

The Holocaust as Active Memory: The Past in the Present. Edited by Marie Louise Seeberg, Irene Levin, and Claudia Lenz. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 207. £55.

The scholarly field of Holocaust memory has grown enormously over the past twenty years, and recent studies in this area suggest an important shift in focus: scholars are now beginning to turn their attention away from large-scale public memory projects and cultural productions, exploring instead the more intimate realm of family memories, personal engagement, and cultures of silence that bridge the space between private and public. *The Holocaust as Active Memory* is a welcome contribution to this emerging perspective. The editors have focused on what they call 'active memory', a phenomenon marked by 'the social role of memory itself as an active element in the shaping of events, lives, and larger structures'; they define memory 'not only as a conscious or subconscious element in the minds of people as they go about their lives, but as intrinsic to dynamic processes that make a difference to the social contexts in which people take part: as continuously relevant information.' [p. 4] Their goal thus is to demonstrate, through a geographically diverse range of case studies, the ways in which memories of the Holocaust continue to matter, and to matter deeply, to individuals, families, and organizations in the present.

The volume is a collection of articles selected and revised from conference papers presented at the 2009 *Families and Memories* and *Towards an Integrated Perspective on Nazi Policies of Mass Murder* conferences, both hosted by the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo, Norway. As such, the volume is methodologically and conceptually varied, and somewhat varied in quality as well. Chapters cover the following topics: memories of children hidden in Belgian convents (Suzanne Vromen); memory in DP families (Lena Inowlocki); representations of the Holocaust in recent Polish literature (Dorota Glowacka); narratives of Soviet victory among Russian-speaking Jews living in Germany (Julia Bernstein); women peace activists and Holocaust discourse in Israel (Tova Benski and Ruth Katz); second-generation reactions to compensation processes (Nicole L. Immler); the rescue of Jews in Denmark (Sofie Lene Bak); official memories of the war and the Holocaust in Finland (Oula

Silvennoinen); and Swedish rescue operations (Ulf Zander). The volume is book-ended by an introduction, co-written by the editors, that sets out the conceptual framework for the collection, and Irene Levin's fine concluding essay on 'The Social Phenomenon of Silence'.

A key strength of the volume is the wide geographical range of the contributions; the editors clearly made a great effort on this part, and the result is a rich overview of current research that spans much of Europe (and Israel), although the focus lies on northern Europe. Many of the papers in the volume represent novel and creative topics; in this regard, I was particularly impressed by Nicole Immler's use of compensation processes as a frame through which to explore contemporary second-generation memories. However, the collection also has the drawbacks typical of published conference proceedings. The editors' concept of 'active memory' is a useful and thought-provoking one, but not all the papers engage with it deeply; indeed, some do not appear to engage with it at all. There is thus a lack of conceptual glue holding the project together. Where the different authors do address 'active memory', they do so to discuss quite different types of memory; this is fine in theory, but one feels that the authors are not working with a shared definition of the concept. Having each author address the concept directly would have strengthened the volume.

The volume also aims to be methodologically diverse, and to represent a wide variety of scholarly fields. Contributors are historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and literary experts. This multi-disciplinarity is one of the volume's strengths, but also one of its weaknesses. It is refreshing to see work in these varied fields side-by-side, but at the same time, there is sometimes a lack of a common language. Scholars in these different fields use the same terms in different ways, and thus the volume would have benefitted from a greater effort to work towards a shared language, or at least to define terms more systematically. However, despite these issues – which are, in any case, frequently found in edited volumes emerging from conferences – there is much to laud in this work, not least the timely reminder that 'memory' in the public

sphere and memories within families may feed each other in complex and subtle ways.

Rebecca Clifford

Swansea University, UK