

Nevena Daković (ed.)

Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media

Belgrade 2014

Review by Aleksandra Kolaković

The Holocaust is one of the most important themes in historiography – not least for its historic relevance. Within the rich history of the Balkans, marked by wars, shifts of borders, and discontinuity, the Holocaust as a topic was, until recently, only explored by historians. But the picture of the greatest sufferings in human history is constantly changing, meaning that the Holocaust must be examined from various perspectives in order to reach an objective conclusion. The academic conference *Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media*, which took place from 2 to 4 October 2014 in Belgrade, investigated new modes of (re)viewing the Holocaust in arts and media. Edited by Nevena Daković, professor at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts at the University of Arts, Belgrade, the conference proceedings include 14 academic papers published on various aspects of the topic; the project was financially supported by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia, and realised in partnership and cooperation with the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, the Centre for Culture and Cultural Studies in Skopje, the Belgrade Youth Centre and the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris.

As David Bathrick¹ has pointed out, visual representations of the Holocaust have proved to be an absolutely integral but also highly contested means by which to understand and remember the Nazi atrocities of the Second World War. These vehicles of memories and memorial complexes, the black-and-white photographs of the concentration and death camps, as well as the memories of traumatised survivors, are given new meanings in the contexts of arts and media. The conference attempted to map the corpus of different arts and media texts, systematise it, and use it for constructing a multidirectional memory of the Balkans' past. Special attention was paid to the role of the culture of remembrance, the institutionalisation of memory, film, and other aspects of memory and their interpretation. The focus of papers written by eminent researchers and compiled in the conference proceedings *Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media* is on the language of arts and media, and the aesthetic, ethical, political, philosophical and historical engagement with the Shoah.

One group of papers is dedicated to representations of the Holocaust in film, radio and television in the Balkans from the Second World War to the present day (former Yugoslavia, Serbia, Bulgaria, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). In the article *(Im)possible Witness: The Revelation of the Himmelkommando*, Nevena Daković reveals how cleverly the eponymous film from 1961 moved the limits of representation.

1 David Bathrick, Introduction: Seeing against the Grain. Re-visualizing the Holocaust, in: David Bathrick/Brad Prager/Michael David Richardson (eds.), *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, Rochester 2008, 1-18, here 1.

The crucial point for Daković is that, through its concept of overt confrontation, the film faces the viewer with the Shoah, trauma, and testimony through the lamination of facts, memories and fiction from three-time perspectives.

In her contribution *The Modest Presence of the Holocaust and Jewish people in Bulgarian Cinema: Facts and Reason*, Gergana Doncheva addresses the problematic issue of the official interpretation of the Holocaust in film and cultural memory in Bulgaria. Doncheva summarises that the scarcity of representation depicting the Holocaust in Bulgarian cinema results from the Holocaust's ambivalent status in Bulgarian history.

Most of the researchers who published their papers in *Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media* dealt with the Holocaust in the context of the sites of memory in the sense of Pierre Nora's *lieu de mémoire*. They used the theory of cultural memory, i.e. the process of cultural memorisation, the representation of the past and the way it shapes the future.

As they point out in *Holocaust Sites of Remembrance in Macedonia: How Do We Learn about the Holocaust, or What Should be Remembered to Prevent it From Happening Again*, Mishel Pavlovski and Loreta Georgievska Jakovleva believe that only objective historical facts can reveal the 'true' picture of the Holocaust and that diverse forms of perception of genocide should be given the "right to be heard".

In their paper *From the Contested Past to the Neglected Present: the Cultural Politics of Memory of Belgrade's Staro Sajmište (The Old Fairground)*, Milena Dragičević-Šešić and Ljiljana Rogač-Mijatović explore the concepts and methodologies of cultural politics and curated memory through postmemory and memorial sites; *Staro Sajmište* is the concentration and extermination camp where almost the half of all Serbian Jews were killed by the Nazis. The authors regard this site as a multilayered keeper of memory and paradigmatic space that displays Belgrade's disrupted memories. They also offer an interesting new vision for the future of the Memorial Centre: *Staro Sajmište* could contribute as a group or minority remembrance site to the collective memory of the Serbian (majority) population.

The perception of the Holocaust is essentially based on personal experience or the recomposition of personal experience. Written by Mirjana Nikolić, the paper *The Art of Radio Drama as a Representation of the Holocaust: Searching in Ashes, Radio Beograd (1985)* focuses on personal experience in the light of the necessity of moral choice in the drama *Traganje po pepelu (Searching in the Ashes)*.

Dragana Stojanović and Vera Mevorah examine the Holocaust from a postmemorial perspective, i.e. not only as the memory of an occurrence but as the memory of the period prior to the Holocaust. Their paper *Portraits and Memory of the Jewish Community in Serbia before the Holocaust: Facing the inscription of the Holocaust in the postmemory media representation contexts* deals with some of the issues that came with the representation of the Holocaust in the public online archive, including interviews, photographs and video material collected.

Aleksandra Milovanović's paper *Images of Jasenovac: Rethinking Use of Archive Footage and Voice-over Narration in Documentary Films* addresses the issues of documentary programs and representation of political, social, cultural and historical processes, especially during the wars in former Yugoslavia. The author researched documentary programs produced by Serbian television between 1990 and 1995, archival footage about the tribulations suffered in Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp in the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War.

In *The Anthropological and Ideological Reading of the Holocaust in Hranjenik (The Fed One)*, Boris Petrović writes that film art delivers a rarely powerful and ideolo-

gically charged message, especially if we consider the symbolic power of the Holocaust in all its implications.

Cultural policy and memory policy, as well as their different strategies of forgetting in the Balkans, were at the heart of the conference *Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media*. Zlatko Popovski's paper *The Holocaust and Cultural Memory: The Role of the Media and the Arts in the Holocaust Profiling* discusses cultural memory in interaction with media and arts, with a focus on the victims of the Holocaust in Macedonia.

Starting from Aleida and Jan Assmann's theory of memory, Nataša Delač wrote the case study *Remembering the Novi Sad Raid: the Film The Monument by Miroslav Antić* based on a mixture of collective and individual memories of the Novi Sad raid during the Second World War.

Memory is never shaped in a vacuum; therefore, it is important to explore the ways in which information on the Holocaust is distributed in a culture through media. In *Representation of the Holocaust in Comics and Graphic Novels*, Lazar Jovanović comments on the ties between the narrative strategies of Holocaust representation in two pieces produced by Serbian authors – *The letters of Hilda Daitch*, drawn and written by Aleksandar Zograf, and *Triangle Rose*, drawn by Milorad Vicanović in cooperation with the writer Michel Dufranne – and their relation to Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*.

In her case study *Places of Suffering, Sites of Memory and Digital Media*, Biljana Mitrović gives a review and analysis of the paths and contents of digital media in presenting and contextualising places of suffering, memorial parks and monuments in Serbia (Jajinci, Museum of the Banjica Concentration Camp, Topovske Šupe, Staro Sajmište).

Tijana Lukić sheds a light on the role of music in the reconstruction of collective memory of the Holocaust in the area of digital media (*Reinterpretation of the Past in the Digital Media: Staro Sajmište in the New Media Space and the Role of Music in the Reconstruction of Collective Memory*).

Paul Bernard-Nauraud deals with visual arts and art history in the aftermath of Auschwitz (*Auschwitz and its After-Images: an Approach to the Visual Arts and Art History*). He argues that Auschwitz, understood as equivalent to the Holocaust and its memory, influenced modern art in two different ways: it produced the artistic trends of modernity and provoked a rupture with them.

Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media offered a comprehensive overview of significant facts and events related to the multiple ways in which the 'Final Solution' was implemented in the Balkans. The reconstruction of the past in arts, film, media and ordinary life may lead to a serious distortion of history and yield ideologically deviating versions of the Holocaust. The conference offered new insights, topics and debates, as well as a new perception and perspective of the joint past of the Balkans. The papers were well-presented, solidly substantiated and of great social relevance. *Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media* gave an idea of the importance of preserving memory in the Balkans' modern states by enabling the production of contemporary – and by preserving existing – media texts on the Holocaust in the Balkans. Nourishing cultural memory represents an important step towards keeping up the tolerance and stability in the region.

The contributions to the conference were compiled in accordance with contemporary methodological requirements in the conference proceedings, which provide valuable knowledge about the horrors of the Holocaust. They contain the papers of both highly acclaimed and young scholars, thus enabling an intergenerational dia-

logue and exchange of ideas and opinions. Because of their readability and attractive design, the conference proceedings of *Representation of the Holocaust in the Balkans in Arts and Media* will be read not only by film and media scholars and historians, but by a broader audience.

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