



*Das ›Pruzenland‹ als geteilte Erinnerungsregion. Konstruktion und Repräsentation eines europäischen Geschichtsraums in Deutschland, Polen, Litauen und Russland seit 1900* (Studien des Georg-Eckert-Instituts zur internationalen Bildungsmedienforschung, Bd. 135). Hrsg. von Stephanie ZLOCH, Izabela LEWANDOWSKA. Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014. – 398 S. ISBN 978-3-8471-0266-3

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The German Volkswagen Foundation, as a rule, funds innovative research; therefore, the scientific community always looks forward to the results. In 2014, the results were published of one piece of research of this kind devoted to Prussia. The very title of the study was intriguing, since it looked at Prussia both as a space of divided remembrance and a European historical space. The term *European*, in a way, presupposes a certain affinity of approaches to the region, or their levelling in Germany, Poland, Russia and Lithuania. True, this trend was formulated more cautiously in the title, by means of the term of *construction*; thus, the European region is perceived as still being in the process of developing. A well-developed theoretical introduction strengthened the intrigue. An international team, composed of researchers from the University of Olsztyn in Poland and the Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany, resolved to investigate historical narratives, fragments of the cultures of remembrance and identity constructions that were related not to the nation-state, but to the region. For this purpose, several approaches were selected: from the cultures of remembrance and regional studies. The research focused on school textbooks of the four countries. The very choice of the perspectives of analysis inspired the hope that not only the impact of the historiography of the four countries on textbooks, but also their cultures of remembrance, were going to be analysed. It was an analysis of cultures of remembrance in individual countries that could answer the question whether regional and national narratives differed very strongly from one another.

The book starts with an overview of the education systems in the four countries. This chapter was probably necessary, to shed light on the context; however, the authors of the book could have paid more attention to themes directly related to the issues analysed. The study did not even attempt to answer questions such as, for example, the impact of reforms carried out in different countries and at different times on the content of textbooks. The description of the education system in Soviet Lithuania is simply puzzling. One would expect an analysis to show how much it was possible in Soviet Lithuania to independently solve teaching content-related problems, and how

much the process was regulated by Moscow. A reader might form the opinion that the education conditions in Soviet Lithuania were similar at least to those in the Polish People's Republic, if not in West Germany. To sum up the considerations about the introductory part of the book, we can only regret that the study totally ignored an analysis of the overall political climate, which had a very significant impact on the emergence of new themes in school textbooks, or on their disappearance. At least in the case of Lithuania and Poland, the insights of Aurimas Švedas and Marcin Zarembe would have proven useful.<sup>1</sup> We can only note that the work of these authors is not even included in the list of references.

For the analysis of the central issues, very specific themes were chosen. Having started an analysis of the theme from a discussion of regional *mental maps*, the authors continue with the following points: 1) the Prussians; 2) Grunwald, Tannenberg and Žalgiris; 3) migration; 4) confessions; 5) personalities; 6) the economy and society; and 7) the landscape. The choice of themes, in the opinion of the project's authors, was conscious. By emphasising these themes, they sought to identify phenomena that transcended the boundaries of the nation-states. Basically, judging by the research objectives alone, we can state that the authors of the study sought to deconstruct nationalism by an analysis of the region of East Prussia. This aspiration, even though its declaration smelt of the ideologisation of research, is frequent in the work of German authors. In the present case, it is not the most important thing. The very outcomes of the research are much more significant.

In the analysis of the issue of *mental maps*, and with reference to other authors, one of the compilers of the study, Stephanie Zloch states:

1. Since the 1970s, attention to the former East German lands has been lost (p. 71).
2. In Russia, the issue of regions was irrelevant.
3. In Lithuanian and Polish history textbooks, regions played a minor role, or were even marginalised (p. 86).

After such statements, one might raise the question whether publicly insignificant or even marginalised phenomena could be elements of the cultures of remembrance, even if they are regional. But let us leave the question unanswered for now and go further.

The discussion of the main themes of the research was even more disappointing. When discussing the Prussians, the author of the chapter recounts a boring story of historical facts on the subject found in the textbooks of the four countries; another

<sup>1</sup> ZAREMBA, Marcin. *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*. Warszawa, 2001; ŠVEDAS, Aurimas. *Matricos nelaisvėje: sovietmečio lietuvių istoriografija (1944–1985)*. Vilnius, 2009 (see also the English edition: *In the Captivity of the Matrix. Soviet Lithuanian Historiography, 1944–1985*. Amsterdam, New York, 2014).

author has nothing new to say about the remembrance of Žalgiris, Grunwald and Tannenberg in the four countries. After the significant studies by Sven Ekdahl<sup>2</sup> and a group of Lithuanian authors,<sup>3</sup> this chapter seems to be a poor synopsis of the work by other authors. However, probably the most comic chapter is the one devoted to a discussion of historical personalities. The author states that in Poland, attention to the subject has increased, while in other countries no research of this kind has been conducted... and finally ends the chapter with comments on the German and Polish discussions on the subject of Nicolaus Copernicus. The situation does not improve in the analysis of other themes. It seems that some of the authors had difficulties with the Lithuanian language, and therefore used only textbooks translated into Russian or Polish. Evidently, it is no accident that a Polish author, when presenting issues of Prussia in Lithuania, refers to the insights of a rather ambiguously reputed linguist Letas Palmaitis (p. 123). A lack of linguistic competence must have preconditioned the fact that, in the discussion on the theme of migration, the interwar debates of Lithuanian and German authors on the autochtony of Lithuanian tribes in the present west Lithuania, and in the interwar period, in the Klaipėda Region, which became a subject of political controversy in Lithuania and Germany, were totally ignored.<sup>4</sup> The list of critical comments could be continued; however, it would not change the essence. The reader fails to find even a mention of the 'European region' construction in the four countries. Maybe some elements of that construction can be discovered; however, the choice of themes for analysis was most unfortunate, and the final results of the study are not surprising.

No comparative analysis of the cultures of remembrance of the four countries was found in the study, and the analysis is limited to just historiographies and school textbooks. It could have been more fruitful. To try a different approach, one might note that the genesis of interpretations of Žalgiris, Grunwald and Tannenberg was national and not regional. One could discuss whether, for example, the myths of personalities such as Kristijonas Donelaitis or the Masurian poet Michał Kajka were created in the regional or national cultures of remembrance.

As it is, the national culture of remembrance affects the regional culture, and simultaneously its elements find a place in school textbooks. It was the turning back of the German culture of remembrance to Germans as victims of the Second World War<sup>5</sup> in the early 21st century, and not the 'constructed European region', that precondi-

<sup>2</sup> EKDAHL, Sven. Tannenberg – Grunwald – Žalgiris. Eine mittelalterliche Schlacht im Spiegel deutscher, polnischer und litauischer Denkmäler. *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 2002, Jhg. 50, Hf. 2, S. 103–118.

<sup>3</sup> MAČIULIS, Dangiras; PETRAUSKAS, Rimvydas; STALIŪNAS, Darius. *Kas laimėjo Žalgirio mūšį? Istorinio paveldo dalybos Vidurio ir Rytų Europoje*. Vilnius, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> HERMANN, Arthur. Mažosios Lietuvos lietuviai: autochtonai ar ateiviai? *Lituanistica*, 1990, Nr. 2, p. 13–26.

<sup>5</sup> RÖGER, Maren. *Flucht, Vertreibung und Umsiedlung. Mediale Erinnerungen und Debatten in Deutschland und Polen seit 1989*. Marburg, 2011.

tioned the emergence of the theme of German exiles from East Prussia in German history textbooks of the 21st century

Thus, it would seem that the authors of the study, ideologically engaged in the deconstruction of nationalism, became stuck in an impasse created by themselves.

We could say that the failure of the project was preconditioned by the situation that has formed in German research on issues of the cultures of remembrance. After a very successful breakthrough initiated by Pierre Nora and Jan Assmann, and afterwards by Aleida Assmann,<sup>6</sup> who successfully continued the latter's research, Germany had a fear of nationalism that might allegedly be reinforced by the theoretical conceptions of these authors. For this reason, a thesis published by Christoph Cornelißen in a popular science journal, which emphasised parallel cultures of remembrance and their mutual competition,<sup>7</sup> became extremely popular; the thesis received scientific justification from a group of researchers at the University of Giessen. They made no secret of the fact that, by the implementation of a large-scale research project, they sought to find an alternative to Jan Assmann's theory. True, when emphasising the significance of the research in the competing cultures of remembrance, the authors of the project did not exclude the thesis that one of them may be predominant; however, in the works of other authors, this conclusion was simply ignored. It has to be noted that the leader of the project was Andreas Langenohl, a well-known researcher into the Russian culture of remembrance. His research in the case of Russia in the late-20th century greatly predetermined the thesis about parallel and mutually competing cultures of remembrance.<sup>8</sup> However, the observation is not made that at a time of social change, such a situation is rather typical, and the general public or the dictators emerging from it simply need time for the development of a new predominating narrative. The case of Russia in the early 21st century, paradoxical as it may seem, was probably the best proof of this thesis. Currently, no one would argue that Russia's President Putin has managed not only to 'bring order' to the country, but also to create (or rather recreate) a master narrative by a new actualisation of the victory in the Great Patriotic War,<sup>9</sup> whose social effectiveness has raised no doubts. Incidentally, similar processes also took place in

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the theories, see ERLI, Astrid. *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*. 2. Aufl. Stuttgart, Weimar, 2011, S. 25–35.

<sup>7</sup> An actualised version of the text: CORNELISSEN, Ch. *Erinnerungskulturen*, Version: 2.0. In *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, URL: [https://docupedia.de/zg/Erinnerungskulturen\\_Version\\_2.0\\_Christoph\\_Cornelißen?oldid=84892](https://docupedia.de/zg/Erinnerungskulturen_Version_2.0_Christoph_Cornelißen?oldid=84892) [Stand 22.10.2012].

<sup>8</sup> LANGENOHL, Andreas. *Erinnerung und Modernisierung. Die öffentliche Rekonstruktion politischer Kollektivität am Beispiel des neuen Russland*. Göttingen, 2000, S. 166–168.

<sup>9</sup> SCHERRER, Jutta. *Erinnern und Vergessen: Russlands Umgangs mit (seiner) Geschichte in einer europäischen Perspektive*. In *Geschichtspolitik und Erinnerungskultur im neuen Russland*. Hrsg. von LARS KARL, Igor POLIANSKI. Göttingen, 2009, S. 23–40.

other countries. For this reason, the authors of the study can only be reproached for blindly relying on the theoretical discourse prevailing in Germany.

The same is true of the theories of regionalism and multiculturalism prevailing in the West. They particularly emphasise the aspect of interaction of different groups, which ultimately led to the integration, and partially the assimilation, of different social groups.<sup>10</sup> These processes actually took place in Central and Western Europe; however, the case of Lithuania's Jews in interwar Lithuania meant those popular theories of regionalism could not be applied blindly to case studies in the eastern border zones of Central Europe. The study in question is more proof of that.

And finally, we should return to the theme we started with. The research conducted by the scholars brought together by Stephanie Zloch and Izabela Lewandowska shows that the concept of Prussia in the mental maps of the four countries is very different. The analysis of the theme does not prove that there was an intention to create such a region. On reading the book, from the data provided by it (and merely by that book!), one could conclude that the region simply did not exist, and it was possibly one of the mental map constructions of the project's participants and leaders. And one positive conclusion to finish with: anyone in the future who is looking for information on how East Prussia was presented in German and Polish textbooks should open the study. One should accept much more critically the data on Russian and Lithuanian textbooks; otherwise, the study is good for nothing.

<sup>10</sup> Plg. CSÁKY, Moritz. *Das Gedächtnis der Städte. Kulturelle Verflechtungen - Wien und die urbanen Milieus in Zentraleuropa*. Wien, 2010.