

Beyond the Nation State: The Transnational Turn in Holocaust Studies

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Abstract:

The extensive volume *Entangled Memories. Remembering the Holocaust in a Global Age* integrates manifold disciplinary backgrounds – from architecture, literary, and film studies to ‘Holocaust Education’ and its musealization. The volume positions itself between the tension of an increasing transnationalism in the field of memory studies and the persistence of the nation state to define commemorative practices in opposition to a globalized Holocaust memory. The edited volume thus aims at depicting different national remembrance cultures in their relation to supra- and subnational perspectives. While the volume successfully displays the multitude of literary, architectural, visual and theatre representations of the Holocaust, the meaning of “entanglement” could have been followed more profoundly to bind the different articles together theoretically.

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Henderson, Marius and Julia Lange (eds.): *Entangled Memories. Remembering the Holocaust in a Global Age*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017. 500 pages, 54 EUR. ISBN: 978-3825366780.

Abstract:

The extensive volume *Entangled Memories. Remembering the Holocaust in a Global Age* integrates manifold disciplinary backgrounds – from architecture, literary, and film studies to ‘Holocaust Education’ and its musealization. The volume positions itself between the tension of an increasing transnationalism in the field of memory studies and the persistence of the nation state to define commemorative practices in opposition to a globalized Holocaust memory. The edited volume thus aims at depicting different national remembrance cultures in their relation to supra- and subnational perspectives. While the volume successfully displays the multitude of literary, architectural, visual and theatre representations of the Holocaust, the meaning of “entanglement” could have been followed more profoundly to bind the different articles together theoretically.

Daniel Levy’s and Natan Sznajder’s seminal work on the “cosmopolitanization” of Holocaust memory is a dominant point of reference in addressing its globalization (Daniel Levy/Natan Sznajder: *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*. Philadelphia 2006). According to the authors, the Holocaust not only became an internationalized ‘template’ for the remembrance of historical atrocities but also provided notions of a universalized humanism. The edited volume from 2017 *Entangled Memories. Remembering the Holocaust in a Global Age* is taking on these premises for literary and cultural studies where research agendas that still concentrate on the nation state supposedly dominate the field (p. 3). Implementing a more comparative and interdisciplinary perspective is thus the aim of this volume which gathers papers from a conference of the same name which took place at the University of Hamburg, October 9-11, 2014. Still, the editors Julia Lange and Marius Henderson are not abandoning the “national” completely. Instead, the collection tries to understand “the specifics of national commemorative cultures and their historical variability [...] [in] the interplay between national, local,

and global perspectives” (p. 5). This stance also addresses the criticism that a globalized Holocaust memory rather is “a postulate than an actual reality” (p. 6). An “Americanization” or “Polonization” of the Holocaust indicates how narratives are nationally “appropriated” (ibid.). But it’s not only the interrelation between the national and the global this volume tries to envision, but also the entanglements between history and memory itself.

The volume presents a wide scope in the study of representations and mediations of Holocaust memory; altogether it assembles 19 articles which are divided into 6 chapters. The first chapter focusses on the memorialization of the Holocaust through architecture and materialized memorial art. Whereas the second chapter delves into Holocaust representation in literature from different Western backgrounds, the third chapter highlights the relatedness of music and memory. Part four then turns to remembrance practices through visual art and chapter six closes the volume with contributions that address the difficulties to perform the Holocaust. Only chapter five takes a very different direction by not only turning to globalized Holocaust pedagogy, but also by broadening the perspective to other geographical areas and a postcolonial critique.

James E. Young opens the volume with his reflections on the personal experiences he gained as a jury member in the selection committees for the construction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the 9/11 Memorial. In his article *The Memorial’s Vernacular Arc between Berlin’s Denkmal and New York City’s 9/11 Memorial*, Young follows the question if and how contemporary architecture is influenced by, and thus entangled with, the experience of the Holocaust. By reconstructing the history of the origins of these memorials, Young is not only highlighting similarities and particularly stark differences between Holocaust remembrance and the 9/11 memorial, he also directs the reader to the limits of monumentality by pointing to the ambivalences of the architectural representations of history. Young emphasizes that a monument’s creation should always be embedded in “polemics” and be seen as “a never-to-be-completed process, animated (not disabled) by the forces of history bringing it into being” (p. 36).

The articles by Tanja Schult and Jonas Engelmann engage with the transmission of Holocaust memory from one generation to the other, its visual and artistic representations and thus the production of (transcultural) Jewish identity. In *Luftmenschen, Golems, and Jewish Punks: on the Pop-Cultural Reflection of Jewish Identity in the Post-Shoa*, Jonas Engelmann depicts the transnational migration of the Golem, a myth from Eastern Europe, and the metaphor of the *Luftmensch* to Western comics and other art work. Engelmann refers to these different memory representations to show divergent interpretations of how to deal with anti-Semitic prejudice and stereotypes. Tanja Schult’s article turns to the visualization of memory as a body practice. In her text *From Stigma to Medal of Honor and Agent*

of Remembrance: Auschwitz Tattoos and Generational Change, the author follows the change of meaning of the Auschwitz prisoner's tattoo and if there is the possibility of a "generational trauma-transfer" (p. 13). Schult identifies the tattoo as a performative practice in which the number is perceived as a bearer for Jewish Identity (p. 269) that inscribes commemorative acts into the body (p. 275).

Kaya de Wolff develops a different perspective on transnational remembrance practices by integrating a postcolonial critique and expanding the geographical scope. In her text on *The Politics of 'Cosmopolitan Memory' from a Postcolonial Perspective*, Wolff offers an insightful critique of Levy and Sznajder's conceptualization of a globalized Holocaust memory by pointing to its Eurocentric assumptions. Instead of creating empathy for colonial atrocities, the reference to the Holocaust is rather reinforcing existing asymmetries by marginalizing colonial pasts. De Wolff analyzes German newspaper discourses regarding the struggles of the Herero and Nama to gain recognition and reparations vis-à-vis the genocide committed in former German South-West from 1904-08. The author stresses that the use of Holocaust parallels, employed by Herero activists to integrate their story of suffering into a Western understanding of genocide, are systematically turned down in German media contexts (pp. 425-26). With this postcolonial lens, de Wolff argues that this notion of "transcultural empathy" (p. 418, referring to Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg: "Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory." In: *Criticism* 53.4 (2011), pp. 517-521, here p. 518) clearly developed under the preconditions of a "Western framework of memory and morality" (p. 416) which consequently excludes colonial pasts. The integration of a postcolonial perspective is an important approach to critically reflect on a Westernized globalization of memory.

The production of a cosmopolitan memory and the corresponding universalization of the Holocaust is the binding framework of this edited volume. It certainly gives a fascinating overview of the plethora of perspectives cultural and literary studies can take in the analysis of Holocaust memory in a global age. However, the volume would have profited from elaborating more deeply on its understanding of "entanglement". Susanne Leeb, who is also cited in the volume by Jana Seehusen, asks the important question: "Entangled: But How?" (p. 475, cf. Susanne A. Leeb: "Entangled – But How?" In: Christoph Behnke et al. (eds.): *Art in the Periphery of the Center*. Berlin 2015, pp. 210-219). While some of the texts engage diversely with this "how" (see for example the contributions of Samantha Mitschke, Jana Seehusen, Kaya de Wolff and James E. Young), in general the volume could have derived more insight from addressing this question in depth. Seehusen already points to a rich body of literature which provides different ways of grasping transnational interrelatedness (cf. p. 476). Especially in the field of cultural memory studies, Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney's work substantiates analytical tools to research "transnational memory" beyond "methodological nationalism" that could have proved useful (Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney: *Transnational Memory. Circulation, Articulation, Scales*. Berlin

2014, p. 1). Still, the assembled contributions offer a glimpse into the production of universalism by a globalized Holocaust memory and the normative proclamation of international morality – at least for a Western context.

German Abstract:

Jenseits des Nationalstaats: Die transnationale Wende in den Holocaust Studies

Der umfangreich gestaltete Sammelband *Entangled Memories. Remembering the Holocaust in a Global Age* vereint zahlreiche disziplinäre Richtungen – von Literatur- und Filmwissenschaften über das Feld der Holocaust-Bildung bis zur Darstellung des Holocausts in Museen. Der Sammelband positioniert sich dabei im Spannungsverhältnis einer zunehmenden Transnationalisierung der Erforschung von Erinnerungskulturen bei gleichzeitig bestehender Bedeutung des Nationalstaats in der Hervorbringung und Verbreitung erinnerungskultureller Praktiken. Darauf aufbauend versucht der Sammelband unterschiedliche national gefasste Erinnerungskulturen in ihrem Verhältnis zu lokalen und globalen Perspektiven zu verstehen. Während es dem Sammelband sehr gut gelingt, die Varietät literarischer, architektonischer, visueller und schauspielerischer Repräsentationen des Holocausts darzustellen, hätte der Band allerdings davon profitiert, wenn die Bedeutung der „entanglements“, also der erinnerungskulturellen Verflechtungen, stärker theoretisch verfolgt worden wäre, um schließlich die Artikel besser in einen Gesamtzusammenhang zu setzen.

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