The Limits of Trauma: Experience and Narrative in Europe c. 1945

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Abstract
This chapter discusses the comparative methodological framework and historiographical implications of the collection. Beginning from the twenty-first-century geopolitics of European traumatic memory, Leese considers the particular historical landscapes of emotion c. 1945, arguing that concepts of trauma are constituted according to the practices, technologies and narratives of their time and place. Leese further argues that the form, content and recognition of traumatic experience depends on particular historical conceptualizations: for example, the variable concepts of stress or adaptation that were widely present during and after World War II. This historical and geographical specificity matters in the production of social and cultural variation; in the complex interplay of silence, stigma and resilience; in the distinctive, ongoing formations of traumatic memory for successive generations.

Keywords
Traumatic memory
Resilience
Recognition
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Histories of emotion
Comparative methodology
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Introduction

The practices, technologies and narratives that constitute trauma adjust continually according to their time and place. One such time and place, Europe in the 1940s and in the later postwar era, was a site of particularly notable human destruction. While much went undocumented, the responses of perpetrators and those against whom actions were directed both register a strong psychological response that to this day remains difficult to effectively name, describe or process. Part of the difficulty is social. The debilitation of a mental wound may be difficult to admit of because it carries the strong possibility of stigmatization, discrimination and implied personal weakness. Part of the difficulty is cultural. Different norms of thinking, believing and behaving reveal or disguise mental suffering in line with local cultural criteria. Part of the difficulty is historical. Although there is a significant brain physiology for traumatic memory, the past is also another country that needs ethnographic interpretation, for example, in relation to concepts of mental health or illness.

The past is also subject to intense present-day political demands in relation to the identity and conduct of communities, to states as well as to international relations. For many European nations, World War II and its aftermath represent a founding moment for political settlement and revision persisting into the twenty-first century, as the essays in Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe During and After World War II show. The cultural politics of the present,

contemporary definitions of trauma included, also tends to obscure the recent past. Trauma in the twenty-first century is a failing concept because it has become so widely embraced, because it increasingly seems present at all times and in all places. Trauma has also been highly successful as a concept since the 1990s because it highlights otherwise difficult to see issues of human suffering and the related need for human rights, justice and reconciliation. Like the concept of trauma itself, our present-day notions of human rights, of truth, reconciliation and justice, have gained particular prominence in the wake of the Cold War. Applied retrospectively to the ideological and cultural divisions that grew so powerfully after 1945, it is difficult to avoid present-minded misreadings of trauma. Nor has the end of the Cold War lessened the retrospective tendency to divide nations and communities into "blocs" of victors, perpetrators and victims. Such distortions predispose us to particular ways of seeing, to historical and memory blind spots or to simplified assumptions of guilt, innocence and moral ascendancy.

This leads naturally to the question of how the postwar era might be reconceived thirty or more years after the end of the Cold War. While scholars from Central and Eastern Europe remain chronically underfunded and consequently do not often achieve the international reach of their western colleagues, anybody who has engaged directly with these scholarly communities knows its inventiveness and vibrancy. This is not a matter only of "younger" scholars—perhaps a polite euphemism for "more exposed to the West"—but also of many who were trained within a rigorous university education system that excluded a large portion of the population but nevertheless produced successive generations of skilled, insightful scholars both before and after 1989. I mention the material conditions of knowledge production to suggest that local conditions are easily misconstrued, that ideological coordinates set from a distant bearing and without the benefit of lived experience are rarely sufficient to survey a terrain fully. I suggest that we might gain new insights by rejecting the still persistent Cold War distinctions of West and East, by rejecting the notion that "bloodlands" belong more to one part of Europe than to another. At the very least, common western preconceptions can hardly do justice to the complexity and diversity of post-World War II developments in Central and Eastern Europe or the Baltic states.

This raises another critical question recently put forward by two Polish scholars, namely, how Europe remembers from its eastern quarters. For Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, "regional" studies more often than not suggest work that is peripheral or "outside the norm." Yet the rapidly emergent canons of western memorialization, commemoration and recollection cannot adequately account for the local, and tend to distort by their emphasis on difference and exceptionality.Footnote1 The intricacies and contradictions of competing memory cultures are well illustrated by the ways in which different nation states choose to remember or forget aspects of their pasts, identities, or give particular emphasis to certain memories. Taking these differences seriously, at once sets up very different genealogies of memory that may relate more closely to each other than to the predominantly western models. Notions of who or what constitutes witness, the affluent conditions of commemoration, the dynamics of memory transmission within families and across generations need to be understood within local settings rather than across transnational "regions."Footnote2 In what follows, I use conceptualizations of trauma—its historical contexts and histories, its forms of narrative conceptualization and expression, its cultural variations—to consider some of these differences, parallels and similarities across time and space, and within Europe's early postwar era.

The Long 1945

The dynamics of cross-cultural understanding grow more complex when engaged with a central theme throughout this collection, namely traumatic memory. Such memories do not appear

mechanically as an automatic or universal response to particular events. Rather, the presence and persistence of traumatic memories depends on the subsequent life-story of the teller, on the material and political conditions within which a troubled recollection returns. As a result, traumatic memories are highly variable, subject to continual shifts across societies and generations, and only gain a limited degree of consensual canonization very gradually, over decades and generations.Footnote3 In the context of Europe during and after 1945, the gradual, troubled and slow acknowledgment of trauma is part of a wider process: a recognition of human suffering in our present. In Targol Mesbah's formulation, this public reckoning is a counter-discourse of trauma "situated within the tradition of articulating, bringing into a field of sayable experiences, experiences […] that have been otherwise excluded from official discourse."Footnote4

This introductory essay to Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe During and After World War II tries to contextualize in various settings the start of one particular "bringing into sayability," and to explain some of the ways in which this group of related essays promotes a new agenda for trauma and memory studies not only connected to Eastern European and Baltic states. In what follows, I first consider the relevant historical conditions—both before and after 1945—to stress continuity and development rather than any dramatic shift or rupture at the moment violent conflict ceased. Second, I consider the complex, diverse and shifting connections as well as the discontinuities between trauma, history and Europe at around the same time. Third, I deal with the relation of narrative, emotions and experiences as I understand them historically, conceptually and methodologically. Fourth, I address the issue of cultural, social and historical variations in the constitution of traumatic symptoms and memories. A final issue, cutting across various essays in this collection, relates to commemoration, memorialization and healing narratives. Borrowing Barbara Rosenwein's terminology for emotions in history, I suggest that there are both "generations of trauma" and "trauma communities." As Rosenwein puts it, "Emotional communities adapt the traditions to their own needs. Sometimes they produce new words and new sequences built on the older ones. That is what I mean by 'generations of feeling': the constant availability and potentiality of older and coexisting emotional traditions."Footnote5 This formulation is especially useful since it connects emotions to the particular time, place, and social setting in which they were experienced. Equally, it acknowledges the need to investigate the particular conditions—practices, technologies and narratives—that articulate any particular manifestation of traumatic memory.

While traumatic memory has much in common with emotional states—malleability, subjective conceptualization, environmental influences—it cannot be reduced to a bundle of mental responses. The psychological suffering that resulted from World War II was unprecedented in its breadth, reach and longevity. Its historical peculiarity lay in the powerful emotional states that accompanied fascism, in the scale and disruption caused by the war, in the mass population displacements and emotional extremities of suffering caused by family and community separations as well as by deaths. All of which pressurized rational behavior, non-expressive temperament and civic nationalism in the postwar years.Footnote6 This response is not surprising given the conditions of the war and the inevitable longevity of its collective effects. Over half of the casualties were civilians; the legacy of physical, martial and emotional destruction was inevitable following the deaths of large portions of Europe's population, including around six million Jews as well as millions of Poles, Germans, Russians and Ukrainians.Footnote7 Likewise, the destabilization of political regimes, retributions, and the imposition of newly established state regimes meant a decade or more of troubled, halting recovery punctuated by mass population shifts and political upheavals.Footnote8 Given these

ongoing deprivations, the struggles for physical survival, sustenance and the very gradual emergence of new stability within the civic societies, neighborhoods and local communities of Europe's eastern and Baltic reaches, it is no surprise that traumatic memories began to form, although their presence may not have been evenly or predictably mapped. If such a mapping had been possible, widespread public participation in procedures of recognition and acknowledgment would surely have been a very basic prerequisite, and, even then, might well have had only a marginal prophylactic effect. In reality, conditions were less than ideal: ideological and highly politicized versions of World War II were often compulsory in public ceremonies; the silencing or active disapproval of dissenting groups or troubling incidents prevented even local community recognition or family acknowledgments.Footnote9

It is also important to recognize that a diversity of war outcomes and postwar settlements is not the same as inherently greater suffering, trauma or backwardness. The highly variable presence or absence of traumatic memory is not necessarily more or less in any particular time or place; politicizations, erasures or delayed responses may occur in all kinds of conditions. Likewise, while the dynamics of connected traumatic memories are highly variable, there are some common generational features and processes. One sign of these common patterns is the delayed emergence of Primo Levi's writing, which only became well known in the 1970s as a part of the wider, emergent "memory boom" of that time. Such delays in public discourse—the transfer between private and family recollection and subsequent engagement via films, museums or book sales—relate in part to the Cold War and the rather more urgent political upheavals of 1956 or 1968. What matters here, too, is the gradual resettlement of displaced persons as well as the continuation of conflict in various zones after 1945, for example, nationalist resistance to the postwar settlement in Poland.Footnote10 A later, equally decisive, shift in the dynamics of collective memory also takes place across the European continent following 1989, with certain kinds of events receiving new attention and new interpretations. It is particularly after 2001 that attention to trauma grows decisively and becomes a more widely recognized vector through which to register and acknowledge formerly overlooked, unrecognized past sufferings.

Among those most acutely and chronically affected, because of their wartime experiences and their lives during the aftermath of war, were children, refugees and women, both as participants and civilians. Many children, for example, were witnesses to the atrocities of conflict but equally became witnesses to the aftereffects of conflict through engagement with the lives of family members. Likewise, family separation, displacement, loss or severe injury of parents had a lifelong impact. The Red Cross received over 300,000 queries in search of lost parents and children in 1945–1948. Of the approximately twelve million human beings displaced in Germany at the end of the war—from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and the Baltic states—around 1.4 million were minors under the age of fourteen.Footnote11 Despite the increasing limitations of the trauma concept because of its current popularization and widespread usage, one effect has been fuller investigation into and recognition of the troubled experiences and memories of increasingly diverse groups. As the essays in this collection show, if ex-servicemen are the most obvious group to suffer adverse psychological effects, other less acknowledged groups include women participants and veterans, civilians and bystanders, perpetrators of atrocities and defeated populations from the very young to the elderly. Psychological injury also now attaches to a far greater variety of circumstances than direct exposure to atrocity. Among the most recently and urgently recognized is the extent to which physical environment, and infrastructural and environmental destruction impact the psyche.

For those whose lives are altered irrevocably by the events of war and its aftermath, and more particularly by the remembrance of those events, such acknowledgments are an essential act, and a precursor to any achievement of social justice. In this respect traumatic memory is an involuntary act of commemoration. Since the rememberer has no choice but to again bring to mind life-disrupting and painful past events, the opportunity for recognition and acknowledgment remains potential, although the effects of recognition can never actually be guaranteed. Moreover, the irreducible persistent presence of such traumatic pasts can be as disruptive as they are elegiac or therapeutic. Quality of life as well as personal family relations with children, parent or partner can all be long-term casualties of such conditions.Footnote12 In this respect, successive generations have continued to live in the uncanny, unhomely psychological ruins of war. Relegating the past to a position of irrelevance, moving on to the possibilities of a present, or a particular future, is not possible. An ongoing sense of mortality, of the past, and of a marginal position in the world of events, are the side effects of traumatic memory. It makes the "long 1945" a persistent presence that may remain throughout the course of a lifetime to cast a shadow over the lives of future generations.Footnote13

Histories of Traumatic Stress

These longer-term effects are being increasingly acknowledged and investigated. As Mark Micale points out in his essay for this collection, trauma and traumatic memory have histories, and expanding historiographies. Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe During and After World War II provides an opportunity to develop both of these further by concentrated attention to a particular time and place.Footnote14 Our interest as editors has been to reflect on commonalities and disjunctions within a particular, limited frame, but also to seek out connections to earlier and later medical, social and cultural conceptualizations of trauma. There is no simple, traceable line of connection here, but, rather, a complex set of variable concepts, mental conditions and medical understandings that need to be interpreted on their own terms. A second aspect of particular interest has been the construction of a cross-cultural perspective that avoids the imposition of normative Western European and North American frameworks.

While there is some merit to the notion of a "return from war" as a timeless, placeless condition, the limitations of such a framework are equally apparent. To go further into the time-based particularities of post-traumatic conditions, it is necessary to engage with specific medical and social practices, technologies and modes of narrative expression. It is also critical to move beyond institutional frameworks of diagnosis, treatment and representation: to engage with communal interest groups; the medical and social triage of psychological war damage; the specific efforts and resources mobilized under local conditions.Footnote15 One approach that would enable a comparative typology of traumatic responses across cultures, medical regimes and social practices would be an analysis of three widespread but variously employed concepts, namely "shock," "stress" and "trauma." All three terms have both physiological and psychological aspects; they also overlap in historical usage, though shock, for example, often retains a predominantly physical implication.

World War II is especially interesting in this respect as it was a moment when "shock," or similar notions of fatigue, suggesting a concussion-like impact and its after effect, were first rivaled by newer, emergent notions of "stress." The emphasis on physical conditions is still present in diagnostic terminology or related treatments. Closely related are views of moral and behavioral stigmatization associated with varied "mental" conditions. Understanding or acceptance of the legitimacy of psychological injury remains highly variable and generally only begins to gain wider acceptance—if at all—in the aftermath of World War II.Footnote16 Attention to the effects of time, like close attention to terminologies and concepts, is a

connected theme within histories of traumatic stress, especially when considering variation across cultural boundaries. The troubling event or set of circumstances may be momentary or prolonged, but, more importantly, it is either anticipated or regarded retrospectively.Footnote17 We may see this, for example, in notions of "attendant expectation," as described in physician Daniel Hack Tuke in his 1884 account of the effects of a train crash. A related example is the conceptualization of "combat fatigue" as a depletion or diminution of physical and psychological resources.Footnote18 While the high-modernist theoreticians of the psyche were not far removed in time from these developments, their practical influence on the everyday treatment of industrial or industrialized warfare mental conditions was marginal. At best, popularization of the psyche as an explanatory model gradually allowed discussion, increased professionalization, and the potential conditions for de-stigmatization. Walter Cannon's "Voodoo Death" article, published in 1942, provides an explicit link between nineteenth and mid-twentieth century conceptualizations. Investigating unexplained deaths among "primitive peoples," Cannon also refers to soldiers both in World War I trenches and civilians in the Spanish Civil War whose sudden deaths could not be explained by physical injury, but, rather, by "the classic symptoms of mental shock" expressed in "malignant anxiety" and a "perturbed state deeply involving the sympathico-adrenal complex."Footnote19 The intriguing implication that World War I soldiers in the trenches of the Western Front also experienced a kind of "Voodoo Death" was not much commented upon then or since, but in other ways Cannon's account previews emergent thinking after World War II. In particular, Cannon illustrates a newly developing sense of bodily sensitivity to the psyche and nervous system that gradually yields new insights for physiology, psychiatry and anthropology, among other disciplines. A longer-term consequence was the popularization and growing explanatory power of the stress concept as it emerges through the second half of the twentieth century.Footnote20

Recognition and investigation of mid-twentieth century traumatic memories have similarly been patchy and slow. Early acknowledgments are connected most often to the practical wartime requirements of discipline, human resource management and combat efficiency. Wider social, medical or physiological responses emerged for the most part retrospectively in response to the insistence on as well as the obvious needs of particular interest groups such as veterans. It is no coincidence that a relatively affluent, well-educated society was able to most effectively articulate, and to some extent alleviate, the mental suffering of ex-servicemen, or that the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first framed in order to secure legitimate claims for financial compensation. The possibility or purpose of acknowledgment in other times or settings has been less clear. Notions of survival or witness develop in tandem with ideas of stress and trauma. Later on, the new, critical category of traumatic memory emerges more clearly and allows for fuller acknowledgment of effects on children and across generations. For many groups, during and after World War II, the difficulty of acknowledgment was related to social and political stigmatization—visible differences of behavior or speech that provoked fears of "madness." Unacceptable memories or stories of witness might also prompt political or communal hostility. Silence and invisibility were the inevitable result when any other response potentially caused greater harm. Marginal groups might also lack the means to articulate or advocate recognition. Hence the difficulties experienced by many groups, including first and second generation "Hibaksha"—survivors of the United States atomic bomb detonations at the end of World War II; genocide survivors of Armenian, Cambodian or Yugoslavian origin; indigenous peoples of Australian or North American descent and African origin. To the long list of twentieth-century survivors we might add populations persecuted under dictatorship regimes in Chile, Argentina, South Africa or Iran.Footnote21

As this list suggests, there is no simple way to reconcile or amalgamate these highly variable sets of social circumstances and memory contexts. What they have in common in the second half of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first century is a tendency towards non-articulation, incommunicability and repression, which may be self-imposed, but which might also result from particular local, communal or wider political conditions. In the case of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Baltic states, the relative nearness as well as recent Cold-War-related constructions of east-west "difference" tend to obscure local specificities. Yet, in certain respects a similar set of historical developments since World War II is certainly present. For those most directly affected by World War II, there is a prolonged pause, a phase of collective recovery, during which time relatively little is said. The social effects of this near silence are expressed in difficulties of communication with the wider society and difficulties in resolving traumatic memories or coming to terms with the past. The turbulent political and economic conditions of the early postwar years, in contrast to slowly emergent affluence and political stability, both generated and reinforced traumatic memories. The emergence of a "multidimensional approach"—which incorporates biological, communal, cultural and religious aspects, as well as a gradually fuller understanding of cross-generation transmission—suggests some of the origins of such mental conditions. Work concerning Argentina similarly outlines both the phases of development that enable effective coping and reconciliation as well as the social requirements necessary to enable retrospectively the resolution of traumatic memories .Footnote22 In another study, a set of five conditions necessary for survival and adaptation following violence, conflict conditions or other potentially traumatizing circumstances also suggests a possible agenda that historians might follow when investigating particular local conditions. These are worth listing as a potential framework for future historical research: first, conditions of safety and security; second, attachment to families, social networks and rituals; third, engagement with justice, including truth, punishment and reconciliation; fourth, sufficient rebuilding of role identity; fifth, concern with existential meaning, including morality, belief systems and cultural expression.Footnote23 The difficulties of achieving such conditions in early postwar Europe were of course substantial, given that traumatic memory can be aptly characterized as "shot through with holes," and the likely delay, postponement or abandonment of resolution even in ideal circumstances.Footnote24

Thinking further about the potential resolution of traumatic memories, the disparity between private reminiscence and public commemoration also matters. Violations of personhood and the traumatized memories that result are, by definition, filled with gaps and disruptions. In one interpretation of this process, personal narratives characteristically split off and slip out of speakability to become spectral and incomplete presences. The difficulties of achieving narrativization in the face of such emotional and cognitive fragmentation thereafter become all the more greater.Footnote25 In the particular social and political conditions of early postwar Central, Eastern and Baltic European states this fragmentation was strengthened by a more general damping down of intense emotions. Passion, blind enthusiasm, extreme devotion to nation and charismatic national leaders: these were seen as the excesses that led to the conflict, violence and atrocities of World War II. One postwar reaction was a more neutral mode of emotional response, a reluctance to articulate damage or damaging pasts in favor of a potentially better, more achievable future. The implication of slow recovery, a gradual loosening of memory around fifteen to twenty years after the war, fits into the larger framework of recognition. The public emergence of Holocaust memory, the beginnings of discussion and conceptualization leading eventually to the PTSD diagnosis also map onto this early postwar phase of emotional recuperation.Footnote26 Yet, at the same time, political repression meant certain kinds of past traumatic memories, and memory conceptualization, only arrive in the

wake of the PTSD diagnosis and develop in the 1990s and 2000s as an extension of the "post-traumatic stress" formulation.Footnote27

Narratives, Emotions, Experiences

The popularization of PTSD, especially since the 1990s, has led, though, to a tacit assumption that exposure to violent events, atrocities or extended periods of physical, emotional or mental deprivation all but guarantees the production of traumatic memories. What this assumption ignores is the greater physical difficulties of survival in past times—even as recently as the mid-twentieth century—which itself has a prophylactic effect. Communal resilience, the urgencies of everyday survival and material conditions that constitute a support system can equally lead to the diminution, eradication or non-formation of intrusive mental images or trigger responses based on past experience. While it is important not to underestimate the resilience effect, it is equally important to acknowledge that trauma is always mediated as memory, and that the forms by which it is transmitted also influence what stays in the mind, what is forgotten, and the degrees of recollection, amnesia or erasure.

Memory formations of all kinds mesh with local ways of living and are constituted in relation to peers as well as to wider collective interpretations of the social world. Memory also has a geological aspect. Recollections are built up in successive layers. Deeper, earlier memories may fragment, collapse or resurface to dominate the horizon. If later conditions do not allow the submergence of particular troubling images or sensations, their continuing presence can take many forms. When such recollections persist, they may come back to consciousness as isolated and repeated fragments that split off from more coherent recollections; as impossible, incomprehensible images that cannot be processed; as feelings of fear, disbelief and powerlessness.Footnote28 These effects have a physiological source in the chemistry of the brain, but culture is also critical. Memories are a form of storytelling; narratives are constituted from the cultural heritage and resources available to the teller. Since many of the essays in this collection are centered on stories, it is useful here to give an account of the relation between narrative and experience as well as the relation of these two to the emotions.

Narrative constitutes a kind of distancing effect from events as they are remembered, and through this "epistemic distance" it becomes possible to reconsider meanings, re-evaluate experiences and think through possible avenues of response. As narrative psychologist Jens Brockmeier suggests:Footnote29

I propose understanding narrative imagination as a form and practice of human agency. Telling stories is an advanced mode of communicating and negotiating meaning, but it is also an advanced mode of creating novel meanings […] Even extreme experiences that seem to evade language often give shape to stories, as uncommon as these may be, that in their own way share the extreme nature of their experiences.

Reconciliation, processing and resilience are in this view implicit to the social meanings and consequences of storytelling. The narratives of traumatic memory, by contrast, continually stumble, hesitate and repeat themselves. The sense-making procedures to which Brockmeier refers are frustrated by the non-sense of fragmentation, isolation and incoherence. The nature of traumatic memory as a social act is its stuck-ness; the inability to create a meaningful explanation generates a repetitive loop of images and feelings that may last across the course of a lifetime and transmit across generations. The dissipation of traumatic memories is difficult to achieve, and by no means is it a likely effect of time's passage. Equally, narrative needs to be an extended category to incorporate the extreme experiences that are described throughout

this collection. Narrating traumatic memories does not necessarily mean direct, vocal articulation. Degrees of self-expression may vary according to distance and conditions at the time of telling; changing degrees of articulacy, coherence, body language or behavior can also describe inner mental states, as can artistic forms. Nor are narrative events final, completed or ever fully resolved. Retellings across the course of a lifetime may take many different forms for both individuals and societies. The completion of one rendering may only serve as the prompt for a new recollection procedure to begin.Footnote30

The social and psychological uses of personal narrative have also become the subject of extensive investigation, especially in the early twenty-first century, and the complex, multiple uses to which such stories can be put by their tellers is increasingly well understood. What matters here is not that first-person or even collectively imagined stories match events in the world, nor is it necessary that the final resolution or definitive version of any such story should emerge. Rather, what matters for any given iteration of a story is its "cultural meaningfulness," since "[…] the meanings that individuals give to (or 'find' in) their lives can be manifold, open, and fleeting […]"Footnote31 While social conditions or personal circumstances sanction the telling of particular stories with relative ease, this is not always the best outcome. Non-resolution or non-processing may also function as a self-protective mechanism. In either case, what matters is a manageable relation of the present self to a particular traumatic past. The site of a particular memory is subject to a complex set of variables in reworking and remaking the present self. A historical moment, communal and family histories, but also emotional vocabulary and constitution can all play a critical part in the purposes, formation and outcome of any given story iteration. Such specificities are, though, not easily catalogued or collated.Footnote32

What the essays in this collection provide is a sequence of careful case studies, each of which examines the variable relations of narrative to the interpretation of traumatic experience and memory. Among these is Kurkowska-Budzan's engagement with the memoir of Stefan Dąmbski, which takes the publication and public presence of such a memory document as the pretext for an examination of culturally specific ways in which the past may be refigured to serve a particular present, in this case in Poland. While more usually medial, state administrative and institutional sources have provided a way to access a range of possible recollection strategies and the ways in which such sources reveal or conceal their subject. For wider social, communal and state affairs, such sources are invaluable; often they are also all that is available, so that the reconstruction of life experiences and stories becomes a patient procedure of putting fragments in meaningful proximity, overlapping institutional encounters, and social possibilities. These are the techniques used in contrasting ways by Robert Dale to reconstruct the lives of post-World War II Soviet veterans, and by Danutė Gailienė to consider the social functioning and traces of traumatic experience via suicide rates in twentieth-century Lithuania. Smaller autobiographical texts—diaries, memoirs, letters—are closer to the norm. Such sources are relatively available and can be used in relation to other sources to reconstruct past lives, as well as for purposes of comparison and contrast. Such sources can also be supplemented by pre-existing collections of oral history interviews, or with present day interviews, as in Anna Wylegała's essay on Eastern Galician bystanders and Outi Autti's research on postwar Finnish reconstruction. An ideal source base for this kind of study would be two or three successive reconstructions of a single life-story since this approach allows for a comparative examination of the storytelling form and narrative purposes. New kinds of sources emerge: in his chapter, Tuomas Laine-Frigren pays attention to poems written by traumatized Hungarian children as a part of their therapy. Image-based evidence is also an important supplement to word-based evidence as it allows another kind of narrative

engagement. Ville Kivimäki examines films in his study of connections between Finnish ex-servicemen's dreams—recorded for ethnographic study in the postwar era—and narrative forms in popular culture, which might also serve as a source for narrative expression. Finally, Ana Antić finds in film a medium through which to access collective cultural trauma in postwar Yugoslavia.

A range of possible strategies might be extracted from this variety of source materials and approaches, but what is apparent across the range of these essays is their diagnostic function. The interpretive task of historical scholarship as it is expressed in the case studies that follow is a complex, imaginative and intricate reconstruction of past mentalities, which are constituted by the narrative expression of emotions and experiences recalled. The range of possibilities here is wide, and in many respects remains to be explored, as indicated by a recent discussion of "fear, sublimity, [and] transcendence" in the music of a composer whose work is closely associated with the most difficult experiences of World War II, Olivier Messiaen.Footnote33

Cultural and Social Variation

Describing the relation between psychological trauma and the contexts within which it is experienced and treated, Boris Drožđek, a specialist in intercultural psychology and the cultural sensitivities of traumatic response, uses the spider's web as a metaphor. There are various "intrapsychic, interpersonal, and socio-political domains" that particularly effect individuals. "When looking at it [the web] one sees the spider clearly and does not have to see the web at all. However, the spider does not exist and cannot live without the web. The web must not be overlooked."Footnote34 Drožđek here alludes to the personal conditions within which any individual acts: social roles and relations, physical and material conditions, upbringing, education, community and social life, levels and varieties of social engagement, governing and ideological belief systems. Following Urie Bronfenbrenner's categories, these types of conditions can be described as micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-.Footnote35 Thinking historically, I would suggest that each of these levels is necessary in any given interpretive analysis in order to fully grasp the particularity of the traumatic experience in its time and place. Even in the present, and even with the full engagement of the subject, such an investigation would be difficult. The act of historical reconstruction—and the varied methodologies that can be used to access different levels of psychological experience in time and space—are in many respects the central theme for the essays in Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe During and After World War II.

One effect of an analysis sensitized to particularities of time and place is to put the most prevalent present-day iteration of trauma, namely PTSD, into its own relativizing context. The PTSD concept originates within the English-speaking world in the 1970s and after; its purpose stressed one particular aspect of such diagnostic categories—to enable medically sanctioned compensation claims especially among United States veterans of the Vietnam War—but like any such category it is focused on a restricted spectrum of symptoms, cases and consequences. The analytic category of PTSD has little to say about the broader cultural web of conditions and sensitivities that shape traumatic responses; it fails to acknowledge the "cultural recipes" for signaling distress, interpreting symptoms, or recovering. These limitations were clear almost as soon as the category of PTSD was invented, and the diagnosis is no different than any other diagnostic conceptualization in having particular strengths, weaknesses or points of emphasis. Still, to explicitly or, more often, implicitly apply such a category beyond its cultural boundaries is to risk a form of "cultural bereavement."Footnote36 Like earlier diagnostic categories as well as popularized notions of the psyche, other limitations quickly emerged in relation to PTSD. In any form of official assessment—successful medical diagnosis, or compensations-claim

assessment for example—success depends on a sanctioned outward performance of an inner mental state. Especially where there are financial implications, the limitation of symptoms to a "correct" performance immediately matters: definition is as much a case of exclusion as of incorporation. Almost inevitably, a broader spectrum of post-traumatic damage is set "off limits," as are ethno-cultural and societal aspects.

To give one example of how restrictive the PTSD diagnosis has become, we might refer to the broader category of historical trauma. While there are varied definitions of the term, it is broadly connected to groups that have a sustained past of physical and psychological violation, for instance, indigenous peoples. More broadly, historical trauma is related to the experiences and psycho-social aftereffects suffered among Holocaust survivors, aboriginal colonial subjects, Allied survivors of Japanese internment camps, Khmer Rouge victims as well as legacy descendants of slavery.Footnote37 One such instance is reported by Aaron Denham in his study of the Si John—a Coeur d'Alene Indian family of North Idaho. Subjected to generations of racism, warfare, murder and forced land removal their reactions bear little relation to western notions of dysphoria or psychopathology. Although the historical experiences of the Si John parallel those of indigenous Australians or twentieth-century war casualties: witnesses to, or subjects against whom atrocity was perpetrated, their response is distinctive. Collective procedures of oral history-making and family narratives have produced strong group ties and collective forms of identification and powerful resilience strategies that enable post-adversity equilibrium. Where narratives of traumatic memory might more readily be transmitted within certain social milieux among the extended Si John family, employment of life events as clearly evolving stories, transmission among various family members and generational sharing by telling stories, listening to and learning from stories, have been especially beneficial. The cumulative effect of these strategies has been to retard potential manifestations of historical trauma, perhaps because collective rather than individual stress and identity are the focus of attention.Footnote38 Such examples illustrate how current conceptions of trauma, more specifically of traumatic memory—its origins, symptomatic effects, and resolution—can easily be defined within a narrow spectrum that too easily and rigidly limits the possibility of cultural, social and historical variation.

This current state of affairs has been present since the later twentieth century and has become increasingly acute since the beginning of the twenty-first century, at which time John P. Wilson and Boris Drožđek first put forward their innovative sequence of hypotheses concerning connections between trauma and culture. What is certainly the case is that syndromes are culturally sanctioned; that healing is person-specific both in health-seeking and treatment pathways; that personal awareness enables mental processes of self-transcendence. Additionally, Wilson and Drožđek argue that cultural grounding particularizes forms of identity disruption, alienation, anxiety, distress or depression; that cultural specificities may be lessened in the current conditions of twenty-first century cross-cultural connection; that culturally specific healing rituals cohere and evolve according to needs and conditions; that western, twenty-first century therapies are specific to time and place while other procedures may be better suited to enhance resilience, personal growth and self-transcendence; and finally, that any effective pathway to diagnosis and healing must incorporate culturally specific as well as common aspects.Footnote39

Such insights, if taken seriously by historians, may enable a better understanding of trauma played out in the conditions of a particular historical, cultural and social milieu. I would suggest here that Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states are under-examined and misunderstood precisely because spectacularly different example of Asian localities are more

readily distinguishable from Northern Europe or North America. When cultural specificities are less visible, they are more likely to be erased or ignored, but the essays in this collection nevertheless demonstrate decisively how much variation there can be in illness and healing scripts, and how landscape, politics and history can decisively reshape medical interpretations as well as individual and collective notions of suffering or psychological distress. Methodologies that help to understand the particular ways of writing trauma remain relatively underdeveloped in historical analysis, but a characteristic feature of several essays in this collection is combined close reading of one or more cultural artefacts, and a strong contextual reading of related clinical, social and political conditions. Ana Antić's examination of "Partisan Neurosis" is an example of this kind of close reading, where diagnostic interpretation is inevitably mixed in with an examination of historical and especially volatile political conditions. Antić's account is also valuable for its reading of popular cultural sources as a way to access contemporary conditions in relation to wider societal trauma effects. Tracing shifts of ideological opinion as well as tensions between state leadership elites and wider social constituencies also allows a more nuanced understanding of how political control could function, as well as the extent to which such political circumstances could direct cultural and diagnostic interpretations.

The varied methodologies of the essays in this collection further suggest some of the ways in which cultural specificities can be incorporated into comparative historical analysis. Hana Kubátová's essay, for example, notes how particular social groups might be treated in separate diagnostic and etiological categories due to their status within a wider communal landscape. Unfavored or minority groups, of course, were especially disadvantaged in finding effective treatment or material sufficiency. Lack of social acknowledgment or recognition has additionally long-term mental health and clinical effects, as traumatic memories are far less likely to be resolved in later unsatisfactory conditions of reinterpretation. While the evidence is more fragmented and diverse—drawing on oral history, diary entries and written testimonies—Kubátová's composite methodology provides a powerful sense of how personal accounts allow insight into collective traumatizations as they evolve after many years and in processes of ongoing retrospection. Finally, Outi Autti addresses a growing field of research interest that remains to date underexplored, namely the traumatic effects of environmental destruction.Footnote40 This is not necessarily a question of generalized degradation or global effects, but can also relate to the ways in which a local, lived landscape may be damaged—in this case Lapland following the withdrawal of German troops, the effect of damming on a local salmon fishing culture and the continuing human-made harm inflicted on local communities, which also has a profound impact on psychological well-being.

The "grass roots" specificity of the studies in Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe During and After World War II is valuable not only for the local knowledge each provides. The organization, content and analytic methodologies on display here also make a powerful argument for the pursuit of transnational and comparative histories of mentalities. Implicit in our analysis, too, is a continuation of the pioneering work by Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooji in The Politics of War Trauma : the Aftermath of World War Two in Eleven European Countries (2010).Footnote41 A closely co-authored collaborative volume by twelve specialists, The Politics of War Trauma covered a coherent thematic and geographical subject area, mostly across Western Europe, and developed a strongly comparative and culturally based interpretation. Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe During and After World War II extends these themes to geographical districts less known among English-speaking readers. What remains to be done is a more thematically based and comparative cultural history of the psychological aftermaths of World War II.

The Limits of Trauma

Describing the ideal conditions that allow recovery and reconciliation from remembered traumatic events, we can return to Derrick Silove's five necessary conditions. First, safety and security; second, attachment to families, social networks and rituals; third, engagement with justice (issues of truth, punishment and recognition); fourth, sufficient rebuilding of role and identity; and fifth, engagement with existential meaning (morality, belief systems and cultural expression).Footnote42 Given the post-conflict turmoil that so dramatically destabilized and continually afflicted the central, eastern and Baltic states of Europe following World War II, it is inevitable that psychological survival and recovery across successive generations was only partially realized. Yet these were not the only consequences of wartime experience. Cultural artifacts across a range of media show, as they are documented and analyzed in the essays of this collection, ongoing procedures of reconciliation and processing. What matters is not that any final resolution could be achieved, as it is very doubtful that this could happen in many cases, especially with transgenerational trauma. Rather, the ongoing process of reworking troubled memories is itself the act of reconciliation.

While traumatic memories may not form even in obviously troubling conditions, and while recovery may be very easy or quick for some, it is also the case that for others there are no quick fixes. Children and grandchildren are often caught up actively in the circumstances of older family members whose ongoing lives are dominated by, or strongly determined by, traumatic memory. Beyond the third generation, in the realm of post-memory, different meanings and greater degrees of political manipulation become possible as the re-telling of events can no longer be directly contradicted. In both cases it is clear that strongly intrusive traumatic memories take generations to work their way out of the collective consciousness. At the same time, amnesia, misremembering and misinterpretation are also always present. Widely recalled or promoted past events are all the more likely to be repurposed to serve subsequent social and political agendas. This is not merely to say that events are cynically manipulated. Instead, the deeper lifecycle of traumatic memory links personal recollection to wider societal purposes, since what is remembered and how it is recalled will always depend on the context of remembering. Social support may enable a sufficient, stable environment within which to resolve painful, contradictory or intrusive memories, but it is equally clear that this process is gradual and most usually progresses in two stages. First, a mastery of troubling events in memory is necessary so that the individual is no longer at the mercy of such recollections or overwhelmed when troubling events come back to mind uninvited. Second, recovery depends on the development of a sense-making narrative for the events remembered.Footnote43 The development of sufficient contextualization is not only an individual process, but also depends on external conditions, not least sufficient public acknowledgment. When there is no such communal recognition, or where there is active suppression for political reasons or because a subject, rape for example, remains taboo, the chances of meaningful recovery are drastically diminished.Footnote44

Returning to my opening theme—that there is a profound imbalance between western memory's public presence and the less well-known events, languages and recollection of events across different parts of Europe—we might speculate on both the causes and consequences of this effect. Thinking first of causes, political history, and especially the prolonged effects of the Cold War, linger on in a troubled afterlife of ideological segregation. To these political aftereffects we may add the persistence of romantic nationalism as in influential ideology that promotes singular, heroic and sometimes martyrological narratives of the nation state to varying degrees in the central and eastern polities of Europe, and perhaps not only. Additionally, levels

of relative affluence tend to allow the collection and preservation of different genres of recollection, remembrance and public past-making. In some Western European states, and with wider encouragement and financing from the European Union, for example, in its Platform of European Memory and Conscience, there is a degree of diversity in public and national commemorations.Footnote45 The increasingly widespread use of oral history, although it tends sometimes in public recollection towards the tokenistic, has nevertheless encouraged and given some legitimacy to more diverse archival practices. Such deviation from state narratives can, however, still be tolerated or seen as subversive rather than recognized or valued. One example is the Polish KARTA Center Foundation, incorporating the journal Karta, which has long promoted a social, cultural and grass-roots methodological perspective with respect to the recent past, though such groups are unfortunately not the norm.Footnote46 In place of wider procedures of public acknowledgment and recognition, which have a transnational aspect in relation to World War II, Europe's western, central and eastern quarters can be characterized as still caught up in procedures of involuntary commemoration. Individuals, families and communities continue to act as witnesses to the effects and aftereffects of conflict; memory and commemoration continue to snare those who are its subject, but there is equally the potential for release.Footnote47

Notes

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