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Making sense of the Holocaust in Socialist Eastern Europe

How to make sense of the Holocaust? This question was crucial for many actors behind the Iron Curtain. The contributions of this book challenge the black-and-white picture that was drawn of the state socialist past, not only in the Western world during the Cold war but also within the former People's Republics after the upheavals of 1989. The general assumption was that it was not possible during those years to elaborate any discourse on the World War II without an underlying political agenda in which the Jewish experience's specificity could not fit. Yet, the careful examination of actions undertaken by various actors demonstrate that Eastern Europe did not completely suppress Holocaust historiography and memory.

To do so, the authors first focused on *how* people expressed memories of the Holocaust, underlining many understudied memorialization efforts and historical projects. Rather than seeing them as merely instrumental tools for the regime, they prove that these actions were legitimate and authentic for the actor that undertook them. Second, they rejected the so-called "Eastern Bloc" as a monolithic entity, pointing to the diversity of realities within it. Third, they showed how the many forms of relationship with the Holocaust that existed—memorialization efforts, literary and artistic representations—were clear evidence of the agency of the actors responsible for them, upturning the traditional view that has positioned these actors as mere implementers of the rigid, top-down, ideological narrative of World War II in state socialist countries. Despite constraints on what could be said about it or done to commemorate the Holocaust, it was possible for Eastern Europeans to try and make sense of the catastrophe, to mourn and seek to explain the massive destruction of their fellow Jewish citizens. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, this volume has helped

demarginalize the history of violence and genocide in Eastern Europe. While recognizing salient specificities in the prelude, unfolding and long-term effects of genocidal violence among east-European societies, such differences do not preclude the possibility for useful comparisons to similar courses of events in other regions. There is certainly much to be gained from understanding the memory of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe since it provides useful concepts and heuristic tools to better seize traumatic memories and representation in other former “extremely violent societies,”¹ like Rwanda after the Tutsi genocide or Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge, places that share a similar past of “paroxysmal violence.”²

Discursive Frameworks for Addressing the Holocaust

Rather than suppression, the authors of this volume have put forward other ways in which memory was controlled in state socialist Eastern Europe, such as marginalization, distortion, and the creation of alternative memory within the legitimate framework of antifascism and universalization of the Jewish experience. These concepts better explain how narratives of the fate of Eastern European Jewish victims during World War II started and changed. The discourses were furthermore extremely affected by the deep and long-lasting impacts of the brutalization of entire societies. Therefore, boldly articulating war experience with any mediation tool would have been too harmful and traumatic.³ The authors have argued that narratives of the Holocaust were not absent at all from the public space but were framed mostly *within* the antifascist discourse that universalized Jewish victims, rendering them not as Jews but as simply citizens. While other scholars have often mistaken—sometimes deliberately—that anti-fascist framework of state socialism for censorship, this book has attempted to prove that this framework cannot be reduced solely to censorship, as shown by

1 A term taken from Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

2 The concept of “paroxysmal violence” (*violence paroxystique*) was first used by Christian Ingrao in his book *The SS Dirlewanger Brigade: The History of the Black Hunters*, trans. Phoebe Green (New York: Skyhorse, 2011 [2006]), 245. His study of a unit of poachers sent to the Eastern front analyzes the conditions that made it possible for them to act with hitherto inconceivable cruelty, which Ingrao describes as “paroxysmal violence.”

3 On the concept of “brutalization,” see George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). On long-lasting effects of World War II on Polish society, see Andrzej Leder, *Polen im Wachtraum: Die Revolution 1939–1956 und ihre Folgen* (Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2019).

the alternative memory forged by the writers of *Sovetish Heymland* or the self-censorship of the editors who published the Ringelblum archives. Though censorship did exist and did prevent the publication of certain works or the expression of Jewish suffering in certain ways—for instance, in the case of state-funded art projects about the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary, or in the case of GDR historian Helmut Eschwege who encountered difficulties when he tried to describe explicitly the fate of Jews in his broader narrative of the war.

Yet, this censorship was not as total or as top-down as it has often been imagined to be. Rather than only taking the form of the censor's black marker, censorship more ambiguously took place in the form of self-censorship, self-constraint, and adaptation to official discourse. Such was the case for many of the painters, sculptors, writers, filmmakers, journalists, and historians discussed in this volume, who thrived to tell their story in their own way. The creative virtue of (self-)censorship, that boundaries enhance creativity and artists pass on messages despite constraints,⁴ appears to be quite important in other fields too, such as with journalists like Heinz Knobloch. As Alexander Walther underscores, Knobloch challenged the conventionally impersonal history of the destruction of European Jewry in his books by presenting a very personal narrative and addressing the controversial issue of responsibility, although in veiled language. Similarly, Anatoli Rybakov used voids in the construction of his novels to help the reader understand the unspeakable. If literature can be defined by an attempt to embody and individualize the expression of universal emotions and situations, then its mission could still be fulfilled among talented artists who acutely used that essence of literature—and art in general—to tackle the potential distorting effects of an imposed and dominating universalistic war narrative.

Thus, censorship of Holocaust discourse was not total. Many chapters in this book analyze the existence of discursive places for the memory of the Holocaust, be it through the critical reception of a work of art or a book. Historical research and publication projects, often looked down upon by Western scholars, did occur behind the Iron Curtain, though they were linguistically cautious in presenting the results and complied to an extent with the official or sometimes unofficial demands of the state in exchange for access to archives. Peter Hallama, for instance, highlights the leading role played by historian Miroslav Kárný in publishing sources on the Nazi persecution in the Czech

4 See for instance on Soviet literature Luba Jurgenson, *Création et tyrannie* (Cabris: Éditions Sulliver, 2009).

lands and in publicizing the history of Jews in the region and particularly in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Similarly, the authorities in Hungary and Poland permitted important publications on the Holocaust, some of which even became important internationally, like many diaries of Jewish survivors and collections of documents from the Ringelblum archives published by the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland.

The universalistic and antifascist narrative also did not prevent the commemoration of Jewish victims specifically, even if they were not openly presented as such. Even in the Soviet Union, commemoration sites appeared throughout the period, like the Ninth Fort Museum in Kaunas analyzed by Gintarė Malinauskaitė, testifying to a particular Soviet narrative of the Holocaust. Indeed, there was a great diversity and inconsistency in official state socialist policies towards Jewish memorial sites: sometimes allowing for important landmarks like the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Monument or the Babi Yar memorial, while other times desecrating important sites, like for instance building a market over a Jewish cemetery and World War II murder site in Parczew, Poland. This volume invites further, much-needed historical research on local initiatives to make sense of these spaces in times when Holocaust memory was still embedded in other local memories of violence and wars.⁵

To be sure, the prevailing narrative in communist countries often resulted in a twofold discourse: one aimed at a domestic audience and the other an international one with the intent of giving the regime the best image possible abroad. For Western audiences, or for major official events, the state would strongly emphasize the antifascist narrative, whereas it could allow for a less heroic, more pluralistic, and empathic narrative for local audiences and smaller events. A similar pattern held for memory discourse on other traumatic events. More broadly, double standards were common use to present abroad the domestic social issues communist governments were facing, especially during political upheavals. This duality led to discrepancies and inconsistencies in policy and attitude. Daniel Véri, for instance, demonstrates the differences between the Holocaust monuments mainly for international audiences at former concentration camps (Auschwitz and Mauthausen), and the plans for monuments that were not built, and were less centered on antifascism and focused more on specifically Jewish victims, and which eventually found their way into domestic art collections and

5 For the Soviet Union, see Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, transl. A. S. Brown (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2018).

were discussed in Hungary. Conversely, there were times when specifically discussing Jewish victims of the war was implicitly authorized for selected audiences, such as with publications that were clearly for an international Jewish/Yiddish audience, like *Sovetish Heymland* in the USSR, or publications from Jewish communities in Czechoslovakia and Poland that were only issued abroad in English and German.

A surprising but crucial finding of this collection is that the prevailing anti-fascist narrative was neither a prison for memory nor an eraser of it. On the contrary, this framework unexpectedly paved the way for voicing some of the earliest expressions of Holocaust memory, at least among intellectuals, who were both deeply embedded in this antifascism and the most in dialogue with it. As Stephan Stach and Peter Hallama have previously pointed out, the antifascist narrative has fostered practices of “counter-history” (*Gegengeschichte*). The dissidents exposed falsifications in order to delegitimize official history.⁶ Even some left-wing political opposition groups could challenge the socialist master narrative.⁷ Similarly, many reference works (books, films, essays, monuments) that have contributed to the elaboration of a specific Eastern European Holocaust historiography and memory can be viewed as alternative interpretations of World War II by shedding lights on so-called “blank spots,” namely the Jewish experience—even if their authors were not labelled as dissidents as such. These productions and practices surely gain in meaning and complexity when considered as a form of non-agonistic “counter-history”. In this respect, the concept of “multidirectional memory,”⁸ referenced repeatedly in this volume, proves useful for explaining the multiplicity of memory narratives, which can be seen as interdependent rather than exclusive and in competition. In this approach, the “Jewish experience” is not muffled by a “national” one but a part of it, with the same amount of agency and similar patterns of transmission.

One question remains, raised by Richard S. Esbenshade about Hungary but easily applicable to in the rest of Eastern Europe. Did the still skewed narratives and representations of the Holocaust he identified in Hungarian literature, actually manage to provide a greater “shared space” between Jews and non-Jews?

6 Peter Hallama and Stephan Stach, “Gegengeschichte—Zweiter Weltkrieg und Holocaust im ostmitteleuropäischen Dissens,” in *Gegengeschichte: Zweiter Weltkrieg und Holocaust im ostmitteleuropäischen Dissens*, ed. Peter Hallama and Stephan Stach (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2015), 9–28.

7 For the Polish case, see Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu* [The anatomy of rebellion] (Kraków: Znak, 2010).

8 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

In other words, did they really keep “division and antisemitism at bay,” or did they fail to bring about a consensus in the memory landscape, as the heated, post-1989 debates over World War II memory still prevailing in this part of Europe would perhaps indicate?⁹ Could these narratives, framed within antifascist lines, provide a forum to discuss local responsibilities for the Holocaust or rather, did they stifle debate, provoking its resurfacing since the 1990s?

Eastern Europe in its Diversity

This volume, by bringing together case studies on various countries in Eastern Europe—the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Hungary Poland, and the Soviet Union, including Soviet Lithuania—allows us to see some similarities in the region as a whole and thus a kind of specificity regarding the Eastern European understanding of the Holocaust, while also highlighting some striking differences hitherto overlooked in historiography.

The first striking difference is that, though the antifascist framework and the issue of censorship would at first glance appear to be a shared and distinctive feature binding the expressions of memories of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, a closer look at each country shows the crucial importance of national contexts. Whether the country had been allied with the Third Reich during World War II, the presence of prewar communist activists and wartime antifascist resistance, the overall civilian casualties in the war and the fate of the Jewish population in particular, the level of antisemitism historically—all these factors played a role in determining the degree to which the antifascist narrative was implemented, and the manner in which it was used to legitimize the socialist regimes in the name of patriotism and heroism. The contributions in this volume demonstrate how crucial it is to approach Holocaust memory and historiography of Eastern Europe within their political and social context rather than treating the area as a monolith. The heroic antifascist narrative was neither equally powerful nor equally discriminatory towards the Jewish experience in every country. The difference between Poland and the GDR is quite illuminating here, especially when it comes to the translation of documents related to the

9 On this issue, see John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic, eds., *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Georges Mink, and Laure Neumayer, eds., *History, Memory, and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, eds., *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

Holocaust, as shown by Stephan Stach. Important Polish books on the Holocaust were translated into German because of the explicit Jewish dimension that was perceived in them. Their publication was considered a part of the antifascist struggle, not as a competitor to it.

A second important finding highlighted by the chapters of this book is the complexity and evolution that characterized this prevailing narrative scheme, which was far from uniform across Eastern Europe. The antifascist framework could have opposite meanings at the same time (heroism vs. victimhood) when it was used to describe Eastern European societies and their attitudes during the war. Moreover, the chronology of antifascist memory and the constraints upon it were not as homogenous as it might seem at first glance. Major political events marked turning points in antifascist discourse: the implementation of Stalinism at the end of the 1940s, the Thaw in 1956 up to the beginning of the 1960s, or the post-1968 normalization all impacted the nature and expression of the antifascist narrative and its inclusion (or exclusion) of the Jewish experience.¹⁰ Indeed, the antifascist framework could function very differently in different countries simultaneously. For instance, when the theater play about Anne Frank opened in Hungary in 1957 it was meant to renew antifascist discourse because the 1956 Revolution was being portrayed as a fascist one by Kádár's propaganda.¹¹ Anne Frank's diary was supposed to remind Hungarians of the dangers of fascism. However, the same period in Poland, marked by Gomulka's ascension to power, was the beginning of a short phase in which the Stalinist narrative of World War II declined, leaving more opportunity to voice the Jewish experience.¹² Meanwhile in the GDR during the 1960s, the antifascist framework shaped the authorized books on the Holocaust to a much greater extent, preventing for instance the publication of Helmut Eschwege's historical analysis, which was meant to accompany his anthology of sources on Jewish persecution. Indeed, a closer look at the dynamics within the antifascist narrative, as ana-

10 For the dynamic evolution of the memory of the Holocaust, see Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); for the Polish case and for the Czech lands, see Peter Hallama, *Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer: Tschechische Repräsentationen des Holocaust* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015). For a general perspective, see Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Clashes in European Memory: Communist Repression and the Holocaust* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2011), especially section 1.

11 Kata Bohus, "Anne and Éva: Two Diaries, Two Holocaust Memories in Communist Hungary," *Remembrance and Solidarity: Studies in 20th-Century European History* 5 (2016): 97–114.

12 Audrey Kichelewski, "A Community under Changes and Pressure: Jews in Poland, 1957–1967," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 21, 1968: *Forty Years After* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008): 159–86.

lyzed in this volume, reveals that the beginning of the 1960s saw a “memory boom,” although it appeared in different forms across the region, such as in literature through novels and published testimonies related to World War II, in historical scholarship,¹³ and even more in commemorations. To be sure, the memory of the Holocaust was generally positioned in terms of heroes and martyrs, a narrative in which the particular fate of Jews did not have much of a place. Yet, the narrative of “parallel fates” and “shared fighting and heroism” at least enabled the inclusion of Jews in this reconstruction of memory. Even during the earlier period of the 1950s, often associated only with Stalinism and the silencing of narratives of Jewish victimhood, needs reevaluation, as shown both in the Hungarian example by Kata Bohus and in the attempts made by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw to have volumes from the Ringelblum Archive published despite censorship.

Another point concerning the periodization of Holocaust memory is the need to place this narrative within a much broader timeframe in order to better grasp its specificity. Especially important in this aspect is the interwar period, if not even the nineteenth century, as illustrated by the examples of prewar Hungary or Lithuania described in this volume. These periods did much to shape relations between Jews and non-Jews in Europe and saw the crystallization of antisemitism in its various forms and expressions, resulting in conceptual frames later used to describe the Jewish fate during World War II, such as depicting Jews alternatively as “victims of fascism” or antifascist “war heroes.” As such, it is crucial to consider the political and broader social context of each country in order to better analyze the many processes at work after the war, when the narratives surrounding Jews were forged.

Lastly, this collection pointed to the importance of the circulation of narratives, motives, books, actors, and ideas within state socialist Eastern Europe. These case studies invite researchers to undertake more systematic comparisons in order to grasp which models circulated, where they originated from, and which patterns were specific to which countries. This collection has also tried to make clearer the differences in how antifascist discourse was articulated between the Soviet Union and the rest of Eastern Europe. Here, rather than the conventional narrative of the top-down way in which the Soviet Union en-

13 In Poland, for instance, while very few books about the Holocaust were published (in Polish) from 1949 in 1955, more than 40 volumes of memoirs, histories, and literature appeared between 1956 and 1962 (Bernard Mark, *Meczenstwo i walka Żydów w latach okupacji: poradnik bibliograficzny* [Martyrdom and struggle of Jews in the years of occupation: Bibliographic guide] (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1963).

forced its ideology and dictated a monolithic model of remembrance (or not remembering), it might be more useful to see Holocaust memory as a complex network of expression and translation that circulated around all of Eastern Europe and beyond, and was not simply imposed.¹⁴

Making Sense of the Holocaust with Agency

Acknowledging the circulations of patterns of memory also enables us to envision them as creative or even liberating forces rather than merely as repressive frameworks for the silencing of expression of Jewish suffering during the war. Writing about the journal *Sovetish Heymland*, Miriam Schulz compared the “ethnic autonomy” allowed in the USSR when it came to certain memories of the war, though always within the limits of the assimilatory goals of the Soviet Union, to “the old *Bundist* principle of “*doikayt*” (hereness).” Doing so, she pointed out that at least parts of the Jewish world could take ownership of anti-fascist interpretative frameworks after the Holocaust and turn them into useful tools to cope with the trauma and loss of mass destruction. Embracing the heroic narrative of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union, the national resistance movement in Poland, or the antifascist struggle in Hungary or the GDR may have been a positive attempt by Jewish individuals and groups to make sense of the immense destruction endured by their community and an expression of their agency.

This volume pointed to many examples of how Jewish survivors took on active roles in commemorating their communities and families. The fact that they did not simply endorse the instrumentalization of the Holocaust by communist regimes but rather participated in the process complicates our current understanding of the period. It would be naïve to believe that the antifascist narrative of the war was inclusive: it did not consider the specific suffering of each category of the victims it claimed to defend. Such a universalizing narrative could not offer a proper expression of the Eastern European Jewish experience of the war, even though there were important intersections where a shared history of

14 For a development of this argument for Soviet writings, see Ksenia Kovrigina, “Le témoignage impossible? Écritures de la destruction des Juifs en URSS” dissertation, Université de Paris, 2019, chap. 1. For the same argument concerning Soviet writing in Yiddish, see Miriam Schulz “*Eynikayt*: Early Soviet Yiddish Writing on the Holocaust as a Means of National Inclusion?,” paper presented at the conference “Nationality in War 1789–1991,” Paris, Établissement public du Palais de la Porte dorée and the Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration and the National Archives, December 4, 2015, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3s7tsn>.

Nazi oppression could be articulated. But it would be equally erroneous to believe that the state manipulation of Holocaust memory was constant and that it deprived Jewish survivors of all agency. The common dual image of Eastern European Jews as either victims or accomplices of state socialism is somewhat misleading. As these essays illustrate, antifascism was a genuine and sincere part of postwar Jewish identity.¹⁵

The case raised by Katarzyna Person and Agnieszka Żółkiewska in their chapter about the publication of texts from the Ringelblum Archives reveals that sometimes self-censorship was due more to reasons internal to the Jewish community than to external political pressure. A closer look at Jews' own agency in making sense of the Holocaust can enable us to understand certain statements they made and positions they took. Jewish survivors and their descendants were positioned in a specific social narrative not of their own making, but often managed to mold it in a way that made sense of their "national" catastrophe through the lens of their own experiences, while embracing the appropriate vocabulary for Eastern European Jews. Focusing on agency may help us grasp the blending of seemingly divided memories: a quiet, if not almost secret, Jewish memory restricted to local and small circles of survivors versus an official, universalistic, and antifascist public memory of the Holocaust. Violating the master narrative of collective suffering and redemptive sacrifice of societies oppressed by Nazism was only admissible within an internal Jewish discourse. The presence of many Jewish actors in both public and private commemorations and memorialization efforts is evidence of a new postwar Jewish identity, for whom the commemoration of the particularly Jewish suffering during World War II was not in opposition to their simultaneous expressions of patriotism and love for their Soviet, Polish, Hungarian, or Czech homelands.

Indeed, for many Jewish survivors living in this part of Europe, the universalist antifascist narrative could be liberating, a more satisfying way of making sense of their catastrophe than a religious understanding might have been. And such contrasting interpretations of the Holocaust were by no means unique to that side of the Iron Curtain.¹⁶ For Jewish survivors and their descendants ev-

15 For an analysis of this phenomena among East German Jews, see Sonia Combe, *La loyauté à tout prix: les floués du 'Socialisme réel'* (Paris: Éditions du Bord de l'Eau, 2019).

16 For the French example, see Simon Perego, "Commemorating the Holocaust during the First Postwar Decade: Jewish Initiatives and non-Jewish Actors in France," in *Before the Holocaust Had Its Name: Early Confrontations with the Nazi Mass Murder of the Jews*, ed. Regina Fritz, Éva Kovács, and Béla Rásky (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016), 223–39.

erywhere, the issue of how to properly articulate memory was central. Despite very different political contexts, survivors on both sides of Europe, in Israel, and in the US, all initially suffered a lack of consideration, if not distortion of their voices by the societies they lived in.

Demarginalizing Eastern Europe

This last point leads us to the need to rethink the issue of Holocaust memory within the Cold War context but also to demarginalize Eastern Europe, as many of its supposedly distinctive features are evident in other parts of the world.

First, some of the commemorative efforts in state socialist countries served a communicative purpose mainly oriented toward a Western audience. Their function was to display that the commemoration of the Holocaust was not suppressed and that the Jewish communities of these areas had not been deprived of their religious and cultural autonomy. Such international-facing forms of memory, though certainly propagandistic, circulated from one side of the Iron Curtain to the other, a process that has still not been properly acknowledged and studied. For instance, one can think about trials of perpetrators that were conducted after Nuremberg, like the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem or the Frankfurt-Auschwitz trial in West Germany, which had their own respective ideological agendas, both domestic and international. Witnesses and archival documents were brought as evidence from Eastern Europe for these trials. Trials conducted in Eastern Europe also had political purposes and with equally important circulations of actors, evidence, and patterns of representation of the Holocaust and Jewish victimhood that remain to be fully explored and understood.¹⁷

Second, many articles in this collection have demonstrated not only that there was a clear understanding and analysis of the Shoah in Eastern Europe, but also that many concepts that were deemed to have emerged first or only in the West were very much present there as well. For example, one could think about the notion of being both a survivor and a historian, and how that dual role impacted how the history of the Holocaust was written;¹⁸ or the concept of a by-

17 For a closer examination of these East-West circulations during trials of perpetrators, see the research project headed by Vanessa Voisin, "Nazi War Crimes on Trial: Central and Eastern Europe," Agence Nationale de la Recherche, April 27, 2020, https://anr.fr/en/funded-projects-and-impact/funded-projects/project/funded/project/b2d9d3668f92a3b9fbbf7866072501ef32826d5476/?tx_anrprojects_funded%5Bcontrollers%5D=Funded&cHash=e7abdd01cddf26e001216d8eda3f196.

18 For a research project that focuses on survivors as historians and writers living on both sides of Europe, see Aurelia Kalisky's German Research Foundation project, *Early Modes of Writing the Shoah: Practices of*

stander, certainly a subject of visual art in socialist Poland and Hungary; or the idea of “living with” the neighbors and the dead, maybe not explicitly articulated as such but surely felt, as clearly evidenced by Yechiel Weizman’s article on Polish neighbors’ feelings about local Jewish cemeteries.

Third, this book’s thorough examination of the effects of the memorial schemes at work in Eastern Europe, with all their constraints and political and social demands, could spur a much-needed reevaluation of Western historiography and memory of World War II and the Holocaust, first to question its ability to fully grasp how this history unfolded in Eastern Europe, and second because Western memory of the Holocaust was also not immune to official narratives and to political imperatives. As historian Pieter Lagrou states,

As far as the historiographical landscape is concerned, until the early 1970’s at least, Eastern and Western Europe were not worlds apart. . . . In both cases, political obedience was paramount, individual freedom limited and any interpretation incompatible with the doxa of their bread masters, professional suicide.”¹⁹

If the discursive antifascist framework for addressing the Holocaust in state socialist countries indeed prevented the expression of Jewish experience in its diversity and complexity, so did the Western framework, which did not fully acknowledge Jewish experience for many other reasons, for instance in need to build unified societies after the war or the political necessities of the Cold War.²⁰ Comparing Eastern and Western representations and politics of memory would surely highlight many similarities, for instance the strongly gendered nature of discursive frameworks on both sides, as was the case, for instance, in Soviet Lithuania.

All in all, this rich volume undoubtedly marks a significant milestone in overturning the continued image of Holocaust memory as simply neglected or misinterpreted under state socialism. From the end of the war on, Eastern Euro-

Knowledge and Textual Practices of Jewish Survivors in Europe (1942–1965), French National Research Agency and the German Research Foundation, Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.zfl-berlin.org/project/early-modes-of-writing-the-shoah.html>.

19 Pieter Lagrou, “Demobilising Europe, 1989–2009: Deconstructing and Resuscitating Cold War Historiography,” EURHISTXX, The European Network for Contemporary History, 2008, <http://www.eurhistxx.de/spip.php%3Farticle76&lang=en.html>

20 On the Western lack of empathy for some categories of victims, especially Jewish victims, see Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

peans raised important questions and issues about its memory, but scholars have failed to acknowledge this history because it was largely unofficial and often not explicit. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, agents of memories carried out policies that may have had much more in common than was proclaimed by the ideologies they supposedly bore. Sadly, though on both sides of Europe the motto “Never Again” was common after the Holocaust, such memory politics failed in building peaceful societies²¹ and did not help Europe reach consensus on interpretations of its recent past when it was eventually reunited after 1989–91.

21 For an analysis of memory politics and its origins and functions, see Sarah Gensburger and Sandrine Lefranc, *Beyond Memory: Can We Really Learn from the Past?*, trans. Katharine Throssell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).