does not mean the “end of the age of class struggle,” as Nikolay Kopusov claims (pp. 55). For instance, in David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), to which Kopusov refers (p. 53),

considers neoliberalism precisely as a ruling-class project to reproduce its class domination through a set of political economic policies and ideological strategies including the “deregulation” and financialization of economy, flexibilization of labor, cuts in public service, and the promotion of the free market as the model for subjectivity.

[2]. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1968). See also Don Kalb, *Expanding Class: Power and Everyday Politics in Industrial Communities, The Netherlands 1850–1950* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); and Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith, eds., *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) for suggestive explorations of the intersection of class, memory, and history. See Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (London: Pluto, 2017) for a fruitful analysis of class with the gendered and sexualized forms of oppression.

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