



Review of the publication: Erica L. Tucker, *Remembering occupied Warsaw. Polish narratives of World War II*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej 2011, ISBN 9780875806556

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Remembering Occupied Warsaw investigates ethnic Poles' memory of the Nazi occupation of Warsaw during World War II based on ethnographic fieldwork and life history interviews. Tucker conducted her research in Żoliborz during the late 1990s with follow-up visits over several summers through 2008. The author wrote on a historical topic, but the research methods are those of a cultural anthropologist: fieldwork, participant observation, and in-depth life interviews.

By examining her respondents' narratives of the outbreak of war, the Nazi occupation and the postwar recovery of Warsaw, Tucker aims to find out how this past has shaped attitudes and actions in contemporary Poland and to explore the relationship between memory, narrative, trauma, and place. Her attention to the private experiences of the inhabitants of Warsaw will add to historians' knowledge and understanding of the occupation of the Polish capital. While the politics of wartime destruction are well-known, this book permits an understanding of the occupation as an everyday phenomenon.

The book consists of seven chapters, divided thematically. Chapter 1 deals with identity politics in interwar Poland and shows that Poles born in the Second Polish Republic were educated in the ideals of Polish independence and service to their country. Resistance during wartime was a duty and was perceived as the highest expression of belonging to the nation; this helps to better understand the choices that Poles made during the occupation. Chapter 2, about the memories of invasion, presents key differences in the expectations and attitudes with which people at different stages of the life cycle met the outbreak of war. Interestingly, the age-based variances in perspective on the occupation have persisted in the ways the interviewees recollect the invasion of Poland. For instance, there are children's perspectives, adolescents' perspectives, and adults' reflections of the invasion. It seems that traumatic events experienced during adolescence may in some way be impervious to the passage of time in that they seem less colored by subsequent events, by changes in political climate, or even personal growth and self-awareness than similar events experienced a few years earlier or a few years later in life. An example is the fact that the informants who experienced the war as adolescents persisted in their views of the war as a "great adventure" even in the face of later personal loss. They would also talk about the habits and fears of wartime that stayed with them, explaining them with the comment that "some things cannot be scrubbed away" (pp. 69-70). It was similar for those who experienced the war as children.

Chapter 3 tells the story of memories of occupation, focusing on how the experience of war shaped the responses to occupation and what meanings were assigned to the experience of occupation (p. 70). Chapter 4 goes on to cover the memory of the "conspiracy" (p.110-138), that is, the active struggle against the Nazis of which the Warsaw Uprising was the culmination. The study of these events is highly significant because Polish identity since World War II has been partially built on this heroic memory. Tucker presents different types of memory at work in narratives of the "conspiracy:" at times the people she interviewed retold the uprising as heroic, and at other times as tragic, absurd or mundane (p. 44).

Chapter 5 analyzes the reflections of Tucker's informants on helping Polish Jews and shows how Polish society struggled with the limitations, fears, and conflicting claims of moral responsibility. This goes beyond an assumption that the lack of action on the part of Poles can be explained through antisemitism or indifference, and makes visible the complex reality under Nazi rule and Poles' responses to the persecution of Jews. Tucker finds three different positions in the responses to the Holocaust in much of Holocaust literature. About two percent of the population was rescuers (Prekerowa 1987, cited in Tucker). The second category were blackmailing Jews, and the exact number of these people is unknown. The rest of the population—and hence the majority of Poles—are assumed to be "bystanders" (p.19). In fact, as Tucker stresses, Poles view themselves as co-victims of Nazi violence. Importantly, as Tucker also underlines, many Poles were blinded to the suffering of their Jewish compatriots by their own losses. In Tucker's opinion this blindness was rooted in experiences of loss on the grounds that on an individual level the suffering is the same and what one feels first and foremost is the injustice, pain, and grief of one's own loss (p.19-20).

Memory of the Warsaw Uprising is discussed in chapter 6. In these narratives, Tucker argues, her informants were commemorating all that they had lost. The narratives refer to deprivations of food, water, and shelter, recount the feeling of being overwhelmed by the pervasiveness of violent death, and express fear. They are a compelling contrast to the informants' remembered expectation that the uprising would be something glorious. Chapter 7 is about the aftermath of occupation: exodus and return. Returning to normalcy included such actions as reburying the dead and cleaning the rubble from city streets. Rebuilding a sense of normal life entailed the reactivation of life worlds.

The final part of *Remembering Occupied Warsaw* examines competing visions of the past that have arisen in the Communist and post-Communist eras. Tucker stresses that it was the hardest topic of all to persuade her informants to talk about their lives during what were nearly fifty years of Communist rule. In fact, her informants have constructed their memories as moral documents—documents that challenge the oppressive occupying force that attempted to dehumanize them. For instance, careful attention to destruction of place and loss of life in narratives of the uprising can be understood as an accusation of betrayal against the Soviets, who accused the Polish insurgents of collaboration with the Nazis while the Red Army halted their advance, failing to cross the Vistula River to save the residents of Warsaw or the city itself (p. 250-251).

In the conclusion, Tucker makes the point that the need to narrate our lives is as basic a need as food, shelter, and sex. It is the force of our desire to understand the self and to gain the understanding of others that pulls us into intertwined processes of remembering and retelling (p. 254). Through remembered experience, people feel who they themselves are. This involves finding one's own narrative frames for an experience and finding out the meanings that it has for others. Without these personal stories, memories, and interpretations, only official versions of events would be accessible, and few individual descriptions, feelings or opinions could be found.

The stories told to Tucker about occupied Warsaw are intensely personal, and her book's strength is its analysis of how her informants narrated their lives under occupation. Events such as the Warsaw Uprising were seen as enacting the heroic vision of carrying on a legacy of fighting for Polish independence: this book helps to make sense of what took place. Tucker's book therefore contributes to the widening of knowledge about World War II history by offering a selection of narratives about occupation in the Polish capital.

Tucker also makes an important distinction between memory and history: people's memories of the past, as her introduction stresses (p. 11) may differ radically from history. An example of this is the way in which her informants' memories of war were associated with the idea of the Warsaw Uprising as a sacred time. Although the Warsaw Uprising was unsuccessful, five decades later Tucker's informants remained confident that their cause was just. The book is therefore not about what Tucker's informants remember so much as how they talk about it. As such, it fulfills the author's objective to extend this way of researching the memory of World War II beyond the areas of Western Europe and the Holocaust on which she considers historians to have focused (p. 5).

I am critical of the use of the term "German occupation" throughout book. In fact this use of scholarly methodology makes the book a scholarly contribution among much of memoir literatures. In popular use, people refer to the wartime as the period of German occupation, but from the point of view of political history, it was a Nazi occupation of Poland.

Remembering Occupied Warsaw can be recommended to readers interested in the history of World War II and its aftermath. It will be of interest to anthropologists and also to oral historians. Its content will interest scholars of Central European history and specialists in memory studies, and it is also relevant for European studies and sociology. The chapter on reflections about aid to Polish Jews could also be read by readers who are interested in the history of the Holocaust, even if they are not specifically interested in the history and memory of occupied Warsaw.

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