

The authors also briefly address the role of colonial legacies in memory politics, but a more comprehensive examination of this critical issue would enhance the book's relevance. While the book primarily centres on Holocaust memory policies, colonialism has increasingly become a focal point in memory studies, especially with recent movements for state apologies and reparative policies. A deeper analysis of colonial memory policies could provide insights into whether these initiatives differ significantly from Holocaust-focused policies in their capacity to foster reconciliation.

Finally, the book might benefit from engaging more with international memory policies beyond the national framework. While Gensburger and Lefranc focus on state-led memory initiatives, exploring the roles of supranational institutions, like the European Union and United Nations, could broaden the analysis and offer valuable insights into multilevel memory politics.

DANNY VAN WANROOIJ, LISA SCHIPPERIJN,
Maastricht University

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OKSANA SARKISOVA, OLGA SHEVCHENKO:
In Visible Presence: Soviet Afterlives in Family Photos
Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2023, 488 p.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/SN.2024.4.43>   Ustav etnol gie a soci lnej antropol gie SAV
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What is the content of memories that photographs invoke? Is it as complex as solicited by madeleine's bite from Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* – 'involuntary memory' bordering physical sensation (Batchen, 2005)? Even if it can sometimes instigate bias, photos are perceived by an individual as the 'reality in a past state' which can also authenticate the feeling of identity (Kirby, 2021, citing Barthes). This multifaceted nature of photography as an evocative object and mnemonic tool is examined by Sarkisova and Shevchenko's extended study, spanning years from 2006 to 2019.

The research data consists of pictures and videos of 54 families, processed through 156 semi-structured interviews across the central and southern Russian region. The bulk of these interviews were conducted between 2006 and 2008. From 2017 to 2019, through twenty-nine interviews, internet ethnography, and media analysis (Introduction, xx), the authors showcased multi-dimensionality of the Immortal Regiment processions dedicated to the Great Patriotic War veterans' remembrance. The meaning of these processions is contextualized in the last chapter and comprises one of the best studies of this phenomenon conducted up to this date. It should be acknowledged that the authors have created an extensive database incorporating about 12,000 images, which included not only materials collected from families but the authors' own archives and so called 'orphan' photographs (p. 119) without owners which ended up at the flea markets across the USSR. This sizable work provides an opportunity to reassess and critically analyze the past and explore issues of repression. This line of inquiry as the authors also note (p. 396) would be hardly imaginable in the currently increasingly repressive political climate in Russia and further highlights its exigency, especially when the number of individuals able to recall firsthand experiences of the Soviet era is gradually declining.

The conspicuous aim, which is underlining most parts of the research, even if not directly related to the themes of silence and erasure, seemed to be to use the photographs to examine existing unspoken elements – presuppositions of those ostensible silences and active attempts to find those disruptions in the narrative and the implications of these omissions. The title of the book also denotes this tendency: visible that unveils the invisible. This is the greatest strength and at the same time the greatest weakness of the study. The poignant stories of the research participants are replete with the authors' compelling insights and detailed analysis set out to find the underlying meanings which they compare to the peeling of an onion: 'If you want to get to the deeper layers, you have to be patient taking off the outer ones. And as with the peeling of an onion, you may expect some tears in the process' (p. 203). However, in this process, sometimes they overcharge them with inferences.

Methodologically, the authors employed what Annette Kuhn calls – 'interactive performative viewing' (Introduction, xviii). It means interpreting domestic imagery from both narrative and visual perspectives. During this process the conversational approach was used to unpack the owners' and caretakers' embodied diverse histories that revealed the complex historical ruptures and tensions characteristic of the Soviet twentieth century. They underline the dialogical process of remembering, which is always incomplete and processual and context specific. In this process they look at the memory as material for interpretation, and it does not only include what is vocalized but also things people do (traces on photographs, interaction with photographs, plans towards photographs) which can be sometimes contradictory to each other.

But why photographs? The pilot study which they conducted included both standalone biographical linear narratives and photo elicitation, where discussions would take unexpected turns (p. 410). They opted for the latter with convincing arguments. The authors use Walter Benjamin's notion of 'optical unconscious' (Introduction, xiv) – the capacity of photography to reveal details to the eye that would otherwise go unnoticed. Unlike biographical interviews, photographs captured distinct, recursive moments that bypassed chronology. These moments which unfolded along nonlinear trajectories,

encouraged a more complex exploration of meaning.

The authors question the generational transmission concept. Firstly, generation itself is seen not as a particular grouping but ‘in interrelation’ (p. 9). Generations are juxtaposed and their diverse experience and accompanying tensions become the focus of investigation. Here Karl Mannheim’s understanding of how location within a specific historical period shapes an individual’s consciousness and perception of the world is central. To illustrate these diverse frames of reference, the perception of the same children’s class picture is instructive. While mother with core professional identity as a teacher sees there the example of instilling self-restraint and respect for peers, her daughter sees discipline, control, domination, and identity erasure (p. 76). Transmission is usually understood as passing down to posterity

certain textualized or textualizable material. Here comes the main contentions of the authors as non-verbal forms of memory work is marginalized in this framework and fluidity of meanings across generations involving ‘affect, habit, even bodily comportment’ (p. 222) becomes sidelined.

In this process of searching for underlying meanings and ideological dimension, sometimes certain material is over contextualized. Although the purpose of public photography in the Soviet context was to position the individual as part of the collective – a representation that was widespread (p. 33), it is not to conclude that children group photographs or other institutional ones for that matter was the common practice only in the Soviet Union. Also, while observing the three-quarter view portrait of the young women looking out of a photo frame, attaching the interpretation of ‘seeing the contours of bright future through their everyday harsh realities’ (p. 148) seems excessive even if only as a poetic parallel. Because of the classical portraiture influence and technical limitations of early photography, this pose was widely practiced (Blanc, 2020; Sorabella, 2007). Its notable examples can be found at the French studio Harcourt established in the 1930s, famous for its black-and-white celebrity photographs who often pose in the way that young soviet woman tried to emulate. In the same vein, an alpine climbers’ group picture from the Caucasian mountains might not necessarily parallel to colonizing and conquering the Caucasus as the element of conquering the mountain peak is the core of the alpinist endeavor.

Material foundations of the nostalgia which is brought up mostly in the context of soviet travel and access to the subsidized holidays, is also understated. In circumstances marked by social and cultural grievances or severe material hardships, nostalgia can



function as a discursive response to these challenges. This point is well illustrated by Mandy Duijn (2020) where users were using soviet toys as medium, kind of a mnemonic device to express their frustration towards present-day policies, market-based values and conditions in comparison to the past. In such instances, individuals may selectively engage with their memories, emphasizing certain aspects of the past. The political climate need not be discounted, but how are we to define what was or was not traumatic for individuals? The negative aspects certainly could be downplayed, but were their positive associations just a charade, not genuine? If they recounted only negative experiences, would they be construed as 'authentic' by the presented analytical frames? The decision to opt for endnotes made the reading process more burdensome and as the text is aimed mostly at an academic audience, it would be appropriate to include them along with the main text, however, the authors' decision is also reasonable considering the sheer volume of the cited literature and extended commentary for clarifications.

These notes aside, the study is apparently seminal with its extent and examination of the interconnections between family memory, vernacular photographic heritage and post-soviet subjectivities and would be instructive for anyone interested in any of these themes academically or otherwise. As the authors end their final chapter, family photographs 'keep the future of the past open' (p. 401) and create the space to consistently generate new meanings and interpretations.

NINO NATROSHVILI,

Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS in Bratislava

Acknowledgements:

The text was produced within the Erasmus+ Traineeship Scholarship and the APVV project 22-0083 Current Images of Socialism in Bohemia and Slovakia. Family Memory.

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