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Regions of Memory Transnational Formations

Edited by Simon Lewis · Jeffrey Olick
Joanna Wawrzyniak · Malgorzata Pakier

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Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies

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University of Glasgow
Glasgow, UK

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Macquarie University
Macquarie, Australia

The nascent field of Memory Studies emerges from contemporary trends that include a shift from concern with historical knowledge of events to that of memory, from ‘what we know’ to ‘how we remember it’; changes in generational memory; the rapid advance of technologies of memory; panics over declining powers of memory, which mirror our fascination with the possibilities of memory enhancement; and the development of trauma narratives in reshaping the past. These factors have contributed to an intensification of public discourses on our past over the last thirty years. Technological, political, interpersonal, social and cultural shifts affect what, how and why people and societies remember and forget. This groundbreaking series tackles questions such as: What is ‘memory’ under these conditions? What are its prospects, and also the prospects for its interdisciplinary and systematic study? What are the conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools for its investigation and illumination?

Simon Lewis • Jeffrey Olick
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Editors

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Editors

Simon Lewis
University of Bremen
Bremen, Germany

Jeffrey Olick
Department of Sociology and History
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA, USA

Joanna Wawrzyniak
Faculty of Sociology, Center for
Research on Social Memory
University of Warsaw
Warsaw, Poland

Malgorzata Pakier
European Network Remembrance and
Solidarity
Warsaw, Poland

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Tony Joel is Associate Professor in History at Deakin University. A former German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) scholarship holder and a member of Deakin's Contemporary Histories Research Group, Tony's main research interests include war memory and commemoration, and sports history. Tony's publications include *The Dresden Firebombing: Memory and the Politics of Commemorating Destruction* (Bloomsbury, 2020) and, with David Lowe, *Remembering the Cold War: Global Contest and National Stories* (Routledge, 2013).

Krishan Kumar is University Professor and William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia. He was previously Professor of Social and Political Thought at the University of Kent at Canterbury. He has also been a Visiting Professor at the Central European University. Among his publications are *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals* (2001), *The Making of English National Identity* (2003), *Visions of Empires: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World* (2017), and *Empires: A Historical and Political Sociology* (2021).

Simon Lewis is Associate Professor in East and Central European Cultural History at the University of Bremen. He researches memory, postcolonialism and multiculturalism in East-Central Europe, and is co-chair of the Polish Memory Studies Group, a regional group of the Memory Studies Association. He is the author of *Belarus – Alternative Visions: Nation, Memory and Cosmopolitanism* (2019) and co-author of *Remembering Katyn* (2012). Forthcoming books include *Multicultural*

Commonwealth: Poland-Lithuania and its Afterlives (co-edited with Stanley Bill).

David Lowe is Chair in Contemporary History at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deakin University. David's recent publications include *Remembering Independence* (with Carola Lentz; Routledge, 2018). His research centres on cultural aspects of the history of international relations, including Australia's role in the world; and on remembering the legacies of modern wars and empires in comparative contexts. He is currently researching the history of postwar foreign aid, including the Colombo Plan and Australia's foreign aid program.

Katharine McGregor is a historian of modern Indonesia, based at the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne. The focus of her research to date has been on the Indonesian military, the Cold War, colonial violence, memory and activism, Indonesian women, and the Japanese occupation. She has published four books and is currently completing a monograph on transnational activism for Indonesian comfort women, a major outcome of an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship. She recently commenced work on a new Australian Research Council funded project on memory activism around colonial violence, and is collaborating on a new project entitled *Rethinking Colonial History: Indonesia*. She is currently President of the Asian Studies Association of Australia and Deputy Associate Dean International Indonesia for the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne.

A. Dirk Moses is the Anne and Bernard Spitzer Professor of Political Science at the City College of New York. He is the author of *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge, 2021) and senior editor of the *Journal of Genocide Research*.

Jeffrey K. Olick is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology and History at the University of Virginia (USA) and co-president of the Memory Studies Association. Recent publications include the six-volume *A Cultural History of Memory*, co-edited with Stefan Berger (Bloomsbury, 2020) and a special issue of the journal *Memory Studies* (2021), co-edited with Hanna Teichler, on "Memory and Crisis".

Malgorzata Pakier is Head of the Academic Department at the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity. She is the author of *The Construction of European Holocaust Memory: German and Polish Cinema*

after 1989 (2013) and co-editor of *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (2010, 2012) and *Memory and Change in Europe. Eastern Perspectives* (2015). Her academic interests include: Europeanization of memory, Holocaust representation, social/cultural memory, museum studies, and film.

Laura Pozzi is Research Assistant Professor at the Faculty of History, University of Warsaw. She is interested in entanglements between global history, colonialism, and memory politics in the People's Republic of China. She studies the impact of postcolonial and decolonial theories on the changing representations of Chinese history in museums and heritage sites at a global level.

Ann Rigney is Professor of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. She has published widely on theories of cultural memory and on memory cultures in Europe since 1800, including *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford UP, 2012) and, co-edited with Chiara De Cesari, *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (De Gruyter, 2014). She currently directs an ERC-funded project called *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe* (ReAct).

Ksenia Robbe is a Senior lecturer in European Culture and Literature at the University of Groningen. She works at the interfaces of postcolonial and postsocialist studies with a focus on memory and time, and writes about contemporary Russian/Russophone and Southern African cultural production. She is the author of *Conversations of Motherhood: South African Women's Writing Across Traditions* (2015) and co-editor of *Post-Soviet Nostalgia* (2019) and *(Un)timely Crises: Chronotopes and Critique* (2021).

Hanna Teichler is a research associate in the department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at Goethe University, Frankfurt. She holds a PhD from the department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Goethe University Frankfurt, and a M.A. degree in English, French and Portuguese philology. Her first monograph *Carnivalizing Reconciliation* came out with Berghahn in 2021. Hanna is the co-editor (with Rebekah Vince) of the book series *Mobilizing Memories* and of the *Handbook Series in Memory Studies* (both Brill). She was a member of the Memory Studies Association Executive Committee (2018–2022) and co-directs (with Astrid Erll) the Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform.

Joanna Wawrzyniak is Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Research on Social Memory at the University of Warsaw. Specializing on East-Central European memory processes, her current projects include memories of socialism, neoliberal transformation, and deindustrialization processes in Poland. She also participates in collaborative research on cultural heritage and memory processes in Western Europe and East and South Asia. She is co-author of the award-winning *Cuts: An Oral History of the Transformation* (2020, in Polish) and *The Enemy on Display* (2015), and the author of *Veterans, Victims and Memory* (2015).

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Introduction: Regions of Memory in Theory

Simon Lewis and Joanna Wawrzyniak

Despite many voices that have predicted the decline of memory studies after its national boom in the 1980s and 1990s, the next twenty years opened up its next, cosmopolitan chapter. The so-called third wave of memory studies brought a variety of new concepts to account for the unprecedented transnationalization of research in the humanities and social science in general, and in memory studies in particular, such as “multidirectional memory” (Rothberg 2009), “travelling memory” (Erl 2011), “memory unbound” (Bond, Craps, and Vermeulen 2017), “transnational memory space” (Wüstenberg and Sierp 2020), and “mnemonic solidarity” (Lim and Rosenhaft 2021). This book sets to introduce one more notion into the family of memory studies’ concepts, that of “regions of memory”. Its principal aim is to challenge further the dichotomy of national vs. cosmopolitan memory that was introduced by the third wave

S. Lewis
University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany
e-mail: lewis@uni-bremen.de

J. Wawrzyniak (✉)
Faculty of Sociology, Center for Research on Social Memory
University of Warsaw, Warszawa, Poland
e-mail: wawrzyniakj@is.uw.edu.pl

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of memory studies, and thereby to contribute towards a more differentiated study of global memory processes.

The volume examines the scale of collective memory that transcends the national level, yet is narrower than the global. This theoretical intervention enables diverse comparisons in memory studies, putting the most established paradigms of (West) European and (North) American memory in corresponding view alongside other regions such as East Asia, Eastern Europe, and Southern Africa. Memory at the regional level has been studied on different continents, but these projects often tend to be inward-looking compendia of studies in and between nations within those regions (e.g. Allier-Montaño and Crenzel 2015; Kim and Schwartz 2010; Makdisi and Silverstein 2006; Waterson and Woon 2012; Pakier and Wawrzyniak 2015; Subotić 2019). The book builds on such area-specific scholarship in two ways. First, it enables studying a variety of global memory regions in parallel. Second, however, it seeks to highlight processes that transcend geographical boundaries to reveal lesser-known vectors and mechanisms of memory travel, such as across Cold War battle lines or between Indonesia and western Europe. Regions of memory, as this volume shows, are not just geographical territories, but conceptual spaces, united by particular histories and cultures as well as by geographical elements.

More specifically, the volume deals with regions as spaces for memory dynamics in a multiplicity of inter- and transnational situations, and the region-based studies we present in this volume emphasize subjectivities, agencies and internal dynamics within regions, and their entanglements, rather than projections of representations that objectivize space. The concept of memory regions allows us also to interpret the (frequently though not necessarily antagonistic) points of contact between larger and smaller memory formations, e.g.: between the official memory projects of supranational alliances and local memory; between cosmopolitan and vernacular memory; or between the transnational flow and local reception of memory narratives.

THINKING REGIONALLY ABOUT MEMORY

The idea behind “regions of memory” originated at the annual conferences series *Genealogies of Memory in Eastern and Central Europe*, organized by the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity since 2011. The first conferences were shaped by memory debates proliferating after the accession of the East-Central European states to the European Union

(EU) in 2004. They focused on differences and conflicts between the cosmopolitan Western European mode of remembrance of the Second World War dominated by the Holocaust and universalist human rights discourse (e.g. Levy and Sznajder 2006; Bull and Hansen 2016) and the new member states' historical narratives centered around the Gulag experience, national victimhood, wartime heroism, criminalization of communism, and reluctance to admit the local populations' compliance with both Nazi and communist atrocities (e.g. Blaive et al. 2013; Mälksoo 2010; Neumayer 2019; Subotić 2019). Also, there were important discursive similarities between the “eastern” EU states in the processes that shaped their post-accession memory policies, and memory negotiations within the bloc. In this context, we tried to capture both the differences with Western Europe and similarities across East-Central Europe by conceptualizing these spaces as regions of memory.

At the time, Jeffrey K. Olick proposed to define “regions of memory” as “discursive arenas above the level of the nation state but not fully universal” (Olick 2015, xii). The notion was intended to challenge both national and cosmopolitan approaches to memory which dominated the scholarship of the time. Together with Małgorzata Pakier, we also called for a further historization of memory research, as we thought that it was the experience of the twentieth century's mass violence—whose scale in Eastern Europe was incomparable to that in Western Europe—that contributed to particular constellations of images and narratives on the past in this region (Wawrzyniak and Pakier 2013). Finally, at the Genealogies of Memory conferences, we started to compare the configurations of East-Central European memories with those of other regions of the world, such as the Caucasus, East Asia, Latin America and West Africa, whose historical legacies also include experiences of mass violence, fragmentation and diversity. Sometimes we were struck by important similarities, like in the memory dynamics of the Korean-Japanese-Chinese and Polish-German-Russian triangles, in which war, mass killing and territorial conquest continue to divide remembrance across country lines. Most significantly, however, we were enriched by criticisms of our initial approach's geographical essentialism. Regions of memory, several speakers argued, can be formed also across continents or social spectra, without gaining global significance. Taking those discussions into account, we decided that the way to approach regions of memory is to use this notion as what American sociologist Herbert Blumer once called a sensitizing concept. According to Blumer, sensitizing concepts suggest “directions

along which to look”, in contrast to definitive concepts which provide “prescriptions of what to see” (Blumer 1954, 7). Let us comment on two of the directions that inform this volume.

Whilst not mutually exclusive, the two main directions of this volume differ in their departure points. The first stems from the classical idea of regional space. In this case, the concept of regions of memory is an invitation to revisit area studies, the Cold War intellectual product of American universities with their regional, geographical foci; or as other want to see area studies—an effect of longer term Western World’s domination over the global “rest” in the colonization and decolonization processes. Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen argued in an influential work a quarter of a century ago against “metageographical mythology” that divided the world into implicitly hierarchized units: “continents, nation states, and supracontinental blocks, such as East and West” (Lewis and Wigen 1997, 6, 10). At the same time, they declined to discard spatial supranational constellations altogether, arguing that “[t]he project of metageographical reform must face the challenge of coming up with multiple crosscutting and overlapping regionalisms for different purposes” (*ibid.*, 199). With the idea of “regions of memory” we take up this challenge, adapting it for the specific realm of memory studies.

Despite its political ambiguity, the traditions of area studies resulted in the production of important expertise that transcended national and disciplinary borders, and contributed to in-depth understanding (or construction, as the opponents of this approach would argue) of entangled regional histories, cultural and political processes in various localities from the Latin America, and different parts of Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Memory studies can draw on and contribute to such area studies expertise without entirely falling into its initial traps, such as modernization theory (putting the “West” as the blueprint for the “rest”) or orientalism (treating the “rest” as different from the “West”). The processes of “inventing” or “imagining” regions such as Eastern Europe (Wolff 1994) or the Balkans (Todorova 1997), of making up their mythologies and traditions by both outsiders and local elites, are exactly what memory studies scholars are trained to study. The regions of memory concept, even when referring to geographical spaces, is sensitive of their discursive constructions. As Diana Mishkova and Balazs Trencényi put it in their comment on the role of “regions” for historiography:

crucial to this understanding of space is not so much its material morphology as the premises of its social production, its ideological underpinnings, as well as the various forms of interpretation and representation that it embodies. (Mishkova and Trencsényi 2017, 11)

Regions of memory are thus to be studied critically and heuristically, and emphatically not as reifications of geographical space. Even when understood spatially, “regions of memory” are of course not intended as large areas in which everyone shares the same memories—analogously to national memoryscapes, which are likewise never monolithic. There are diverse historical events remembered with varied significance across the geographical space; and the same events are often given different or conflicting meanings. However, their memories are in one or other way discursively connected to the place in which they happened. They might form supra- or transnational constellations of representations of the past within or referring to the particular regional space. They may share specific regional carriers, forms, agents, sites, or nodes of memory.

To come back to our initial example, the extensive memory research undertaken in East-Central Europe in recent decades has uncovered different constellations of collective memory unfolding to this region. The legacies of its ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious heterogeneity, early modern and modern imperial histories, nation-building processes, communist experience, border shifts, migration waves, as well as links to diasporas all over the world, formed varied, inter- and transnational constellations of memory. In other words, “East-Central Europe” is not a single region of memory shaped by a specific transnational history; rather, the space commonly referred to using this term contains multiple overlapping and intersecting memory regions that together form uneven concentrations of mnemonic interaction.

To give just a few illustrations of recent research, Natalia Nowakowska (2019) studies memories of the Jagiellonian dynasty—who ruled in Poland-Lithuania, Bohemia, and Hungary in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—and discovers a regional framework of remembrance of this family of monarchs, in the sense of a mnemonic system that evolves and changes over centuries and connects the lands of the former Jagiellonian dynasty. In the present moment, Nowakowska concludes, one can speak of nationalization of the Jagiellonians in particular countries on the one hand, while on the other hand the roots of their representations, and the histories of the changes in those representations, are culturally and

historically entangled. The same can be said about myriads of other representations originating in the early modern or modern era in the region, layered by and framed by successive generations and changing cultural, social, and political circumstances.

To present an example of twentieth century memories, a team of authors led by Alexander Etkind and Rory Finnin (2012) trace the circulation of cultural representations of the 1940 Katyn massacre, in which more than 22,000 Polish soldiers were murdered by the Soviet NKVD, across Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and Baltic States. Again, the researchers observe both the movement of images and interpretations across state borders and their anchoring in specific national cultural setting—as well as important remembrance roles outside the region, for instance the impact of political decisions in the USA and the UK, often influenced by Polish diaspora communities.

Finally, one of the largest bilateral multi-volume Polish-German history projects of recent years focuses on the Polish-German *lieux de mémoire*, showing how trans-local symbols and patterns of meaning are formed between these two cultures and others in the region (Traba and Hahn 2012–15; 2015–16). What all these examples—and numerous others—have in common is that they show such a movement of cultural memories which cannot be seized in national containers. Their relevance crosses national borders, however is unlikely to attain global significance, remaining within spatial, regional boundaries.

The other way to conceptualize regions of memory is to draw on the scholarship that postulates to concentrate on the travels, movements, and circulations of memory (Erlil 2011; De Cesari and Rigney 2014). Take for instance, the seminal concept of “multidirectional memory” advanced by Michael Rothberg (2009), who focuses on how the memory of the Holocaust was shaped by, confronted by, and contributed to the articulation of histories of other cases of extreme violence in various local settings, including in North America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans. Rothberg observes that in each of these cases, the memory of the Holocaust plays a different role and has different meanings. In the processes of cross-referencing with other memories, it contributes to a (re)construction of subjects, spaces, and sites of memory.

More generally, the second direction takes as its starting point not a predeterminate geographical space—and a question what constellations of memory nodes, agents, carriers, forms, events, sites, or practices, add to its specificity—but the *movement* of some of these across space; though again,

within (loosely) bounded limits depending on the subject being remembered. Importantly for several chapters in this volume, following the movements of remembrance helps to account on the one hand for regionalization of seemingly cosmopolitan themes (e.g. genocide or the Cold War), and on the other hand to identify regions of memory that are beyond the geographical focus of classical area studies. Considering these two directions together, we have realized that the more open ended our understanding of regions of memory is, the more heuristic value it has. Regions of memory can be historically conditioned patterns of cultural similarity, institutional projects for political integration, or imagined constellations of mnemonic solidarity. They can be all of these things at the same time, or any number of other configurations of transnational memory flow—in geopolitical, digital, or artistic space. Regions of memory can be geographically contiguous or dispersed, and have uneven distribution of mnemonic intensity; to return to an earlier example, the memory of the Katyn massacre is not as powerful in Belarus or Latvia as it is in Poland, and also has historical roots in diaspora communities in the USA, UK, and other countries.

Regions of memory are not the “areas” of “area studies”, nor are they bound to theoretical constructions such as postcolonialism. Rather, the study of memory regions allows us to reach across different disciplinary and geographically-specialized traditions and enter into multiple forms of dialogue; for example, to territorialize postcolonial discourses by specifying the regions they imagine (see e.g. chapters by McGregor, Kumar, Moses, Teichler and Robbe), or to challenge established spatializations of memory by considering new material, such as the Cold War (Joel and Lowe), the One Belt, One Road initiative (Pozzi), or the digitalization of memory through a resource like Wikipedia (Rigney). The concept of memory regions should also be empowering rather than essentializing, as it allows for the locally situated voices within cultures to be heard and understood as constitutive co-creators of mnemonic transculturation—as all the chapters that follow illustrate, in different ways. Regions of memory, in other words, do not need to be thematically or geographically bounded. The borders of memory regions define themselves, depending on what is being remembered and by whom.

STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

The volume is divided into three sections, illustrating three broad categories through which regions of memory may be analyzed: **historical**, **political**, and **cultural** regions of memory. These categories are far from exhaustive, and not mutually exclusive. In considering “historical” regions of memory we take as our point of departure the well-established fact that memory cultures are themselves products of history. As Olick (1999, 383) puts it, remembrance involves “not only the history being commemorated but also the accumulated succession of commemorations, as well as what has occurred between those powerful moments.” Societies that have historically strong ties, or that have been affected by similar historical events, are more than likely to cultivate and exchange memories about the shared past, setting off further path dependencies and chains of dialogue. The paradigmatic example here is the Holocaust, whose “Americanization” and “Europeanization” have made it the primary candidate for a “globalized” status (e.g. Levy and Sznajder 2002, 2006; Assmann 2010). Yet the Holocaust is clearly not remembered in similar ways or to a similar extent everywhere, with phenomena such as migration complicating the picture even at the European core (Rothberg and Yildiz 2011). Holocaust recognition may have been a “contemporary European entry ticket” for many Eastern European countries in the early-to-mid-2000s before EU accession (Judt 2005, 803), but a decade and a half later, amidst a rise of nationalist right-wing populist governments in the region that have downplayed its significance, it is clear that supranational specificities remain.

The three chapters in the first section of the book explore such historically conditioned memory regions, but they do not only show how transnational historical events create singular regions of memory. Rather, they analyze the interactions and cross-flows between multiple historical legacies and the ways in which different regionalized memory regimes can mutually influence and interrupt each other. **David Lowe and Tony Joel** take the Cold War, a global event (or set of events) with no clear temporal boundaries or even main actors, and show how its remembrance is at once universal and specific: the Cold War is commemorated all over the world, but in different regions it is remembered in different border-crossing constellations. The chapter examines four case studies, two European political projects and two socio-political phenomena in the Asia-Pacific: first, the Visegrád Group comprising of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia; second, the Baltic Initiative and Network incorporating 11 European

countries; third, the “nuclear colonialism” whereby world powers used Pacific islands as their testing grounds for atomic warheads; and fourth, the rise of tourism inflected by a Cold War past on the islands of Okinawa (Japan) and Kinmen (Taiwan). The examples are geographically dispersed and thematically diverse, encompassing various levels of state involvement and grassroots activity. Yet in juxtaposition, they show that the Cold War is remembered in distinct memory regions that are tied together by threads of commonality.

Katharine McGregor’s chapter also examines the overlapping of different memory regions, and the past being remembered is likewise connected to the Cold War: the 1965–68 mass murder of approximately half a million people by government forces in Indonesia under the guise of an anti-communist purge. McGregor analyzes the intersections between what she terms “human rights regions of memory”, whereby she ascribes ethical rather than geographical connotations to the notion of “regions”. One region of memory is the human rights discourse centered around the Hague tribunals: the author argues that the convening in 2015 of the International People’s Tribunal on Crimes against Humanity in Indonesia 1965 in the Dutch city tapped into the “global memory of human rights injustices”. Another thematically defined region is the memory of anti-communism, including a historical commitment of western governments to fight perceived communists in post-war decades; the People’s Tribunal also accused the Netherlands, the USA and Australia of complicity in the atrocities. A third region is the postcolonial memory region: in this case, representatives of the Indonesian government countered with arguments that the activists were marginalizing the colonial violence of Dutch imperialism in Indonesia by bringing the tribunal to the Netherlands. The chapter shows skillfully how these different historical legacies—each of them transnational in different ways—intertwine and are brought into contact when the memory of the genocide is activated.

Krishan Kumar’s chapter examines the multiple imperial legacies that crystallize in the region of East-Central Europe, creating a region of memory that is defined by its location on the fault-lines of land-based empires: the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman Empire, the Hohenzollern dynasty, the Romanov and Soviet realms of expansion, and—briefly but most bloodily—the Nazi empire. He demonstrates the contrasting timbres of remembrance that result from the entanglement of imperial histories, from nostalgia for Habsburg rule to politicized recriminations over the divisive legacies of communism. Imperial histories are by

definition transnational, and the memories that circulate in the aftermath of empires likewise resonate at the regional level.

The second section of the book concerns regions of memory as political projects, both as supranational or imperial administrative initiatives to create a common realm of remembrance, and as conglomerations of political fields that converge to create regionalized patterns. The paradigmatic case of the former is, of course, the European Union, which through its decades of existence in various guises has gradually come to espouse a more or less unified—if, needless to say, still contested—memory policy through legislation, political declarations, the founding of a pan-European memory museum in the form of the House of European History in Brussels, and other measures (e.g. Sierp 2014; Kopolov 2017; Verovšek 2020). Another example is the post-Soviet realm, where the exigencies of post-Soviet transition and present-day Russian expansionism have combined to create a territory where old myths of Soviet victory in the Second World War (known here as the Great Patriotic War, 1941–45) are valorized by many—especially in Russia and Belarus and some parts of Ukraine—and rejected by an increasing number of societies in the former peripheral republics (Fedor et al. 2017). These established cases show that political memory regions can work to integrate societies across national borders, but also that political systems play a major role in how successful such endeavors may be. As a union of participatory democracies, the EU’s striving for common remembrance is influenced to a greater extent by transnational grass-roots activity and mnemonic pluralism. Memory in the post-Soviet realm, in contrast, is shaped above all by autocratic regimes and their official ideologies, as well as oppositional narratives that emerge to debunk those ideologies. The tensions that result in each type of memory region are a function of their political structures.

Laura Pozzi’s chapter considers a different supranational project: the “One Belt, One Road” initiative launched by the Chinese government in 2013. This foreign policy program has typically been seen as a politico-economic phenomenon, but Pozzi shows that it also has an effect on narratives of remembrance. She analyzes three museums: the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum, the Hong Kong Museum of History, and the Galle National Museum in Sri Lanka. These three institutions are examined on a continuum: in Shanghai, the Chinese government exerts full control over the narrative, while in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Area the influence of the mainland is strong though not total, and political pressure is on the rise; the Sri Lankan case, on the

other hand, is located on the periphery of Chinese influence, and the creation of a gallery dedicated to the “Sri Lanka-China Historical Relationship” reveals both an attempt to construct a Sinocentric pan-Asian memory, and also the limitations thereof; the display is fairly marginal within the museum building. Chinese hegemony in Asia is, therefore, a region of memory in the making. How successful this initiative can be is a subject for further research.

A. Dirk Moses, in turn, explores the Eastern European memory region not as a supranational institutional effort (like the Visegrád Group analyzed by Joel and Lowe), but as a realm of “partisan histories”. This term captures both the “highly partial” mnemonic narratives that circulate in political discourse in several East European states and the historical phenomenon of “partisans”, i.e. mid-twentieth century freedom fighters who pursued political goals by military means and who remain key objects of commemoration by memory activists today. Moses demonstrates that the politicization of memory occurs transnationally when political actors choose in parallel to instrumentalize and nationalize the notion of genocide—paradoxically, a term intended by its inventor Raphael Lemkin as a cosmopolitan idea, never a national one. The proliferation of partisan histories throughout Eastern Europe is of course a result of overlapping historical legacies, including imperialism and epochal violence (as discussed in Kumar’s chapter), but importantly, Moses also shows that migration and diaspora play important roles in negotiations over the meanings of the past. Using examples from North America and Israel, he demonstrates that this region of memory extends beyond the confines of continental Eastern Europe.

The third part of the volume considers cultural regions of memory. As is now well established, memories are by nature mediated, with symbols, texts and images playing key roles to “mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time” (Erl and Rigney 2009, 1). The three chapters in this section consider ways in which regions of memory are constituted by writers and readers particular, with one study on Wikipedia as a realm of supranational but bounded memory, and two analyses of African literary constellations that construct memory regions. As **Ann Rigney** points out in the opening theoretical section of her chapter, classical theories of nationalism such as those of Benedict Anderson (1983) envisioned literacy and literary imaginations as preconditions of bounded national communities; however, a similar logic can be applied to examine ways in which contemporary “complex media