

Zitierhinweis

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Orli Fridman 2022. *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict: Unwanted Memories*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (Heritage and Memory Studies). 237 pp., ISBN 9789463723466 (hardcover), ISBN 9789048554515 (eBook), €117.00 / €116.99

In this fascinating and well-researched book, *Orli Fridman* contributes to the memory politics literature with a truly original approach. In *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict*, Fridman explores what memory activism in contested societies looks like on the ground. Further, she persuasively shows how the digital turn is changing both the practice and the meaning of memory activism. Fridman's focus is Serbia, but her methodological and theoretical toolkit is generalisable to many other postconflict settings and contexts. This is where the true value and the long life of the book lies.

Fridman's main inquiry is into how memory activists, or entrepreneurs, go about commemorating historical events that remain hidden or "unwanted" by the state and its cultural and political institutions. When the state does not want to remember events from its past – most often, because that past is unflattering or very damaging to the state narrative – how do memory activists create an alternative calendar of events to commemorate? Who gets to choose what is important to memorialise and what is not? What is the relationship between official and unofficial memories? How can unofficial memories become official, and what needs to change to make that happen? These are some of the profound questions that Fridman asks in this very engaging book.

Memory Activism is centred, like much of Fridman's previous work, on Serbia. A state with a deeply contested past and even more contested narratives about that past, Serbia is an excellent case for the

study of the conflict between official and unofficial memory politics. Serbia's fraught relationship with its own history of violence, which has often been wrapped within a broader story of Serbia's victimisation, has been studied so extensively that this particular topic has reached near saturation. What makes Fridman's approach so refreshing is that it moves the scholarship forward from its relentless focus on state action and really explores what happens below the state. Her patient and comprehensive field research, participant observation, interviews, and general ethnographic sensibility have all brought to life a vibrant, active, deeply principled but, sadly, often very much ignored network of Serbian memory activists who have for decades kept the "unwanted" memory of the violent dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, and Serbia's role in this violence, alive. Fridman's deep empathy for the work of these activists, and careful storytelling about their various projects, challenges, setbacks, disappointments, and triumphs, represents an additional moral contribution of her scholarship, beyond the project's clear contribution to the scholarship on memory politics and the Western Balkans.

Fridman accomplishes the goals she set out for her book by proposing a novel methodological framework – what she calls a “generational lens” – to explore, with all the necessary nuance, the politics of memory activism in Serbia. This focus on generations is important as the story Fridman is telling really begins with the generation that came before most of the participants in contemporary memory activism in Serbia. It begins not with memory activists, but with antiwar activists, who, unsuccessfully, coordinated the antiwar effort across the former Yugoslavia – with strong groups of antiwar activists and organisations in both Serbia and Croatia. Connecting peace activism with memory activism and then, later, with

memory of activism, allows us to follow a delicate narrative that links some of the major actors – individual and institutional – and their role in the expanding memory landscape.

Memory Activism then really kicks into gear when Fridman turns to online, or what she calls “hashtag activism”. Here we are introduced to a truly dizzying array of online events, commemorations, campaigns, protests, and actions, which have dramatically broadened both the scope of memory activism and the field of actors. Fridman’s contribution here is to really expand our notion of what is and what should count as memory activism, and point to the many ways in which online platforms can serve to multiply the activists’ message and reach. On this point, I wish Fridman had spent a bit more time discussing the downsides of online activism, mostly in terms of the environment being ripe for blowback, harassment, and abuse, but also in terms of what kind of activism the online variant replaces. While online activism may certainly reach more people, does it not also serve as a form of emotional reassurance that something is being done, while the only thing asked of us is to click a “like” button? My skepticism about the permanent reach of online activism, however, certainly goes beyond the case of Serbia, the core of Fridman’s research.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out just what the limits, expectations, and promises of online activism are for Serbia, and indeed for memory activists in other regions, including those with quite repressive and monitored online spaces (China, for example).

Orli Fridman has written a broad, deep, and comprehensive book on memory activism in Serbia. Addressing a topic that is seriously underexplored in the broader scholarship of memory studies but also in the area studies scholarship on Serbian politics and society, *Memory Activism* succeeds in providing a truly

nuanced analysis of the many overlapping generations of memory activists. This book adds an invaluable dimension to our understanding of the various different avenues memory activism can take and the complicated relationship between official and unofficial memory in societies with deeply contested narratives of the past.