

Rezension

**Strategic Commemoration;
Unveiling Memory Activism in
*The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism***

Yifat Gutman & Jenny Wüstenberg (eds.)

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The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism (2023) edited by Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg constitutes a noteworthy addition to the extremely well-established field of Memory Studies. The collection of articles presents a wide range of topics linked with the concept of memory and focuses, in particular, on the newly emerging phenomenon known as “memory activism.” Memory activism, as described by Gutman, refers to the purposeful remembrance of contested historical narratives outside of state-sanctioned routes, with the goal of influencing public discourse and policy (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 5). It is a kind of political action that has been around for a while. The handbook serves as the intersection where memory activists leverage cultural repositories to achieve their political objectives, meticulously delineating the fundamental concerns, empirical evidence, and theoretical implications of memory activism within the social, political, and economic contexts. The substantial research carried out by a number of different authors is positioned within the context of globalization, decolonization, identity politics, and the dynamic interaction between inclusive and exclusionary narratives.

Drawing on the results of their previous study conducted in Israel and Palestine as well as in Germany, Gutman and Wüstenberg concentrate their attention in this collection on the investigation of the possible applications of memory activism in hitherto unexplored situations beyond Palestine and

Israel. The writers in this book come from a diverse range of academic traditions, multidisciplinary perspectives, and methods; as a result, the reader is presented with a comprehensive view of memory activism. Memory battles are not limited to transnational historical catastrophes like the Holocaust and global wars; rather, they are presented as essential structural components of current society (Glynn and Kleist, 6). To accomplish their goal to advance the discussion on memory activism concerning primarily marginalized people, the authors combine academic and activist voices from all around the globe.

The structure of the manual has been carefully adapted to reflect the changing nature of the rapidly expanding environment of the field. Preceded by a foreword by Alieda Asmann and introduced by the editors themselves, it is organized into six parts comprising seventy-eight chapters. Each section contains scholarly analyses as well as first-hand stories written by memory activists originating from a variety of geographical places.

In the introduction of the first section “Debates,” Gutman highlights the relevance of memory activism by providing an explanation of the primary disputes that are now taking place within the field. He encourages an open conversation, inviting a cross-disciplinary discussion on the subject matter. He investigates the dynamics of “transnational memory” as well as the connections between memory activism, democracy, and populism. For example, in the chapter titled “Decommissioning Monuments, Mobilizing Monuments,” Ann Rigeby highlights the continual interaction between memory and actions of commemoration, highlighting how they compete for the attention of the general public (21). In this part, the temporal differences between history and memory are brought to light, along with the consequences these differences have for political action in the present day.

Elaborating upon the same line of thought, the second section of the book entitled “Actors and Agency,” introduced by Irit Dekel, elaborates upon the categorization of social and political players in the memory movement and goes beyond the traditional categories such as victims and perpetrators. It explores the concept of “agency” within the context of memory activism; highlighting the fact that agency is not limited simply to organized social movements but rather encompasses a wide variety of protest forms. The post-heroes, post-transition generations, academics, museum personnel, and even actors such as ghosts are used in this section to exemplify the notion of agency and their relationship with the phenomenon of memory activism.

The third part of the book titled as “Institutions and Institutionalization,” edited and introduced by Joanna Wawrzyniak, discusses the nature and definition of institutions and offers critical discussions of them. The section advocates for a wide, interdisciplinary view of institutions while highlighting the contentious nature of the institution’s definition in the social sciences and humanities. It examines institutions as normative frame works that structure

social life and influence individual decisions, and it does so by delving into a variety of institutional spheres, such as the state, international organizations, legal and administrative systems, political parties, cultural and economic policies, education, religion, the family, and class. The chapters that are included in this part give insight into the ways in which distinct institutional contexts either empower or hinder diverse types of memory activism. In addition, they investigate the ways in which the institutional legacies left behind by historical systems such as slavery, colonialism, and imperialism continue to have an effect on modern memory activists.

In the fourth part of the volume, an investigation is conducted into the many different arenas in which memory activists are active. Titled as “Spaces,” the section investigates two distinct types of memory spaces as outlined by Jenny Wüstenberg and Yifat Gutman in their introduction to the section: “memoryscapes,” which are socially constructed spheres inter-linking memory practices and collective action, and “regions of memory,” which raise questions about the production of coherent spheres of memory activism based on geo-historical boundaries and regional commonalities. Memory worlds from the Post-Soviet Union, the Middle East, Latin America, North America, North Africa, the Arctic, Africa, East Asia, Oceania, South East-Asia, East-Central Europe, and Post-Germany are all included in its scope of coverage. The purpose of this part is to encourage academics to engage in comparative analysis and to question assumed limits, with the ultimate goal of preferably promoting unity across preexisting differences.

The fifth part, edited by Kaitlin M. Murphy and Kerry Whigham is titled as “Sites and Practices,” examines the tactics that memory activists utilize in addition to the locations, both real and symbolic, that they seek to change. As such, ideas of the body and embodiment are closely related to this part on memory activist practices. When it comes to the transmission of knowledge, embodied practice stands in stark contrast to the methods provided by books, records, recordings, and other items that are part of what Diana Taylor (2003) has called “the archive.” Memory activism is actually by its very nature an opposition to archive knowledge, which has officially gained acceptance to the point that it is present in official, frequently state-run archival institutions. For instance, Kerry Whigham’s chapter titled “Memory Sites” emphasizes the necessity for a complete grasp of the whole spectrum of memory sites in order to evaluate their potential influence. In this way, one can determine how much of an effect memory sites might potentially have. The view proposed does not only include monuments erected by state actors, but also grassroots activities that integrate alternative historical narratives into public debate.

Under the direction of Benjamin Nienass, the last part entitled “Normative Dilemmas” dives into the deep normative difficulties raised by memory activism. The section investigates the contributions of memory activism

research to democratic theory, and vice versa. Some chapters in this section use specific visions of democracy as analytical categories to understand the normative implications of various forms of memory activism. Other chapters use these visions descriptively, as categories of practice, to uncover the presumptions and explanations of memory activists. The authors investigate how the need for increased involvement in creating historical representation might possibly lead to societies that are more democratic and equitable using democratic political theory and case studies from a variety of places.

The book serves, in essence, as a complete resource for academics, students, politicians, journalists, and activists who have a profound interest in the conceptual components of memory and history. It offers helpful advice and introduces new analytical frameworks for the reader to get familiar with the idea of memory activism as well as the procedures that are involved in participating in memory activism.