

## **POST-CATASTROPHIC CITIES: TOTAL WAR AND URBAN RECOVERY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY EUROPE**

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### **Abstracts**

- Lisa Kirschenbaum (West Chester University), Remembering and Rebuilding: Leningrad after the Siege in Comparative Perspective

The paper takes as its starting point the recognition that when compared with other post-catastrophic cities, Leningrad appears to be an outlier that offers little insight into more “typical” cases. Blockaded for almost nine-hundred days, subject to air raids, artillery attacks, and the ravages of famine, Leningrad suffered less damage to its physical plant than the iconic destroyed cities of World War II. At the same time, the city’s relatively intact cityscape barely hinted at the vast human losses—perhaps one million Leningraders died of starvation—that also defy comparison.

Shifting the focus of comparative analysis to the complex relationships between urban spaces and the people who inhabit them offers an alternative framework for comparison. From the point of interaction between city dwellers and the city, Leningrad offers a useful comparative perspective. Everywhere that war invaded familiar neighborhoods, shops, workplaces, and apartments, it left its traces on both the city and on city dwellers’ mental maps. Attending to the multiple local meanings attached to the cityscape permits an analysis of how repaired cities facilitated both remembering and forgetting, and not always in ways the architects or city planners predicted. Comparative analyses of the restoration and reconfiguration of urban landscapes in Leningrad and post-September 11 New York and of the construction of virtual cityscapes in London and Leningrad museums illuminate the difficulty of pinpointing what, exactly, people are “remembering” or “forgetting” as they recreate or remake multivalent urban environments.

- Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Center for Contemporary History Potsdam), Gazing at Ruins: German Defeat as Visual Experience

This paper focuses on photography and diary-writing as the most common social practices for registering experiences of German defeat in 1945. More specifically, it brings together the imagery of American, Soviet and German photographers and diarists who were in Berlin at the end of war and during the early Allied occupation. Berlin witnessed one of the last gruesome battles of the war and the only one—except for Stalingrad—where a major city became a battlefield. The Soviet Army suffered more than 300,000 casualties in the space of only three weeks. More German civilians died during these last weeks of the war than during

the entire bombing campaign against the city. The shattered capital of the Nazi empire was the trophy of the war for the Allies and subsequently became the social laboratory for the postwar global order.

By moving beyond an exploration of visual propaganda, the main claim is that visual experiences in the wake of war constituted distinctive ways of making sense of defeat, destruction and desolation. Finally, the paper will ask how different modes of photographic gazing at ruins shaped the "politics of pity" in the early Cold War years.

- Stéphane Michonneau (Casa de Velazquez, Madrid), Ruins and the Heritage of Civil War: The Case of Belchite in Spain

Between August 24th and September 6th 1937, the small town of Belchite was the site of one of the most dreadful battles in the Spanish Civil War. 80,000 men from the Popular Army launched an attack on the market-town that gives access to Saragossa, the capital of Aragon. After being pounded by the Republican artillery, the city was almost completely razed. When the town was finally reconquered by the armies of Franco, it fell victim to a shorter but even more destructive attack. Franco himself conquered the place a few days later: there, he came to a twofold decision that changed dramatically the social fabric of Belchite. On the one hand he ordered to build a new model village that would be the showcase of the régime. After years of penury, the new Belchite was finally rededicated by the dictator in 1954, seventeen years after the end of the fighting. On the other hand the *Generalísimo* decided to keep intact the ruins of the former village as an irrefutable proof of the 'red barbarity'-- a kind of anti-Guernica.

In this paper, I want to describe the politics of memory from 1938 until the present: the monumentalization of the ruins, the reconstruction of the new village and, the abandonment of both when democracy arrived. Secondly, I will focus on the reactions of the inhabitants to massive destruction, reconstruction and the relations they kept with the ruins of the old town. What the ruins of Belchite show is the discrepancy between the cultural memories imposed by different political régimes, and the social memories of the inhabitants based on different experiences and forms of remembering.

- Jan Musekamp (Viadrina-University Frankfurt), A New Polish City on German Ruins? Rebuilding Stettin/Szczecin after 1945

The city of Stettin was largely destroyed by the Allied bombing campaigns in 1943 and, in particular, during in the summer of 1944. Not only industrial and communication facilities were devastated; the densely built historic old town west of the Oder went up in flames. A key figure in the reconstruction was the first Polish mayor, Piotr Zaremba, an urbanist with modernist ambitions. Already in 1945 Zaremba suggested the reconstruction of a new Polish city on the ruins of what has been a German city.

The paper will examine this Polish vision for urban reconstruction, as well as which historic buildings could be incorporated into this vision and which could not. In particular I will ask whether it is justified to speak of a 'Polish reconstruction' or whether Zaremba's vision was influenced by international trends in city planning as well as by a wartime study of the last German planning director of Stettin, Hans Bernhard Reichow. Finally, I will investigate how attitudes towards the German architectural past changed in the postwar period, and how the post-1989 entrance of private capital changed the urban landscape of Szczecin.

- David Crowley (Royal College of Art, London), Memory in Ruins: Remaking Warsaw after 1944

In this paper I explore the political symbolism of the ruin in the Polish capital from 1944 to the present. The question of what a war ruin might represent was deeply problematic for the communist authorities, not least because fragments of buildings and streets could be used to remember prohibited and unsanctioned aspects of the Warsaw's history. These included the actions of citizens of the city during the Warsaw Uprising. Viewed in this light, the reconstruction of the historic fabric of the city – most notably in the case of the Royal Castle in the 1970s – can, I suggest be interpreted as an attempt to fix and ultimately to narrow the meanings attached to places in the popular imagination. Reconstruction could be a kind of forgetting. At much the same time, the anti-communist opposition was drawn to the ruin as a powerful symbol of conflict with illegitimate authority.

Today, ruins feature highly in the veins of retrospection which run through political culture in Poland. The left and right enter into conflict over the fate of the few lingering ruins in the city, symbolic conflicts over 'ownership' of the past. Ruins, it seems, are deeply 'desired', even acquiring a kind of perverse glamour.

- Tarik Cyril Amar (Center for Urban History of East Central Europe, Lviv), After the 'Golden September:' Recovering and Re-Covering Memories of War in Lviv, 1989-2009

This paper seeks to identify and interpret major changes in the culture of memory of the Second World War in the western Ukrainian city and regional center of Lviv between the end of Soviet rule in Ukraine and now. While specific changes in Lviv's public sphere and cityscape have been described, they have been interpreted mostly from only one – if important – perspective. This approach has emphasized and criticized the power of contemporary Ukrainian nationalist discourse, with its glorification of Ukraine's, especially Western Ukraine's and Lviv's, World-War-Two nationalists and its tendency to suppress the experiences of Lviv's two other major wartime ethnic groups of Poles and Jews, in particular where remembering and acknowledging them would contravene the glorification of Ukrainian nationalism or implicate ethnic Ukrainians in morally problematic or reprehensible decisions and behavior, such as collaboration with the German occupiers or participation in the Holocaust.

Current attempts to construct a heroic as well as innocent memory of Ukrainian nationalism in the Second World War do add up to the single most influential factor shaping the culture of memory of Lviv with regards to the Second World War. Yet, at the same time, Lviv's culture of memory is a complex social phenomenon. To state the strong influence of nationalism can only be the beginning of its fuller conceptualization and explanation. This, in turn, requires more attention to a less obvious but equally important change in Lviv's relationship to its past. In essence, the post-Soviet period is the first time in Lviv's postwar history, when the city can openly and officially relate as a subject to its memory, whereas, during the Soviet period, it was an important symbolical object of larger Soviet and Soviet Ukrainian narratives.

- Gruia Bădescu (London School of Economics and Political Science), Reading Postwar Sarajevo as Text

The city, according to Walter Benjamin, is a "linguistic cosmos" of signs and symbols. This paper aims to provide such a reading of the post-war reconstruction city of Sarajevo. Between 1992 and 1996, Sarajevo has been under siege, which affected more than 60% of its building

stock and traumatized its residents. The underlying question is whether the subsequent architectural reconstruction was accompanied by ‘healing’ the wounds of war. Consequently, the paper distinguishes between syntactic transformations of the post-war city (ie. architectural reconstruction) and the semantic changes (ie. meanings of places, practices of everyday life)

The paper first examines the syntax of postwar Sarajevo, by exploring how destruction and reconstruction modified the urban text through erasing and rewriting. Second, the perspective of the outsider *flâneur*-observer is used for the reading of the signs and symbols of contemporary Sarajevo. In a third part, the paper concentrates on the lived experiences of the local residents, examining the city through a phenomenological lens, and exploring readings of the city by the residents as well as the practices of everyday life. Several processes come to the foreground, including the segregation of experiences, the establishment of new borders and boundaries, as well as a blurring of these boundaries, based on economic needs of individuals. The paper argues that while the city’s built landscape still expresses multiculturalism, experiences and readings of the city by particular groups have generally become segregated after the war of the 1990s. This reflects that architectural and political reconstruction were not accompanied by attempts to promote collective „coming to terms with the past“ processes.