

Morina, Christina: *Legacies of Stalingrad. Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011. ISBN: 978-1-107-01304-9; 297 S.

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In this illuminating and exhaustively researched study, Christina Morina sets out to explore the different, yet in some ways parallel political memories of the battle of Stalingrad in particular, and the war on the eastern front more generally in East and West Germany. In East Germany, she informs us in her cogently argued introduction, the war on the eastern front became the „central historical event in the ruling party’s view of World War II“ (p. 11). While the SED acknowledged the degree of suffering undergone by Soviet soldiers at Stalingrad and elsewhere, celebrating Soviet endurance and ultimate victory in the face of the aggression of fascism, there was a tendency to exculpate German workers from Nazi criminality while simultaneously marginalising „other aspects, such as the mass murder of Jews, the Western Front, and the wartime alliance between the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain“ (p. 10). In West Germany, the focus of political memory was on the suffering of German soldiers at Stalingrad, at least until the Brandt era, when Ostpolitik enabled a shift towards an understanding of Soviet suffering at the hands of Nazism. This more critical memory, Morina writes, emerged later than West German Holocaust memory, and it was not until the 1980s that the „true scope of the crimes committed during the ‘war of extermination’ in the East“ was openly acknowledged (p. 11). Typical of both the East and West German views of Stalingrad, beyond all differences, was a reluctance to confront the involvement of the „ordinary German soldier“ in the ideological war against bolshevism, at least until the first *Crimes of the Wehrmacht* exhibition of 1995–1999.

After a prologue examining the representation of war on the eastern front in Nazi propaganda – a propaganda characterised by racist stereotypes and a redemptive view of

the fight against bolshevism, both of which long influenced post-war views of Operation Barbarossa – Morina turns to an exploration of „memory under occupation“. In the eastern zone, there gradually emerged a view of the Soviets as liberators, and of the Germans as guilty of crimes against the Soviets; at the same time, the tendency to equate criticism of the Soviets in the present with renascent fascism anticipated the GDR’s habit of externalising guilt by projecting it onto West Germany. In the west, Adenauer, overall, pursued an integrative memory politics of whitewashing the German army, thus contributing to the Wehrmacht myth, and a deep silence on Soviet suffering. As the Cold War developed, in East Germany Operation Barbarossa evolved into a Hegelian moment in which the transcendent *Weltgeist* of Soviet communism became visible. Such glorification sought to dispel lingering rejection of both communism and the Soviet Union among east Germans, and to underpin the Soviet Union’s moral superiority vis-à-vis the West. While totalitarian equations between Nazism and Soviet communism became common in 1950s West Germany, Adenauer, keen as he was to secure the release of German POWs from Soviet imprisonment, had to at least concede to the Soviets that the Red Army had indeed suffered greatly, but he was equally careful to draw a line between the average German and the „Hitlerism“ which had caused this suffering. And he also pointed to the „terrible things“ done to Germans by the Red Army, before maintaining that the beginning of a new era called for a „psychological cleansing“ – a term which so incensed Khrushchev he responded by shaking his fist at the German chancellor (p. 91).

The parallels and contrasts between East and West Germany are particularly visible in Morina’s account of the establishment of the National People’s Army on the one hand, and the Bundeswehr on the other. In the GDR, the Soviet war on the eastern front was presented as the key example of a „just war“ that even ostensibly peace-loving countries such as the Soviet Union occasionally needed to fight. In West Germany, the fight against bolshevism which had driven Operation Barbarossa was implicitly linked with that against contem-

porary totalitarianism; Wehrmacht, and Bundeswehr, in this sense were comparable as guarantors against the Soviet threat. It was, of course, as Morina also reveals, not just politicians, but also former generals and officers who were shaping memory of the eastern front, casting it either as a „preventive war“ (so viewed in the Federal Republic), or, in relation to Stalingrad, as a time of epiphany when German generals realised the error of their ways and converted smoothly to socialism (the view in the GDR). Morina's concept of „political memory“ is sensitive to the impact of personal biography. Loyalty to ideology and political tactics cannot explain everything. Ulbricht, Morina tells us, was a veteran of the eastern front. Not so Honecker. His experience of Nazism was shaped by his time in Nazi prisons. When he took over the reins of power in East Germany, he viewed the history of the eastern front as but one part of the whole antifascist story, a story of socialist triumph; its symbolic significance mattered more than the actual events. Interestingly, while confirming the accepted view that it was the Willy Brandt era as a whole which saw a shift in West Germany towards a degree of empathy with Soviet suffering, Morina shows that Brandt himself remained somewhat cool on the fate of the Red Army, while his sympathy for Polish pain and loss under the Nazis was much more acute and explicit.

In a fascinating epilogue, Morina considers the „rhetoric of reconciliation and closure since 1990“. She argues that the fall of the Wall made possible a „pluralization and differentiation of the Eastern Front memory“ (p. 243). At the same time, as her analysis of the *Crimes of the Wehrmacht* exhibition makes clear, this pluralization brought intense, emotional disagreement. The epilogue is characteristic of Morina's thoughtful, balanced study. The book enriches our knowledge of the memory of the eastern front considerably.¹ Whether Germany really has confronted the legacy of Operation Barbarossa, in terms of Soviet suffering, remains a moot point. Few will doubt the sincerity and comprehensiveness of Germany's memorialisation and commemoration of the Holocaust. The fate of the 3,3 million Soviet POWs who died in German imprisonment, however, or that of the Soviet civilians

who fell victim to Operation Barbarossa is not memorialised in contemporary Germany to nearly the same extent. A certain marginalisation of Soviet victimhood remains characteristic of German memory – while in Russia, little attempt is made to acknowledge Red Army crimes against Germans. Reconciliation may have been and may be sincere, but it remains curiously vacuous.

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¹ Before Morina's dissertation, the most important book on the subject was Michael Kumpfmüller, *Die Schlacht von Stalingrad. Metamorphosen eines deutschen Mythos*, Munich 1995 (accessible online: <http://digi20.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00040943_00001.html> [22.5.2012]). See also the exhibition catalogue of the German-Russian Museum Berlin-Karlshorst: Peter Jahn (ed.), *Stalingrad erinnern. Stalingrad im deutschen und im russischen Gedächtnis*, Berlin 2003; and Wolfram Wette / Gerd R. Ueberschär (eds), *Stalingrad. Mythos und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht*, Frankfurt am Main 1992 (latest edition: 2012; will be published in September).