

Zitierhinweis

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James Mark: *The Unfinished Revolution*. Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe. Yale University Press. New Haven 2010. 312 S. ISBN 978-0-300-16716-0. (€ 49,99.)

James Mark analyzes major debates over the meaning and current relevance of the communist experience in Central-Eastern Europe at multiple political and cultural levels. He covers a range of memory practices related to the recent past of the countries lying between Germany and Russia and draws on a significant amount of personal testimony. The book thus combines the study of prominent institutions such as history commissions, institutes of national memory and of the current uses of former terror sites (chapters 1 to 4), with the approach of oral history through which, among other aspects, the various renegotiations of anti-fascist narratives and the revived (and heavily politicized) memories of Red Army rape are explored (chapters 5 to 7). M. thereby manages to provide a rich empirical panorama of the divisive moral and political contests raging in post-communist societies over how their communist pasts should be interpreted and overcome. On the other hand, the book at times feels like a collection of articles, rather than a coherent, fully rounded monograph.

The starting point of the study is that the collapse of communist regimes practically coincided with the transnational “memory boom”. Second, there were both internal political drives and external expectations and pressures in post-communist countries to confront their recent pasts. M. rightly emphasizes that the extent of both are unprecedented in the region although without discussing relevant theories in memory studies or the possibilities and problems of retroactive justice in any greater depth.

He explains that in spite of triumphalist Western narratives about the victory of liberal democracy that focused on those who resisted the communist regimes, the way communism ended could neither be narrated as a heroic story nor employed as a source of national cohesion. In the absence of profound judicial reckoning, attempts to complete the revolution were usually made in the political and cultural realms. The book as a whole could indeed be read as a study in cultures of “historical reinvention” (p. 215). As M. notes, “the task for producers of new public memories was the construction of a believable popular narrative of a revolutionary rupture between dictatorship and liberal democracy, despite the absence of an actual revolution to mythologize” (p. 32).

It is among the main aims of M.’s study to show how the idea expressed in its title acquired ever greater resonance, how it was not only recurrently stressed that the communist epoch should be revisited in order to be fully overcome, but that the need to reject communism was ever more frequently, not to mention aggressively, invoked. This story line seems especially fitting in the cases of Hungary, Poland and Romania that are the primary, though not exclusive subjects of the case studies presented.

The materials analyzed in the first half are organized in nationally divided subchapters. Chapter One deals with Hungarian and Polish leftist and rightist narratives on the resistance to and the collapse of communism. Chapter Two focuses mainly on the Polish Institute of National Remembrance and Romania’s Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship. Chapter Three discusses, above all, Hungarian and Romanian uses of former terror sites, while also analyzing forms of representing the communist epoch in museums. It is not national differences that structure M.’s interpretation though. What he offers is essentially a regional narrative, stressing common patterns and marked parallels. (Tellingly, the conclusion does not address any national differences.) While striking parallels indubitably exist, M. misses opportunities to explore local-national specificities in greater depth – it is indeed conspicuous how few sources written in languages of the region he makes use of. Even though it is rarely made explicit, his regionally framed account cannot hide significant local variety.

The second half of the book studies new autobiographical narratives, highlighting M.’s interest in the evolution of the dialogue between past and present: how individuals adjusted

their autobiographies in a new socio-political context. It ought to be noted that most of his interview partners were born between 1918 and 1940 and are from Hungary.

In his chapter on non-communists, M. discusses the tendency observable mainly in conservative and Catholic milieus to validate stories of suffering. Such stories simultaneously stress individual and collective victimization, politically and ethnically grounded refusal and the preservation of national traditions in the domestic sphere. He points out that this conception of the past not only seems obsessed with distinguishing private life from public engagement, but often denies the actual level of integration and success of their tellers during communist times (pp. 171-173). He also shows that others managed to develop self-reflexive forms of autobiography through which they questioned the validity of victim identity. Such people tend to belong to groups of dissidents who have become critical of the new anti-communist simplifications and distortions and typically claim that the communist regime never managed to humiliate them.

Besides noting some admittedly rather strange aspects of post-communist political cultures, the book presents a critical overall perspective on recent developments. M. not only shows how political elites instrumentalized the project of reckoning with the past, but also how they have seemed to have no interest in incorporating multiple, clashing perspectives into their versions of communism. The democratic pluralization of memory was alien to the projects of "democratically remolding" collective memories. The polemics of the book reach their height when M. labels new pressures to fit life stories into simple categories of victim or collaborator as totalitarian, seeing the painting of such monochromatic pictures as the dominant way of depicting the recent past in Central-Eastern Europe.

Jena

Ferenc Laczó

Jüdische Spuren in der Kaschubei. Ein Reisehandbuch. / Śladami Żydowskimi po Kaszubach. Przewodnik. Hrsg. von Miłoslawa Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk und Christian Pletzing. Meidenbauer. München 2010. 448 S., Abb., Kt. ISBN 978-3-89975-178-9, 978-9-78838-920-0. (€ 26,90.)

In den letzten zwei Dekaden ließ sich beobachten, wie Verdrängtes bzw. Vergessenes in das öffentliche Bewusstsein zurückkehrte. Dank der Tätigkeit von Stiftungen und Kulturgemeinschaften wie z.B. *Borussia* oder *Pogranicza*, um nur die wichtigsten zu nennen, sowie einer Reihe von zivilgesellschaftlichen Initiativen¹ ist die deutsche kulturelle Hinterlassenschaft in den polnischen West- und Nordgebieten seit fast zwei Jahrzehnten kein Tabuthema mehr. Vielmehr wurde dieses oft fremde und als feindlich begriffene Kulturerbe zum unersetzlichen Bestandteil der Identität der heutigen Einwohner. Die jüdische Kulturlandschaft dieser Gebiete konnte hingegen erst in der ersten Dekade des 21. Jh.s in größerem Umfang entdeckt und der Öffentlichkeit präsentiert werden. Zweifelsohne wurde der Prozess, das vergessene jüdische Erbe zurückzuholen, durch den Ausbruch der Jedwabne-Debatte beschleunigt (S. 11). Die Erforschung dieser kulturellen Hinterlassenschaft ging jedoch eher auf wissenschaftliche Initiativen zurück und erreichte somit kaum populärwissenschaftlich interessierte Kreise. Umso wichtiger ist die vorliegende Studie polnischer, kaschubischer, deutscher und israelischer Projektteilnehmer, die nicht nur das materielle Kulturerbe der ehemaligen jüdischen Einwohnerschaft der Kaschubei detailliert darstellt. Den Autoren ging es auch darum, die tiefen Spuren jüdischen Lebens in einer Region, deren Erforschung erhebliche Desiderate aufweist, zu dokumentieren und in Form einer übersichtlichen Publikation einem breiteren Leserkreis zur Verfügung zu stellen. Die

¹ Vgl. z.B. die Aktivitäten des Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Słońska „Unitis Viribus“: <http://www.tps-unitisviribus.org.pl>, oder des Park Drogowskóz i Słupów Milowych Cywilizacji in Witnica (Vietz): <http://www.witnica.pl/?mod=news&cID=323> (eingesehen am 11.05.2011).