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In the third chapter, 'The Effects of Memory', the authors demonstrate just how limited memory policies are and ask why they continue to flourish. Gensburger and Lefranc affirm that memory policies do not expose individuals to a past that is unknown to them and they 'do not create good citizens [. . .] ex nihilo' (p. 83). Given their contextualized and cumulative effect, the authors suggest that if we want to learn something about their significance, it is not enough to study memory policies in the places where they are implemented. In some ways, memory studies thus returns to its own starting point in the early twentieth century and the classical sociological questions on the relevance of status and habitus, milieu and class, as well as the relationship between structure and individuals.

At the core of memory policies is also the ambition to redistribute identities or at least grant recognition to past victims in order to increase their symbolic place in a country, and at times even their financial position. The authors claim that in that regard 'memory policies are like any other policies' (p. 97), an assertion that one might want to take issue with. It seems a stretch of the imagination to suggest that memory policies, such as the recognition of victimhood, are comparable in their logic to fiscal, pension, or public health policies. Recognizing the status of a specific victim group is bound to have knock-on effects on those that are excluded and identity politics cannot find a compromise that other policies can strive for. Redistributing identity and recognition has adverse and counter-intuitive effects that are not completely absent but less pronounced in other more technical political fields.

Written in an accessible and engaging manner, this short book is also well suited to a larger audience that seeks to understand the state of the art. The authors bring in personal anecdotes that illustrate how our engagement with questions of memory always has a personal biographical component. Exposing such motivations, and the perspectives that derive from them, helps to situate the volume and is certainly an example to follow. Gensburger and Lefranc have contributed further to the development of memory studies as a distinct and established perspective that has all to gain in the years ahead from inter-disciplinary and mixed-methods approaches.

Author biography

Felix Krawatzek is a political scientist and senior researcher at ZOiS, where he coordinates the research cluster Youth in Eastern Europe. He is also an Associate Member of Nuffield College at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on post-Soviet politics and European politics, in particular the role of youth in politics, the significance of historical representation in political processes, and questions related to migration and transnationalism.

David, Lea

The Past Can't Heal Us: The Dangers of Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights (Human Rights in History). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 243 pp., £ 75.00, ISBN 9781108495189.

Reviewed by: Tamara Kolarić, *OLIve Weekend Program, Croatia*

A core element of scholarly endeavour should be reflexivity: self-reflexivity of each author, but also a broader reflexivity on the assumptions made by those inhabiting the same research space. In memory studies, reflexivity has long co-existed with research agendas – not the least on the pages of this journal. Recent years have seen a new wave of critical reflection on the implicit positions researchers take, perhaps best exemplified by the work of Gensburger and Lefranc (2020) on the

connection between memorialisation and social behaviour. Are memory policies effective in building peaceful societies (in short: no), and what can be done?

In her first book, Lea David takes on herself a similar – and similarly grand – task: to question one of the main postulates of memorialisation, its loyalty to memory as a means of promoting human rights. The standardized way of 'proper' remembering to be observed by states when dealing with legacies of human rights abuses – referred to here as *moral remembrance* – does not, David argues, lead to promotion of human rights globally, as is assumed. Criticism is not aimed at human rights as an ideal, but at the way of promoting rights through memorialisation, which, implemented in the context of nation-states and building on false premises, produces effects different from those intended. Moral remembrance relies on several (wrong) assumptions: that proper memorialisation is necessary for healing societies after a conflict; that it is crucial for establishing responsibility for past atrocities; and that it will lead to establishing human rights values and enabling reconciliation. David sees their wide adoption as stemming from a lack of empirical research – aided by scholars who embrace human rights as 'devoted activists' (p. 6) instead of critically assessing the impact of standardizing memory as means of rights-promotion. And the consequences are not negligible.

In the Introduction, David puts forward six claims, which she develops in subsequent chapters. One, that human rights should be understood not as a desirable set of values, but as an ideology. Hence the focus in researching human rights should be on the institutionalization of their organizational and ideological power, and on the ability to impact individuals' thinking and behaviour. Two, that moral remembrance has become the dominant form of memorialisation globally, encompassing three principles: *facing the past*, *duty to remember*, and *justice for victims*. Three, that moral remembrance is often in conflict with the memory narratives of individual states (the 'state-sponsored memorialisation agenda', p. 13)—and is manipulated by state elites to fit their needs. Four, that insistence on universalized memorialisation is frequently counter-productive, as its mandated nature, seen as oppressive on the ground, helps impose national/ethnic distinctions. Five, that moral remembrance, through its homogenizing categories – victim/perpetrator/bystander – creates new inequalities and social divisions. And six, that it fails at promoting human rights values among individuals: the rights agenda is a weak alternative to nationalism (and other symbols- and history-based collectivities) and lacks the states' memorialisation infrastructure.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the decision to study human rights as an ideology, despite a history of resistance to doing so in sociology (David's primary discipline). Human rights can be understood as an ideology because they offer a clear worldview, a model for a desired society, and an explanation for 'how political change can and should be brought about' (p. 32). The conceptualization is productive, for it creates the possibility to study the organizational and ideological power of human rights and evaluate its on-the-ground transformative potential.

Chapter 3 traces the institutionalization of moral remembrance on the 'world polity' (p. 43) level and maps out its ideological content: the development of the three core principles mentioned earlier, to be imposed regardless of the local context. In two subsequent chapters, two case studies are presented: Israel-Palestine (Ch. 4) and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia (Ch. 5). The cases are very different (see p. 99); yet in both, there is some level of institutionalization of moral remembrance – and the elites use/manipulate it to serve national interests. Israel exploits the special status of Holocaust memory to promote a nationalist agenda; the Palestinians, whose narrative this excludes, try to adapt the model with the Nakba. In post-Yugoslav countries, where memorialisation is tied to political interests (primarily EU accession), there is a balancing act for political elites between the international community and the domestic voters, often resulting in purposefully complex, multi-meaning memorialisation that doesn't exclude, but makes space for nationalism (pp. 111–115). In both cases, remembrance perpetuates, not weakens the conflicts (p. 68).

In Chapter 6, David brings the analysis to the micro-level, asking '[w]hat happens once moral remembrance hits the ground' (p. 124). Taking *interaction ritual chain theory* (p. 131) as the framework, she analyses discussion groups, 'the jewel' of reconciliation work (p. 145), for their capacity to produce action-creating group solidarity. These encounters do not achieve the targeted goal, she concludes. What they promise is 'healing' (p. 145); what happens is internalization of ethnic identities. The balanced representation of individuals from different sides of the conflict – as members of ethnic groups – sets the stage for a predictable engagement, with everyone soon discursively 'moving from the "I" to the 'we'' (p. 147); the encounters end up re-enforcing ethnic narratives ritualized by group members. And while emotional energy is created and feelings of micro-solidarity produced among participants (aided by emotions such as anger and fear), these do not last. Back in the domestic contexts, the nationalisms of their immediate surroundings and a lack of political will for change push individuals away from the solidarity they felt in the dialogue groups.

The advocated principles also lead to unexpected negative effects. The false assumption that nations, like individuals, need healing hinders the agenda by making memory concentrated around particular events and repressing others, and by imposition of one memory model at the expense of societal differences. Moreover, the framework of moral remembrance reifies the categories of victims, perpetrators and bystanders, makes victims conform to particular narratives and yet doesn't instil in them appreciation for human rights values, turning them into competitors for limited resources instead. This becomes the 'biggest 'sin'' (p. 181) of standardizing memory: the hierarchy between categories is transmitted across generations, leading to permanently observing individuals as members of their respective groups. Finally, while the duty to remember presupposes that facing and remembering the past will lead to elimination of future conflicts, there is no evidence for this. And it doesn't result in justice for victims, either. Instead, it produces a sense of oppression among communities, leading to strengthening – not weakening – nationalisms.

The last chapter tightens the argument on how moral remembrance 'enforces nationalist sentiment' (p. 192), adding to the exploration of the tension between memorialisation requirements and nationalist narratives through observing how mandating memorialisation – a requirement that affects countries asymmetrically (see p. 188) – backfires in three cases: Holocaust remembrance, public apologies and memorialisation laws. Two further claims are raised: that standardized memorialisation produces new inequalities, as it forces victim groups to homogenize into 'ideal victims' (p. 202) while pitting them against each other in a battle for resources (and the support of the state holding resources long-term, which utilizes victims for political goals – and sometimes corrupt practices on both sides); and that there is little evidence that people, including those who benefit from human rights memorialisation, internalize its values. The abstract sense of solidarity with other humans is inevitably trumped by more tangible individual interests.

The Past Can't Heal Us is in many ways a remarkable book. It is ambitious, theoretically complex and thought-provoking. At its best, it weaves familiar arguments – on the issues with conceptualizing collective trauma, on the appropriation of the Holocaust memory or on the politicization of transitional justice mechanisms in post-Yugoslav countries – with new ones into a rich narrative; or it offers, as in Chapter 3, a novel view of familiar developments, revealing its author as an original thinker and a strong writer.

Yet as with any interesting work raising difficult questions, there are things to be debated. For one, I missed a discussion on what kind of ideology human rights are that goes beyond what is offered in Chapters 2 and 7. Understanding human rights as an ideology might be productive, yet it is not obvious that an ideology based on rights is equivalent to, say, nationalism, which is 'thick' and hence 'emotionally recruiting' (p. 18)—although less than is often implied, as nationalisms tend to benefit from a substantial promotion/coercion apparatus (a fact the book recognizes). What are the implications of treating as ideology something built around the abstract, enforcement-needing concept of rights?

Intriguing claims and interpretations could sometimes use strengthening or elaboration. For example, the reading of the European Parliament's 2015 Srebrenica resolution as meant to 'establish orders of power for the moral community of the righteous' (p. 101) appears harsh considering its text – as does the observation that it draws 'moral lines' between 'distinct communities' on an ethnic basis. The statement that 'descendants of Holocaust survivors are still regarded as victims' (p. 64; also p. 182), relevant for the criticism of the justice for victims principle, remains unsupported. At other times, arguments lean towards re-enforcement of the collectivism moral remembrance is accused of. The claim that official apologies are problematic because some might find them 'insulting and (. . .) clashing with their own personal and culturally acquired knowledge' (p. 195) fails to convince, as it is precisely the denial of mass crimes – which are not dependent on personal knowledge or experience, including that of another atrocity – that makes apologies a valuable tool against relativisation. The subsequent defence of a possible nationalist backlash by arguing, referencing a blogpost by Branko Milanović, that it is the people's history— 'practically nothing but unending struggles for national and religious emancipation' – that makes them 'sensitive, aggravated and even enraged' (p. 195) to external imposition of historical knowledge reads as an adoption of the dangerous collectivist 'we' that David otherwise seems to denounce (see for example p. 186).

The empirical analysis in Chapter 6 could benefit from a bit more transparency in presentation. The analysis is intriguing, but also challenging, raising important questions about individual agency and responsibility in (re)producing national(ist) discourse. It thus warrants critical examination. One could, for example, question the interpretation of us-and-them speech as essentially a symptom of the malaise of implementing moral remembrance in practice, and the related behaviour – such as apologies by participants (see p. 162) – as internalizing ethnic legacy. In post-conflict reconciliation groups, one might expect eruptions of latent nationalist biases to occur, but where they lead is crucial; and acknowledgement of crimes committed by one's political community can mean reflexively distancing oneself from nationalism rather than embracing it, marking a break with the past that should, but doesn't come from political leaders. However, due to how the results are presented, without specifying the procedure and exact materials analysed (referred to as 'myriad' materials; p. 19; see also pp. 143–144 for a bit more detail), challenging the interpretation and theory fit is hard. Adding a bit more detail would have helped the reader to engage in dialogue with the material.

Having finished the book, I am still pondering over whether moral remembrance itself is the problem, or we need to direct our criticisms elsewhere – to nation-states and their manipulation of memory – and observe standardized memorialisation as a corrective after all. How long should we wait to see if the agenda is successful, asks David (p. 183). Maybe the question should be reversed: how long until we know it has failed? But I owe the author gratitude for provoking the question with her daring, inspiring book, which I hope will be debated in conferences and articles to come – as the need for reflexivity in the scholarly community requires.

Reference

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Author biography

Tamara Kolarić is an independent researcher working on the intersection of political science, memory and film studies, with a particular focus on film and memory in the post-Yugoslav countries. She obtained her PhD in political science from Central European University, Budapest (now Vienna) in 2019, with a dissertation on the negotiations of the official memory narrative of the 'Homeland War' in contemporary Croatian fiction film. In the 2019/2020 academic year, she was a teaching fellow at Bard College Berlin. She currently teaches with the CEU-affiliated OLIve weekend programme.