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# Book Review: *The Visual Memory of Protest*. Editors: Ann Rigney & Thomas Smits

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What makes some protest-related images more memorable than others? How does the repetition of familiar imagery serve activists while, simultaneously, also potentially undermine their efforts for recognition? What can one learn from those stories of images that returned to public consciousness years after their creation, and are now presented in wholly different contexts from the original ones? The authors of *The Visual Memory of Protest* address these and other related questions through a range of intriguing case studies of worldwide protests, in terms of their visual representations. This book stands out as highly pertinent in this current global climate, characterized by political and social upheaval, and the prevalence of media platforms that prominently feature visual content.

This book comprises three primary sections, each featuring three articles that tackle various aspects of the role of visuals and imagery in shaping the cultural memory of protests worldwide. Keeping the book focused on this topic enables a thorough, in-depth examination of the subject matter. Simultaneously, its extensive breadth and scope reveal intriguing correlations among the explored subjects. The articles demonstrate the relevance of cultural memory to a wide range of academic disciplines such as media, photography, art, gender studies, and political science. Consequently, *The Visual Memory of Protest* is expected to appeal to many researchers in various scholarly fields, thanks to its solid theoretical infrastructure and methodology use.

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As noted by book editors Ann Rigney and Thomas Smits, the significance of protests lies in their visibility, which, in turn, influences the extent and reach of their recognition (p.11). The articles in the book discuss this in various contexts. Some of the authors' main arguments deal with the impact of visuals on shaping the narrative of the protest and its leaders, and how both are remembered. There is some complexity here, as this is an era in which visual content is abundant and accessible through many platforms, "post-scarcity," as Andrew Hoskins refers to it. On the one hand, there is the potential for a visual to attain virality and give rise to diverse iterations, potentially becoming iconic and entrenched in cultural memory. Conversely, this abundance poses a challenge, making it increasingly difficult for a specific visual to stand out and secure a lasting place in cultural memory (p. 21).

Each article in the book sheds a unique, engaging light on key aspects of the subject matter, making substantial contributions to memory studies. In this review, I would like to highlight two of them, beginning with Duygu Erbil's 'Deniz Gezmiş Takes to the Streets: From Photograph to Silhouette.' Erbil's fluid and fascinating storytelling style immediately draws the reader in. This article delves into alternative media within the context of cultural memory, and focuses on visual representations of Turkish revolutionary and political activist, Deniz Gezmiş. Erbil relies on Rigney's distinction between Memory Activism, Memory of Activism, and Memory in Activism, and applies it to this case study. Additionally, the article emphasizes the critical role of context in shaping interpretation. The connection between visual creation, production, and interpretation is thoughtfully explored. Erbil illustrates how communication materialities and means of cultural production can, and according to her, should, be at the heart of the study of protest-related images that have become iconic. Erbil claims that alongside the focus on representation and identity, there is also the use of material, suggesting that the production culture of activism largely influences the visual aesthetics of protest. An image has greater memorability potential when it lends itself to copying through available means associated with protest and the DIY culture. Examples of such means include graffiti and stencils, used to create silhouettes of various figures, among other techniques.

The second article I would like to refer to is Marco Solaroli's 'Photojournalism, the World Press Photo Awards, and the Visual Memory of Protest.' This study, employing a mixed methodology, offers compelling insights into the intricate relationship between photojournalistic competitions, notably the World Press Photo Awards, and the construction of protest memory. Solaroli delves into the agenda-setting dynamics behind the selection of winning images, arguing that the jury's judgment goes beyond artistic considerations to encompass narratives, politics, and social contexts. The article raises pivotal questions about the dual

nature of press photographs as journalism and art, asking whether they merely reflect reality or actively contribute to creating new narratives. Solaroli's focus on visual motifs and recurring styles in protest photography underscores their profound impact on shaping public memory. Notably, he argues that photojournalism awards institutionalize specific models and styles, potentially diminishing the nuanced local and political contexts of protest-themed events.

That being said, a running thread between the articles would have offered readers a richer experience. This could have been achieved had the authors read the early drafts of their peers' essays in their respective sections, and weighed in on their main arguments. This kind of 'dialogue' could have lent itself to integrative discussions and contributed to profound conversations, besides the insights provided by the book editors in the introduction. While the format of a book cannot possibly compete with more interactive forms such as a panel, this approach could have made the book's content more cohesive and allowed for a deeper exploration of the interconnected aspects of the overarching topic.

The book's audience includes scholars from various research fields in social sciences, the humanities, the arts, and beyond. Given its focus on high-profile events, it is also expected to spark interest well beyond the academic community. The authors ground their work in a rich theoretical framework, relying on central and prominent researchers' insights, and skillfully applying these theories to their own work. Building on this theoretical foundation, the book's primary contribution lies in its broadening of readers' knowledge and perspectives within memory studies by forging meaningful connections across divergent academic fields such as activism, art, and media; thereby deepening our understanding of the many interplaying aspects of the visual memory of protest. Furthermore, it offers a solid theoretical foundation for further research within memory and protest. Should a future volume delve into recent protests worldwide, it will likely be as fascinating as this current volume.

**Book details:**

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