

EDITORIAL

The aftermath of a troubled past triggers a war between convoluted memories in actors representing all points on the political spectrum, signaling that the materialization of “collective memories” in a culture is neither objective or set in stone. The politics of memory influences the memory cultures of diverse, heterogeneous regions worldwide to a greater or lesser degree. While state-sponsored museums, commemorations, and memorials receive constant attention in academic studies, the mnemonic rendering that emerges from them or sometimes in opposition to them – the hegemonic memory culture – is less frequently addressed and critically scrutinized.

In that light, the present special issue zooms in on the multifarious memory discourses that arise in the aftermath of difficult pasts. This exploration reveals the intricacies of what, why and how we remember about the past. Beside the official institutions and places where memory dwells – which may or may not be recognized by the people as accurate “collective” memory spaces – there are also “unofficial” sites of memory. There, various mnemonic actors perform their work of memorializing outside the framework of official memory in a fresh attempt to decolonize the knowledge of a troubled past. The contributions to this issue address both official and unofficial memory practice and the spaces where collective memory is created. Those spaces and practices are not necessarily linked to the conventional sites of memory, that is, the official *lieux de mémoire*, or to the accredited ways of representing a troubled past and its victims, bystanders, and perpetrators. The common framework of the studies in this issue is the conflict between hegemonic and repressed or neglected narratives.

The struggle between institutional and unconventional memory culture has yet to be sufficiently explored, and the demarcation of the border between them is still very fluid. This means that one “official” memory culture can be replaced by another “binding” narrative of the troubled past after a new

political or social order arises from the battlefield of collective memory. By the same token, the politics of memory has revealed that the limits of “collective memory” are quite nebulous and lax. The various mnemonic groups competing to grasp the banner of official memory are demanding to have their particular versions of memory enshrined in new commemorative cultural formats.

This special issue of *AUC Studia Territorialia* seeks to contribute to the debate over memory politics by bringing together three original essays that highlight some of the various cultural settings and discursive formats in which mnemonic narratives are produced and disseminated. The papers are a response to our 2020 call entitled “Troubled Pasts and Memory Politics: Contesting Hegemonic Narratives in North America, Europe and Eurasia.” Further contributions produced by that call for papers will follow in the next issue.

This volume opens with an essay by Robert Cook that unveils the controversial nature of race-centered narratives of the memory of the American Civil War of 1861 to 1865. The paper scrutinizes the works and legacy of two pioneer African American soldier-historians and Union veterans, George Washington Williams and Joseph T. Wilson. It argues that while their efforts to immortalize the role played by black Union troops in the American Civil War proved short-lived, their novel narrative strategies paved the way for the establishment in the twentieth century of an effective black counter-memory, one that has lasted to this day.

The second article takes the reader to contemporary Southeast Europe. In her essay, Gorica Majstorovic explores the relations and literary exchanges between small nations’ “minor” literatures and world literature, where the translator functions as the mediator. Employing Rothberg’s concept of the multidirectionality of memory, Majstorovic shows how different historical memories interact and clash in post-Yugoslav societies. To illustrate this, she analyzes the lives and works of two prominent writers who were exiled from the former Yugoslavia, Danilo Kiš and Dubravka Ugrešić.

Finally, Liane Schäfer in her contribution deals with the conflicting constellations of Holocaust memory and the memory of colonialism in Germany. Proceeding from a case study of the public controversy over an invitation to the postcolonial studies scholar Achilles Mbembe to speak at an official event, which highlighted the standoff between the two memory cultures, she proposes a discursive approach that critically questions and deconstructs the underlying discourse of German memory culture as a whole.

The regular report column in this issue is dedicated to the late founder of the Institute of International Studies at Charles University in Prague, and a long-time member of the editorial board of this journal, Professor Jan Křen, who passed away in 2020.

Wishing you a pleasant read,

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