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Remembering to Forget: Commemoration of Atrocities in the Baltic States

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This paper revisits the controversies surrounding commemoration of the Second World War in the Baltic states and explores the difficulties of translating the complexities and ambivalences of history, personal experience, and memory into monolithic statues and acts of commemoration. In particular, the Baltic states are faced with the difficult challenge of commemorating the atrocities of two dictatorships and are failing to meet that challenge. A fundamental impediment to such collective remembrance and commemoration is the breadth and depth of historical displacement and suffering of different ethnic communities. The lack of commemoration of two marginalized groups, namely, the Roma and psychiatric patients is also examined.

KEYWORDS commemoration, memory wars, atrocities, Baltic states

THE PEOPLES OF THE BALTIC STATES have a lot to remember and Baltic calendars are peppered with commemoration days. The Latvian calendar has several for each month. Some, like Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, and Teachers' Day on 1 September, are relatively uncontroversial and joyful occasions. Others arouse strong passions because personal and family memories conflict with official versions of history and public commemorations. Changes in the political landscape and politically sanctioned memory have given credence to different communities of memory at different times. The commemorative calendars as national institutions of the three Baltic states have undergone many revisions since independence and none has satisfied all parties involved. In the Baltic states such conflicts have also shaped present-day discussions about language priorities and citizenship.

The Baltic states offer a prime, if painful example of what in another academic context has been described as the 'memory wars'.[1] Memory sites are frequently the

[1] Frederick C. Crews, *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (New York, 1993).

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targets of these wars. Just as street names are changed, so these sites acquire new commemorative inscriptions, creating a palimpsest of historical memory. Lack of congruence between individual perceptions and collective formulations of the past is a frequent source of social and individual tension. In particular, the Baltic states are faced with the difficult task of commemorating the atrocities of two successive dictatorships. Some years ago Helmut Kohl made the statement that East Germany was the only country to suffer the experience of two dictatorships: the Nazis and the Soviets.[2] Although degrees of suffering are a hotly contested issue, Kohl's claim does not stand up as a factual statement. The Baltic states, along with many other Eastern European countries, experienced both the Nazi and Soviet invasions as occupations rather than home-grown dictatorships even if there was no unanimity of response.

Disputes over commemorative practices in the Baltic embody what Leggewie describes as 'the most significant challenge for a European memory', that is, 'to reconcile "competing" memories of the Holocaust and the Gulag'.[3] An inclusive, shared memory of the past is a distant prospect where ethnic communities struggle to promote themselves solely as heroes or victims rather than as perpetrators. Thus Assmann writes of the way in which 'the national status as victim can lead to self-immunization against guilt and responsibility' and the dangers of 'strategic selection of expedient recollections'.[4] She describes the way in which commemoration of another's guilt can serve to mask one's own: 'to acknowledge one trauma must not mean to marginalize or even discard another'.[5] In the Baltic states the recognition of trauma is used precisely in this way: to mask both the atrocities of the Holocaust and of the Gulag.

Commemoration of the Second World War is surrounded by controversy. A seemingly insuperable impediment to an inclusive collective remembrance and commemoration is the extent and degree of suffering and population displacement. Almost every family in the Baltic states of whatever ethnic background has been affected by the war. The complexities and ambivalences of history resist easy transfer to commemorative statues or univocal acts of commemoration. Commemoration of the reciprocal atrocities of two dictatorships poses the difficult challenge of acknowledging the guilt of each. This paper attempts to answer four interrelated questions. First, what are the ethnic differences in commemorative practices in the Baltic states? Second, in what ways do different interpretations of the past shape commemorative practice? Third, what are the obstacles to achieving less divisive and more inclusive practices of commemoration? And fourth, why are some terrible atrocities seemingly forgotten and left without commemorative markers?

Ethnic differences in commemorative practices

There are considerable similarities in commemorative practices between Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. All three Baltic states have long traditions of graveyard

[2] Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 375.

[3] Claus Leggewie, 'Seven Circles of European Memory', *Eurozine*, 20 December 2010 <www.eurozine.com/articles/2010-12-20-leggewie-en.html> [accessed 31 May 2013].

[4] Aleida Assmann, 'Europe: A Community of Memory', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 40 (2007), 17.

[5] Ibid., p. 20.

practices. Graveyard celebrations have existed throughout this area since the early twentieth century, and graveyards are immaculately tended. Commemorative rituals focus on loss and grief. The singing revolution that united the three Baltic states before independence was achieved was articulated in a sad musical idiom. The songs spoke of parting, loss, and death. By contrast, Russians in the Baltic states do not have similar graveyard cultures and their graves are relatively neglected. Russian commemorative practices celebrate Soviet victory in Second World War, rather than war deaths.

Prior to the Soviet occupation graveyard celebrations were scattered and sporadic. After the Soviet occupation these celebrations took place in every graveyard on a specified Sunday during July or August. Their ostensible rationale was respect and remembrance of the dead. In practice they provided a rare opportunity for relatives to meet without fear of surveillance. The language of loss and bereavement was stretched to encompass collective historical losses. Thus the Gulag was implicitly remembered by referring to relatives buried far-away under frozen earth. These practices continue to the present day with graveyard tending being the favourite Latvian national pastime.[6] During the Soviet period these commemorative practices multiplied and provided a subversive but disguised route for responding to the Gulag.

In Lithuania, as in Latvia, there is a long tradition of remembrance and graveyard ceremonies. Commemoration of the dead (*veles*) is celebrated on 1 November, when roads are crowded with cars making their way to ancestral graves. Since independence in 1991, 14 June has been declared a national day of mourning and hope marking the Soviet deportations of 17,500 citizens to Siberia in 1940. In Lithuania the Catholic Church has played a major part in the preservation of national identity and the commemoration of Lithuanian deaths in the Gulag. The pilgrimage site called The Hill of Crosses near Siauliai originally marked the site where crusaders defeated the pagan natives. During the Soviet period the crosses served as markers of oppression and remembrance. This Baltic graveyard culture has provided fertile ground for the post-independence proliferation of commemorative practices — all of them commemorating sacrifice, loss, and victimhood.

In sharp contrast, even the Russian sections of multi-ethnic graveyards are relatively neglected. Russian commemorative practices celebrate heroism and victory. In this way, by concentrating on victory over National Socialism, the 14,000 people lost every day between 1941 and 1945 can be blotted out.[7] For many Russian-speaking inhabitants of Russia, 9 May is the single most important date in the history of the twentieth century and one in which they take most pride. This day was inaugurated as a national holiday on 26 April 1965 by Leonid Brezhnev and was renamed Victory Day. It had to wait some twenty years for the visible signs of the devastation of the war, including the mutilation of bodies, to be less noticeable.[8] The Russian sociologist

[6] Indeed, there is a Latvian joke which encapsulates the national importance of grave-tending. It goes like this: ‘When you are young marry a French woman because she will be good at sex. In middle-age marry a Russian because Russian women are good cooks. But in old age marry a Latvian woman because she will best look after your grave’. The importance of graveyard tending is illustrated by the fact that there is a magazine specifically concerned with this pastime, *In Memoriam*.

[7] See James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 7.

[8] Vera Kacena, ‘Karaviri pec Kara. Otraja Pasaules Kara Sarkanaja Armija Karojosie Latvijas Cilveki’, in *Balle Beidzas Pusnakti*, ed. by Aija Rozensteine, Vita Zelce, and Kaspars Zellis (Riga, 2013), p. 315.

Gudkov writes that the Soviet victory of 1945 'is actually the only supportive mechanism for a positive sense of self worth in post-Soviet society'.[9] Other historical events such as the October Revolution, the Chernobyl disaster, or Gagarin's flight into space receive far less acknowledgement. Stalin's repressions of the 1920s and 1930s barely register in popular consciousness. The Great Patriotic War 'is still the most important symbol holding the nation together, a historical event beyond comparison'.[10]

However, for many Latvians, the remembrance rituals are a frightening reminder of the military power of the Soviet Union. The rituals focus on a gathering in *Uzvaras Laukums* (Victory Park), which is dominated by typically massive military statues brandishing weapons. To an outsider they speak of military might rather than loss or sorrow. Military bands play loud music. The war veterans are resplendent with rows of bright medals. In recent years these gatherings have involved police surveillance. For example, 23 February is Soviet Army Day and arouses fierce feelings of condemnation as well as support. This may be the outward face of the commemoration. As Ignatieff has suggested, the remembrance of the Great Patriotic War is the one event that is not 'tarnished by terror and fratricide'.[11] It also provides a mechanism for forgetting: 'it is perhaps because Soviet citizens have so much need to forget that they remember what they remember with such intense passion'.[12]

The same may apply to the other ethnic communities in the Baltic states. Interestingly, during the independence period, Victory Park was intended as a remembrance place for Latvian heroes. At the end of Second World War it witnessed the last public hangings in Latvia, when a number of German army officers were hanged there. The monumental military statues were erected in 1985, a year that saw Gorbachev come to power and the beginning of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Ignatieff is certainly right when he claims that 'the further the war recedes in actual memory the more insistent becomes its inscription in collective myth, the more grandiose and gigantic the war memorials have to become'.[13] Different interpretations and selective remembering of the past mean that commemoration is ethnically divisive rather than cohesive, as classical anthropological literature would suggest. Although there are significant ethnic differences in commemorative practice in the Baltic states, certain features are shared. Namely, all ethnic groups vie for visibility and prominence in the urban landscape. In the process the same site may be claimed by successive ethnic groups and political factions, thus creating an interesting archaeological memory site or palimpsest.

With independence, debate about the veracity of official versions of the historical past became public. Commemoration days are designated by the state and all institutions such as schools, hospitals, shops, and other enterprises are required to fly the Latvian flag on these occasions. Some days of mourning also require a black ribbon

[9] Cited in Klinta Locmele, Olga Procevska, and Vita Zelce, 'Commemorative Dates and Related Rituals: Soviet Experience, its Transformation and Contemporary Victory Day Celebrations in Russia and Latvia', in *The Geopolitics of History in Latvian-Russian Relations*, ed. by Nils Muiznieks (Riga, 2011), p. 242.

[10] Marko Lehti, Matti Jutila, and Markku Jokisipila, 'Never Ending Second World War: Public Performances of National Dignity and the Drama of the Bronze Soldier', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 39 (2008), 402.

[11] Michael Ignatieff, 'Soviet War Memories', *History Workshop*, 17 (1984), 160.

[12] Ibid., p. 160.

[13] Ibid., p. 161.

to be attached to the flagpole. Failure to fly the flag on these days can lead to a substantial fine, although this varies according to municipality and, I should add, how well you know the local police officials. Some people have take no chances and keep their flags flying throughout the year.

The two dates that are most important for Latvians and Russians also arouse the most controversy. They are 9 May, as discussed above, and 16 March. In 1943 the Latvian fifteenth division was sent to the eastern front in Russia, and the nineteenth was sent to defend what came to be known as the Courland Kettle or *Kurzemes katls* in Latvian. On 16 March 1944, the two divisions of the Latvian legion fought together for the first time by the river Velikaya, just east of the Latvian Russian border. In April 1952 *Daugavas Vanagi* (Daugava's Hawks), originally a veterans' mutual assistance organization and transmuted into a Latvian exile organization based in London, instituted 16 March as a remembrance day for fallen Latvian legionnaires formed under the auspices of the *Waffen-SS*. According to the Latvian historian Vita Zelce, the timing of this first commemoration is significant in that it was prompted by the global dispersal of Latvian refugees from camps in Germany and thus by the need felt for integrative rituals promoting solidarity among a scattered population.[14]

In Latvia the commemoration was first initiated following independence in 1991. During the early 1990s it was treated as a state commemoration and was attended by government ministers, including then president Guntis Ulmanis, who laid flowers at the Freedom Monument, perhaps the single most important memory site for Latvians. Everything changed in 1998 when the Western press condemned the commemoration, perceiving in it expression of neo-Nazi sentiments. Such sentiments were reinforced by the demonstrations of 3 March 1998 by Russian pensioners against inadequate pensions, protests that received sympathetic publicity. In 1998 ministers were forbidden to participate in the demonstration. The remembrance marches were declared unofficial in 2000 and yet they continued to attract attention in the international press. Most recently David Miliband called them 'sickening'.[15] The procession itself has become increasingly associated with extremist groups both of Latvian nationalists and Moscow-supported Russians.

The legionnaires and the end of the war

Indeed, the horrendous events of the Second World War make it easy to elide the identities of distinct groups of Latvian soldiers and resistance fighters.[16] Such elision has been made easier by the representational strategies of Russia. During the Soviet period war films depicting Nazis regularly featured actors from the three Baltic countries. This aspect of Soviet cinema history has been explored in a recent film entitled *Fritzes and Blondines* first shown in Riga in May 2009.[17] Although these practices no

[14] Vita Zelce, 'Latviesu legiona pieminas dienas geneze un legionaru komemoracijas tradicija Rietuma Latviesu kopiena', in *Karojosa Piemina 16. Marts un 9. Maijs*, ed. by Nils Muiznieks and Vita Zelce (Riga, 2011).

[15] Cited in Allegra Stratton, 'Tory Ties with EU Extremists are Sickening, says David Miliband', *The Guardian*, 1 October 2009.

[16] Ezergailis has written one of the most exhaustive and balanced histories on this subject. Andrievs Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia: The Missing Center* (Washington, 1996).

[17] The director of the film is Estonian Arbo Tammiksara and producer Latvian Askolds Saulitis.

longer continue, they have created in popular Russian imagination a strong association between the Baltic peoples and the Nazis. Using visual media to help construct a particular version of history in which Latvians play a negative role persists to this day. Russian documentary history films are skilled at projecting such images. In the words of one commentator: 'do not search for an executioner, but search for a Latvian'.[18]

After the German invasion of Latvia in July 1941, volunteers were not accepted into the German army: 'the German attitude was that there should be no Latvian uniforms, flag, nor independence'.[19] This changed in April 1943 when, at the order of Hitler, the formation of two Latvian divisions was announced. Although the nominal leaders were Latvian officers, in practice orders came from the German Nazi officers. The soldiers were 'volunteers' in name only: only between 5 per cent and 15 per cent had volunteered, while later recruits were conscripted. However, the title was essential as, according to international law, soldiers could not be conscripted from occupied territories. The motivation and role of the Latvian legionnaires remains hotly contested. Undoubtedly most believed that they were fighting for their own country against Bolshevism and not for the enlargement of the Nazi empire. The huge German investment in anti-Bolshevik propaganda re-enforced this view.[20] The Baltic legions were not given the training, indoctrination and induction normally given to SS members. Undoubtedly some Latvian auxiliary police and the Arājs kommando were directly involved in the massacre of Jews, and this involvement sustains Latvian collective guilt, but it should not compromise retrospective perceptions of the Latvian legionnaires and justify their wholesale condemnation. Moreover, the Latvian legion was formed in the spring of 1943. The killing of the Jews took place immediately after the Nazi occupation of Latvia in the second half of 1941. The order to murder the inmates of psychiatric hospitals, discussed below, was enacted by medical personnel. In 1941 the killing of the Roma in Latvia was carried out by the Arājs commando. The following year the Roma were murdered by locally stationed Nazi police. At this point in time the Latvian legionnaires had not yet been formed and their services could not therefore be called upon. As Andrejs Plakans has pointed out, Arajs and other perpetrators appeared on the scene when there was neither a Latvian state framework, nor a Latvian government, as these had been destroyed a year earlier by the USSR.[21]

Thus Latvian and Russian communities have radically different interpretations of the role of the legionnaires. The contested meanings around 9 May have left an equally difficult legacy in the Baltic states. On 9 May 1945 the Soviets declared victory over the Nazis. However, for most Latvians 9 May also marked the beginning of Soviet occupation. The end of the war was the beginning of a series of oppressive measures against the Baltic peoples. The most sensitive issues concern the family of words

[18] Dmitrijs Petrenko, 'The Interpretation of Latvian History in Russian Documentary Films', in *The Geopolitics of History in Latvian-Russian Relations*, ed. by Nils Muiznieks (Riga, 2011), p. 94.

[19] Andrievs Ezergailis, ed., *The Latvian Legion Heroes, Nazis, or Victims? A Collection of Documents from OSS War-Crimes Investigation Files 1945–1950* (Riga, 1997), p. 29.

[20] Kaspars Zellis, *Iluziju un Bailu Masinerija. Propaganda Nacistu Okupetaja Latvija: Vara, Mediji un Sabiedriba, 1941–1945* (Riga, 2012).

[21] Personal communication, 12 May 2013.

around occupation: if the Soviet occupation is acknowledged, then there must of necessity be occupiers or *okupanti* in Latvian. Indeed, for *Vienotība* (the Unity Party) acknowledgement of the occupation has become the central building block of its party manifesto. *Vienotība* sees the Soviet occupation and the ensuing suffering as a key component of contemporary Latvian national identity. A compromise was reached by suggesting that 'Latvia was occupied, but that there are no occupiers at the moment'.[22] Others, by contrast, such as the Harmony Party (*Saskaņa Centrs*) led by Janis Urbanovičs, refuse to recognize the invasions of 1940 and 1944 as occupations, arguing instead and unconvincingly that there was indeed active cooperation from the Latvians.

If, on the other hand, the Soviet army is described as having liberated Latvia using the same language that applies to the Soviet liberation of Auschwitz, then this commemoration has an entirely different semantic and moral meaning. This makes practices of commemoration extremely complex, not to say politically and emotionally fraught. The so-called liberators from Nazi racist practices in the Baltic states also helped to initiate the killing and slaughter of both the middle classes and farmers. On 14 June 1941, 15,000 professionals and businessmen were deported to Siberia.[23] On 25 March 1949 one-tenth of all Baltic farmers, termed *kulaks*, were deported to Siberia as part of the drive to collectivize farming. Thus 9 May also marks the beginning of a war against partisans, farmers, and property owners. A way of avoiding the controversy has been to move the commemorative date to 8 May, in line with Western Europe's commemoration of victims of the Second World War and the celebration of the end of the war.

Latvians in the Soviet army

However, the commemoration of the legionnaires also helps to render invisible the equal numbers of Latvian men and some 500 women who were enlisted in the Soviet army to fight and to die on the eastern front. There were between 80,000 and 100,000 Latvian soldiers in the Soviet army, half of whom were Latvians living in Russia or Latvians who had fled to Russia at the time of the Nazi occupation. The rest were enlisted after the second Soviet occupation of Latvia. This complicated history meant that there were many families where brothers or cousins were fighting on opposing sides. More than half the Latvian soldiers enlisted in the Soviet army were killed. Indeed, between January 1940 and June 1945 Latvia lost more than 21 per cent of its population.

It is interesting that although nearly 100,000 Latvian men were enlisted in the Soviet army, these veterans have not contributed to the 9 May commemorations in Victory Park. Rather they honour fallen comrades by marching to the Brethren graveyard, also the resting place of significant Latvian figures such as poets and 'freedom fighters' from the First World War. In 1968 the 130th division of Latvian riflemen in the Soviet army was commemorated by a memorial in Vietalva in the district of Pļaviņas. Vietalva was the site of a battle against the German *Wehrmacht* in the

[22] *Leta*, 7 October 2011.

[23] Some, like my 48-year-old grandfather, described as a plutocrat, were killed without delay.

Soviet drive towards Riga in August 1944. It was only in the Courland Kettle that Latvian soldiers found themselves locked in battle with Latvian legionnaires later that autumn. It is interesting that the memorial, the work of the sculptor V. Albergs, does not depict the red riflemen as do his other sculptures in Riga, but rather the iconic figures of Latvian folklore, namely *Lāčplēsis*, the bearslayer, fighting the black knight. The three bells atop the spire symbolize the need to stay vigilant in the defence of one's country. Although 500 riflemen are buried in the graveyard in Vietalva, the memorial could potentially serve as fitting tribute to either side. None the less, Vietalva is a site of commemoration only for the Latvian veterans of the Soviet army. The folkloric nature of the statues suggests that, like the Latvian legionnaires, Latvian red army riflemen were not fighting for the enlargement of an occupying power but rather using that power for their own patriotic ends. Since 1968 they have assembled here every year on the first Saturday in August.

The Lihula monument and bronze soldier in Estonia

The peregrination of the Lihula monument in Estonia is another example of commemoration tied to a singular view of history. Originally set up in Parnu in 2002, the monument depicts a soldier with a gun and wearing a German helmet. The inscription reads: 'To Estonian men who fought in 1940–1945 against Bolshevism and for the restoration of Estonian independence'. The then prime minister, Juhan Parts, described the monument as a provocation and nine days later at his behest the monument was moved to Lihula. An analysis of the monument's symbols commissioned from the semiotician Peeter Torop concluded that there were no Nazi symbols used. However, the helmet clearly identified the soldier as belonging to the German army. In 2004, under combined pressure from the European Union and the Jewish community, the monument was moved to a privately owned museum in Lagedi near Tallinn. It seems that political misjudgements taken at a national level affect who can and cannot be remembered. To what extent are the majority responsible for the crimes committed by a few? At what point should such crimes contribute to the guilt of the nation?

Soviet commemorations in Estonia are equally controversial. The removal of the bronze soldier from the centre of Tallinn to the Soviet military graveyard is one such example. This memorial was erected in the autumn of 1947 on the burial site of unknown Soviet soldiers on Tonismagi Hill. It is worth remembering that there is a long and fraught history behind the erection of the bronze soldier. The monument replaced a wooden monument, also commemorating fallen Soviet soldiers, which was blown up by two Estonian teenage girls, Aili Jurgenson and Ageeda Pavel. Their action was in retaliation for the earlier Soviet destruction of Estonian memorials to First World War independence fighters. The girls were arrested by the secret police and sent to the Gulag. The history of this struggle was resumed in 2006 when the Estonian government decided that the public situation of the bronze soldier was inappropriate. In April 2007 Estonian defence forces planned to remove the monument to the principal Estonian military graveyard on the outskirts of Tallinn. It would thus become a site of private remembrance and mourning rather than public commemoration. In anticipation of the move, rioting broke out on the night of 25 April and

continued the following day and night. Nearly all the rioters were Russian-speakers and, like the two Estonian girls in 1946, they were youngsters in their teens and twenties who would have had no memory of what the statue was commemorating. On 26 April 2007 the monument was in fact transported to the military graveyard. The irony is that this graveyard was commandeered by the Red Army at the end of the Second World War and that Soviet soldiers were buried on top of independence fighters from the First World War, obliterating gravestones in the process and creating a huge emotional charge of patriotic resentment. Although protests in Tallinn subsided, further attacks continued in Russia. The Estonian embassy in Moscow was besieged for a week by Russian youths and on 27 April a three-week cyber attack was launched against Estonian websites. So it seems that the fight over commemoration practices is ongoing and fed as much by current discontents as by memory of past griefs.

Absence of commemoration

There has been considerable resistance to Holocaust commemoration in the Baltic states, although the Holocaust is among the most thoroughly researched aspects of Latvian history in the twentieth century.[24] Among the reasons appears to be the view that acknowledgement of the suffering of other ethnic groups detracts from the acknowledgment of one's own. During the Soviet period Jews were not considered distinct from other victims of Nazism, and in Latvia a memorial in Bikernieku forest had to wait until 29 November 2002, when its dedication was attended by then president Viķe-Freiberga. The single largest slaughter of Jews taken from the Riga ghetto — 25,000 people — took place on 30 November and 8 December 1941.

Evidence of reluctance is provided by recent events in the provincial town of Bauska, south of Riga. In September 2012 a memorial was built to commemorate those soldiers who resisted the occupation of the town by the Soviet army. This was initiated by Imants Zeltiņš, one of the few survivors from the Latvian nineteenth division of the Waffen-SS, and supported by the local council. By contrast, earlier proposals to erect a memorial on the site of the town's destroyed synagogue have been postponed. The synagogue was built in 1844 and was one of the most impressive buildings in the town. Its most illustrious incumbent was Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, from 1895 to 1904, scholar and later chief Ashkenazi rabbi of the British Mandatory Palestine. The synagogue was burnt down in July 1941 following the Nazi invasion, and in August 1941 2000 Jews from the town and the surrounding area were massacred. As at the present the memorial has still not been erected. Its erection has been stalled by the Latvian architectural association on the superficial grounds that it would not fit into the local surroundings. The debates around memorialization in Bauska point to what Peter Carrier calls the 'discursive existence' of memorials, namely unresolved issues and contrasting experiences of the past promote a dialogue and memory culture even before the physical memorials have been erected.[25]

[24] Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*.

[25] Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory France and Germany since 1989* (Oxford and New York, 2005), p. 4.

Since 1994, 23 September has been declared a national memorial day commemorating the murder of Lithuanian Jews in 1941. Of the three Baltic countries Lithuania had the largest Jewish population: 7 per cent of the entire population (including roughly half the population of Vilnius) was Jewish. Lithuania also had the largest number of local communists emerging after the Soviet occupation, with 1500 in Lithuania, 500 in Latvia, and 133 in Estonia. As Timothy Snyder has argued, 'the German anti-Semitic equation of Jews with Soviet rule allowed Lithuanians (and others) to find a scapegoat for their own humiliation and suffering under Soviet rule'.[26] Almost the entire Jewish population of Lithuania, some 200,000 people, were murdered. Since the late 1990s an extensive programme of Holocaust awareness and re-education has been established in all Lithuanian schools. Holocaust study is a mandatory subject in three different school grades. As in the other two Baltic states, an international historical commission has been formed to establish a more balanced and factual account of both Holocaust and Soviet atrocities.

However, the state-funded reburial and memorial conference for Juozas Ambrazevicius (later Brazaitis) in May 2012 contradict the concerted efforts at Holocaust reparation, if such they can be called. Ambrazevicius had been head of the provisional government for six weeks between 23 June and 5 August 1941. Previously a professor of literary history, Brazaitis, in his brief spell as acting Prime Minister Ambrazevicius, allegedly managed to pass laws and decrees that initiated the setting up of the ghetto in Kaunas for Lithuanian Jews. The mayor of Kaunas Kupcinskas is reported as saying 'every head of state must be honoured by the state',[27] thereby conferring a spurious sense of inevitability on the event. The case of Lithuanian contested cultures of memory illustrates the way in which commemorative acts, rather than promoting integration, may serve to expose different experiences of the same events.

Two categories of people who perished during the Nazi period and for whom no commemorative practices exist are the Roma and psychiatric patients. The fate of the Roma in the Baltic states during the Nazi occupation is, indeed, one aspect of the past which these countries have chosen to forget. Shame and indignity undoubtedly play a part here, but the powerlessness of this group and the lack of a spokesperson are equally important. Latvia had a Roma population of almost 4000 people, half of whom were killed during the German occupation. The Nazis distinguished between sedentary and itinerant Roma and reserved their fiercest hatred for itinerant Roma, whom they characterized as spies and carriers of disease, particularly typhus. The first arrests took place in Liepaja, and, of 103 persons arrested, 100 were shot on 5 December 1941. Further murders took place in Rēzekne, Bauska, Tukums, and Valmiera, where several generations of an entire clan, the Sīmanis, were killed. In the provincial town of Talsis orders were given for Roma to be rounded up and shot. However, the mayor of the town Krūmiņš refused to carry out the order and thus saved the lives of the local Roma population. Interestingly, while the Roma erected

[26] Timothy Snyder, 'Neglecting the Lithuanian Holocaust', *The New York Review of Books*, 25 July 2011 <www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2011/jul/25/neglecting-lithuanian-holocaust> [accessed 4 February 2014].

[27] Cited in '"Prime Minister" of Lithuania's Nazi Puppet Government to be Glorified, Re-interred and Subject of a Commemorative Conference at Vytautas Magnus University' (3 May 2013) <http://defendinghistory.com/prime-minister-of-lithuanias-1941-nazi-puppet-government-to-be-glorified-reinterred-and-subject-of-new-politico-academic-conference-at-vytautas-magnus-university/34514> [accessed 8 February 2014].

a monument in gratitude for the mayor's protection in this specific instance, there is no monument that specifically marks the massacre of the Roma people in Latvia. Estimates suggest that half the Roma population perished and that, unlike the case of the Jews, this was almost entirely at the hands of local Latvians. The monument in Valmiera to 3000 who were murdered in 1941 refers collectively to Jews, Gypsies, and Russians.

The case of patients in psychiatric hospitals, and patients with physical and mental disabilities is another instance of forgetting and lack of commemoration. Again the absence of someone who can speak on their behalf partly accounts for the absence of commemoration, but the ongoing stigmatization of mental illness is also an important factor. During the Nazi occupation of Latvia inmates of all the psychiatric hospitals were systematically murdered. Patients in Daugavpils psychiatric hospital were the first to be murdered in August 1941. This hospital happened to be sheltering some sixty children aged between three and ten from a nearby orphanage, which was pressed for space. This unfortunate circumstance meant that these children also lost their lives. Jelgava patients were murdered at the end of August 1941, Rīga patients in September 1941, patients from Strenči hospital in north-east Latvia in March 1942, and patients from Liepaja hospital in October 1942. Altogether, 2271 people were murdered.[28] Head doctors were requested to provide a list of Jewish patients in their care, and these were murdered first. One psychiatrist, Ozoliņš, head of Jelgava hospital, was arrested for failing to carry out instructions. A senior doctor at Strenči hospital, Olģerts Feders, subsequently committed suicide. Commemoration of these terrible events is needed, but what form it should take is difficult to answer. Vulnerable people entering hospital may not need to be reminded that earlier inmates were killed there.

Interestingly, the fate of psychiatric patients under Nazi occupation in Estonia and Lithuania was very different. Although death rates increased due to worsening conditions and food shortages, patients were not systematically killed. The historian Ken Kalling attributes this to the respect Estonians felt for Germans (not necessarily Nazis) and the fact that in Nazi ideology Estonians were perceived as nearly Aryan and were therefore granted more autonomy.[29] No such preferential treatment by the Nazi occupiers applied to Lithuania, however, and yet there was no forced systematic euthanasia of psychiatric patients there either. Jewish patients were the significant exception. Whereas the then minister of health, Matulionis, enlisted the help of the Catholic Church and the underground anti-Nazi resistance movement, this gesture was not extended to Jewish patients. On 1 September 1941, the Nazi security police executed 109 patients of Jewish descent.[30] It may be that the continued marginality and vulnerability of these categories explains the absence of commemoration. The lack of a substantial textual record may also contribute to the lack of commemoration.

[28] Rudite Viksne, 'Garigi Slimo Iznicinasana Latvija vacu okupacijas laika', in *The Issues of the Holocaust Research in Latvia*, ed. by Dzintars Erglis (Riga, 2003), pp. 324–50.

[29] Ken Kalling, 'Estonian Psychiatric Hospitals During the German Occupation (1941–1944)', *International Journal of Mental Health*, 36 (2007), 96.

[30] A. Andrius and A. Dembinskas, 'Psychiatric Euthanasia in Lithuania under Nazi Occupation', *International Journal of Mental Health*, 35 (2006), 83.

Resistance to commemoration of the Holocaust is not, of course, confined to the Baltic states. James E. Young has documented the varieties of resistance and uses of Holocaust commemorative practice and the 'unseemly haggling' that this sometimes involves.[31] He writes 'memory is never shaped in a vacuum; the motives of memory are never pure'.[32] Stefan Troebst charts the varieties of conflicts and resistance and relates them to distinct cultures of remembrance in Eastern Europe.[33] Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have demonstrated the divergent uses to which commemorations of the Holocaust had been put in the two Germanies.[34] We find similar cultures of remembrance in the Baltic states, with interpretations of the past differing along ethnic axes: Russian, Jewish, and Baltic peoples. The outlook for a cohesive and inclusive commemorative calendar and guide to practice is somewhat bleak unless and until a more inclusive history is written, perhaps taking precedent from the collaboration of French and German historians in the writing of textbooks.[35]

Towards a resolution of historical and ethical dilemmas

Commemoration of the dead continues as a 'Never Ending Second World War'.[36] The brief and contested remembrance by Latvian veterans of their fallen legionnaire colleagues testifies to this. So do the attempts to blow up the monumental Soviet statues on *Uzvaras Laukums*. The reversals of parliamentary decrees also point to conflicting versions of history. In 1998 the Latvian parliament voted for 16 March to become an official day of remembrance. Two years later, under international pressure, 16 March was removed as an official day of remembrance, although veterans continue to march to the Freedom monument.[37] How should one commemorate comrades who thought they were fighting for their country, who overcame eight centuries of prejudice against the German overlords, and who were left as gun-fodder by the Nazis in the surrounded Courland peninsula? Heroism that leads to victory can be celebrated, victimhood must be remembered. But what does one do about mistakes? In fighting for opposing armies, Latvian soldiers on both sides mistakenly thought they could advance the cause of Latvian independence. Are these mistakes to be remembered in private by a gravesite in the graveyard?

There is here a considerable amount of what the philosopher Bernard Williams calls moral luck.[38] The examples of Paul Gauguin and Anna Karenina are used to show how the evaluation of moral choices depends very much on the outcome. Thus in Gauguin's case, his abandonment of wife and children to develop his art in the

[31] James E. Young, 'The Counter Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1992), 268.

[32] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993), p. 178.

[33] Stefan Troebst, 'Halecki Revisited Europe's Conflicting Cultures of Remembrance', in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and the Politics of Remembrance*, ed. by Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York and Oxford, 2010). pp. 56–69.

[34] Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, 2002).

[35] Karina Korostelina and Simone Laessig, eds, *History Education and Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Reconsidering Joint Text Book Projects* (London and New York, 2013).

[36] Lehti et al., 'Never Ending Second World War'.

[37] Although these remembrance marches were declared unofficial in 2000, they continue to take place and to attract attention in the international press.

[38] Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

South Seas would have acquired a far more negative meaning had his artistic achievement been less great. Conversely, the disintegration of Anna's relationship with Vronsky casts her abandonment of her child as more mistaken than it might have been had the adulterous relationship succeeded.[39] Similarly, the outcome of war, namely victory or defeat, affects its subsequent commemoration. We should also bear in mind that enlistment into the Latvian SS legion or the Soviet army depended not only on conviction but on where one happened to be at a particular time and place. More broadly, selective remembering relates to what Elizabeth Spelman calls 'the economy of attention' demonstrating how 'not everyone's pain deserves notice'.[40]

One response to these historical and ethical dilemmas has been the creation of a *Likteņu Dārzs*, a garden of destiny on an island of 22 hectares near Koknese on the Daugava. This has been the brainchild of Vilis Vītols, an exile Latvian millionaire and philanthropist who returned to Latvia from Venezuela in 1998. The project for the design of the destiny garden was won by the leading Japanese landscape architect Shunmyo Masuno. Masuno first visited Latvia in 2006. Masuno is a practising Zen Buddhist monk, and the garden has no overtly religious indicators or nationalist symbols such as flags. It is described as a sacred place where past, present, and future meet; a memory site for the victims of Nazi and Communist occupations in Latvia; a present to the Latvian nation for its one-hundredth birthday in 2018. It is supported by charitable donations from various sources and of varied kinds. Alongside financial donations and contributions of time, skills, and labour, Latvians are invited to bring stones and to plant trees in memory of those lost through violence and war. Stones should be round and between 20 cm and 30 cm in diameter and are for the amphitheatre. Trees bear a tag with the name of the donor and of the deceased to whom the tree is dedicated. The description of the garden includes the reminder that spirituality has no nationality and no boundaries.

There are similarities with the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. That, too, was erected to commemorate a difficult past for which there was no single agreed historical story line. How can one honour countless lives lost without honouring a mistaken cause?[41] Thus the Vietnam War Memorial had 'the task of commemorating a divisive defeat'.[42] It did so by eschewing national symbols. The design of the memorial was the work of a young Chinese American, Maya Lin. It was minimalist and allowed each soldier and family to project their own experiences and emotions. As Daphne Berdahl has shown, the wall invited unexpected and unprecedented responses; letters, personal items of clothing, and possessions wove personal stories on an extraordinary scale.[43] So, too, the Garden of Destiny in Koknese invites individuals to commemorate the deaths of loved ones without tying these deaths into a monolithic historical narrative.

[39] Ibid., pp. 26–27.

[40] Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing our Attention to Suffering* (Boston, 1997), p. 47.

[41] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, 'The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past', *American Journal of Sociology*, 97 (1991), 382.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Daphne Berdahl, 'Voices at the Wall: Discourses of Self, History and National Identity at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial', in *History and Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past*, 6 (1994), 88–124.

Conclusion

National calendars prescribe what should be remembered and valued in the future. As Nora writes of the French Revolution, 'the function of the calendar [. . .] would be to halt history at the hour of the Revolution by indexing future months, days, centuries, and years to the Revolutionary epic'.[44] It seems, though, that for those who lived through the Soviet and the Nazi occupations it is impossible to remember two dictatorships simultaneously, particularly as these groups were enemies. The discourse around memorials suggests that the kind of 'memory pluralism' or 'democratization of memory' that Smith and his researchers found in Narva is not found in Latvia.[45] These commemorations are monolithic in a double sense. Robert Musil's famous observation that 'there is nothing in the world so invisible as a monument'[46] sometimes applies to their role in public life. However, it neglects the role of memorials in misrepresenting the past, in facilitating a one-sided view of the past and in promoting forgetfulness of the rest. As Ignatieff claims, we choose the past we can bear to remember or need to remember and consign shame and indignity to oblivion.[47]

Much of the literature on memory has moved away from the idea of a homogeneous or even conflicting memory to that of textually mediated cultural memory. Wertsch writes of processes of remembrance as 'nearly always distributed among agents and the cultural tools they employ to think, remember and carry out other forms of action'.[48] This version of memory fits the Baltic situation in a number of ways. It allows for individual as well as collective differences in the representation of the past. It partially explains the absence of commemoration practices for certain categories of people, such as the Roma and those who happened to find themselves in Latvian psychiatric hospitals at the time of the Nazi invasion in the summer and autumn of 1941. And finally it opens up the possibility of a degree of optimism about rethinking the national commemorative calendars in the Baltic states.

While commemorations continue to feed upon living, albeit contrasting, memories, monuments remain visible. Only when that connection is broken do they become invisible. Here I am reminded of the unusual situation of a man observed recently standing by the statue of Nelson in Trafalgar Square and weeping. Nelson was killed at the battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and the statue was erected in 1843. The huge outpouring of grief that Nelson's death invoked in this man is perhaps best explained by the potent combination of military victory and death of a military leader. National mourning in 1805 is understandable in a way that the behaviour of the contemporary weeping man is not. His case and the puzzlement of passers-by illustrate the required connection between living memory and commemoration. Personal grief at public commemorations hardly attracts any notice because here living memories feed into later memories, forming a palimpsest that continues to grow.

[44] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 19.

[45] David J. Smith, '"You've got to know History!" Remembering and Forgetting the Past in the Present-Day Baltic', in *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History: Diversity and Inclusion*, ed. by Martyn Hansden and David J. Smith (Amsterdam and New York, 2011), p. 291.

[46] Robert Musil, 'Denkmale', in *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg, 1957), p. 480. First published in 1927.

[47] Ignatieff, 'Soviet War Memories', p. 158.

[48] Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p. 25.

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