

# Memories of Terror: Essays on Recent Histories

Mihaela Gilgor, 2021

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There exist piles of recorded memories of the dead that society has overlooked or simply forgotten. *Memories of Terror: Essays on Recent Histories* argues that the Holocaust has been largely abandoned by our collective consciousness, and that the existential validity of such events has even been called into question by certain political narratives. *Memories of Terror* explores Holocaust stories, skipping around the world, camping at the margins of our knowledge. These seven essays engage stories from Romania, the USSR, France, Spain, Italy, fledgling Israel, and Shanghai. They tell stories of trauma and effectively analyse disassociation, dehumanisation, and Derrida's *différance*. While the essays cover an expansive terrain, they are similarly preoccupied with the task of remembering the forgotten and integrating terror into our cultural memory, so that the world remembers and indeed learns from its past.

*Memories of Terror* starts with a question Mihaela Gilgor asked herself as she wandered through a Polish cemetery, musing over the tombstones of rich and famous Jews and the unburied ashes of an unknown multitude: "What should we do to keep their memory alive?" This book is a response to that question, an exploration of untold stories. Even for a reader familiar with Holocaust literature, this volume offers valuable, newly discovered narratives as well as new perspectives on old narratives. The collection takes its rightful place as an insightful and noteworthy contribution to the recorded memory of the Holocaust.

Sonia Catrina examines the phenomenon of dehumanisation vis-à-vis the personal memoir and an interview with Romanian oncologist Miriam Korber-Bercovici. Katharina Friedla delivers a fascinating look into the life of practicing Jews in the USSR. Tuvia Friling dives into the enigmatic tale of communist activist Leon Berger, a.k.a. Eliezer Gruenbaum. Mihaela Gilgor, the editor of this volume, follows *New Yorker* illustrator Saul Steinberg's sense of displacement and the *lieux de mémoire* [places of memory]. Arleen Ionescu's essay

demonstrates the inherent historicity of Kathy Kacer's *Shanghai Escape* and proceeds to examine the traces of survivor Lily Toufar Lash's trauma and the psychological repression of its memory. Eugenia Mihaelcia writes of the forced silence of Romanian child survivors and the stigma that followed them. In the concluding essay, Olga Stegan details multiple accounts of the bravery of the inmates of Vapniarka, a death camp in Transnistria.

*Memories of Terror* is not for the faint of heart. The writers do an excellent job of transmitting the horrors of genocide, making this text indispensable for memory and trauma, as well as Eastern European and Jewish studies. The book's overall tone is engaging. Where *Memories of Terror* truly shines, however, is in the nuanced and innovative ways its diverse essays approach established subjects, shedding new light on old material. Ionescu's contribution is notable for treating a lesser-known subject: the Jewish ghetto in Shanghai. Catrina, Mihaelcia, and Stegan's essays all deal with the mass relocation of Jews to Transnistria and the different kinds of horrors they experienced there. Gligor and Friling put the enigmatic persons of Eliezer Gruenbaum and Saul Steinberg under a microscope. In all, this volume will expand the knowledge of even the most established academic.

*Memories of Terror* is a substantial read. While each writer does an admirable job within their field, the collection can be stilted at times. There are a few linguistic inaccuracies common to the non-native English speaker and "Vapniarka: Personal Memories from the 'Camp of Death'" quotes abundantly from different sources, whereas a summary would have been equally appropriate.

Overall, this book is a well-researched, interesting volume. The tone is both grave and curious, inviting the reader to expand one's ideas beyond familiar notions of the horrors of World War II. It explains the scars engraved on Eastern Europe and highlights the resilience and resourcefulness of the individual as contrasted with the collective. Catrina and Ionescu's essays are precursors for a feminist reading of Holocaust survivors' memoirs. Ultimately, this book succeeds at its task: graciously and respectfully keeping the memories of our recent traumatic past alive.