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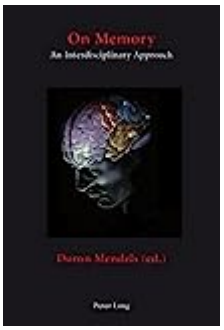

Doron Mendels, ed. *On Memory: An Interdisciplinary Approach.* Bern: Peter Lang, 2007. 356 pp.p Illustrations. $89.95 (paper), ISBN 978-3-03911-064-3.

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Putting Public Memory On Stage

On Memory: An Interdisciplinary Approach is a collection of essays resulting from a conference on public memory held at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in April 2005. Doron Mendels, the volume editor, retains the conferenceâs interdisciplinary ethos with great success. The contributions of fifteen world-renowned scholars gathered here attest to a wide variety of approaches to cultural memory that examine written texts, oral histories, material and visual constructions of memory, and neurological and psychological processes of recovering from and discarding harmful or traumatic memories.

Setting out the direction of the book, Mendelsâs introduction focuses on one of public memoryâs most conspicuous sites: fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian paintings preserved in public places, such as churches and market places. The study reveals the mechanics of memorializing through the visual arts: selecting a canon of topics conducive to establishing the hegemony of the ruling class while encouraging the submission of the ruled, choosing an opportune occasion and a place for displaying the morally charged painting in a way that affords them maximum attention. Mendelsâs second contribution to the volume, âA Model of Public Memory and a Note on GuÌnter Grassâs Crabwalk,â focuses this time on the dissemination through the Internet, films, and books of the memory of a maritime disaster caused by the Russian sinking of the German submarine *Gustloff* carrying thousands of German expellees during WWII. These media exemplify the connection between the nature of the society in which remembering takes place and the nature of the memories it maintains–a relationship mediated by, and centered on, the medium of transmission, the unceasing flowing of time, and, of course, ideology.

The topic of media and ideology is taken up again in Bianca KuÌhnelâs âMemory and Architecture: Visual Constructions of the Jewish Holy Land.â The author examines the representation of the Holy Land in two medieval travel scrolls presently located in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. Pilgrimage literature depicting âholy placesâ in the land developed, despite Judaismâs resistance to tomb veneration, in re-

sponse to increasing Christianization of the land under the influence of the Crusades. The act of creating, on paper, Jewish holy sites covering all the Land of Israel was therefore highly significant, not least because in these scrolls other places apart from the Temple in Jerusalem are âinfusedâ with holiness, thus creating a sacred geography encompassing the whole country. The role of these pictorial representations of the land through its holy sites clearly went beyond simple tourism. Their placement in houses and synagogues suggests a commemorative function of keeping the Holy Land alive in the collective memory of the Jewish diaspora. As artifacts of sixteen-century Israel, they also reflect the Ottoman occupation in the shape and architectural features of the buildings depicted.

Jeffrey Andrew Barashâs article, âAnalysing Collective Memoryâ argues in favor of a phenomenological understanding of collective memory, which in his opinion is better suited to address the question of retaining and transmitting a shared past than are the psychoanalytical, neurocognitive, and socio-historical approaches. Collective memory, he argues, is found in neither personal memory nor the symbolic embodiment of a collectively experienced event. It gravitates between these two poles. The example discussed is Martin Luther Kingâs speech, âI Have a Dream,â delivered on August 28, 1963. Those who were there in the crowd on that day and those who watched the event on TV will have different memories, but all memories center on this singular event, itself a link in a longer chain of social justice events. This dialogic relationship in which memory emerges âin betweenâ us and other remembering subjects is further scrutinized by Moshe Shokeid in âAnthropological Texts: Mirrored Memories of Researchers and Subjects.â The author reflects on the relationship of anthropologyâs most treasured method–participant observation–with remembering, both as regards the ethnographerâs production and subsequent revisit of âethnographic notes,â as well as the informants whom s/he meets during field work. Memories form an essential, yet rarely acknowledged, component in this discipline.

Yoram Biluâs âSaint Impresarios in Israel as Agents of Memoryâ traces the development of mnemonic communities around the cult of two *tsaddiqim*, holy, pious men. One of these memorial cults was translocated to Israel by the Jewish Moroccan immigrant community. The essay shows the compensatory and orienting function of social memory organized around saint worship for these two Ã©migrÃ© communities struggling to overcome alienation, but also the politics of forgetting resulting from the refusal of local authorities to uphold a past, as embodied by one of the shrines, no longer fitting in the contemporary memory landscape of Israel. This important question of how âsocial and material frameworks of memoryâ shape the process of commemoration is further theorized, on a larger scale, by Yael Zerubavel, in âAntiquity and the Renewal Paradigm: Strategies of Representation and Mnemonic Practices in Israeli Culture.â[1] Focusing on one ârevitalization movementâ in Israel (p. 331), Zionism, the study explores three kinds of mnemonic practices constructed in the early years of modern Israeli society that link it back with the golden age of Jewish national life in antiquity. The regeneration of Israel was thus premised on creating an indissoluble link between these two eras by: (a) preserving the existing artifacts originating in that distant past; (b) reproducing those items or biblical and post-biblical scenes that were iconic of the ancient communities; and, finally, (c) by massive Hebraization of the Jewish immigrant communities, who were encouraged to adopt Jewish names, and of the localities and regions, especially the new settlements in the land, to reflect continuity with the Hebrew forefathers.

Nili Cohenâs âMemory and Forgetfulness in Lawâ brings memory of the law into the courtroom and finds it âguiltyâ of being partial. Though key to establishing guilt, memory alone is insufficient in the administration of justice, so other culturally upheld principles, such as legal precedent, come to its aid. The judicial heritage that accumulates successively from one generation to the next provides a link between past and future generations, but it is equally an arena of combat between legal memory and cultural forgetting, as witnessed in the Supreme Courtâs right to deviate from the rules imposed on smaller courts of law. The subtler point pursued by Cohen is not that the law is circumstantial, though it may appear as such in the case of the Supreme Court, but that the judicial system, as a cultural instrument, reuses and retains the past selectively.

Idan Segevâs article, âWhat Changes in the Brain When We Learn,â examines the functions of the brain in storing and retrieving new information. Segev describes with just enough detail for any non-specialist the neurologic process that enables learning, namely the growing of new synapses or the strengthening or weakening of already existing ones. The age of âbrain-renaissanceâ (p. 172) has brought more disciplines to bear on developing a multifaceted learning theory than ever before, and consequently a tremendous result has been noted, but much still remains to be solved, particularly in the area of how

other parts of the brain contribute to the process of acquisition and storing of memory and what, at the synaptic level, makes it hard to forget or control strong emotions. The need for further investment in these questions is also made clear by the work of Gabriel Zimmerman and Hermona Soreq, âRemembering Trauma: The Role of Acetylcholinesterase in the Formation of Fear Memoriesâ and Jonathan H. Slavin, âPersonal Agency and the Possession of Memory.â The first study is a lab report dealing with the âbiology of fear reactionsâ (p. 320) in the case of a rare neuronal protein, AChE-R, particularly relevant for better understanding and, it is hoped, better treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The second essay challenges the contemporary psychoanalytic practice of first establishing the âtruthâ from the memory of sexually abused or traumatized patients before assembling a treatment plan. Personal agency, it is claimed, should be first recovered, not what happened. While the authors grant that even an agency-first approach has its own limitations, especially in the case of patients suffering from self and memory dissociation, an empowered self better discerns the truthfulness or falsehood of traumatic memories and is better prepared to cope with them.

Arye Edreiâs âHolocaust Memorial: A Paradigm of Competing Memories in the Religious and Secular Societies in Israelâ unveils two conceptions of remembering by way of scrutinizing the debate over how best to commemorate the Holocaust between religious Zionists and the *haredi* community (ultra-Orthodox Jews) in Israel. Holocaust memorial days and the placement of memorial sites in very suggestive places, such as the grave of King David in Mount Zion and Yad Vashem, confront the image of the Jew unable to defend himself and suppress it by promoting Jewish heroism and redemption through human strength. The *haredi* leaders, on the other hand, have sought to preserve an entirely different past, aimed at recovering the spirituality of the âworld that was destroyedâ (p. 55), so minimizing the horrific tragedy of the Holocaust. For the latter, the Talmudic school, the yeshiva, best memorializes the spirit of that age. Also, in their eyes, the preservation of the rabbinic teaching prior to the start of the European pogroms seems more in tone with the Jewish tradition in general than are the elegies for the dead used at public memorial gatherings. These two visions of what and how to remember, though both seeking to preserve the vitality and continuity of the Jewish collective, shed important light on the wider issues with which they are associated, namely the modeling of modern Jewish identity, its political expression in an independent State of Israel and, last but not least, its relationship with the binding power of the Torah. Dan Lao, in âHow Are We Expected to Remember the Holocaust? Szenes versus Kasztner,â further explores the politics polarizing Holocaust remembering in Israel through a study on the âtwo pathsâ of resistance and negotiation, taken by two Jews in Hungary in the wake of the Shoah. The young Hannah Szenes, having escaped to Eretz Israel during WWII, returned to her natal country Hungary to rescue Jewish lives, but failed to save any. Israel Kasztner, the deputy chairman of the rescue committee, saved thousands of Jews by trading âblood for goodsâ with Nazi authorities. Yet Israel Kasztner was condemned by an Israeli tribunal for having âsold his soul to the devilâ (p. 196). The author reveals the ideological frameworks from which remembering can never be detached, as well as the modeling of the national âheroâ as a site of elite aspirations and collective remembering and forgetting.

Alexander Yakobsonâs âUs and Them: Empire, Memory and Identity in Claudiusâ Speech on Bringing Gauls into Roman Senateâ tackles the mis/use of historical memory in the controversial proposal of acceptance of an elite group of Gallic chieftains into the rows of the imperial senate. Emperor Claudiusâs speech, around which the debate centers, recalls the memory of the Gaulsâ enmity and (reluctant) friendship with Rome in such a way as to minimize the difference between âusâ (the educated Roman elite) and âthemâ (the adopted Roman citizens), bringing to the surface the âforeignâ ancestral origin of some of Romeâs most prominent figures, including Claudius, and the past rivalry between Roman clans. Amia Lieblichâs âThe Second Generation of Kfar Etzion: A Study of Collective Memoryâ reformulates this very question of the political foundations and social implications of historical memory in terms of the Jewish/Arab debate over the right to inhabit certain settlements. The author focuses on how the children of the founding members of the kibbutz Kfar Etzion remember the history of this settlement and what place this site occupies in their life stories. The story of Kfar Etzion is one of âsurvival against all odds,â having been settled, destroyed, and resettled between 1943 and 1967 (p. 222). For some of the kibbutzâs descendants, the story provides a harmonizing framework. It connects more deeply with other layers of consciousness colored by stories of miraculous deliverance from the hands of the oppressor. For the majority, however, the memory of Kfar Etzion is less central: they simply âcarryâ this past without letting it affect them. A few even reject this history, considering it misleading and political. The study sounds a warning to the power of collective and personal memory to root a community

in the land at the expense of another.

Tamar Liebesâs ââHear O Israelâ: Radio, Nationbuilding and Collective Memoryâ investigates the radio as a site and medium of memory during the early days of Israeli state-building, which happily coincided with the beginning of Israeli radio broadcasting. The radio educated and harmonized the culturally and linguistically diverse groups of Jewish immigrants arriving in Eretz Yisrael and prepared the ground for the âimagined communityâ necessary for nation-building to emerge.[2] In the nationâs collective memory, the radio is associated with critical moments qua nation, as opposed to the ceremonial events screened on TV after the formation of the State of Israel. Hebrew radio, it is concluded, was initially conceived to create an âimagined homelandâ in a Zionist utopia, but became, and still is, paradoxically, a medium for sounding out changing and conflicting notions of âhomeland,â as programs in Arabic or English continue to appear.

In conclusion, then, *On Memory: An Interdisciplinary Approach* excels in putting âpublic memoryâ on stage. It asks in various ways what are the nature, contents, and expression of this memory and it traces its roots to the social, cultural, material, and even bodily realm. The less public memories, those that are not shared by all the members of the larger group, are also dealt with in different ways, as are the many ways of forgetting, or trying to do so–whether in the public arena or on the therapistâs chair. Assembling the papers in distinct categories may have eased the reading process and may have even made the connection between these sixteen essays plainer, but this is a minor criticism of an otherwise readable and insightful book.

Notes

[1]. Most notably formulated by Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed., trans. and intro. Lewis A. Coser, Heritage of Sociology Series (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter, intro. Mary Douglas (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980).

[2]. The phrase comes from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

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