

Book Review

Mirjam Zadoff, *Gewalt und Gedächtnis: Globale Erinnerung im 21. Jahrhundert (Violence and Memory: Global Remembrance in the 21st Century)*, München: Hanser, 2023, 240 p. ISBN 978-3-446-27807-3.

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The memories of the Holocaust and the Nazis' crimes are central to German remembrance culture and history education, forming an integral part of the country's identity in the 21st century. However, a debate about the singularity and comparability of the Holocaust has emerged in Germany recently, as the country's colonial past has made its way into the consciousness of the wider public. This forces a society, now more diverse than ever before, to address contemporary antisemitism and the persistence of structural racism. Controversies about the Cameroonian historian Achille Mbembe and antisemitism at the art exhibition Documenta have fueled a so-called *Historikerstreit 2.0*. In the center of this new "Historians' Dispute" lies the question whether the memory of the Holocaust can be linked to, and contextualized with other histories of violence. For instance, whether the Herrero and Nama genocide (1904–1908) can be regarded as a precursor to the Holocaust. The new "Historians' Dispute" is also fueled by Michael Rothberg's thesis of "multidirectional memory". Rothberg's book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, originally published in 2009, was translated into German only in 2021.

Mirjam Zadoff also uses Rothberg's thesis of "multidirectional memory" as a launchpad for her intellectual yet very accessible meditations in her book *Gewalt und Gedächtnis: Globale Erinnerung im 21. Jahrhundert* (Violence and Memory: Global Remembrance in the 21st Century). In the 13 essays, the director of the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism takes the reader on a trip around the world to introduce new places, thinkers, and concepts to the "Historians' Dispute 2.0." With Zadoff as a travel guide, the reader visits Ukraine, Cambodia, and South Africa among other places, only to return to Germany in the elaborate and profound conclusion of the book. Thinkers such as the American journalist and activist Ta-Nehisi Coates, practitioners like Tali Nates, founder and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, as well as survivors of violence, such as the South Korean "Comfort women" function as travel companions. Circulating the German debate, the essays deal with the tension between past and present, history and memory, East and West, and North and South. With this itinerary, Zadoff

highlights two aspects often overlooked in the heated debate in Germany about memory in the global age; first, remembrance is not a monolithic institution but is always a process of resistance and contestation by the victims against the perpetrators, also in Germany as a country of *Erinnerungsweltmeister* (“remembrance world champions”). Second, Zadoff shows that memorialization, musealization, and reconciliation initiatives around the world are inherently transnational and trans-cultural. She highlights that, around the world from Cape Town to Cambodia, from the American South to Amsterdam, Germany is often taken as a best practice model for negotiating painful memories and histories.

With these two findings in the suitcase, Zadoff returns to Germany in her final essay for a critical examination of the German *Gedächtnis- und Erinnerungstheater* (“memory and remembrance theater,” a term originally coined by the author Max Czollek). She shows how problematic and untenable the monolithic and standardized norms of remembrance have become within German society and in a global context. Thus, the author problematizes how isolated and provincial the debate on Holocaust remembrance has become in the country of the perpetrators from the global discourse about “multidirectional memory.” Finally, Zadoff criticizes how Germany “likes to pat itself on the back in a smug manner for what it has achieved” (*klopft sich gerne selbstgefällig auf die Schulter für das Erreichte*, 211). At the same time, the responsibility for present-day antisemitism is outsourced to migrants from the second or third generation, while the German state has been incapable of adequately reacting to racism and violence against minorities. As a result, Zadoff joins the ranks of those who argue for a critical examination of the inner-German debate itself, as well as the question of who, and under what conditions is allowed to speak. It is no coincidence that Zadoff primarily cites studies and projects that question the German *Versöhnungstheater* (Theater of Reconciliation, also coined by Max Czollek) that relegates Jews and migrant Germans to the bleachers.

By addressing the German debate indirectly and from the outside for most of the book, Zadoff shows that establishing new connections and associations does not automatically lead to the trivialization and dilution of the memory of the Holocaust and German remembrance culture. Instead, she argues, the widening of the discourse and the admission of new discussants would expand and enrich a debate that often resembles provincial navel-gazing. By pleading for a more multidirectional remembrance culture in Germany, Zadoff finally suggests that maybe it is time for the German World Champions in Remembrance to learn from those whom they once served as role models, e.g. coming to terms with the memories of Apartheid in South Africa or the crimes of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. It is noteworthy that Africa and Asia play a prominent role in the book, as well as women’s history. By doing so, remembrance culture can steer away from the treacherous paths of

becoming a soothing narrative, nostalgic kitsch, or – worst of all – a trade-off for inhumane politics (217).

In the often over-intellectual German debate, Zadoff's contribution is a surprisingly personal and accessible book that begins, not without reason, at the record player in her parents' house. Zadoff is a seasoned, well-connected, and – as her trip around the world shows – well-traveled practitioner in the field of remembrance, exhibition, and mediation of histories of violence. The current German debates about racism, antisemitism, and history certainly benefit from her personal yet profound contribution. Even if some examples are only briefly touched upon, the book makes the over-theorized debate that often hinges on single scandalous incidents more tangible.

The target audience of *Gewalt and Gedächtnis* is certainly the German debate landscape. Readers familiar with the new "Historians' Dispute 2.0" will definitely appreciate that Zadoff introduces new voices and perspectives to a debate that is often an inner-German patting each other on the back. Being familiar with the German debate, however, is not a prerequisite for finding access to Zadoff's arguments. Readers new to the current German debate will appreciate her storytelling and wit as she takes her readers around the world and highlights connections and entanglements rather than serving as a mere travel guide to spots on the global map of remembrance. Therefore, the book should not be misunderstood as a memory atlas claiming to present a complete picture of the global memory landscape(s). For the readers, this trip around the world is an invitation to draw their connections and maps of places, institutions, and intellectuals Zadoff does not mention, e.g., South America, Russia, or the Balkans, and to reflect on our positionality as readers and thinkers, academics and practitioners.