



MemWar

Memorie e oblii delle guerre e dei traumi del XX secolo. Convegno internazionale.

ABSTRACTS

2 dicembre 2021

Alina Molisak

Memories of trauma. Polish and Jewish parallel variants

In my speech, I want to point out the parallelism of Polish and Jewish memory concerning the trauma of both World War I and World War II. I will discuss texts that belong to literature, showing how narrations about events were constructed, which will allow us to see the differences, which I call parallelism, in Polish and Jewish records and works. I will also present the evolution of literature written in Polish about the Holocaust and the memory of Jewish fate - both during the communist era and after the change of political system in Poland. Apart from the above-mentioned parallelism of memory, the changes in the approach to Jewish themes in contemporary Polish literature are evident, although sometimes they take on a surprising form.

Luca Pisano

***“To face Heaven without any shame”: General Bai Chongxi 白崇禧 (1893-1966)
in the memoirs of his son Bai Xianyong 白先勇 (1937)***

Bai Chongxi was one of the most important figures within the Nationalist Army of the Republic of China and one of the main protagonists of the historical events that characterized the history of China in the first half of the twentieth century, from the birth of the republic following the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 to the retreat to Taiwan together with the nationalist government in 1949. Almost fifty years after his death, his son Bai Xianyong, recognized as one of the most representative voices of the contemporary Taiwanese literary context, undertook a work of research and reconstruction of his father's biography that highlights Bai Chongxi's sphere of influence within many crucial historical moments. Far from being a hagiographic re-enactment, Bai Xianyong's narrative reveals the complex relationships that his father had with the leadership of the Nationalist Party and with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) himself. This paper aims to focus on the memories that Bai Xianyong traced in relation to the last phase of his father's military career, in particular from the period immediately preceding the retreat to Taiwan which saw Bai Chongxi playing a key role in the aftermath of the tragic events of the “February 28th Incident” in Taiwan, a still open wound that indelibly sanctioned the hostility between the local population and the mainland Chinese who took control of the island after fifty years of Japanese colonization.

Francesca De Rosa

***Presence of an absence: memories of slavery in Lisbon's urban space. Plantation - Prosperity
and Nightmare by Kiluanji Kia Henda and Atlântico Vermelho by Rosana Paulino***

This paper reflects on the emerging contemporary artistic and memorial forms that have the intent or effect of redefining the public space from the repressed memory of slavery history in Lisbon (Portugal). The analysis will focus on the exhibition of Brazilian artist Rosana Paulino *Atlântico Vermelho* inside the Padrão dos Descobrimentos (2017) and the installation “*Plantação-Prosperidade e Pesadelo*” (2017) by Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda in the wide Campo das

Cebolas in Lisbon. The aim is to look at how the memory of slavery has been framed as presence of an absence, and how contemporary artistic languages, black communities and Afro-descendant movements try to repair the city and represent a transnational trauma against collective amnesia by redefining and rethinking the urban space.

Gregorio Taccola

Museum narratives and trauma processing.

The Civic Historical Collections of Milan and the wars of the 20th century

Wars and traumas are crucial topics for museums dedicated to contemporary history. My presentation has a twofold aim. Firstly, I will illustrate the contribution of museums to the construction of twentieth-century narratives about wars through the gathering, organising and displaying of objects that we shall consider as sources or texts. Secondly, I will suggest how historical museums significantly contribute to social cohesion through the reification of war memories in a public space and through the performance of rituals to recover from traumas.

To illustrate this matter, I shall focus on a particular case study. The Civic Historical Collections of Milan was founded in 1885 as *Museum of the 'Risorgimento'*. After the Great War it renewed its mission collecting a huge amount of war memorabilia, which merged into the *War Museum* (1935), renamed *Museum of the Wars of Italy* in 1939. The latter name was functional to the inclusion of the Spanish Civil War, the colonial wars and the Second World War. After the Second world war, the Historical Collections displayed twentieth-century wars in the new *Museo of 'Risorgimento'*, and later, between 1963 and 1995, in the *Museum of Contemporary History*.

This case study - local and yet national because of its importance - allows us to investigate the ways in which historical museums pass on the memory of twentieth-century wars. By taking a cross-disciplinary approach between historiography, archive studies and anthropology I will show how the museum memory of twentieth-century wars is the result of rituals functional to the re-signification of war heritage and to the passing on texts through contexts.

Daniel Blaufuks

The Territory of Memory

The archive is unexpectedly not what we remember but what we have forgotten, or at least, partly forgotten. That is exactly why we need the archive, to restore memory, to clarify memory, to extract memory from recordings, from artefacts, from journals and newspapers. However, we should also consider that the archive is not necessarily a physical place or a collection of documents and objects stored at an exact address.

Neli Dobрева

***Losing Memory in the wake of September 11th 2001:
anachronism or sublime historical experience?***

Lingering idea of “sublime experience of the past” as concept of *sublime historical experience* (Ankersmit, 2005), I would revisit the process of *re-remembrance* of the tragic events from September 2001 as consolidation of new national mythologies. In terms of Ankersmit: “the sublime is in many, although not all, respects the philosophical equivalent of the psychological notion of trauma. More specifically, although trauma challenges our identity, it does, in the end, respect it, whereas the sublime requires us to abandon a previous identity. This is why trauma serves the cause of memory, and the sublime that of forgetting”.

Following that idea, we should consider different processes of memorializing and *re-traumatizing* (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2017) the events following the narratives of the sites of lost: inspirational, traumatic, patriotic, sacred etc. However there appears an interconnection within space and time through juxtaposition of narrative coming out from national mythology: a new big narrative (*grand récit*).

In that line of thoughts I hope to demonstrate that within the idea of *sublime historical experience*, the amnesia and the forgetfulness of the past, operates an *anachronism* (Rancière, 1996; Agamben, 2008) that confronts a new American identity: the one that suppresses the binary victim-perpetrator and thus transcends the past.

Ronan Richard

Individual stories, collective history

For a century, the editorial memory of the First World War in France has been constructed selectively. The testimonies of combatants exerted an almost exclusive domination over the production of war narratives. Social representations of the war is in fact very subjective, because the great majority of these witnesses came from a literate elite mobilized in the infantry. Soldiers engaged in Other Weapons published less, as if memory was built on meritocratic principle, focusing attention on the « generation of fire », which was considered to have suffered and sacrificed the most. Moreover, the book market was not very open to the experience of civilians, durably complexed by not having been at the front.

Alessandro Castellano

Gender – Remembrance - Italy

Reconstructing memory through the collective imagination

Women's roles in Italian partisan “Resistenza” were recognized very belatedly, as evidenced by the representation that was made of them from the end of the war until the 1970s in the cinema. In this essay, we retrace the representation of women in various films between gender stereotypes and the conquest of emancipation.

Iva Jelušić

Memories of War, Memories of Emancipation: AFŽ's Dream for the Yugoslav New Woman

For an entire generation of communist activist girls and women WW2 in Yugoslavia was conceived as the foundation that led to the realization of the women's equality. Already in 1942, communist activist and partisan Mitra Mitrović talked how gender equality came and “achieved itself.” The dream of the emerging utopia permeated women's magazines published during the war. This paper will focus on the way in which imagery about the woman fighter (*žena borac*) developed in the first decade following the end of the war. It will analyze how the members of the Antifascist Front of Women (*Antifašistička fronta žena*, AFŽ) in Croatia managed the legacy of the People's Liberation Struggle in the organization's official journal *Woman in Combat* (*Žena u borbi*).

This paper will emphasize how was their interpretation – perhaps it was true that *partizanke* [women partisans] thought that the “equality was in the *četa*,” but the members of the AFŽ were certain that it was in the Party organization – reflected in their considerations of women's wartime engagement. As a rule, they resorted to the descriptions of the war in a way that was meaningful to them. Since they focused on the aspects they experienced and considered important, they also helped engrain into the collective memory of its readership a narrative about the auxiliary role of women in the war and postwar society. At the same time, such interpretation of the partisan struggle placed the role of the women partisans, unprecedented one hundred thousand of women soldiers who fought in the Yugoslav partisan army, in the margins of the narrative of the women's wartime experience.

Patricia Kottelat

Memorial governance of wars: the French case

This study aims to illustrate how war memories are the subject of an effective policy on the part of French institutions, in particular the Ministry of the Armed Forces and the Presidency of the Republic. Focusing on the period of the last twenty years, we will analyze the constructions of memories of 1870 war, the Great War, the Algerian war and finally the OPEX, in order to identify the issues at stake.

3 dicembre 2021

Giorgio de Marchis

«honouring bandits and torturers and golpistas». *The Brazilian dictatorship as a case of amnesia*

In a famous essay, Argentine writer Ricardo Piglia declares that a state, however fiercely repressive, cannot rely on violence and coercion alone. Established on different forms of mass acquiescence, dictatorships need to develop convincing plots to make their version of events credible. The literature of witnesses and survivors contrasts alternative tales of the country's 'official' history, in which truth becomes a political horizon. Also in Brazil, in these first decades of the 21st century, the memory of the dictatorship (1964-1985) lies at the core of opposing narratives. This paper will focus in particular on Bolsonaroist rhetoric and on Bernardo Kucinski and e Maria José Silveira's works.

Patrizia Violi

Interwoven memories in Cono Sur: from colonialism to dictatorships and back again

My presentation aims to analyse how memories of different historical traumas can intertwine with each other's in a non-competitive but rather transversal way, producing a new narration that can be seen as a form of creative translation. I will analyse Patricio Guzman's documentary of 2015, *El botòn de nacàr*, where memories of the XIX Century colonialism and Pinochet's dictatorships show their deep multidirectional (Rothberg) connections allowing a deeper political understanding of historical facts.

Elisa Rossi

Epopèa and ruins: the colonial war in Manuel Alegre's Jornada de África

The most famous novel by Manuel Alegre, *Jornada de Africa*, published in Lisbon in 1989, had a strong impact on post-colonial war literature. Re-elaborating one of the most suggestive myths of Portuguese literature, the sebastianism myth, was taken as a model in several literary and artistic representations.

Taking into account the main critical readings about the novel, the present contribution aims to offer a new perspective, placing it in the vein of the so-called «fiction of memory» (Nunning, 2003) and reflecting on the narrative strategies that the novel unfolds in the construction of the «mimesis of memory» (Neumann, 2005). Indeed, through the analysis of these narrative expedients, it will be possible to reveal different approaches in the construction of the individual and collective memory.

Davide Finco

Chronicles from a Neglected War. Swedish Literature and Spanish Civil War (1936-1939):

Att skjuta hästar (2015) by Kjell Eriksson

Chronologically placed between (and logically overshadowed by) World War I and II, Spanish Civil War marked Spanish history in the 20th century: as the outcome of decades of social and political tensions, it led to the replacement of the new born republic with an authoritarian regime, which would last until the 1970s; moreover, it was the main international event before World War II where a military confrontation of totalitarianisms (and fascist forces) with democracies (and anti-fascist forces) took place. Several nations brought help to the opposite fronts and, in general, a lively debate on the advisability of an involvement in the war arose in parliaments and public opinions. As regards specifically Scandinavia, hundreds of volunteers joined the International Brigades, even against their own government's position (as is the case of Sweden).

Yet, certainly due to the geographical and cultural distance of Spain and, primarily, of course, to the incomparably more devastating experience of World War II, the impact of Spanish Civil War on Swedish literature has in no way been relevant: if we exclude historical or journalistic contributions, we do not have books dedicated to Spanish Civil War until 2010, when this war features as the setting or dramatic element in a few detective stories. As far as I know, however, *Att skjuta hästar. En roman*

om spanska inbördeskriget (Shooting Horses. A Novel on Spanish Civil War) is by now the only work of literary fiction in Swedish that is thoroughly devoted to this crucial event.

In the story conceived by Eriksson, which proves to rely on historically documented elements, memory operates at various levels: not only has a fundamental episode of European history been reconstructed from the perspective of some volunteers in the International Brigades, but the whole report is based, fictitiously, on what the Swedish protagonist, Alfons Andersson, wrote in some notebooks during that experience. He has never spread the content of his writings, but now that he is going to turn a hundred years old, he strongly desires to save his account and leave it as a legacy; besides, and not secondarily, the main characters featuring in the novel are in search of their own path in life and their own identity, thus they share their memories both on very personal events (among which the reasons why they decided to come to Spain) and on recent historical facts, something which may help readers understand the climate of the time. As a bitter tale on war violence, grief and injustice, as well as a proud (fictional but believable) testimony of people's courage, humanity and generosity, this work can be considered, in my view, a good and suitable example of memory culture in Swedish literature.

Francesca Negro

Solano Trindade's Musical-play Zumbi dos Palmares Malungo The Quilombo between Memory and Myth

Zumbi dos Palmares Malungo, is a unique example in Brazilian literature, being the first musical play dedicated to the Afro-Brazilian hero Zumbi, governor of Quilombo dos Palmares. The play has an intrinsic memorial value, as it recalls the fight for the liberation from slavery in the country, a long-silenced chapter of Brazilian history. While merging memories and historical facts with ritual elements coming from Yoruba religious tradition, the play is inspired by the Greek classical theatre, and it is itself a multidisciplinary and multicultural archive of the process of cultural creolization in Brazil. Conceived on Edson Carneiro's historiographical text, the play presents the society of the *quilombo* as an ideal reference for the creation of a modern inclusive democracy. The play, still unpublished and never put on stage, denounces the perversity of the internal dynamics of the colonial system in a sublimated representation, which opens to values of peaceful coexistence. The play is also an archive of vocabulary of Bantu origin related to agriculture and cooking, which influenced permanently the language of the colonizers, entering through the same domestic environment where Africans were often segregated. The play retains various kind of memories: the one of slavery, the musical memory of rhythms, rituals and dances, the memory of a history and the linguistic memory of languages erased by colonization. Francisco Solano Trindade is one of the most inspiring figures of Afro-Brazilian literature. He was the organizer of the first two Afro-Brazilian congresses in Brazil in the Thirties, and co-founder in Recife of Frente Negra Pernambucana, and of the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Centre for the promotion of works of Afro-Brazilian artists and intellectuals. He gave also birth to the well-known *Teatro Popular Brasileiro*, in Rio de Janeiro, where he started his collaboration with Edson Carneiro. In Embu das Artes (São Paulo) his family is currently preparing the first representation of this play.

Anna Giaufret

Déboulonnage des statues and memory

The phenomenon known as *déboulonnage des statues* (or simply *déboulonnage*), closely linked to memorial issues, gave rise, between June and July 2020, to what Moirand (2007) calls a *moment discursif*, i.e. a set of discursive productions that appear massively in the media space, which in this case take on a polemical dimension (Amossy 2014). In this communication we will present the results of two teaching experiences: a dissertation in discourse analysis on a corpus of French-language press and a course for the Political Science department that used the debate technique.

Marco Succio
Memory and Novel

Novel and memory have always had a deep relationship, and more than ever now that “remembering” is becoming one of the key themes of international philosophical, sociological and political studies. The intervention aims to deal with some of the most important questions about this relationships from a Spanish perspective. Is it always useful to remember? How can the memory and the fictional space come into contact? And again, how fiction can be used to create a shared narrative of the past?

Simona Leonardi
Memory and Places

The relationship between remembrance, memories and places has recently been tackled in many areas as a result of the so-called ‘spatial turn’. Actually, close analyses of remembered contents show, as Casey has put it, «the variegated features of a (remembered) place that serve as points of attachment for specific memorial content; ‘things to hang our memories on’» (Casey, 1993, p. 172; cf. also Ricœur, 2000). Research focusing on the construction of (semi)spontaneous narratives highlight both the role of space orientation in the construction of narratives (e.g. Baynham, 2015) and the spatial dimension in the narrator’s positioning; the spatial dimension contributes thus considerably to the narrative identity of the self (Ricœur, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Orletti, 2009; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). Insights from biographical and linguistic research (Keating, 2015; Becker, 2019) also pinpoint the analytical advantages of an approach which focuses on places and emplacement in life stories. This relevance of spacetime coordinates can be taken into account under consideration of the category of ‘chronotope’, first introduced in literary studies by Bakhtin (1937, 1981), which can prove fruitful for a fine-grained linguistic analysis of the role of space in narratives, since it points towards the «intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships» (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84) in human social action (on chronotopes in narrative analysis cf. Perrino, 2015; Leonardi, 2016; Blommaert & De Fina, 2017).

Duccio Colombo

Perspectives on Memory: The Stalingrad and Khatyn’s Memorials and Soviet War Literature

Evgeny Vuchetich’s statue of a Soviet soldier from the War Memorial in Berlin’s Treptower Park (1947) holds a sword in its hand; this is, of course, an indication to the importance of the Classicist element in the Socialist-Realist koine. This element will find its fullest realization in Vuchetich’s giant, sword-brandishing statue of the Motherland for the Stalingrad memorial (1967) – a statue which appeared in the Guinness book of world records as the highest in the world for several years.

In literature, these sculptures are paralleled by the fluvial “novel-epics” (which in the late-Soviet years were treated by literary theory as a new, separated genre) by such authors as Aleksandr Chakovskii and Ivan Stadniuk. A diametrical different approach to war can be found in the work of the representatives of the so-called “truth of the trenches” movement; the founding father of this movement, Viktor Nekrasov, vehemently protested in fact against the Stalingrad monument. His work has been criticized precisely because of the narrowness of the point of view – the war in his novel was observed from inside a trench, with no attempt at generalization.

Do monuments inevitably have to be vertical, tall, allegorical? A different solution can be seen in the Khatyn’ memorial to the destroyed villages of Byelorussia (opened 1969; architects Gradov, Zankovich, Levin, sculptor Selikhanov), where the remains of the burned-down huts are reconstructed in cement, each with only one obelisk stemming out, reproducing the chimney. Not casually, it is in a book called *The Khatyn’ Novella* (and in the chapter dedicated to the destruction by the Nazis of a village together with his inhabitants) that the Belorussian writer Ales’ Adamovich first experimented the collage of interviews technique, which was to become the basics of his future work – see *I come from a village on fire* (with Ianka Bryl’ and Vladimir Kolesnik, 1975) and *Leningrad under Siege*

(with Daniil Granin, 1977-1981) and of that of his disciple, the Nobel-prize winner Svetlana Aleksievich. This technique implies, however, to go one step further: to renounce every pretense to typicality of the represented facts. Every witness carries his own name and tells his own story and his story only; totality can only be reconstructed by the reader out of the sum of them. The Khatyn' memorial, on the other hand, stands for every burnt down Belorussian village, and, in the choice of the site, the fact that its name can be easily confused with that of Katyn – a place the Soviet government would have probably preferred forgotten – could have played a part.

Nekrasov admitted to be moved by one room at the Stalingrad memorial: the “glory hall”, where the names – the list of names – of the victims of the battle are inscribed on the walls. Leningrad Under Siege opens with the line: “This truth has names, addresses, phone numbers”. The list of real names thus opposes the pretended typicality of the imagined character.

This figure of speech, however, cannot be automatically held as opposed to imperial rhetoric, as shown by the fate of the “immortal regiment” in contemporary Russia: it started as a civic initiative, where people marched carrying the portraits of their relatives who fell in the war, soon to become a government sponsored enterprise, where participants often do not even know the names of the people whose portraits they are carrying.

Anna K. Aleksandrova

Greece: Remembering WWII during the Financial and Economic Crisis

In late 2009 a financial and economic crisis in Greece became apparent, severely damaging the all aspects of the economy and placing a significant burden on most citizens. The growing instability and economic hardship was compared to those during the periods of the dictatorial rule of the “Black colonels” junta, and during World War II. Many Greek politicians have also, since the first weeks of the crisis, used WWII comparisons in their public speeches, calling for the citizens to “tighten their belts”. The comparison between the financial and economic crisis and the wartime, used so actively by the political elites and so easily absorbed by the public had one unavoidable result – it fostered a search for an image of an enemy, of some external force to blame for the country's troubles. A convenient target for politicians in this regard was Germany, occupying a special place in the Greek perceptions of the economic crisis. Germany, an economic and in many ways a political “locomotive” of the European Union, played a key part in the attempts to recover the Greek economy. The responsibility for shortcomings in anti-crisis measures, leading to a deep recession and a downturn in foreign investment, was also placed on Germany. Unsurprisingly, the idea of Germany being responsible for the dire situation Greece was facing in the last decade, gained significant traction.

Thus during the financial and economic crisis the image of an enemy which lingered in Greek public consciousness since World War II was actualized and intersected with the new one, emerging during the crisis. Throughout the economically difficult years the Greek media and the general public (through social media and in images used in public protests) had frequently referenced the Third Reich, sometimes directly comparing it to contemporary Germany. The loan provided to Greece by the “troika” of creditors (the Eurocommission, the ECB and the IMF), reminded the Greek public of the still unpaid post-war reparations and the occupation loan, conveniently “forgotten” by Germany. Today, after the end of the “memorandum era”, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the subject of World War II and the image of Germany as the enemy has largely faded into the background of the Greek public consciousness and political life. Despite that, it would be unwise to ignore the trend of rough generalizations, stereotypes and references to cultural memory becoming a favored tool of populist politicians. This presentation examines the use of images of World War II in Greek politics during the financial and economic crisis.

Gleya Maatallah

Annie Ernaux and the war years as a novel

In *La Place* (1983) work devoted to the father and *Une Femme* (1987) devoted to the mother, the horrors of the invasion and occupation of Normandy are inscribed in the life story of both parents and

the narrator of returning on the violence of this “modern fatality” which descends on the peaceful existence of the little people to upset it “from top to bottom.” In both books, Annie Ernaux describes the war in terms of apocalyptic chaos that brutally invades the family space, having nothing to do with great history in its extreme violence. To the economic disaster (the loss of the small business, the only means of survival) is added the great disorder with which life is reduced to nothing: panic, dispersed family, famine, looting, disease, sudden death of his family.

This three-generation injustice affects the grandmother, unable to flee and found by chance, with her packages, on the steps of a church. The father, having received “shrapnel in the face”, is saved by a miracle, “in the only open pharmacy” of the stricken town. The mother is threatened with death. The child who will be born in this context will live as a “child of war”, that is, a being with limited skills. With the liberation, the couple, “carried along by the general hope of 1945”, realizes that the post-war period is “more difficult to live with than the war”: in a city in rubble, the father is employed afterwards. so many sacrifices and risks, to “plug the holes in the bombs.” The mother, idle in her turn after a busy life struggling for survival, spends her time walking her child through the empty streets of a “city burned down by the Germans”.

Beyond this historical violence, *L'Événement* will mark the collective memory of survivors and feed oral culture in a rather gloomy vision of the world: they only have the war to tell “like a novel”.

In the detailed presentation, we will develop in more detail this representation of war, striking for its realism and its contemporaneity. We will open our reading with other works whose authors raise the same subject.

Ana Catarina Pinho

Against Silence. The visual archive and echoes of the Portuguese colonial war

By the time most European countries began a process of decolonization, in the 20th century, Portugal started a war against the liberation movements in the African former colonies. Initiated in Angola, the war soon unfolded to other colonial territories, giving rise to an armed conflict that lasted for thirteen years. In what can be seen as a historical anachronistic movement in regard to other European colonial powers, the Portuguese regime mobilized over one million people to war, creating an impact not only on the generation that experienced it but also in generations to come. Beyond the social impact caused in both national and overseas territories, the armed conflict contributed to the fall of the Portuguese colonial empire and the political transition to democracy, marked by the Carnation Revolution in 1974.

The regime’s strategies of propaganda and censorship prevented the disclosure of many violent events and promoted a politics of silence that prevailed even after the turn to democracy. Such silence, however, does not lead to the erasure or forgetfulness of the historical events from where it emerges. In turn, it holds the potential to become a ‘language’ of memory and thus express that which is silenced. Such is the case with different forms of artistic expression which started to unveil, question and contest the war, from literature to visual arts, reaching a significant increase at the turn of the 21st century. Within this framework, this paper will articulate the notions of *communicative memory* (Assmann) and *communicative silence* (Winter), through the work of Portuguese visual artists from different generations, hence different experiences, memories and forms of signification, in order to demonstrate that silence can be a socially constructed space that reveals more than it hides.

