



The Visceral and the Virtual: Memorial Practices in Eastern and Southeastern Europe

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For centuries, Eastern and Southeastern Europe have been the sites and targets of imperial projects and inter-imperial rivalries. Throughout this region, counter-hegemonic political, economic and cultural regimes have necessarily sought sovereignty against imperial power, while simultaneously mimicking imperial political violence. Exclusive forms of nationalism have frequently been recruited to this end, creating a dynamic of schismogenesis. The Russian Invasion of Crimea, the War in Donbas, and the full-scale Invasion of Ukraine are the latest conflagrations in this history of imperial, inter-imperial, and anti-imperial political violence.

In this two-day symposium, we gather together historians, anthropologists, sociologists and scholars in heritage and memory studies to interrogate the relationship between efforts to commemorate ongoing violence and warfare in Ukraine, and the politics of memorialization in the wider region. How does the memory landscape of the 21st century take shape against the backdrop of the commemorative palimpsest of previous wars? Are we witnessing a shift towards decentralized, community-driven, and participatory commemoration on the part of contemporary memory activists that moves away from traditional monumentalism? To what degree does anti-imperial nationalism establish the horizons of memory politics and commemorative practices in Ukraine and beyond? Against the backdrop of

nationalized collective memories, can brokers of memory move beyond the dichotomies of victors and vanquished, villains and victims? Finally, what have mnemonic actors in Ukraine and other sites of recent warfare learned from the experiences of earlier generations of eastern and southeastern Europeans, whose living memories of war have sedimented into relatively stable collective memories?

These open-ended questions demand closer attention to the relationship among memory, medium and message. Digital environments, including social media platforms, virtual memorials and online forums, have become critical sites for expressions of grief and acts of memorialization, requiring a re-examination of traditional commemorative practices, both in eastern and southeastern Europe and globally. Memorials increasingly inhabit online, virtual and sometimes more personalized spheres; consequently, they are less rooted in specific places and less limited to circumscribed communities. The well-worn rubric of "sites of memory" may not adequately account for the unanticipated dispersions, atmospheres, and peregrinations of contemporary commemoration. Simultaneously, virtual memories can lead to new forms of visceral belonging and affiliation that were previously unimaginable. Above all, our symposium seeks to illuminate these new arrangements of the visceral and the virtual in the eastern European shatterzone of empires.

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