

# Editorial

„Politics of History and Cultures of Remembrance“, this is the broad topical frame of this volume, which does not at all claim to systematically or indeed exhaustively present the interrelations between these two levels. In the past three decades, these terms have rapidly become common in the context of historical- and political-scientific debates on the history of the German dictatorships, however they compete with semantically similar terms such as remembrance policy, policy of coping with the past or remembrance policy on the one hand and culture of history and “collective memory” on the other. Whereas in most cases “remembrance policy” is used as a neutral term for the many ways of society’s dealing with the past, the term “history policy” is often normatively connected to abusing the past for political purposes, although it competes with other, neutral terms. Accordingly, political scientists deal with history policy as the subject of a kind of policy research which, in a descriptive and explaining way, asks about the various ways in which political actors deal with the past.

This is indeed the point of view of the Director of the Potsdam Zentrum für Zeitgeschichtliche Forschung (ZZF), *Martin Sabrow*, in his contribution, where he works out problems of a specifically German way of coping with the past most of all by the example of dealing with the history of the GDR in general and with the Stasi files in particular. This way of dealing, he says, is firstly characterised by a focus on actors (both perpetrators and victims) and neglects structural-historical contexts. Secondly, it makes use of history for shaping the present, the debate on this dictatorship, for consolidating the democratic state under the rule of law. And thirdly, he states, due to its application-orientation it runs the risk of “blurring the boundary between description and prescription, between the science of history and history policy to the same degree as that between history policy and the policy of dealing with the past or between law and politics”. The morally-grounded “close connection between insight and interest” provides the reason for “being close to the way in which politics deal with the past and to the politicians, to a degree which was unimaginable in other times and societies.” Although by and large the results of dealing with the past in Germany looks well presentable, in the future the science of history will have to keep more “epistemic distance” if in the long run its public significance as a supplier of subject-related capital is not supposed to be put into question.

Also historian *Ulrike Jureit* from Hamburg identifies the normative charging of historical remembrance as a crucial problem, however she most of all aims at “utilisation fashions, consumption habits as well as entertainment and market mechanisms”. This trend, she says, is closely connected to the medial communication of history by film, on the Internet or in the context of computer games as well as to the unfolding of an event culture which increasingly arranges history as a social event. Even the Holocaust, she states, is exploited in this way and not seldom also serves economic interests. The focus is on the “adventure potential of the events

to be remembered” for a flourishing “entertainment, leisure time and tourism industry”. Although the “aura of the authentic” determines the mobilisation of the consumers demanding historical meaning, at the relevant places history is rather experienced and felt than learned, understood or critically reflected on. A kind of remembrance culture which first of all identifies victims insufficiently reflects on one’s own, temporary interpretations of history. Instead, the past is conserved as a normatively elevated identity resource.

The history-political challenge remembrance cultures pose for regions looking back to frequent shifts of borders and populations is demonstrated, by the example of the city of Stettin/Szczecin, by *Magdalena Waligórska*, the head of the department of the History and Culture of East Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries, with a Focus on Poland at the University of Bremen. For a long time this city was a multi-ethnic place where Germans, Poles and Ukrainians were living together. The history-political myth of the “regained regions” maintained by the People’s Republic of Poland after 1945, however, covered this historical fact. Then the remembrance-cultural turn of 1989 did not only result in the rediscovery of the Jewish culture but also in reconsidering the German heritage which was, in a variety of ways, interwoven with the Jewish one. Waligórska demonstrates this by help of a number of examples. One of them is the project by fine artist Karolina Freino, “Mauern und Sandkästen (Walls and Sandboxes)” (2007) about the destruction of Stettin’s necropolis. The artist charted the desecrated and broken German and Jewish gravestones which had been used for building walls, sandboxes and pavements, and thus the artist “performed an act of cultural translation which provided the burial debris with a lively meaning again.” The deciphering of the epitaphs triggered an intensive debate on the destruction of other cultures in a city which had long begun to recognize its historical multi-culturality. However, as a result of the recent national-Polish turn of history policy this process is put into question again.

Under autocratic auspices, the Putin regime in Russia pursues a nationalist kind of history policy. The East Europe-historian *Ekaterina Makhotina* demonstrates how subtle these efforts are. Although at an early stage Putin turned away from sweepingly distancing from the Soviet heritage, a rehabilitation of Stalin can only be stated with many reservations – in contrast to frequent claims by Western media. The victims of political suppression are commemorated in many ways, whereas the perpetrators and the structures allowing for their actions stay in the dark. At the Kremlin she identifies “national-conservative” and “Western liberal policy-makers” pursuing divergent history-political goals. Furthermore, often they act in tandem with “local” civil society actors, some of which are critical towards the Kremlin while others support it. The debate on Stalin, she says, serves “as the perfect marker of self-positioning – for some it represents their progressive, liberal position of belonging to ‘Western modernity’, for others it represents their identity as the ‘true patriots’ of a world power.” For the former group, Stalin is the “hangman of his own people”, for the latter he is a symbol of “power, order and historic success.”

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