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Research Article

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Tourism and the dynamics of transnational mnemonic encounters

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Abstract

The turn towards transnational memory has largely focused on particular sites and modes of remembering, focusing on the creation of memories between and beyond nation-states in institutional politics, the media, migration and to a lesser degree social movements. Despite its significance for encountering other people's past, international tourism remains under-examined in the scholarship due to a focus on macro-developments, a polarisation along a binary of cosmopolitan vs conflictive memories and a discounting of memories shaped by commercialised logics. Drawing on a case study of Russian tourism in Tallinn, Estonia, this paper makes the case for a closer examination of tourist encounters as part of research on transnational memory. It examines how tourism works as an arena for the production and circulation of memories through direct transnational encounters, refracting and modifying macro-political memories within a commercialised service environment. We analyse the role of tour guides as mnemonic intermediaries and show how in their work with Russian tourists they navigate pasts that form the subject of on-going memory conflicts at the level of international politics. Their representational strategies deemphasise contested pasts and avoid conflicts through neutrality and compromise. At the same time tourist encounters can also be used to create spaces for dialogue and the formation of positive relations. Overall the article demonstrates both the productivity and frictions of tourist settings for transnational remembering and makes the case for considering more ambiguous cases in transnational memory research.

Keywords

Transnational memory, tourism industry, tour guides, mediation, Russia, Estonia.

Introduction

Over the course of the last decade, there has been an increasing recognition that conceptual and methodological nationalism dominated the early years of memory studies research. As De Cesari and Rigney point out ‘the national has also ceased to be the inevitable or preeminent scale for the study of collective remembrance. By now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it has become a matter of urgency for scholars in the field of memory studies to develop new theoretical frameworks, invent new methodological tools, and identify new sites and archival resources for studying collective remembrance beyond the nation-state’ (De Cesari and Rigney, 2014b: 2). Indeed, while there is nothing inevitable about the diminution of the nation-state as an agent in the production and articulation of collective remembering, the importance of recognising the mobility of memory, its articulation at local, regional and supranational scales, as well as in contested territories between national borders has become increasingly apparent. However, the increasing number of studies on transcultural or transnational memory that have been produced as part of this scholarship have tended to privilege particular sites and modes of remembering, focusing on the creation of memories between and beyond nation-states in institutional politics, the media, migration and to a lesser degree social movements. Within this body of literature the sphere of leisure, and in particular tourism, as an important site for the encounter with other people’s pasts has largely been overlooked. Despite the rise of tourism mobilities globally and the significance of international tourism as a key practice of experiencing and producing knowledge about other places and pasts (Sturken, 2011; Bajc, 2006), in collected volumes and special issues on transnational or transcultural memory it is mass media representations and technologies, political elites and migrants that contribute to memory’s flows while tourism mobilities are mentioned only in passing (de Cesari and Rigney, 2014a; Bond and Rapson, 2014a; Erll, 2011) or are left out of the discussion altogether (Erll and Rigney, 2018;

Amine and Beschea-Fache 2012; Assman and Conrad, 2010). In De Cesari and Rigney's volume (2014a) for example only one chapter considers how tourism practices at 'the intersection between memory and commercial circuits (...) encourag(e) transnational connections' (Ebron, 2014: 162) as part of a longer discussion on memories of slavery. Bond and Rapson acknowledge the 'potential of travel, tourism and the associated practice of travel writing' (Bond and Rapson, 2014b: 13) for developing a better understanding of the other in the introduction of their edited collection, however neither they nor the other contributors offer any further exploration of how this works in practice. While this shortcoming might well be caused by the necessary selectivity of edited volumes and existing research networks from which they emerge, we see this lack of engagement as linked to some general tendencies of the transnational memory literature. Based on a critical reading of this literature and an empirical case study of tour guiding practices in Tallinn, Estonia, this article aims to widen the focus of transnational memory research to encompass practices of remembering in leisure and tourism, which are often considered mundane and trivial due to their commercial and pragmatic character. The article particularly highlights the role of tour guides as agents of transnational memory, who are concerned with the translation and intermediation of the past in direct encounters with tourists. Focusing on a contested memory context in the post-Soviet space, namely tour guides running city tours for Russian tourists in Tallinn, Estonia, we examine how tour guides negotiate different interpretations of World War II and the socialist pasts, which have been the subject of memory wars at the international level. We show both the difficulties of intermediating between different memory versions and the potentials of their work for dialogue and the emergence of new memories. In doing so, we highlight how polarised memories at the level of international politics are refracted, domesticated and modified in transnational tourist encounters and show the relevance and ambiguous outcomes of memory production in tourism. Whereas our discussion of the literature encompasses both

scholarship on transnational and transcultural memory, analytically we largely refer the concept of transnational memory. In line with existing scholarship (de Cesari and Rigney, 2014a, Rothberg, 2014, Törnquist-Plewa, 2018), we understand transnational memory as remembering across geopolitical borders of nation-states, in our case caused by international tourist mobilities. The concept draws attention to both the flows and frictions in the production and exchange of mnemonic narratives and forms. Transnational memory can involve transcultural memory, understood here as hybridised or cosmopolitan memories forming new imaginations of community and belonging, however, as the article will show transnational memories involve also more fraught and complex mnemonic forms.

The empirical data for the article was collected during a three-week fieldwork stay in Tallinn in June 2016 as part of a focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2001, 2005). This research approach is characterised by a relatively short but data intensive research stays and a focus on particular social phenomenon and relations in contrast to traditional ethnographies that seek to capture a whole culture or place (Knoblauch, 2001; 2005; cf. Pink and Morgan, 2013). Focused ethnography is an increasingly common practice in qualitative research. According to Knoblauch this is linked to the macro-development of social differentiation and cultural fragmentation. In highly differentiated societies the proposition to capture the social organisation of a culture in its entirety is seen as increasingly illusory (see also discussions on multi-sited ethnography, Falzon, 2009): ‘the more short term the fields and activities to be observed become, the more flexible, short-term and focused should be the instruments of our research’ (Knoblauch, 2005: 30). In our case the aim was to focus on a specific set of practices, practices of memory-making, in the field of tourism with a specific group of visitors, Russian tourists. To capture practices of memory-making and contextualise them, we mapped tourist offers for Russian tourists, engaged in participant observations of five guided tours and conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 tour guides and tourism stakeholders

as well as 14 Russian tourists. The interviewed tourism professionals were contacted with the support of the Tourist Information Centre, direct contact with tour companies and personal recommendations. They worked for several private tour companies in Tallinn part-time or full-time and had different levels of experience. The interviews were focused on their motivations, professional identities and tour guiding practices. Experiences of memory conflicts within guided tours and strategies of dealing with them were directly addressed in the interview.

Tourism and the transnational turn in memory studies

The recent de-centring of the nation-state as the lens through which cultural memory is understood alongside an increasing recognition that ‘all cultural memory must “travel”, be kept in motion, in order to “stay alive”, to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations (Erll, 2011: 12) has, as one of us noted elsewhere, led to the development of plethora of conceptual and theoretical approaches to analysing the ways in which memory moves across space and time and the concomitant consequences of this for the kinds of identities, experiences and social formations it supports (Keightley and Pickering, 2017). In the first instance, this body of research has emphasised the role of communications technologies and media texts in the movement of cultural memory across time and space. From Alison Landsberg’s concept of prosthetic memory (Landsberg, 2004) which emphasises the potential role of media representations, particularly film, to allow memories of emplaced social groups to be accessed and imaginatively synthesised with the experience of distant others, to Anna Reading’s more recent conceptual framework of global memory which attends to the ways in which the movement of memory adheres to a set of global-digital dynamics (Reading, 2016), a significant strand of work in contemporary memory studies has focused on the nature and practices of memories’ movements in a global context

(Erl, 2011). Scholars have been increasingly critical of the focus on movement and mobility alone, which carries with it an attendant risk of eliding what remain the 'highly specific and located processes' in which increasingly globalised mnemonic encounters occur (Radstone, 2011: 114). As De Cesari and Rigney have noted, the analysis of memory flows has largely involved the identification and analysis of universalist narratives and symbols around which human rights discourses can be built (De Cesari and Rigney, 2014b: 14; see also Assman and Conrad, 2010). As Bisht identifies, the shift towards an analysis of mobile memory which moves between cultures and across national borders facilitated by communications media has largely been 'rendered in a positive light with the imagination of a mnemonic community transcending the nation-state seen as providing the basis for post-nationalist political alliances and a more democratic and just global polity' (Bisht, 2013: 13). The ethico-political evaluation of mobile memory in a global context is sustainable largely because of the thematic and empirical focus of transnational and transcultural memory studies research, which has been particularly concerned with the 'macro-political dynamics involved in the spatial movements of memory' (Keightley and Pickering, 2017: 120). The evaluation of memory has tended to focus on the extent to which memories produced in transnational flows are either cosmopolitan products which offer 'a conduit to recognition and empowerment on the part of the marginalized and dispossessed' (de Cesari and Rigney, 2014b: 11) in the manner outlined by Levy and Sznajder (Levy and Sznajder 2006; see also Misztal, 2010), or when these objectives are not met, that the movement of memory narratives alternatively functions 'as an instrument of discrimination and a measure of exclusion' (de Cesari and Rigney, 2014b: 23). For example, such competition and clash of memories has been identified in a recent growing body on the 'wars' waged over the interpretation of World War II and communism in Eastern Europe as well as competing definitions of victimhood running through European memory (Fedor et al, 2017a; Blacker et al, 2013; Rutten et al, 2013),

demonstrating the difficulty of creating a shared narrative transcending national borders. The cross-border movements of memory have then been evaluated in somewhat polarised terms, as either the antidote to cultural conflict – in particular *transcultural* memory has been understood in this way – or as active articulations cross-border antipathies. In either case relatively little attention to the pragmatic, polyvocal or ethically and politically ambiguous nature of many of these mnemonic encounters, and their evaluation is based largely on putative political consequences, rather than the mnemonic processes and practices that they involve. Of course, on the one hand an analytic focus on the macro-political is essential to understanding how, for example, memories of oppression, discrimination and violence circulate and gain traction in contemporary public discourse, and how redistribution and recompense are legitimated, on the other hand this leads to significant limitations in the conceptualisation of transnational memory, which have contributed to the neglect of leisure and tourism as a relevant subjects for researchers working in the area. Firstly, as Amine and Beschea-Fache (2012) have argued, these macro-conceptualisations are based on a privileging of global memories, which are pitted against the local. Focusing on the direction from the local to the global, practices of transnational remembering that are located in the familiar and perhaps even the banal but nevertheless constitute for many people the most common mode of remembering in a global context are routinely overlooked. The neglect of these sites and processes of transnational remembering means that their complexity – the ways in which they operate at the intersection of scales from the most personal to the most public of practices, the synthesis that they involve between the individual pasts and those of close and distant others, and the ways in which they are structured by political discourses, but also by more prosaic economic conditions, professional practices and social norms and conventions – are routinely ignored. Furthermore, an analytic focus which works with a somewhat binary evaluative model based on cosmopolitan and politically conflictual forms of

cultural memory leads to the wholesale neglect, or premature discounting of transnational encounters which are shaped largely or at least in significant part by a commercial rather than communal or expressly political logic, despite their prevalence in everyday experience. One of the reasons why tourism has largely been ignored within the literature on transnational memory is that memory studies research has also tended to take a (not always unwarranted) pejorative view of tourist practices, often whilst neglecting to explore in details the employed meanings that tourist encounters with the pasts of others produce in practice for those involved in them. There is a tendency to assume that the process of commodification intrinsic to tourist practices always runs counter to the possibility of creative modes of engagement with the past of others, and, on that basis, undermines the possibility for the development of cosmopolitan memory. For Sturken, while consumerism as a key part of tourist practices are not a 'problem to be rectified' *per se*, she does emphasise the dangers in equating 'consumerism with citizenship' and the 'political acquiescence that is enabled by kitsch objects of comfort' (Sturken, 2007: 292) without examining the negotiated practices of remembering – the cultural and transnational encounters – as they are experienced and made meaningful in those sites.

Research in the field of tourism and heritage studies has started to show a more complex picture of remembering practices, analysing constructions and performances of memory at different scales and by differently situated agents (Bajc, 2006; Marshall, 2012). Several authors have examined how memory conflicts and reconciliation projects which constitute the object of much transnational memory research reverberate within the tourism industry and are translated and refracted within specific tourist encounters (McDowell, 2008; Lisle, 2016; Schwenkel, 2006; West, 2010; Lehrer 2010). While studies of tour guiding initially conveyed a rather static and functional account of the roles of tour guides, more recent literature has analysed guiding as a practice that co-produces meaning in interaction

with tourists, including the joint negotiation of the past. Empirical case studies on memory-making in guided tours have focused particularly on contested sites (Quinn and Ryan, 2016; Feldman, 2016; McDowell, 2008) and/or sites of dark tourism (Wong, 2013; Macdonald 2006) showing that while being situating within a commercialised setting memory practices in tourism have the potential to foster exchanges, mutual understanding and solidarities (Lehrer, 2010) but also contribute to entrenchments and animosities as for example in the case of political tourism in Belfast where conflict heritage and particular versions of the past are sold to an external audience (McDowell, 2008). In her discussion of dark tourism Lisle has made some valuable suggestions that can be extended to research on memory in tourism in general. Lisle argues for the need to overcome static and normative frameworks of how (dark) tourism works and instead suggests to closely interrogate the work that is done within particular settings, how remembering and forgetting are harnessed to particular purposes. This also means to account for the ‘complex performance of the tourist encounter itself’ (Lisle, 2016: 198) and the ‘possibility that both tourists and hosts might reflect critically on their experience’ (Lisle, 2016: 198) and subvert existing scripts and conventions.

Even though studies on heritage and tourism usually fail to make a connection to the field of memory studies and the increasingly transnational production of memory, they offer some relevant (if tentative) insights for memory scholars: not only has international tourism become a dominant way of directly engaging with the pasts of ‘others’ and routinely brings different memories into conversation. Memory-making in tourism also intersects with and complicate macro-conceptualisation of global memory practices and is productive in the way that ‘memory is not necessarily being erased or defiled in such cases so much as being reconstituted in spaces, objects, and knowledge formations, which are renarrativized and given new signification’ (Schwenkel, 2006: 21-22). This conceptualisation of memory in tourism is directly in line with de Cesari and Rigney’s argument to consider transnational

memory both in ‘processual terms (as the outcome of ongoing cultural practices and unequal encounters) as well as generative ones (as an activity that is productive of stories and new social relations rather than merely preservative of legacies)’ (de Cesari and Rigney, 2014b: 20).

Tour guides in Tallinn: mnemonic intermediaries within a contested field

The article particularly highlights the work of tour guides as memory agents involved in transnational tourist encounters. As part of their everyday work tour guides directly work with tourists and intermediate between past and present, guests and hosts, thus providing us with insights into the dynamics and complexities of remembering processes in tourist settings. We conceptualise tour guides as *mnemonic intermediaries* whose memory practices are shaped by specific social, political and economic conditions, including the tourism industry and the large socio-political context in which it operates. According to Irwin-Zarecka’s early conceptualisation, memory intermediaries are concerned with the ‘editorial framing of raw materials, ... giving sense and structure to physical traces, records, tellings’ (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 175). Through processes of selection, translation and the channelling of cultural sensibilities, they are involved in ‘shaping and reshaping of popular thinking on the subject’ (189) and create relations between past, present and future. Tour guides perform this work of mnemonic mediation within direct encounters with tourists. Salazar, for example, conceives of tour guides as cultural brokers who guides managing the encounter between hosts and guests and facilitate encounters with a place and heritage, actively helping ‘to (re)construct, folklorize, ethnicize, and exoticize the local, “authentic” distinctiveness’ (Salazar, 2005: 642). By doing so, they perform a double role as both a representative and mediator of the culture of the host country. This is a rather complicated task as it requires tour guides to present their own culture while at the same time demonstrating knowledge of and connecting with the

experiences of visitors. Our conceptualisation of tour guides as mnemonic intermediaries builds on both Irwin-Zarecka and Salazar; it acknowledges that tour guides seek to create understanding and mediate between hosts and guests and at the same time foregrounds the mnemonic practices that these acts of cultural translation involve: tour guides engage in mediation work across space and time, they select particular pasts, offer interpretations and navigate potential conflicting meanings. In doing so, they reconstitute and refract memories within a specific transnational setting, shaped by understandings of tourism as a transnational capitalist service culture.

The article examines this work in relation to tour guides working with Russian tourists in Tallinn, Estonia. In a recent contribution Michael Rothberg has described the post-Soviet space including Russian-Estonian relations, as one of the ‘hottest’ zones of memory conflict, where ‘multiple legacies of extreme violence coexist in explosive constellations’ (Moses and Rothberg, 2014: 32). Indeed, memories of World War II and the socialist period are the subject of intense and on-going conflicts between Russia and Estonia and can be located at the conflictual pole of the cosmopolitan and politically conflictual memory binary that we’ve outlined earlier. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Estonian state has built its national identity on the experience of collective victimhood and suffering during the dual occupation by the Nazis and particularly the Soviets (Wulf, 2016). Recent debates and also developments in heritage preservation have started to show more plural identity constructions (Weekes, 2017; Alatalu and Koivupuu, 2014), however, the violent and unlawful character of Soviet rule and the fight of a small nation for freedom continue to be dominant tropes within national remembering. In Russia, the Estonian narrative of a dual occupation is directly contested. Russian national identity is founded on the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany and the liberation of Europe from fascism, which are integrated into a story of state patriotism and military glory (Fedor et al, 2017b). Part of the dominant

historical narrative is also the assumption of Estonians' voluntary joining of the Soviet Union in 1940 (rather than its violent and illegal occupation) as well as assumptions of Russian people as good colonisers who brought economic progress to the Baltic region (Platt, 2013). The conflict over the interpretation of the past has been fought out in attempts to politically and juridically institutionalise particular memories as in calls for the pan-European criminalisation of the denial of the crimes committed by communist regimes (Mälksoo, 2014) and Russian legislation against the 'falsification of history'. In this context, Russian tourists visiting Estonia then pose a challenge as it can be assumed that they do not approve of established historical narratives. Attracted by its geographical proximity, European outlook and the locals' language proficiency (many Estonians speak Russian), Russians in Estonia constitute a significant tourist group; in 2016, 453,000 tourists visited Tallinn alone, forming the second largest group of foreign visitors in the city (Tallinn City Tourist Office & Convention Bureau, 2018). While Russian tourists travelling to Estonia do not specifically seek out sites associated with the contested histories of World War II and socialism, the following sections will show how these pasts nevertheless figure in guided tours and the strategies tour guides choose to represent them.

Mediating mnemonic encounters: transnational sensibility and selective readings of the city

Tour guides offering Russian-language city tours are uniquely positioned to act as mnemonic intermediaries for Russian tourists, both in their role as tourism professionals and as members of Estonia's Russian-speaking minority. As tourism professionals, tour guides are experts at representing the place, communicating its heritage and history and making it accessible and interesting for an international audience. Furthermore, belonging to Estonia's Russian-speaking minority they occupy an in-between status as ethnic Russians and residents, and

often citizens, of Estonia. Russian-speakers make up more than a quarter of Estonia's population and live in Estonia largely as a result of Soviet-era industrialisation and russification attempts. Their status after the break-up of the Soviet Union has been hotly contested: they have been denied automatic citizenship rights in independent Estonia and are seen to undermine the stability of the national community. Although many of them have been brought up with narratives associated with Russian cultural memory, living and working in Estonia, they have however, as research has shown (Pfoser, 2014; Cheskin, 2012 on the similar case of Latvia), become familiar – and often explicitly align themselves – with Estonian narratives through media exposure, professional courses, and historical literature and in the case of younger generations education system. Interviewed tour guides did not position themselves as members of a discriminated minority but as professionals with particular assets, language and cultural skills who due to their positioning possessed a particular transnational sensibility, an awareness of cultural memories of both tourists and hosts. This can be used to adjust their guiding practices, making connections, engaging in specifically targeted practices of translations and deemphasising particular, often contested, aspects of the past. Tour guides working with Russian tourists regularly describe the shared past between Russia and Estonia as both a resource and as a burden: tourists' general familiarity with the shared history makes it easier to tell stories about the history of Tallinn; more generally, Tallinn's multiple foreign rulers are interpreted as an asset that can be sold to tourists who originate from the states that Tallinn historically belonged to. At the same time, tour guides are aware of competing interpretations of the past. As one tour guide explains, 'people grew up in different narratives, hearing different stories of history' (Interview with Anton, 08 June 2016). Tour guides need to navigate potentially conflicting interpretations in their guided tours, as they weave together a temporal and 'spatial narrative' (Wynn, 2012; cf. Macdonald, 2006) on their way through Tallinn's inner city. The emphasis of most tours lies

on the Medieval period which like no other shaped the city's unique Hanseatic architecture, with its gothic churches, narrow lanes, market squares and city walls. Walking through the city, however, also involves encountering traces of more recent and contested pasts: the Independence War Victory column commemorating the Estonian war of independence in 1918-1920, memorial plaques commemorating victims of Soviet repressions and marking the destructions of the city during World War II as well as less obvious visual signs like buildings built in the post-war period which replaced those destroyed by the war, which can be integrated into the guided tour. Furthermore, several guided tours introduce an overview of the city's history in the beginning of the guided tour, in which contested periods necessarily get mentioned. Tour guides are largely left to themselves to find their way to develop their guiding practice. The discussion below shows two sets of strategies of intermediating between different versions of the past, which are developed based on their professional identities and relations to the audience: the first one deemphasises the contested past and aims to avoid confrontation through neutrality, compromise and entertainment. The second one uses the tourist encounter as a possibility for dialogue, explaining local positions and historicising past conflicts, aiming to detach present relations between Russians and Estonians from the past. The latter strategy creates the possibility for an opening of entrenched memory versions, however involves more risks for tour guides and is largely incited by tourists rather than forming part of an intentional educational strategy.

Neutrality, compromise and entertainment: framing the contested past in the service industry

A: The history is still the same but the words I choose are different. For example, for locals the thing that was happening after Second World War was 'Russian

occupation', 'Soviet occupation'. For Russians, for a lot of Russians it is not. It depends on Russians again. There are very different people but the mainstream, I would say, (for) the people who come here it's better not to use the word 'occupation'.

I: What would you use then?

A: Basically I can say when I do the crash course of history I would say in 1940 we became part of Soviet Union, in 41 part of Nazi Germany, 44 again part of Soviet Union and we stayed as a part of Soviet Union till 1991. So even though in my head it's occupation I don't use the word not to provoke people. Just to feel safe. Better not to. You never know how they'll react. (Interview with Anna, 16 June 2016)

Anna who conducts guided tours for tourists in English and Russian is aware of different interpretations of the past and adjusts her representational strategies accordingly when working with visitors from Russia. Based on her professional and cultural knowledge she makes assumptions about how tourists interpret the past and react to particular framings. The dominant Estonian framing of the period of Soviet rule as 'occupation' carries with itself the risk of a negative reaction, and she therefore replaces it what she sees as 'safe' expressions that do not offer any interpretation of the character of the regime. Furthermore, her 'crash course of history' is kept consciously short, listing the different occupying powers. As could be observed in several participant observations of guided tours, whereas the periods of World War II and Soviet rule are not left out of guided tour, contextualisations that would give more insights into the character of the regime are regularly avoided. Remembering practices based on neutrality and factuality do not privilege any interpretation of the pasts and convey an interpretative openness that allows tourists to make their own meaning of the past. Another strategy aimed at avoiding conflict is to offer an interpretative compromise, which is already adjusted to the others' presumed interpretation. It is less frequently used by tour guides due to the difficulty of 'getting it right'. Similar to Anna, tour guide Aleksandr stays away from

what he calls ‘extreme words like occupation’; he instead chooses to characterise Estonia’s annexation by the Soviet Union following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact as taking place ‘under pressure’ or being ‘almost voluntary’. Expressions like ‘under pressure’ aim to signal the forcefulness of the Soviet annexation and the limited choice of the Estonian leadership in 1940, however at the same time they seek to accommodate Russians’ perspectives in that they do not mention the illegality of the occupation. The awkward and contradictory ‘almost voluntary’ is a further interpretative convergence with the Russian interpretation that insists that Estonia voluntarily joined the Soviet Union. The emphasis on neutrality, the adjusted lexical choices and interpretative offers show the difficult work of memory-making in the context of diverging and polarised narratives. Certain aspects of the past are seen as potentially destabilising and undermining tourism’s promise of positive experiences. When tour guides choose their strategies of dealing with the contested past, they do so in an awareness that conflicts can easily erupt. The dominant local narrative which interprets Estonian history in terms of collective victimhood and suffering is presented in a moderated and/or brief fashion when for example Tallinn’s history is referred to as being shaped by a succession of different colonial/occupying powers including the Russian and Soviet rulers.

An alternative interpretative frame is focused on positive, entertaining or otherwise uncontested aspects of the Soviet period – for example, references to popular Soviet films like *D’Artagnan and Three Musketeers* (1978) and *Hound of Baskervilles* (1981) that were filmed in Tallinn (cf. Näripea, 2004) or anecdotes about life under socialism, aimed at a younger audience. Traveller Tours OÜ, which also offers the Tallinn Free Tour, a popular guided tour financed by tips, puts particular emphasis on entertainment through ‘colourful tales of the city, its history and people (...) without getting stuck in the dizzying world of numbers and figures’ (Traveller Tours OÜ, 2018). One of these tales is of a Western

journalist who stayed in Tallinn's central Viru hotel during at unspecified moment during Soviet rule:

...and next to it was a room of the KGB. The journalist said, oh my god, there's no toilet paper, and what do you think? The toilet paper appears within three minutes in front of his door. (Interview with Anton, 8 June 2016)

This story reduces state surveillance to the object of an anecdote, which has almost a benevolent dimension; the KGB is not described as a repressive institution but being concerned with the country's image, it serves the journalist with toilet paper. While these stories operate in a context in which prior knowledge of the KGB is assumed, the focus here is on entertainment about a 'distant' past rather than on conveying a fuller picture of Soviet rule in Estonia.

The emphasis on positive or entertaining aspects of the past together with the interpretative openness of tour guides – reflected in the attempt to avoid confrontation and interpretative compromises – can be read as a concession to Russian representational regimes that deny the suffering of Estonian people. To better understand this strategy it is however necessary to read it also in relation to tourism's orientation as a service industry as well as the wider political and social context in which it is situated. Guided tours are part of an 'economised, contested field for the production of a meaningful shared past' (Frank, 2016: 112), in which tourists are seen customers whose positive experiences are in the interest of tour companies and tour guides. Many of the interviewed tour guides understand themselves as service providers, seeking to create 'a good mood' and 'positive emotions' and wanting tourists to 'like the city' and 'come back to visit'. As Anna remarks: '...relationships between Russians and Estonians are very difficult in relation to history. But I would say they're very welcome here (and) relationships are getting a bit better now, people in Tallinn understand, it's business' (Interview with Anna, 16 June 2016). Particularly in a situation of on-going

memory conflicts tourist encounters are shaped by a pragmatics of memory, willing to adjust interpretations in order to secure positive relations or at least avoid conflict in the present.

Rather than following a confrontational logic that reproduces memory conflicts and entrenches positions, the strategies of tour guides try to work against this, even if in some cases this means to conceal conflict and sanitise particular pasts when they are considered politically or culturally sensitive. Aleksandr's response to memory conflicts in his guided tours is telling:

You need to understand that my task is it not to provoke. I don't want to fight with them, I only want to finish the tour. This means if they tell me a different version of the history, I won't contest it. Even if, in their eyes, this certainly lowers my competence. But I still say 'ok, you're right, you're completely right. I didn't say this correctly. ... I try not to fight with the people because they can easily write me a review and this is not good for the company and for me (Interview with Aleksandr, 19 years, 9 June 2016)

This excerpt shows how the tour guide interprets the conflict as a mistake caused by himself; despite disagreeing with the tourists' interpretation of the past, the wish to keep up a positive relation to the tourists predominates. While this reactive approach appears as the easiest way to contain an argument and, importantly, avoid a negative review, the problem of this strategy is, as Aleksandr rightly acknowledges, that it undermines the tour guide's credibility and role as symbolic expert who has interpretive power over the past.

Encouraging transnational dialogue? Productive provocations and the education of tourists

As the earlier sections show, the encounter between tourists and tour guides is fraught with tensions, leading to a situation where tour guides adopt strategies that minimize interpretation and the risk of conflict to create a positive outcome. It is up to the tour guide to ensure the encounter runs smoothly, and there is little potential to challenge visitors' interpretations of the past. However the 'complex performance of the tourist encounter itself' (Lisle, 2016: 198) also allows for strategies of dealing with contested pasts that have the potential to encourage tourists to engage with the other's perspective and enter into a dialogue about the past. When talking about their professional identities, several tour guides also conceive of their work as educational and enlightening in that they widen tourists' understanding of the place they are visiting.

It's very important to me to get this across (*the history of the place*). Because in order to understand... when you don't know something, you are afraid of it and you don't like it. The more you know, the more you see and travel, then the more you begin to understand that you don't have that many enemies. ...And you know what, it is actually really quite easy to get this across to most people. (Interview with Tatjana, 17 June 2016)

In this excerpt tourism carries the potential of learning about the 'other': based on direct experiences of a place and interpersonal encounters between geographically separated groups it creates the basis for mutual understanding and can help to overcome entrenched positions (cf. Lehrer, 2010). In practice, this is however not so easy to achieve and requires careful intermediary work, as Tatjana describes in a recent conflict she experienced over the Soviet bombardments of Tallinn:

I had a big group and somehow I mentioned, not very cleverly, that 'this area here was destroyed by Soviet aircraft during the war and then completely rebuilt'. And then when we were getting out of the bus at Kadriorg... it was a big group... they just

started pecking at me. They started saying: ‘Look, about what you just said. It was war time.’ ... They crowded me so much there... by this parapet, that I decided that I would no longer focus attention on it. Although, then, after we had gotten out of this situation, they had only just calmed down and we were back on the bus. And then we went to the monastery at Pirita. But the monastery at Pirita was destroyed by Ivan the Terrible’s army during the Livonian war. This was in 1572. And I said: ‘And this was destroyed by Ivan the Terrible’s army. Does that... does that offend you?’ ‘No,’ they said. (Laughs) It was all quite friendly, and afterwards we parted happily.

This excerpt shows how Tatjana deals with a memory conflict, firstly by deemphasising the contested past (‘no longer focus attention on it’) – similar to the strategies described in the earlier section. Later Tatjana uses another strategy, which rather than trying to ignore the conflicting accounts, actively deals with them: she seeks to create distance between the past and the present, aiming to historicise World War II. The mentioning of Soviet war-time destruction is offensive to Russian visitors as it questions the Red Army’s role as good liberators; Tatjana’s strategy in this context is to make the destruction less significant for present-day identities. Referring to an earlier war on Estonian territory, she points out that negative historical events shouldn’t affect relations between Russians and Estonians in the present. Whereas the role of mnemonic intermediaries is often to make the past personal and relevant to the present to engage audiences (cf. White, 1999), Tatjana’s strategy on the contrary seeks to work against the emotionalization of history that forms the basis for entrenched identities. That Tatjana does this in a playful way further contributes to a bridging of divisions. Her rhetorical question ‘Does this offend you?’ reaches out to the tourists, aiming to form connections through laughter. In situations like these tour guides do not give up on their role as symbolic experts but try to actively deal with memory conflicts. Alongside with the

historicisation of conflict, tour guides also use the guided tour to explain local interpretations:

The Russians like to provoke, (they ask) provocative questions, for example the last couple I worked with was asking me... I explained that we were part of different countries, and of course they know that in Estonia we call it occupation even though I personally did not use the word. They were like: 'Why don't you call what is happening now with European Union occupation? Why don't you say they're occupying now?' And you have to explain that without being rude and without being just 'yes yes yes you're right'. Well explain the view of your local people and everything like that. So something like this requires a lot of effort. (...) It's like as a guide, yes, whatever question is... you don't make it personal. (Interview with Anna, 16 June 2016)

The tour guide here seeks to occupy a neutral position as a translator and mediator between different interpretations of the past rather than being implicated in the conflict as a representative of the local culture and memory. Anna uses the tourists' 'provocation' to explain what her 'local people' think, while at the same time turning the disagreement over the past away from the relationship between the guide and the tourist. Strategies of explaining local perspectives and historicising conflict create the potential for a (limited) dialogue about the past and different ways of encountering each other. In her discussion of memory conflicts in Europe, Siobhan Kattago outlines a vision for a democratization of memory based a democratic debate about diverging historical experience. Drawing on Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin, her model of memory pluralism is grounded in the 'respect for different memories of the past and recognition of historical difference' (Kattago, 2009: 16) to ensure that the diversity of meanings assigned to the past are seen as truly enriching and welcome. This mutual respect however can't be taken for granted;

and the interviews with tour guides make clear that exchanges about the past require effort and bear the risk of escalation. Despite their self-understandings of educators and enlighteners tour guides are hesitant in seeking out exchanges over contested events. Most of them work with a flexible narrative and adjust their intermediary work to their group, for example by asking visitors about their motivations to visit at the beginning of the tour. Whereas in the examples above a memory dialogue is initiated by 'provocative' or unintentionally offended tourists, the work of translation is easier in the case of visitors who come with a particular interest and openness for Estonian perspectives. Also those who adopt professional identities as educators and enlighteners see themselves largely as service workers, who want above all to provide tourists with a positive experience. Transnational mnemonic encounters between tour guides and tourists thus do not fit into idealised versions of reconciliation and the development of a cosmopolitan or transcultural memory but can be seen as a more limited attempt of engaging in a dialogue, shaped by the desire to satisfy tourists and find positive ways of dealing with the unpredictable dynamics of direct encounters.

Conclusion

In an age of increased global mobility tourism is one of the main ways of encountering and engaging with the past of others. The inclusion of tourism into transnational memory research is not only important due to its empirical significance. Tourist encounters are interesting sites for the exploration of transnational memory as they are public, performative points of intersection and negotiation between multiple national, ethnic, linguistic and political identities. At the same time they are uniquely positioned as being bound by the demands of the leisure industry. As such, they provide opportunities for examining how the frictions

embedded in transnational encounters have to be navigated, managed and ameliorated by professional mnemonic intermediaries.

This can make a more general contribution to the scholarship on transnational memory: Firstly, it can help to conceive transnational remembering as a *process with multiple outcomes* going beyond, as we have argued, a binary of cosmopolitan and conflictive memories in transnational memory research, either transcending the nation to inform universalist imaginaries or reproducing entrenched identities within an oppositional framework. The multiple memory practices and meanings generated within the encounters between tourists, tour guides and hosts are shaped by the professional practices and conventions of tour guides, the personal interests of visitors and more generally a pragmatics of memory, which is characteristic for much remembering in commercialised settings.

In the case of Tallinn, we can see how memory production in guided tours has ambiguous outcomes. The structure of the encounters between guides and tourists often leaves tourists' perceptions unchallenged and does not succeed in creating conciliatory interpretations of the past. Understanding themselves as service providers tour guides try to avoid confrontation over the interpretation of the pasts and instead seek to create pleasurable and entertaining experiences for tourists. Nonetheless remembering practices in guided tours can encourage the opening up of established memories and identities: driven by tour guides' wish to educate tourists as well as the tourists' 'provocations', the guided tour can encourage (limited) mnemonic dialogue and create a space for compromise and the questioning of established positions. Furthermore, even when avoiding engagement with the conflicted past, the prosaic service orientation aimed at creating of positive relations in the present can contribute to breaking up established animosities. In this way tourist encounters can transform memory wars over how to remember socialism and World War II that have been waged between Russia and its neighbours since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Secondly, and related to the first point, for memory scholars this means more generally to see commercialised settings like tourism not as limiting but as *productive sites of analysis* (cf. Landsberg, 2004; Schwenkel, 2006). The experience of tourism is inevitably caught up with commercial practices. Tourism can sell and validate local, national and cosmopolitan memories to a wider audience, encourage reflection or create easily consumable images and narratives of the other, stimulate feelings of solidarity and voyeurism over others' suffering, create opportunities for exchange or reproduce conflict. Commodification and consumption run through memory-making in tourism but it is worth close ethnographic attention what exactly is being done within tourist encounters – what kind of memories are produced, sold and negotiated and with what consequences. In comparison to spectacular memory conflicts waged through political speeches, protests and symbols guided tours and other arenas of tourism may appear mundane and trivial but they can create 'aesthetic and discursive frames for comprehending social life' (West, 2010: 210). Based on face-to-face encounters between citizens across geopolitical borders they form vernacular international relations which over time can have a cumulative effect in shaping public conceptions of the past.

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