Nuo Basanavičiaus, Vytauto Didžiojo iki Molotovo ir Ribbentropo: Atminties ir atminimo kultūrų transformacijos XX–XXI amžiuje, ed. Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011, 490 p. ISBN 978-9955-847-37-3

This magisterial volume with the catchy title *From Basanavičius, Vytautas the Great to Molotov and Ribbentrop: Transformations of Memory and the Cultures of Remembrance in the 20th–21st Centuries* is a long-awaited piece of scholarship in Lithuania. As the editor of the volume Alvydas Nikžentaitis points out in the introduction, Lithuanian historians and sociologists have been engaged for more than a decade in research in a field that could roughly be described as collective memory studies. The primary purpose of this book, therefore, is to bring together some of the key Lithuanian scholars in the area, and to include additional case studies about the development of collective memory politics in several neighbouring countries: Russia, Poland and Belarus.

The contributors to the volume include both established and young researchers (Edmund Dmitrów, David E. Fishman, Vladas Gaidys, Christoph Klessmann, Dangiras Mačiulis, Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Irena Šutinienė, Rasa Čepaitienė, Aurimas Švedas and Vasilijus Safronovas). The book begins with a thematic section that explores the theoretical frameworks for studying cultural memory, the politics of history, and the culture of commemoration, which is followed by a section with seven contributions that focuses on ‘cultures of memory’ in urban spaces. The third section consists of four chapters that analyse ‘the articulation of memory on the national level’, and two chapters in the fourth section discuss ‘culture and the politics of memory’ in Poland and Russia. The final section is dedicated to a comparative approach to the ‘cultures of memory and commemoration’. Limited space makes it impossible to grant each and every chapter (of 18) equal attention; therefore, I will limit my discussion to a few themes that stand out prominently in this collection.

The section dedicated to perceptions and uses of narratives about the past in the discourses of inhabitants and urban spaces constitutes a highly welcome contribution to existing studies of national identification in Lithuania. So far, many studies of Lithuanian nationalism have focused on political discourses and literary materials, and in this way have neglected other rich material dimensions, such as city objects, architectural spaces and landscapes. In turn, Lithuanian sociologists and ethnographers have been accumulating research about individual articulations of national and

ethnic belonging; hence, it is rewarding to see the two fields, sociology and history, coming together in the exploration of contemporary uses of the past for the purposes of identification.

The chapter by Safronovas on the history of the changing strategies of the nationalisation and domestication of Klaipėda/Memel stands out as an original contribution. Safronovas builds a well-documented case study of nation-building, in a specific urban area, as a conscious and strategic activity pursued by the changing governing bodies of the city. An interesting revelation by Safronovas is that the creation of new narratives about Klaipėda's belonging to Lithuania, as well as the erection of new material objects meant to solidify this belonging, were often driven not by state organisations, but by various social groups. These social groups, however, were able skilfully to anchor their initiatives in formal state organisations. What we know today as Lithuanian Klaipėda, a city with a strong identity as a gateway to the Baltic Sea, is, as shown by Safronovas, a particular assemblage of historical narratives that were chosen selectively by policy entrepreneurs. A striking fact is that this entrepreneurship as an organisational mode was common to both the independent (1923–1939) and Soviet (the 1940s to the 1980s) periods.

A similar study by Dangiras Mačiulis explores the articulation of historical narratives in the discursive and material environment of the city of Šiauliai. Unlike Klaipėda, Šiauliai did not have to be made a territory of Lithuanians (although one would wish to hear more about the Jewish heritage of the city). However, an interesting element highlighted by Mačiulis was the impact of international relations on the municipal policies aiming to shape the local historical identity of the city: in 1936, a proposal to associate Šiauliai with the famous Battle of Saulė which the Crusaders lost to the Lithuanians in 1236 was rejected, because there was a dispute with Latvia about the actual site of this battle. An interesting fact, writes Mačiulis, is that the association of Šiauliai with the Battle of Saulė was revived in the early 1970s, and since then has become an important axis for urban identification.

Although the Jewish legacy is little discussed in the chapters on Šiauliai and Klaipėda, this important subject is surveyed in the essay by David E. Fishman, who attempts to assess the possible strategies for making Jewish history more visible in Vilnius. The author insightfully notes that traditional commemorative techniques, such as putting up memorial plaques, or even rebuilding an architectural structure, can hardly do justice to the complex and painful history of the Jews of Vilnius. While agreeing with this observation, I would just like to add that the contemporary repertoire of urban interventions need not be limited to installing memorial plaques and putting up signs: a combination of virtual and physical realities, and joint projects with contemporary artists and designers, may lead to more convincing and appropriate solutions.

Among the many intriguing insights that the volume offers are the findings derived from the in-depth interviews done by Irena Štutiniienė, which reveal the fluidity of historical contexts in the individual narratives of belonging to the cities of Klaipėda and Vilnius. On the basis of her study of semi-structured qualitative interviews, Štutiniienė concludes that the citizens interviewed always mobilised the historical narratives of their ethnic belonging to Lithuanian, German, Russian and Polish communities in a partial way; no less important for the informants were the personal histories of their families, and even the material histories of the urban spaces where they lived. A similarly specific sense of ethnic and political belonging to the nation is hinted at by quantitative surveys, discussed in the chapters by Štutiniienė and Gaidys. These surveys, which measured the perceptions by Lithuania's inhabitants of historical events, also hint at the elasticity of identity and changes in attitudes that are seen as milestones for national identification: for example, the negative evaluation of Poland has been declining. Another example was provided by a random sample survey that posed the open question about which historical events were considered as the most important by the respondents. According to Gaidys, the answers, on one hand, revealed an expected self-centredness, with respondents concentrating on national events: in a survey done in 2009, the most often-mentioned event is the regaining of independence (both by Lithuanian and Russian respondents). On the other hand, this survey has produced results that disagree with the common interpretations of the hegemonic narratives of the Lithuanian past. First, the Second World War came up second as the most important historical event in the accounts of both Lithuanian and Russian respondents. Another rather surprising finding was that the Soviet deportations did not rank highly at all in the answers given by Lithuanian respondents. These results make one wonder about the validity of the popular argument that ethnic Lithuanians have a martyrological view of their past, and may lead one to ask if martyrology is not a discursive strategy which is used only by specific groups.

The relational character of the personal and political uses of the past made it important to include studies of the processes in Russia and Belarus; here, the often incompatible ways of interpreting the Second World War are discussed in further chapters by Safronovas and Nikžentaitis. A rather brief article by Dmitrów points to the persistence of the martyrological perspective in the Polish, Belarusian and Ukrainian accounts of those tragic events; and the chapter by Švedas gives a well-informed overview of the uses of historical narratives in the search for a new discourse of Russian statehood. Finally, Nikžentaitis argues for the need to explore the uses of historical narratives in international relations and foreign policy; this is certainly an important field for studies of political uses of the past.

I would like to reserve the remaining space for a few comments on the binding academic rationale of the volume. It seems that 'collective memory'

performs several important functions in Lithuanian historiography: it works, first and foremost, as an umbrella concept that effectively legitimises a constructionist approach to historical research. This is something that is acknowledged by the contributors themselves (see Nikžentaitis, Klessman, and also Safronovas). Having labelled their research as ‘memory studies’, historians seem to be able to liberate themselves from positivist and ethno-centric historiography, and the plurality of historical narratives seems to be more easily accommodated. ‘Memory studies’, in this way, seem to facilitate the transformation of a significant part of Lithuanian historiography in a way that post-structuralist approaches, such as, for example, Michel Foucault’s ideas about power/knowledge, are not able to deliver.

The problem with the umbrella of memory studies is that this more pluralist and relational view of Lithuania’s history has come at the cost of methodological rigour. For example, having presented an exhaustive exploration of several approaches to memory studies, Safronovas also published a highly interesting and informative chapter about Klaipėda’s domestication, in which the concept of ‘memory’ does not really add much to his otherwise excellent reconstruction of the engineering of political and cultural discourses of political belonging in the city of Klaipėda. In other contributions, the concept of memory is used to redress the classic cultural histories of nationalism: here, the chapter about national monuments and urban spaces in Kaunas by Mačiulis is a good example. Mačiulis has written a lot about interwar Lithuanian cultural policy; moreover, the cultural articulations of ethnic nationalism in interwar Kaunas have been studied in detail by the art historian Giedrė Jankevičiūtė. Labelling interwar nationalist cultural policies as attempts at creating a collective memory does not add very much to existing academic knowledge about cultural policies and national symbols in that period. A similar point can be made in relation to Štutinienė’s contribution on surveys of national narratives: sociologists already have adequate and well-developed theoretical tools to study social identification in the urban space, such as the theories of social categorisation, discourse, framing and material performativity. There is hardly an academic need to label the findings as an expression of collective memory, something that is well illustrated by the contribution, which, in my view, shows that the history of urbanism in Vilnius and Minsk does not gain that much by being approached through the problematic of collective memory.

However, as several contributors to the volume note, memory studies bring not only an academic, but also a political rationale to the work of the historian. Although theoretically and methodologically quite well developed, post-structuralism, understandably, has little appeal to the clients and sponsors of research. The word ‘memory’ is so much more approachable than ‘discourse’. Furthermore, the rising populist politicians of the left and the right appear to have a firm belief in ‘memory’ as a new political currency. It is quite probable that the willingness of state governments, not only

Lithuanian or East European, but also West European ones, to fund memory studies generously stems from populist roots. It is important, therefore, for academic memory studies to go beyond the stage of typology (social, political, communicative and other types of memory), and engage critically with the very rationale of this type of research. Otherwise, the spectre of collective memory will continue haunting Europe, West and East alike.

In all, the book is very timely, and constitutes a milestone in contemporary history writing in Lithuania. As is the case with many collections, some tighter editing would have benefitted the volume: Fishman's chapter lacks references, and the fact that almost every chapter begins with a theoretical introduction to memory studies creates unnecessary repetitiveness. These are, however, minor quibbles. The book is certainly a valuable resource for researchers and students alike; it will also, hopefully, reach out to wider audiences beyond academia.

Eglė Rindzevičiūtė