

REVIEWS

Uilleam Blacker, *Memory, the City and the Legacy of World War II in East Central Europe: The Ghosts of Others*. London: Routledge, 2019. 242 pp.

This book is an exploration into cultural memory construction in a number of East–Central European cities affected by border and population shifts in the course of World War II. The book’s endeavor parallels developments in current historiography focused on the legacies of violence and erased pre-war diversity of the region. Yet, the author’s approach comes from cultural memory studies and offers an intriguing conceptualization of the link between collective memory and urban space.

It is worth noting that many recent scholarly and popular literary accounts have dealt with the erased traces of multicultural pasts in the East European context. In this connection, Blacker aims to unveil the interactions with the past on the part of those “who took the place of the killed, transferred or deported pre-war populations” (p. 3) by inhabiting the physical sites of “lost others.” Arguably, these interactions play an important role in informing contemporary memory cultures in the region. Thus, the task is positioned on a very fertile ground of cultural memory developments—and the book delivers well on its promise.

The author offers an artful conceptualization of the link between memory and urban space by drawing on cultural memory scholarship. In addition, Blacker poses an intriguing question, which has important theoretical ramifications as well. Blacker asks: “can productive, reflective and critical connections to the past be built among the fragments and ruins of the past, and in the face of the increasingly globalized city?” (p. 10) Indeed, this is an interesting focus, taking into account the fact that much of memory studies scholarship focuses on the concept and actual processes of societal *forgetting*. The notion of how selectively and instrumentally societies remember events of the past is highly visible in the current scholarship. From this perspective, the

author's engagement with practices of encountering, appropriating, and incorporating the memories of "lost others" into local memory cultures comparatively is a promising undertaking that proceeds from a different normative point of view.

Building on Marianne Hirsch's notion of "post-memory," the author applies it to whole cityscapes chosen as case studies for the book. L'viv, Wrocław, and Kaliningrad are the main places of cultural memory construction of the "lost others" discussed in the book. Blacker's post-memory is encompassed in the processes of production of various kinds of memory fabric (texts, cemeteries, images etc.) that facilitate our relatedness and rootedness in places. As Blacker notes at one point, "texts create a 'post-memory' effect" (p. 175) similar to the effects produced by "hardware" memory fabric. The study of literature as a medium for accessing the city occupies a prominent place in the book. Blacker offers a conceptual allegory for considering cities as texts and, by implication, "reading" cityscapes as palimpsests. Not only does the book contain a separate chapter surveying developments in Polish and Ukrainian literature and their relationship to national historical imagination, but, generally, rich literary analyses inhabit the book. Based on his study of material drawn mostly from Ukrainian and Polish literature, Blacker describes reflective encounters with the pasts of L'viv, Kaliningrad, and Wrocław, and the effects of these encounters on changing local memory cultures. In addition, close readings of contemporary literature showcasing the interplay between physical sites of the "lost others" and the present-day authors comprehending those sites inform the most valuable and insightful parts of the book.

Certain parts of the book revolve around themes that will already be familiar to scholars, such as competitive victimhood, nostalgia, and memory in popular culture. On the one hand, this "repetitiveness" affords the author multiple conceptual tools to approach the topic that help to survey current commemorative developments in the region quite well. In fact, the chapter on martyrdom, memory, and the city surveying recent changes in the memory cultures of Ukraine and Poland would make an excellent

introduction to the subject for university courses on memory in East-Central European societies. In particular, it provides a succinct overview and good discussion points about the current state of Holocaust memory in the two countries. On the other hand, the author always provides his own distinctive interpretation of familiar topics, conveying a clear sense of his original authorship. Overall, the book makes a valuable contribution to scholarship on cultural memory of the region.

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Alexander Gogun, *Stalin's Commandos: Ukrainian Partisan Forces on the Eastern Front*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2016. 336 pp.

This work was translated for publication in English after its initial release in Moscow in 2008 with the title *Stalinskie kommandos: ukrainskie partizanskie formirovaniia: maloizuchennyye stranitsy istorii, 1941-1944*.

In this contribution to the overall scholarship on the Second World War in Ukraine, Alexander Gogun examines the activities of all of the various irregular warfare units that fought in Ukraine. With pro-Soviet forces as the primary focus, it also covers the activities of the Ukrainian nationalists as well as pro-Polish partisan groups, especially Armia Krajowa, which operated in Western Ukraine. Some mention is also necessarily made of the methods used by German and allied anti-partisan forces in dealing with, and occasionally working with, this spectrum of groups. The broad utility of the study rests on an interesting fact, that compared with other regions, the Soviets had relatively little luck recruiting friendly partisan forces in proportion to the size of the region and population.