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BOOK REVIEWS

Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia, by Nikolay Koposov. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. xvi+322.

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In “*Memory Laws, Memory Wars – The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*”, Nikolay Koposov explains that the general term “memory laws” encompasses a wide span of understandings, including but not limited to state symbols, museums and education policies, and commemorations. His book focuses on one type of memory laws: the “criminalizing statements” about past tragedies, especially the denial of atrocities committed by the state. While the broad notion of memory laws dates back to the late 1940s and 1950s, criminalizing statements are an invention of the late 20th century, and first emerged in Germany in 1985 as a response to rising anti-Semitism in the country.

Through a comparative historical analysis, Koposov explores to what extent Western and Eastern European countries as well as Russia distinguish in their approach to criminalize certain statements about the past, and argues that the states’ different political goals structure the way in which these laws are phrased. Western European countries face their participation – to varying degrees – to the Holocaust and grapple with their own narratives of perpetrators to benefit culturally and eco-

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nomically from their admission of guilt. By contrast, in the issuing of memory laws, Eastern European countries not only struggle with their past during the Holocaust but also with their involvement with the Soviet Union. Since the 2000s, they have been attempting to use memory laws to distance themselves from Nazi and Soviet oppression and to potentially escape from Russia's influence. Kuposov demonstrates that both Western and Eastern European countries manipulate historical consciousness through legislation to advance their interests and solidify their position in the global sphere. The two models collide in Kuposov's case study of the Ukraine and its tenuous past with Russia.

The book's structure guides the reader eloquently from the broad discussion of the historical, philosophical, and legal foundation that constitute memory laws in Europe to in-depth case studies in Western and Eastern Europe, culminating in the application of the author's main argument. Kuposov warns of the steady increase of memory legislation, in particular the criminalization of statements, as history has become more and more politicized. The legislating of memory no longer serves the purpose of propagating the historical truthful facts – as its initial purpose was to counter Holocaust negations in Western Europe –, but rather it is utilized to advance domestic and foreign policy agendas.

Kuposov paints a clear differentiation between Western European memory laws and Eastern European memory laws (Chapters 2 and 3). Western Europe has (reluctantly) over time structured the Shoah as an universal evil, in which remembrance is tied to repentance, and – unlike the Eastern narrative – self-victimization is not key in creating memory laws. Eastern Europe, however, has developed two competing frameworks and narratives further complicating remembrances: one in the footsteps of Poland; and the other Western-like. The choice for which model, so Kuposov, largely depends on the country's relation to Russia –the former Soviet

Union —, as Eastern European memory laws not only account for the Holocaust like in Western European countries but also for the crimes committed by the Communist regime. The stronger the Soviet influence and presence in a specific country in the past, the greater the distance the country wishes to take from it now, like Poland, for instance. By implementing this model, mainstream narrative favors national self-victimization, an equalizing of Jewish and national sufferings; avoids any allusion to potential collaboration with the Nazis or the Communists; and puts Soviet crimes on the same level of crimes committed in the Holocaust.

The novelty and excitement of his actual scholarly contribution is found in the second half of the book devoted to modern Ukraine (Chapter 4), a case in point for its complex ties and history with Russia which have split the country essentially in half. He illustrates a fascinating and intricate story of a country which is struggling to define a unifying historical narrative. Its attempts of accomplishing that through the Holodomor narrative, the man-made famine in the 1930s killing millions of people, do not seem to succeed. Memory laws are treated as sophisticated weaponry in the fight over Ukraine's national memory. Parliamentary battles show the difficult relationship the government has with Russia, its former Soviet satellite mothership. Both narratives for and against Russia are frequently proposed by members of government and parliament, shifting back and forth between a decommunization effort and a neglecting of Ukraine's fascist history.

Russia's impact on the country's ideological conflicts becomes even more complex, when Kuposov delves into Russia's own history with memory laws (Chapters 5 and 6). He details the different approaches to memory laws by presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, and demonstrates the many changes experienced by the country. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has been dealing with its Communist past through a different approach to memory laws. This is where the

author's title truly comes into play, as he illustrates all the elements that contribute to a memory war. Namely, Russia's current celebration of Soviet culture, the marginal acknowledgement of Holocaust memory, and the limiting of Nazi-style crimes to Nazis - and not to the Fascist, for instance - in order to avoid any association of Russia with the memory of perpetrators. Russia is not just fighting this war with itself but also - in its obsession over Ukraine- against potential Western narratives flourishing in the ideologically split country.

Invoking a lot of the key literature in the field, Koposov succeeds at presenting a highly detailed overview of what the current legal situation in many key European countries looks like. Additionally, he offers a fascinating narrative of how the states' current laws have developed since their common foundation in the Nuremberg trial judgements. He does so through the assessment of political conditions surrounding the legislative process, and through his portrayal of the biggest contentions between the wording of those laws. Necessary on one hand, the overtly descriptive nature of information presented sometimes appears redundant – especially the quoting of lengthy potential memory laws which then are not passed.

Koposov's categorization of memory laws which criminalize statements about the past, while new due to a definitive account of the historical process, is not novel in its contribution to the larger literature. The differentiation between Eastern and Western Holocaust and Communist narratives is well documented. Koposov, however, brings it all together in his book, adding to the academic debate by discussing also some underexplored European countries, for instance Western Balkan or Scandinavian countries.

To conclude, Koposov's book provides a foundational text in European memory laws, recalling known arguments and shedding new light on the power these laws can have on a country's self-consciousness and national identity, as well as

on its foreign policy in Eastern Europe. Memory laws serve dual goals: banning untrue facts about history and creating more historical consciousness amongst the public. On paper this sounds innocuous. As Kopusov shows, though, they are also being utilized to reshape historical narratives in individual countries as a means to whitewash the guilt of perpetrators and advance political goals. His book is timely as it offers an additional layer of understanding to policy making and national narrative making, particularly in countries which have recently been experiencing a democratic backsliding.

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