

Memorial Space and Gender. Analysis of Latvian Contemporary Commemorative Places

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This work has been funded by Fundamental and Applied Research Projects program project "Latvia's Media Ecology: Analysis of Changes Caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution." Nr. Izp-2018/2-0260

Theoretical background

- **Collective memory (Halbwachs)**

- Decisive importance in remembering or forgetting that past are “social frameworks,” as opposed to individuals. Memories always are reconstructed because of public pressure and dominant values and identities
- «Collective memory is particularly susceptible to politicised forms of remembering» (Assmann 2006, 7).

- **Cultural memory (Confino, J. & A. Assmann)**

- The central role in cultural memory is performed by symbolic carriers of memories (not living people and their communication). Memorials are symbolic media and collective and symbolic constructs that function on the basis of social communications and are revitalised in terms of individuals learning about them and including them in their memories (Assmann 2016, 19)

- **Feminist scholarship on collective memory (Hirsh & Smith, Jacobs, Massey, McDowell)**

- «Gender is an inescapable dimension of different power relations, and cultural memory is always about the distribution of and contested claims to power. What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender” (Hirsh & Smith 2002, 6)

Theoretical background

- «Texture of Memory», «mapping memory» (Jung, Johnson)
 - The concept of texture in this regard characterizes the diversity, complexity and social importance of such memories, as well as the influence of various circumstances, community and individual views, places, time and many other factors on existing memories (Jung 1992)
- Memorial landscapes (Dwyer & Alderman 2008)
 - Memorial landscape as text
 - Memorial landscape as arena
 - Memorial landscape as performance
- The research involved content analysis of memorial places as text, semiotic analysis and ethnographic approaches

Periodization of establishment of memorial places

- 1) Russian Empire
- 2) World War I and the replacement of regimes
- 3) Republic of Latvia



Periodization of establishment of memorial places

- 4) Period of occupations and totalitarianism
- 5) the period of the Latvian Awakening and the restoration of the Latvian state



Monuments dedicated to people of importance in Latvian history and culture

- Equally important are monuments dedicated to people of importance in Latvian history and culture. There are few monuments to women.
- Of the 46 monuments that are found in Rīga, just 5%, feature women



- Monuments to truly important women are found elsewhere in Latvia, though they, too, are few in number:

- monument to the poet Aspazija in Jūrmala,
- one to the writer Anna Brigadere in Tērvete,
- to the pop singer Nora Bumbiere in Jelgava,
- and another to poet Mirdza Ķempe in Liepāja.



Džūkste

- Džūkste was a place where battles were waged during World War I, the liberation war and World War II.
- As in many other places in Latvia, several monuments are concentrated in a very small territorial space in Džūkste.



Lestene



- Opened in 2003, and it is the final resting place of soldiers from the Latvian Legion during World War II. A wall at the cemetery contains the engraved names of some 20,000 legionnaires. Also buried at the cemetery are a few women who worked as nurses at field hospitals near the front lines. A monument to Mother Latvia stands over the cemetery, depicting a sad woman who seems to be bending down to look at fallen fathers, husbands and sons.



Conclusions

- Latvia's memorial landscape is dominated by memorial places that contain no open gender marks
- Memorial places in Latvia tend to be dominated by monuments to the war and to the resistance movement, which embody masculine identity in collective memory
- Images of women are used little in Latvia's memorial culture in quantitative terms
- The collective memory that is embodied in memorial culture has no gender balance; it is distinctly masculine, and it overshadows in collective memory and cultural memory the roles of women in history and culture, as well as their suffering during World War I and the liberation battles and in terms of the crimes that were committed here by the totalitarian regimes
- The memorial design demonstrates that space itself continues to serve as an expression of cultural memory, as the ground upon which struggles over gender are played out

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Thank you

