

REVIEWS

Acta Poloniae Historica
106, 2012
PL ISSN 0001-6892

Marcin Siadkowski, *Szlachcicen. Przemiany stereotypu polskiej szlachty w Wiedniu na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* [The *Szlachcicen*. The stereotype of Polish nobility under transformation in Vienna of late 19th/early 20th century], Warszawa, 2011, Wydawnictwo Naukowe 'Scholar', 228 pp., bibliog., ill.

Although signed with a modest title, the book by Marcin Siadkowski is a source of many new inspiring observations and comments, findings, and conclusions. Being a master thesis written under the tutelage of Włodzimierz Borodziej, at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw, the treatise is composed of five chapters, preceded by an extensive methodological introduction and a wide discussion of the source base. There are chapters including brief essays appended to them, termed 'excurses', meant to illustrate the general considerations evolving ahead of them. The book covers the period of mid-nineteenth century to WWI, discussing the problems of relevance and their chronology – a structure that enables the author to grasp, characterise, and conceptualise the moments of key importance for the formation of a 'Polish' discourse in Vienna.

First of all, the versatility with which the varied sources are analysed is notable. In most cases, instead of summarising or paraphrasing the texts being referred to, they are subject to, so to put it, ongoing analysis. This method makes the book standing out against essays or studies on the shaping of stereotypes, so numerous as they have been in the Polish historiography in the recent years. Clarity of argumentation combined with a transparent composition is not at all the last noteworthy strong point of this book. Siadkowski has made use of an extensive and, seemingly, representative collection of newspapers and journals (across over twenty titles), numerous brochures and caricatures; he has also surveyed school handbooks and tourist guides, and offered a critical reading of anniversary publications, operetta libretti, or encyclopaedic releases (e.g. *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie im Wort und Bild*, the so-called *Kronprinzwerk*). Period memoirs are used to lesser degree. The sources are taken advantage of in a reliable fashion, the argument avoids being overcharged with irrelevant facts, and the examples are dosed in appropriate portions. The complex nature of the issue in question did not make the task easy; yet, the author has skilfully included hundreds, or

perhaps thousands, of utterances and enunciations within the framework of the relevant categories applied in an orderly manner.

The book analyses a specific type of public discourse. Its opening methodological remarks act almost as a manifesto. Although discourse remains the basic analytical concept throughout the disquisition, the scholar's approach to the subject-matter is quite extensive, as he adds certain new problems and formulates subsequent questions.

A thesis is posed, interesting and certainly worth of in-depth penetration, whereby the image of Galician nobility – the *Schlachcicen* – has been identified with the average Pole. The phenomenon is not marginal, albeit the 'Polish question' itself did not occupy a central position within the general-Habsburg debate. The significance of the issue taken up by Siadkowski manifests itself when juxtaposed against the earlier-published descriptions or analyses concerning the stereotype of Pole in the German cultural circle. The prevalent conviction – the subject having been dealt with, on an in-depth basis, by, e.g., Hubert Orłowski and Tomasz Szarota – has heretofore been that the Protestant-culture-based concept of Polishness as a chaotic type of social organisation, so-called *Pölnische Wirtschaft*, remained the dominant image. The book under review has enriched the picture with new motifs.

The effigy of the Polish nobility, and thus, of Polish people in general, has been built in a polarised way. For one thing, Poles were looked at paternalistically; for another, not without a certain dose of admiration. The Galician nobility stereotype has from the outset been associated with periphery, civilisation backwardness, and thoughtless conservatism. Observers not identifying (the) Poles with unrepentant obscurantism, underdevelopment, and bigoted Catholicism, were exceptional. As the author argues, a positive image of the Galician – a specific counterpoint to the dominant image – appeared all too seldom to become embedded in the Viennese community's memory. Interestingly, the dominating stereotype of the Galician nobility, albeit a creation of the liberal-democratic spheres, got detached with time from its original environment and started living its own life. Evoked and exploited by other milieus and groups, it felt at home with the popular culture of the epoch; its elements proved identifiable later on as well.

The Habsburg Vienna is often ascribed a special importance for comprehension of the modern condition of Europe; of the twentieth-century myths, and crimes too. From 1960s on, U.S. historians rediscovered those areas (to name Carl E. Schorske, or William M. Johnston), viewing Vienna at the turn of the century as, simply, a laboratory of modernity.

Siadkowski's theses seem rather pessimistic, if seen versus a more general assumption. From the standpoint of aesthetics as well as civilisation progress, Galicia – or, more broadly, the Polish area seen through the prism of the Viennese opinion – was a pitiful sight. The illustrations and interpretations the book evokes show that this image has been mostly stable, very rarely

changing, and bore all the hallmarks of a durable stereotype. What is more, somehow contrary to the far-reaching division of the Viennese political scene, almost all the acting political forces made use of it, on an equal footing – also once the public debate became much democratised and pluralised. In a concerted perception of the repeatedly-conflicted factions, Galicia formed part of the Slavonic world that, since the middle of nineteenth century, has gained entrance and penetrated into Vienna for good. Mostly because of the Czechs, let us add.

Dealing with the discourse's meanders, tracing down the allusions, references, and borrowings, Siadkowski has a few things of high relevance to say about the political culture of Vienna at the turn of the century. He namely shows how open and innovative it was, on the one hand; on the other, though, it appeared to be permanently confined within certain mental schemas. The Viennese political culture thus seems to have been full of contradictions, carrying the germs of modern phenomena, and containing certain durable mental formations built upon fear. As the reference literature tells us, fear has been one of the predominant collective emotions of the *fin de siècle*. In the case under discussion, the fear concerned otherness. Descriptions of the Poles, an example that could probably be extended to the other Slavs too, frequently assumed a black-and-white optics, no *chiaroscuro*. For the reader of this treatise, the tenacious presence of just a few motifs, fairly obsessively reappearing in the popular culture domain, might seem astonishing. These pictures are often of primary importance for understanding the stereotype of an eastern part of Europe – the Slavonic one, perceived by the nineteenth-century Vienna. The nineteenth century saw a radicalising perception of aliens. Hostility against the 'other' was becoming the instrument of combat against political opponents. The image of (the) Poles became one of the weighty points of reference, one that assumed the proportions of a metaphor of the epoch-specific emotions.

The image being described was a threat and, in parallel, a challenge for political representations of the Habsburg Slavs – the Poles, in this case. There were such, though, who decided to quit the role imposed on them by the 'Viennese world', remaining all the same proactive and influential participants of the system; yet, their impact on the shaping of their own image was limited. If a stereotype, as is customary to assume, can tell much of those who have generated and persistently tended them – offering a photograph of their knowledge and mentality, often outlining the geographic and intellectual vistas, thus enabling to reconstruct their makers' worldview – then it has less to say about its object(s) as such. The images namely appear contradictory, not infrequently paradoxical, even though similar motifs are at work, at first sight.

While commending the book, I should just like to indicate some doubts. Although the author has decided to manage his task in an integral way, the argument remains not completely coherent at some points. In some places where Siadkowski attempts to show a stable picture, I would rather

seek certain discontinuities. One example would be the Christian-Social Party (Christlichsoziale Partei – ChSP) which in 1890s disclosed a strong inclination toward formulating its political strategy around a confessional identity. Thereby, its notion of politicality nowise precluded (the) ‘Slavs’. Next, I would look more attentively, and perhaps from a different angle, at the Social-Democratic Workers’ Party of Austria (Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs – SDAPÖ). Is it true, following Siadkowski’s idea, that those did not form an alternative image of Galicia? Another thing is that the problems or issues the author refers to are not at all an exhaustive catalogue of the Viennese public opinion’s attitudes toward Galicia and the Poles. Gossip played a part of importance, which fact was not quite detected, or perhaps merely overlooked, by the author. It is without a big risk that one may claim that the world of rigid clichés and stereotypes started wavering at moments of political crises. Not at all such moments was the Poles’ position uniform, which must have contributed to the way they were perceived.

One more strong point of the Marcin Siadkowski book is respect for the predecessors, that is, historians researching into the stereotypes and political culture of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The treatise now fills in a gap in historical research, unidentified until recently, while also showing the benefactions of a research attitude consisting in a skilful discussion not only around the posed exploratory queries but also around the theses and findings ‘domesticated’ within the historiography. Apart from some concept-related doubts already enumerated, the analytical work calls for high appraisal. The author has skilfully tackled the extensive input material, producing in effect an excellent introduction to a multilayered afterthought on the image of Poles in the Habsburg monarchy. This up-and-coming scholar definitely deserves attention.

trans. Tristan Korecki

Grzegorz Krzywiec

Moritz Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis der Städte. Kulturelle Verflechtungen – Wien und die urbanen Milieus in Zentraleuropa*, Wien, Köln and Weimar, 2010, Böhlau Verlag, 417 pp., bibliog., index

Urbanisation processes are one of the fundamental experiences of modernity. Until recently, the urban studies discourse had encompassed mainly such issues as progress, the dynamics of social life or the risks facing the individual. Its connotations had more in common with the present and the future than the past. The otherwise self-evident fact that ‘history takes place’¹ has

¹ Karl Schlögel, ‘Spatial Turn. Endlich’, in *idem, Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich, 2003), 68.

only recently become recognised as a fully-fledged scientific problem. That has become possible largely due to the explosion of two paradigms: a demand for memory, not infrequently called the memory boom, and the spatial turn.

Seeing the city as a transmitter of memory has intensified in the last years – particularly with regards to Central European towns. It was there that twentieth-century history made its exceptional imprint, leaving many traces which today, with the gradual passing away of the witnesses, have to be read by younger generations. Thus, city space reveals empty plots left by houses that have been bombed down, walls with old bullet holes, almost ineligible inscriptions in foreign languages. Still, not only war and evictions have left their mark there, but also later changes: pre-war architecture intermingles with socialist buildings and communist heroes have vanished from their pedestals. Central European cities also perfectly record the most recent transformations: old commercial murals painted on front elevations are being replaced with mobile banners, promoting that or other product.²

Against the background of the currently predominant urban memory concepts, based mainly on the assumption of cultural memory (Jan and Aleida Assmann), is Moritz Csáky's approach. He concentrates on the city spaces of Central-Eastern Europe – which he calls Central Europe – from around 1900. Among the cities he discusses are Vienna (as the focal point of the analysis), as well as Budapest, Bratislava, Trieste, Ljubljana, Chernivtsi and Prague. The places are distinguished by their trans-boundary, multinational, multi-language and finally: multicultural character. The cities of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire were at the time a meeting-point of people of different origins, who shaped the social and cultural life and, as a consequence, also the memory of those areas. When looking at the phenomena characteristic of urban modernity, Csáky places an emphasis on the merging of ethnic and national cultures. Central-Eastern Europe is to him a perfect laboratory for such an analysis, as many communities met there, speaking different languages, professing different religions and formed by different traditions. What proved to be a problem for such a dynamic cultural melting-pot, though, was communication. It is obvious that the elites in the Austrian-Hungarian towns spoke German. Additionally, most artists, journalists, scientists, lawyers, doctors, etc., also spoke their own national languages: Hungarian, Czech, Slovenian, Polish, Yiddish, etc. (if one could at all differentiate the mother tongue from the non-native language). The cultural memory of those towns has thus been evoked in a multi-lingual literature and in the local press, published in different languages.

Although Csáky concentrates on literary and journalistic life, there are nevertheless interesting interpolations on Central-East European music and

² Ella Chmielewska, 'Logos or the Resonance of Branding: A Close Reading of the Iconosphere of Warsaw', *Space and Culture*, viii, 4 (2005), 349–80.

cuisine. For what they have in common is the fact that neither cooking nor music require language. Hence, dishes and melodies easily transgressed the boundaries of ethnic and national communities and appeared ‘under the thatches’ – also in places where people spoke only their native tongue on account of their inferior social position. Thus, the memory of the multicultural urban spaces of Central-Eastern Europe at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been recorded in the recipes used till today for *knedle* (dumplings), goulashes and chocolate cakes, as well as in many music standards still played at New Year concerts by the Viennese philharmonic orchestra.

The city is to Csáky first and foremost a place where culture is created, where works of art (also culinary art), literature, journalism and music are born. The urban space involved, both material and – much more so – immaterial one, serve him to formulate a new definition of culture, which he terms ‘communicative space’ (*Kommunikationsraum*). Focusing on literature, journalism, autobiography, music and culinary examples, the author almost ignores the city iconosphere. Still, for the memory of Central-European cities, the architectural and visual dimension is equally important. What deserves special attention is the relation of collective memory to the evolution of urban iconography, beginning with the turn of the twentieth century.³ The opulence of the spatial iconosphere was at the time noted by Walter Benjamin with an almost prophetic consistence: ‘Writing which had found an asylum in the printed book, where it led an autonomous existence, is unavoidably cast out onto the street by advertising and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of the brutal economic chaos’.⁴ Although one could presume that the transient iconosphere of advertisements and sounds deafened by the urban hubbub has not been – contrary to literature, architecture and culinary art – a particularly long-lasting means of conveying collective memory, yet it is just that memory of the modern city that makes today’s post-modern cities dominated by visual and audiovisual media facades.

How are we to translate such observations into research practices? The analyses of the memories of Central-East European towns and cities proposed by Csáky can be supplemented with an architectural dimension. The ‘cultural interweaving’ (*kulturelle Verflechtungen*, as Csáky calls the result of inter-cultural communication) of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Budapest or Prague could presumably be also seen in their city plans, architectural designs or photographs. Undoubtedly, the mobility of the modernist architects, their

³ See i.a. Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, 1993); Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2001).

⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘Attested Auditor of Books’, in *idem*, *One-Way Street, and Other Writings* (London, 1979), 62.

mutual contacts, study at the same colleges made architectural inspirations spread just as culinary recipes and musical motifs were interpenetrating. We could, for instance, make the biography and designs of the Ljubljana-born architect Jože Plečnik (indeed a couple of times mentioned in the book) the subject of such an analysis, as he worked not only in his hometown but also in Graz, Vienna and Prague. It would also be worthwhile to look more closely at the transient elements of the urban iconosphere from around 1900: architectural details, advertisements, shop signs, the programmes of wandering and stationary cinemas (it should be remembered that the language barrier did not exist in the early years of the cinema), newspaper illustrations, etc. Putting it shortly, parallel to the cultural phenomena discussed by Csáky, there also existed a huge space of popular urban visual culture.

What is the chief merit of Csáky's book? He first of all supplies empirical arguments to the reflections on the connections between memory, the city and modernity. The work to a great extent retains the 'media' paradigm of memory, as communication, language and also writing (through many references to regional literature and journalism) are important concepts in it. Csáky stresses also the role of the multicultural Bohemians and avant-garde in shaping the culture of Central-Eastern Europe around 1900. From among the numerous works in German on the memory of different Central-East European towns,⁵ Csáky's is the only one to introduce a comparative perspective, confronting different places and, further, presenting the influence of the memory of other Central European cities on shaping the multicultural melting-pot in Vienna. The author sets alongside different sources, stresses the role of music, which is very rare in the reflection on modern cities. He at the same time uses a very ample archival material (e.g., demographic data), thus developing the tools of his trans-disciplinary work, which lays the foundations of his theory of culture as communicative space.

trans. Katarzyna Kretkowska

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska

⁵ See i.a. Karl Schlögel, *Petersburg. Das Laboratorium der Moderne 1909–1921* (Munich, 2002); Gregor Thum, *Die fremde Stadt. Breslau 1945 und danach* (Munich, 2003); Per Brodersen, *Die Stadt im Westen: wie Königsberg Kaliningrad wurde* (Göttingen, 2008); Jan Musekamp, *Zwischen Stettin und Szczecin. Metamorphosen einer Stadt zwischen 1945 und 2005* (Wiesbaden, 2010); Felix Ackermann, *Palimpsest Grodno: Nationalisierung, Nivellierung und Sowjetisierung einer mitteleuropäischen Stadt 1919–1991* (Wiesbaden, 2011); Peter Oliver Loew, *Danzig. Biographie einer Stadt* (Munich, 2011).

Piotr Filipkowski, *Historia mówiona i wojna. Doświadczenie obozu koncentracyjnego w perspektywie narracji biograficznych* [Oral history and the war: concentration camp experience in biographical narratives perspective], Wrocław, 2010, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 509 pp., bibliog., index, English sum.; series: Monografie Fundacji na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej. Seria Humanistyczna

In Poland, the experience of the Second World War has been analysed for years in the fixed framework of the factual and objective narrative, as opposed to the fictional, literary description. Both witnesses' accounts and scholarly works conformed to the pattern that left individual experience and its personal expressions behind. This prevailing cultural model of the war story changed its frame and content with the flow of memory representations after the 1989 transition, with contributions from the important books by Barbara Engelking, Kaja Kaźmierska, Jacek Leociak, Małgorzata Melchior, Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek and other researchers, operating mainly in the areas of sociology and literary studies. For many scholars this shift meant the necessity to confront archival sources with a vast number of memoirs, and – as a consequence of the growing interest in issues related to the war in public debates – to compare the analyses against the interpretations of past events represented by memory bearers.

While a considerable part of the Polish historiography tends to focus on the reconstruction of facts, the interpretative approach is what defines the fabric of the book by Piotr Filipkowski. The title, although apt and to the point, is, however, a bit misleading – the study, within the broader context of the experience of Nazi concentration camps' victims, is precisely based on the biographical interviews conducted with the Polish survivors of KZ Mauthausen. Published by the Foundation for Polish Science, in the prestigious series of monographs in the humanities and social sciences, and being the winner of the 2011 'Stanisław Ossowski' Prize, the book is already acclaimed. The forthcoming English edition will be published by the Jena-based Imre Kertész Kolleg.

Piotr Filipkowski represents a young generation of researchers in the field of oral history and memory studies. Devotion to the subject of the study, rare sensitivity and tactfulness in dealing with the interlocutors, along with insightful reflection, are the features defining his approach. Currently, he is affiliated with the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Filipkowski has greatly contributed to various historical documentation projects fostered by the KARTA Centre, a renowned Polish non-governmental organisation. He is a co-founder and president of the Polish Oral History Association.

The two introductory chapters provide the reader with a complete profile of the relevant methodological and theoretical backgrounds. Their aim is to bring together the European and the American oral history traditions and juxtapose them with the qualitative sociology approach. This is followed by a description of the 'Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project', forming the very basis for the analysis, as well as several other projects, similar in terms of method. The first part of the book, albeit much necessary and useful, is, in my view, somewhat lengthy and detailed in its systematic account. Filipkowski's contribution to the field of biography studies and oral history reflection is unquestionable; however, the author does not follow any particular method of analysis. Instead, the attention constantly fixed at his interlocutors, their expressions as well as ability in posing subsequent questions to the narratives, being the result of the encounter, are the factors of essence. In the discursive section, which closes the introduction, Filipkowski argues that the interlocutors' own interpretation of their experience is what appears in the centre of his attention. Through their elucidation and conceptualisations, he attempts to grasp 'the reality of the experience' (p. 59). The interplay between the real experience and its interpretation is what coheres the collage of threads raised within the book.

The following two complementary sections provide a more general description of the main examples of prisoners' experience, extracted from the whole, very diverse, pool of the Mauthausen inmates. The part in question is seemingly subordinate, but is, in fact, crucial; it analyses three case studies. The status of an experienced man, initiated into the camp's reality, marks the group of intelligentsia that was imprisoned, for most part, in 1940. In the lives of those forming the second set of cases under analysis, Mauthausen appears to have been one of the many WWII imprisonment experiences. Most of the people representing this truly heterogeneous group ended up in the concentration camp between 1941 and 1944, accused of conspiracy or as escapees from forced labour. Poles sent to Mauthausen in 1944, who passed through Pruszków transit camp, being expelled from Warsaw after the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, formed a majority of the youngest generation of the Polish prisoners. Starvation and inability to adjust to daily life in the camp were the reasons for the highest death toll within this group. An additional chapter, intentionally separated, illuminates the specificity of the female victims' narratives, marked by being focused mainly on the private, intimate sphere of the everyday life that is depicted through vivid, emotional descriptions. By differentiating between the generations and between the genders, Filipkowski shows the variety of the Mauthausen experience – one that the book is, clearly, able to embrace only partially. Yet, the collective, dehumanised character of the camp's reality is positioned against the particular, personal reception of it.

Biography, thus, plays a key role in the analysis and it is through the biographies, in the first place, that social phenomena are elaborated and

explained. Not surprisingly, the cultural frameworks and patterns of a more collective nature, through which the life events and circumstances might have been evaluated and adopted, are revealed only at a general level. This results from the significant differences among the representatives of the three discussed groups, regarding social reality, status, identity, age and other factors related to their cultural background. The insightful account appears within the case studies, dense and rich (sometimes, arguably, overabundant) in details, where Filipkowski successfully provides the reader with a very thorough and complete analysis. The recurring themes of vital importance are the attitude toward people regarded as 'the others' and the relationships between Poles and Jews, Russians or Ukrainians, respectively. This related section will be obligatory reading for any researcher dealing with the complexity of interrelationships related to the multicultural past, shattered by WWII and its aftermaths, and prevalent in the present discourses.

Memory representations, especially these of traumatic experiences, call for a critical approach that would be directed at both – interpretation of the given 'evidence' and everything that might be left behind the framework of, usually precisely constructed, narrative. Filipkowski believes that the biographical narrative interview is the primary, most fruitful method of research, and he makes a convincing argument based on the materials he analyses. Nevertheless, he sees how the memoirs that aim to bear witness, typically being thought over in advance, are marred by the moment of reflection, revealing their nature. Such is the case of an interviewee named Zbigniew who, from the very beginning, appears to be a person consciously controlling the narrative and carefully sharing the experience, presumably according to the way it was depicted in his memoirs. When the wrought construction based on the masculine narrative of being an invincible hero guided by fortune gets accidentally broken, and the well-structured utterance turns into a chaotic, emotional talk, the interlocutor refuses to face the concealed memories. This 'end of performance' is thought-provoking: to what extent has the way the interviews have been conducted influenced and shaped the final outcome? Open-ended questions as an invitation to a long narrative without any interruptions seem to be conducive to a well-crafted biography. Still, in many cases, the researchers, however they strive for it, fail to overcome the necessity of creating one's own life picture.

The diversity and separateness of the prisoners' experience reinforced by the analytical approach grounded in biography make it difficult to arrive at conclusions. Filipkowski is aware of this weakness but very consistent in the investigation. Deliberately, he does not introduce any additional sources, as many researchers would probably be tempted to – and maintains the cohesive, meticulous study instead. His cautious, well considered statements during the course of discussion enable the reader to produce their own interpretation.

Anna Wolff-Powęska and Piotr Forecki (eds.), *Der Holocaust in der polnischen Erinnerungskultur*, Frankfurt am Main, etc., 2012, Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 421 pp.; series: Geschichte, Erinnerung, Politik. Posener Studien zur Geschichts-, Kultur- und Politikwissenschaft, 2

This anthology comprises a total of twenty-one essays, by various authors, on the place of the Holocaust in the Polish culture of memory. It is a multithread work, with essays categorised into four areas: (i) memory and responsibility; (ii) memory and politics in the 'People's Poland'; (iii) public debate in the democratic Poland (after 1989); lastly, (iv) issues of memory on the Holocaust and its contemporary (re)presentations in literature, film and music. The selection of topics and authors proves to be representative of the Polish afterthought of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century – or, to be more specific, of the fraction that endeavours to come to grips with the role of memory regarding the genocide of Jews in the Polish culture.

In her short introduction, Anna Wolff-Powęska, one of the series editors, situates the Holocaust in the Polish historical memory by showing analogies to, and differences from, the German debate. She points out that memory of the Shoah is *de facto* a memory on (the) Jews. This introduction well corresponds with the first section of the anthology where texts by leading Polish intellectuals: Zygmunt Bauman, Jerzy Jedlicki, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, and Michał Głowiński, can be found. Those by Bauman and Jedlicki freely refer to the debate related to the issue of the first famous book by Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbours*. Z. Bauman's essay ('Categorical murder, or: how to remember the Holocaust') takes up the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust as juxtaposed with the other genocide crimes of the twentieth century, seeking whether it has a separate status; whether it was modern, seen in the context of other mass murders – or, conversely, archaic; whether a crime of this sort is repeatable. Bauman's output in general offers these, and many other, questions and threads, commencing with *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), if not with some earlier works. This author argues that an 'evil' memory about the victims, their humiliation and, subsequently, removal from the collective memory (albeit the latter is an ordinary human response in a situation of cognitive dissonance, motivated with a need to positively think of oneself and a will to deny anything that is negative) reappears sooner or later, often twice as strong, and intoxicates the social life of contemporaries who for most part have nothing in common with the past. Not only does the suppression of a natural 'moral impulse' for squaring accounts with the past denigrate the memory of the victims: its effects on the present are devastating.

Jerzy Jedlicki ('Das Problem von Schuld und Verantwortung') has repeated his opinion formulated in 1980s about the reasonableness and the limits of

the category of collective guilt and collective responsibility in a debate on collective memory. His position has not changed much over the years. This historian continually argues for a legitimacy of collective responsibility for one's own history for endurance of a cultural community – and thus, of the memory of a national disgrace and pride of the past. In the Polish intellectual landscape, this opinion has remained isolated for years owing to its ethical integrity, while being unique against the background of the other voices; nowadays, it has become almost a dominant discourse, though.

The texts by Tokarska-Bakir and Głowiński are, in turn, two separate, penetrating commentaries in the public debate of the beginning of the twenty-first century. First published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily (2003), Tokarska-Bakir's theses ('Jedwabne: history as a fetish') form, basically, a combination of scholarly essay on the 'post-memory' syndrome in contemporary public debates in Poland and a lampoon on the Polish historiography, permeated with 'empiricism', as this author believes. Tokarska-Bakir essentially comes to the same conclusions as Bauman does: a vital and open community is exposed to incessant confrontation with the past. Turning the back at it results in reproducing social traumas.

The essay by M. Głowiński ('Die Besonderheiten des antisemitischen Diskurses'), which has already become classical in the Polish humanities, is a structuralist analysis of anti-Semitic discourse as a hate speech. The literary scholar indicates several of its constitutive characteristics: fluidity in the defining of 'Jew'; inner logical errors, including, in the first place, the 'principle of excluded middle'; hidden valuation; debunking narrative; peculiar author-addressee relationship: the author assumes the role of undisputed authority as he reads 'the revealed truth'; and, the rather narrow repertoire of recurring clichés, including, e.g., the motifs of the 'false Talmud' or 'good Jews'. As analysis of hatred speech, the study is instructive as it discusses all the paradigmatic elements of language of this sort.

A considerable share of the anthology is formed of texts on the issue of memory in the so-called People's Poland. In this group, the essays by Feliks (the table of contents has, erroneously, 'Józef') Tych ('Umfang und Quellen des Wissens über den Holocaust in Polen'); Alina Cała ('Die Genese des polnischen und des jüdischen Martyrermythos nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg'); Zofia Wóycicka ('Zur Internationalität der Gedankkultur'); Marcin Zaremba ('Das organisierte Vergessen des Holocaust in der Ära Gierk: Kontinuität und Wandel'); and, Jacek Leociak ('Die Instrumentalisierung des Holocaust während des Märzdiskurses') indicate an active, till 1989, role of the communist state in the formation of the culture of memory – or rather, non-memory or oblivion – of the Holocaust.

The group of essays headed 'Die öffentliche Debatte im demokratischen Polen' contains three texts, of which two present the great discussions of the late 1990s. The catalyst and narrative groundwork for one of them –

i.e. Bartłomiej Krupa's 'Die Intensivierung der Holocaust-Diskussion. Der Streit um *Die dunklen Seiten des Aufstands* von Michał Cichy' – was an article by Cichy published in 1994 in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, titled 'The Poles–the Jews: The [Warsaw] Uprising's Black Chapters'. The other concerns the so-called Auschwitz lie (Piotr Forecki, 'Polens symbolische Eliten und die "Auschwitzlüge"').

While the essays by Forecki and Krupa are accounts of Polish public debates of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century, Elżbieta Janicka's study ('Der Ritualmord nach dem Arierparagrafen. Über das Buch *Die Angst* von Jan Tomasz Gross') goes much beyond this framework in terms of interpretation. It is a critical review of J.T. Gross's *Fear*, and was first published in *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, a sociological journal. Janicka emphasises a deep cultural embedment of anti-Semitic attitudes in Poland. Radical and uncompromised in her opinions, and gifted with the skill of formulating clear theses, she conclusively resolves yet another question. She namely notices that memory of Jews in Polish culture may be extremely instrumental, usefully acting in benefit of a mythology of innocence. Our contemporary mass media seem to oversimplify this way of thinking even more.

The anthology's most extensive section is on the Holocaust in literature, film and present-day museums. The texts are written mostly by literary scholars: Józef Wróbel ('Blätter der Erinnerung. Die polnisch-jüdische Literatur nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg'); Przemysław Czapliński ('Holocaust und Profanierung'); Bogumiła Kaniewska ('The Space of Every Day Life in the Literary Representations of the Holocaust'); Sławomir Buryła ('Die Prosa Tadeusz Borowskis und der Holocaust'); Aleksandra Ubertowska ('Der Holocaust, eine Verlängerung der Diskurse. Über die Dichtung Adam Zagajewskis'); Dorota Krawczyńska ('Holocaust-Literatur in den Augen der Literaturwissenschaft'); film experts Tomasz Łysak ('Das postume Leben der Nazi-propaganda. Dokumentarfilme der Nachkriegszeit über das Warschauer Ghetto') and Małgorzata Pakier ('Scripting the "Jew" in German and Polish Holocaust Melodrama'); and, one by a cultural critic, Anna Ziębińska-Witek ('Die Ästhetik des Todes – Der Holocaust in Museumsausstellungen').

Significantly, while the literary scholars' essays are unambiguously indicative of a far-fetched workout of the Holocaust theme in the belles-lettres, virtually since the very beginning, the essays on popular art show, instead, an incrementing trivialisation of the methods of showing the Holocaust, its permanent political abuse and commercialism. Kitsch, and the aesthetics of kitsch, tend to appear frequently. Noteworthy, against this background, are the research-and-ethical postulates that recur in almost all of the enumerated texts. Ziębińska-Witek, whose article brings the author's impressions from several known international art exhibitions, postulates – following Jennifer Bonnell, Roger I. Simon, and others – that representations of the Holocaust in our contemporary exhibiting practice exceed the will to understand and describe the Shoah experience, leaning toward empathy and solidarity with the

victims (p. 418). This will enable, as she believes, to more fully extract the individuality of destiny, which will not illustrate the so-called historical process, or, all the more, ready-made narrations. Krawczyńska, whose essay is for most part a piece of methodological afterthought, emphasises the need to return to the sources, which would for instance mean to refer to Holocaust-related literature in the original languages. This literary scholar indicates that a comprehensive understanding of the place of the Shoah in the twentieth century may provide a toolkit for analysing our contemporary situation and realities, but this would require that individual disciplines be transgressed, and an alternative language of criticism developed. Such a language would enable coexistence, on equal footing, of the various discourses: historical, literary-critical, social, and psychological. A research field thus expanded using off-scholarly tools would be called, after Imre Kertész, an 'atonal space'.

Most authors contributing to the volume in question have taken up the debate around Jan Tomasz Gross's books as a catalyst, or at least a critical point, for a great discussion unfolding around the Polish collective identity. The reading of these texts is indicative of one more regularity. Although a number of facts Gross describes had long been known to historians, and, to a lesser extent, to representatives of other social sciences, most of them have never penetrated into the Polish historical awareness. At the same time, Polish-Jewish debate remains one of those motifs which affect the national identity of the contemporary Polish people the most, with nothing around that would suggest it could change soon. The 'outrage' around Gross has not so much publicised the bitter truth about the past and relaxed the restrictions in tackling tough and painful topics, as it primarily became a detonator for the long-expected discussion on the framework of a new collective identity.

This anthology illustrates how the Polish memory is getting released not only from the ethnical burdens and stereotypes, but also, from the dictate of a conventional language of public debate, whose arrangement dates back to the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Imprinted into the cultural community tissue, this language fares extremely well in certain social circles still today. Not being depreciative of the importance of the issues raised by the anthology, and appreciating the positive change taking place in the Polish public debate past 1989, many of the essays indicate how much still remains to be done. A subcutaneous subject-matter in most of them is the tension between collective self-representations of the Polish cultural community and the facts. Any deeper-penetrating quest behind the curtain of notions such as moral-national unity, Polish Catholicism, or ethnically uniform society, some facts 'kicked down the road' for years will be surfacing. Still, if we compare the Polish debates with the state-of-play and standards of the discussions going on in our neighbouring countries – or even, an apparently risky claim, if we confront them with analogical public debates in the West-European countries, where these problems have been tackled for two or three decades

now – then the reading of the texts collected in the volume edited by Wolff-Powęska and Forecki seems inspiring and reassuring.

trans. *Tristan Korecki*

Grzegorz Krzywiec

Machteld Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain? Immigrants, Immigrant Organisations, War Memories*, Frankfurt am Main, etc., 2011, Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 206 pp., 3 fig.; series: Geschichte, Erinnerung, Politik. Posener Studien zur Geschichts-, Kultur- und Politikwissenschaft, 1

Straddling the Iron Curtain? by Machteld Venken starts the new, promising, interdisciplinary series 'Geschichte – Erinnerung – Politik' edited by Anna Wolff-Powęska and Piotr Forecki, and published by Peter Lang.¹ The series has a chance to contribute significantly to the complex European research of collective memory by shifting attention from the Western toward Eastern Europe and to their mutual relationship, as is the case with Venken's book. It concentrates on two migration streams that entered Belgium after WWII: the former *Ostarbeiterinnen* from the Soviet Union and the Allied soldiers from Poland fighting on the Western Front in the division of General Stanisław Maczek. The book falls in three parts. The first one describes the processes of adjustment to the host society of these two flows of immigrants and the formation of their groups' identity and official organisations, from the immediately post-war period until the late 2000s. The second focuses on the evolution of social practices of commemoration at the military cemetery Lommel (soldiers) and of singing performance (*Ostarbeiterinnen*). The third discusses the relevance of the concept of trauma in the research of the group memories and shows how the trauma was not only experienced, but also socially constructed among members of immigrant organisations.

Venken's main question concerns the impact of the Cold War on the formation of a group of immigrants, and their war memories. She shows how they were shaped in continuous negotiation with organisations of war memories on both sides of the Iron Curtain. She also documents how the collapse of communism resulted in reclaiming ethnic categories into the

¹ Three following, very interesting volumes are already available, including: Anna Wolff-Powęska and Piotr Forecki (eds.), *Der Holocaust in der polnischen Erinnerungskultur*, 2012 (see the review by Grzegorz Krzywiec in this issue of APH); Marta Grzechnik, *Regional Histories and Historical Regions: The Concept of the Baltic Sea Region in Polish and Swedish Historiographies*, 2012; Lutz Niethammer, *Memory and History: Essays in Contemporary History*, 2012.

groups' identities. Equally important is the comparative, gender dimension of Venken's inquiry. The war experiences and social background among former soldiers and female slave labourers were already very different in terms of social prestige and the Cold War context only inflated these discrepancies: former Polish soldiers enjoyed much more favourable conditions than *Ostarbeiterinnen* to adjust to Belgian society and to articulate their war memories in the public realm. In such a way, Venken gives an interesting insight into processes of inclusion and exclusion of both certain social groups within Belgian society, as well as certaintopics and agencies within the public sphere. In such a way, concentrating on ex-combatants and forced labourers, this study follows the path once started by Pieter Lagrou's groundbreaking comparative book on *Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe*,² however it is innovative by adding the Eastern perspective to the overall picture.

The study was based on: twenty-four biographical interviews with *Ostarbeiterinnen* and soldiers, two participant observations (at Lommel cemetery and at the Association for Soviet Citizens), many informal talks, extensive archival research and organisational periodicals. Using such source material, Venken has been successful in realising several methodological postulates formulated in the contemporary memory studies. She concentrates not only on personal narratives or commemorative events, but also on the process of formation of public agencies and the ways the groups interacted with the structures of both Belgian and home societies. With the bottom-up approach she was able to offer long-term insight into those processes. Focusing on immigrants, she tried to go beyond research of national mythologies and studied the effects of cross-borders exchange on war narratives. In all that, she merged migration and memory studies. Her work calls for further such case studies, written from the same perspective, as well as for a future comprehensive study of immigrant memories in post-war Europe.

Let me express, to end with, two minor critical remarks on the book's editorial facet: while the decision to make one's interviewees anonymous is absolutely justified in the light of ethics of biographical studies, I cannot understand why on earth the author gives her interlocutors English pseudonyms such as Becky or Wendy – instead of, say, Natasha or Anastasia. It is confusing, and blurs the historical circumstances of a study in which all the other (non-anonymous) names are either Ukrainian, Russian, Polish or Belgian. The book would also have benefited from a more careful proofreading by Peter Lang.

Joanna Wawrzyniak

² Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare, 8, New York, 2000).

Robert Traba, Hans Henning Hahn, Maciej Górny and Kornelia Kończal (eds.), *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci* [Polish-German realms of memory], vol. 3: *Paralele* [Parallels], Warszawa, 2011, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 475 pp.; German edn: *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, Band 3: *Parallelen*, Paderborn, 2012, Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 490 pp.

It is somewhat awkward to get down to discussing a study which has only *started* a series, without really *opening* it. I am referring to a part of one of the largest ventures of Polish humanities of the last decade, being, at the same time, a common Polish-German project (delivered by the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin and the Institute of History, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg), titled 'Polish-German realms of memory'.

The entire project encompasses four volumes (to be) published in Polish and four other, in German. The first two, entitled 'The Common/The Separate', are meant to deal with German and Polish realms of memory, described in a shared fashion, but separately as well, not infrequently in a confrontation. It has been announced that volume 4 – 'Methodological afterthought' will be most burdened with theoretical aspects of research on historical memory, thus being, one might guess, the titbit for experts and other interested readers. Volume 5, contributed to by the Deutsches Polen-Institut in Darmstadt, to be published in German only, will make the German reader acquainted with the state-of-play in Polish collective memory research. The whole project is a work of almost 130 authors, from five countries.

The studies presented in volume 3 offer a representative insight into the series' assumptions. Although research into collective memory has a longer history behind it, 'realms of memory' (*lieux de mémoire*) is a fairly new category, which was introduced to historiography by outstanding French historian Pierre Nora. Without dwelling on the idea's intellectual genealogy, it needs being mentioned that the present Polish-German project draws a lot from the French-German experience.

The main subject of consideration for its authors is cultural heritage of the two communities, Polish and German. What the present volume provides a first sample of is not even so much an attempt at a novel and all-embracing researcher's glance on the history of Poland and Germany, seen together, as an attempt to outline a new research paradigm. In line with the latter, the researcher's focus shifts from national histories toward a history of sites where the memories, symbolism, and founding myths of both national communities gained shape. The authors have taken the trouble to analyse something that is only graspable on a *longue durée* basis: changes, flows,

transformations and fluctuations of national consciousness, inter-generational receptions and transactions of ideas perceptible, usually, over several epochs or, at least, mini-epochs; not in an eternal confrontation but separately, each within its own plot, in a sort of loopy interrelatedness. Without evading certain hard-to-tackle or bruising problems.

It is a rather well-informed guess that this design is backed with an idea to adapt and create an 'inventory of national memorial legacy', to use the vocabulary proposed by the aforementioned giant of French twentieth-century historiography. 'Realms of memory' is, after all, something more than certain cultural-geographic contexts, or topological venues. It is, as if, a cultural 'exrescence' without which (a) group identity would be hard to understand. This may include occurrences or events, as well as culturally established, fictitious or really existing characters, plus artefacts in which collective identity is constituted and develops. This association with the past may assume the form of a relationship with historic realities (e.g. the Battle of Grunwald/Tannenberg), or, of a sort of reference to certain cultural testimonies (e.g. Henryk Sienkiewicz's novelistic historical trilogy). An archaeology of memory is not so much a history of 'sites' where something of essential importance has taken place; instead, it deals with anything that has exerted – and often still does – an impact on our contemporary times. 'Realms of memory' of this kind are, therefore, not limited to places/signs/figures with respect to whom/which memory is preserved, but a sort of cultural message in which the community finds its reflection – and, most essentially perhaps, from which it draws knowledge about itself. Delving in them enables these authors to elicit and show the foundations of a cultural community.

The first issued volume (numbered '3') gives a genuine sample of the method: a portion of more than twenty 'realms of memory'. Encyclopaedic entries can be found, dealing with the emergence and fall of states ('The First Reich and the Commonwealth of the Two Nations', written by Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg); the place and role of expansion in the history of both communities (Christoph Kleßmann and Robert Traba, 'The borderland area and the German East'; also, Leszek Żyliński, '*Mitteleuropa* and the Isthmus'); battles, transformed into foundation myths (Paweł Migdalski and Dirk Mellis, 'The Teutoburg Forest Battle and the Battle of Cedynia/Zehden'); along with those, the focus is on the profiles of national traitors emblematic to both communities (Bogusław Dybaś, 'Wallenstein and Radziwiłł'), or, for that matter, water areas whose significance has become fundamental to the formation of geographical imagination of both communities (Beata Halicka, 'The Vistula and the Rhine'). One also encounters studies on national songs (Robert Rduch, 'National anthems'), legislative acts – not really regulating a legal environment as forming a group mentality (Jerzy Kałużny, 'The Constitution of 3 May and the Constitution of 1848-9'); at

last, authors sanctioned as those who have established the national canon (Izabela Surynt's brilliant study 'Gustaw Freytag and Henryk Sienkiewicz'). Moreover, there is an array of essays on popular culture. A vast majority of the texts identifies the genealogy of the issue in question, which is followed by in-depth cultural analyses: reconstruction of what was remembered and of what was becoming a peculiar national treasure, a stencil to (re)use.

This published volume already shows that the designers and editors are deliberately willing to 'X-ray' and penetrate German-Polish cultural points--of-contact – and in a double perspective so. This does not in each case mean that a Polish and a German scholar deals with a given problem. Such reversal of perspective obviously implies a number of consequences, making one view the two last centuries of the Polish-German history anew.

Read as a whole, the volume poses several essential questions: about the condition of historiography and about the standard of public life, particularly with reference to Poland. These studies manage the national singularity and peculiarity mythologies. Some of the authors, though, emphasise certain distinct and *sui-generis* characteristics; others cannot detach themselves from national narrations, with their alleged idiosyncratic originality and uniqueness (as if certain experiences were undecipherable outside of the vernacular historical context). What stands out, in the first place, is the shared experiences, including common historical experiences – even if not always realised, and not for everyone. It is only confrontation with 'neighbourly' experiences that provides the reader, as if from the outside, a more complete image – more comprehensive as it is – enabling to regard one's native history in a somewhat different manner. Only such a juxtaposition, perhaps, reveals and renders explicit the crystallisation points and platforms for collective memories; landscapes and topographies of (the) collective memory.

For the record, it ought to be remarked that the authors refer to a few different research methods, techniques and schools. Transnational depictions are confronted with more traditional comparative studies, gender studies with those referring to the methods and instruments used by cultural studies. Historians of ideas and mentalities are thus concurrent with experts in micro-history – or, to be more precise, history of everyday life, *Alltagsgeschichte*. Some authors, in turn, refrained themselves, perhaps deliberately, from any theorising at all, albeit not from afterthought. Regardless, however, of the assumed method, most of the volume's studies have been produced by erudite scholars displaying the skill of synthetic depiction, coupled with clever lead-in. The volume in question, seen as a whole, is an attempt at comparative studies, in a new capture, applying new methodologies and, sometimes, going athwart the styles and genres of historical writing. This

research concept comes over in an ideal moment, when researchers of many sections and historical periods voice the need for a new opening, exhaustion with a rather primitive positivism appears (marked in the Polish historiography of the recent years by the Institute of National Remembrance publications), whilst the Western humanities display a lassitude about postmodernism.

Lastly, the translation and editorial effort made in rendering these texts uniform, and in making more out of them than just a concert of lonely stars. It is quite possible that not every single intent has been successfully delivered; not all the ambitions and intentions of the authors could have been tamed and coordinated. All the same, having conscientiously read this book, no-one may doubt that this volume gives a new quality. What it does is unveils the stereotypes petrified by time, squares accounts with the accrued and mythology; moreover, it is a chronicle of changes and transformations having occurred in historiography and social studies.

Such common, 'parallel' collation of essays based upon various schools and methodologies must, and sure will, trigger a wealth of reflections. Reproducing the material substance of the past, and showing its primal characteristics, the authors have also referred to the genealogy of the present. Application by the authors of new or somewhat refreshed methods in research of a 'living' historical material: memory and mental representations, is a considerable advantage of this volume. This book, strongly embedded in the recent quests of international humanities, hits the mark of public debates.

To sum up, the book is an extensive, comprehensively depicted and richly documented study, touching upon a number of new issues, and raising anew certain new problems which have so far not enjoyed deserved attention. The publication is part of an important current of humanistic reflection. Also, it displays yet another non-negligible value: coming out as a result of the efforts of scholars drawing their methodological inspirations from various currents of the humanities of today, it offers a genuine array of achievements and exchange of voices between several generations of Polish and German humanists. These reasons, along with the beauty of many texts, most of which could certainly exist independently, make this study a herald of one of the most seminal, most interesting and most ambitious achievements of the humanities in the recent period.

Ewa Domańska, *Historia egzystencjalna. Krytyczne studium narratywizmu i humanistyki zaangażowanej* [Existential history: A critical study in narrativism and committed humanities], Warszawa, 2012, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 223 pp., bibliog., subject index (notions); series: Klio

Ewa Domańska, a professor with the Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań and with the Stanford University, is doubtless the most outstanding and Poland's best-known expert in contemporary Anglo-American theory of historiography. She was a student of Jerzy Topolski, probably the only history theoretician wider-known outside Poland. Domańska's favourite area of study and research has by far been described as 'narrativism' – or, theoretical concepts related to the notion of narration/narrative in historiography, as a whole. Presently, *Historia egzystencjalna* seems to be a summa of her studies and research done hitherto, and an attempt to position narrativism in the context of her new interests and a broader afterthought on the condition of contemporary historical research and practice of history pursuance and university teaching. As she declares, Domańska deals today with post-humanities, bio-humanities, ecological humanities, multi-genre humanities, and the ways they influence the understanding and writing of history.

Historia egzystencjalna thus comprises a reflection on the input of narrativism into our contemporary historiographical theory and practice, along with a series of theoretical as well as practical postulates put forth by its author – directed at, primarily, Polish historians. The first three chapters – titled, respectively, 'Zwrot narratystyczny' [The narrativistic turn]; 'Estetyczny wymiar narratywizmu' [An aesthetic dimension of narrativism]; 'Fakt historyczny' [The historical fact], offer a retrospective view, considering, to a large extent, the output of the classic narrativist authors: Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit, and, Richard Rorty and Jerzy Topolski beside them. The book's first section is concluded with 'Topos tradycyjnego historyka' [The topos of traditional historian], a chapter arguing that 'traditional historian' of today (the author limits herself to a single example at this point, though) has essentially absorbed many a narrativist(ic) postulate, and yet still tends to be undeservedly demonised by adherers of incessant progress in historical research. The following chapter ('Epistemologia bez niewinności' [Epistemology without innocence]) offers a review of research areas and methods whose contribution to historical research seems to make the author optimistic, giving a hope that her postulated 'existential history' is realisable. In a briefest summary, the said project is founded upon the idea of rendering historians ethically sensitive to the subject-matter of their research, in view of the resultant 'agentive turn'.

Among the areas of research that meet the postulate in question, the author mentions postcolonial studies and studies on the twentieth-century trauma, focusing on the perspective of the victims – in other words, aiming at ‘subjectivising’ those who, in Domańska’s opinion, were denied a ‘deepened subjectivity’ by the bygone historiography. The sixth chapter (bearing a title in English, ‘Forget Foucault!’) aims at squaring accounts with the French Theory – i.e. an American-style French theory of the history of the latter half of twentieth century. As Domańska notes, the American perspective has significantly politicised the original French texts – and it was in such a version that those texts were received, or appropriated, in Poland. On the other hand, she reproaches them for – following Deleuze’s *bon-mot* – for having approached the methodology as a ‘toolbox’, exaggeratingly emphasising the necessity of its being applied in practice. The last chapter (‘Praktyczna metodologia’ [Practical methodology]) and the following conclusive section focus on the author’s proposed remedies to improve the deficient (in her perception) condition of our contemporary historiographic theory. She points out the domain’s institutional shortcomings occurring in the West: faculties closing down, academia courses cancelled, etc. And, based thereon, she draws a rather farfetched conclusion that historiography will be de-professionalised in a future, or history would perhaps disappear as an independent academic area, absorbed by certain cognate branches of humanities which tend not to neglect an afterthought on their own methodology. Yet, she limits her considerations to the present-day condition of history in Poland, putting forth a thesis whereby provincialism is the main issue it faces. The antidote she suggests to apply is to discontinue the copying of the Western methodological patterns, a trend she calls ‘self-colonisation’, which she contrasts with an ‘established theory’ – one that combines ‘subjectivisation’ and respect for professional background and techniques of historian.

Although the author does not avoid expressive generalising claims, *Historia egzystencjalna* is not an easy piece of reading – this being the case with the other books by Domańska as well. First, this latest book juggles, in an enviably erudite manner, with a vivid and capacious terminology, tracing which raises doubts, every once a while, about what the underlying meaning is of notions such as ‘established theory’ or ‘practical methodology’. Even more difficult it proves to discern between, and follow, the numerous grandiloquent postulates the author proposes whilst not bothering herself with making some of her appeals more precise: ‘The humanities need a new language today’; or, ‘We are in need, I should think, of a science of being together, adapted to the modern-world realities’ are the examples. Moreover, one of the main theses, the one which claims the need to abandon efforts made by Polish historians to adopt the methodologies elaborated in the West – the trend Domańska describes as ‘self-colonisation’, as already mentioned – seems awkward, in fact, given the context of her own output as a researcher

and author. Regretfully, *Historia egzystencjalna* does not reflect upon how to reconcile this particular postulate with her own long-lasting endeavours to implant the narrativistic theories in the Polish soil. The same remark holds true for the question of how to implant into Polish historical practice/pragmatics the perspective worked out by postcolonial studies – a mostly failing attempt by far. To rephrase these observations, in spite of its impressive erudition and judicious criticism aimed at many intellectual currents it discusses, the book by Ewa Domańska, owing to its style, reminds one of an ideologically engaged manifesto – instead of precise argumentation a theorist should be expected to offer. This is at least a partly purposeful effect: this author does not conceal her emotional involvement – and, furthermore, she considers such attitude a model to follow. At times, however, the impression is irresistible that the postulate to engage historians in (an) ‘existential history’ or ‘science of being together’ would be undeliverable as long as we cannot more specifically tell what those ideas actually stand for – a missing aspect in Domańska’s book.

trans. Tristan Korecki

Adam Koźuchowski