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Valentyna Kharkhun

Reconstructing the Past: Narratives of Soviet Occupation in Ukrainian Museums¹

Introduction

On June 27, 2017, the Kyiv Occupation Museum announced the opening ceremony of its permanent exhibition which would be highlighting the numerous occupations Kyiv experienced during Ukraine's struggle for national self-determination in the 20th century. With this announcement it also stated that focus of the exhibition would be primarily on the Soviet occupation which is perceived as a controversial topic in Ukrainian society.¹ The concept of the museum is to provide an ideology of occupation regimes, terror, resistance and collaboration, as well as for the destruction of the urban environment. With its accent on the Soviet occupation, this Museum joins similar themed museums such as the Museum of the Soviet Occupation which opened in Kyiv in 2007 and also emphasizes and highlights the occupation narrative while portraying the Soviet time. Moreover, this institution now joins a large group of museums which already existed in other post-Soviet republics and have been exploiting this particular narrative since 1992, immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union.² Thus the Kyiv Occupation Museum at its opening became the most recent attempt to provide such an interpretation of the Soviet past, revealing the popularity, endurance and acclaim of this "revisionist" approach with the communist past.

With the establishment of the Kyiv Occupation Museum and their introducing an exhibition dominated by a narrative of the Soviet occupation, major questions inevitably arise regarding mnemopolitics against the Soviet legacy: What are the benefits of using victimhood narratives in

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contemporary politics when identity-building within post-socialist countries? Does Ukraine make any contributions in developing its own occupation narrative in context with pan-European efforts to justify the criminalization of communism? What are the anti-Soviet narratives and how are they presented in occupation museums today? And finally, are these presentations different from museum practices developed during the Soviet time?

While not providing all of the answers, this paper will attempt to focus the discussion these questions while primarily analyzing how the Museum of the Soviet Occupation and the Kyiv Occupation Museum exhibit the Soviet time as an occupation. In the first section, I will provide a conceptual framework for my research discussing how criminalizing communism is a way of implementing transitional justice and is an attempt to create a pan-European memory about communism. I will also consider how mnemopolitics works for the ontological security of post-socialist countries when influencing their states' biographical narrative. The goal of this framework is to highlight why the occupation narrative appeared and how it became an important fixture in representing the Soviet past through the prism of victimization. I will then examine the term "Soviet occupation," qualifying its juridical, historical and ideological usage in Ukraine to clarify the need for establishing museums focusing on the occupation narrative; the main intent being to highlight the ideological nature of the "Soviet occupation" term which drives the occupation narrative in Ukrainian museums. I shall also touch upon the peculiarities of the Soviet occupation narrative while offering an overview of similar museums found in other post-Soviet countries to emphasize the Ukrainian specificity of the narrative. Ultimately, by providing an analysis of these two Ukrainian museums of occupation, you will gain insight as to who the main "memory actors" are and why specific "narrative templates" are being created in Ukraine to describe the Soviet occupation.

It is my argument that in continuing to use Soviet occupation narratives, memory studies and museum exhibitions merely enable the enduring Soviet style of history telling and exemplify

the politicization of history museums. It is not simply a nationalist narrative replacing a communist version, but is a reproduction of an ideological interpretation of history in an endlessly one-sided manner which acknowledges the challenges of the current political situation. Political securization, didactic manner and white/black polarization act as the main tools in constructing such an occupation narrative and testify that it is tightly bound with the Soviet tradition of using history for political purposes.

Dealing with the Communist Legacy: Transnational Justice, Mnemonical Security and the State's Biographical Narrative

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, each newly independent state faced the necessity of dealing with their former communist legacies. Coming to terms with the recent past foresaw policies of transitional justice aimed at evaluating communist brutality and crimes. These policies were predetermined by needs of the various societies for truth-seeking and social healing, as well as by attempting to find post-conflict resolutions, political forgiveness and reconciliation. Despite the moral and ethical intentions of casting out the communist past, most cases of transitional justice were primarily motivated by contemporary political agendas. Post-communist societies have used trials, truth commissions, and lustrations in order to criminalize communism through legislation.³ Memorialization or establishing appropriate commemorative practices are also recognized as a way in implementing transitional justice.⁴

Analyzing post-communist times, researchers proposed that it was a “milieu of memory.” Mnemonical projects of that period were driven by the necessity of state-building, thus they were focused on three major issues: searching for the origins of their national identities, dealing with their communist suppressed memories of conflicts between national and ethnic groups, and with their memories about the recent communist past.⁵ The latter predominated among all others since the communist legacy had been regarded as an “existential center”⁶ of new mnemoscapes of post-

communist countries, and working through the communist past was the most important existentialist task for a nation's "being."

This existential sense of communism memorializations is revealed in two global tasks these transitional societies were trying to fulfill: to (re)establish a national identity and to (re)position themselves in the pan-European space. In this context, communism is considered as a "usable past" and remembering communism becomes a political burden. Maria Mälksoo, studying a political usage of the communist past for "existential" purposes has offered the term "mnemonical security" – "the idea that a distinct understanding of the past should be fixed in public remembrance and consciousness in order to buttress an actor's stable sense of self as the basis of its political agency."⁷ Ontological securitization of historical memory predetermines the creation of biographical narratives in post-communist states. In many cases the discourse of mnemonical securities were narrowed to a rather one-dimensional anti-communist agenda which supported the victimhood narrative and presented history in terms of a "national martyrology." By emphasizing the aspects of terror, occupation and genocide the political elites of post-communist countries were allowed to capitalize on the experiences of suffering for creating positive national self-images. Thus remembering victimhood became politically beneficial. The intention to build a national "positive image" transforms "truth-seeking," a basic principle of transitional justice, to "truth-creation" or in other words, mythologizing communist violence.⁸ Csilla Kiss assumes that "transitional justice involves an effort to come to terms with the past and build a future, but instead of carrying out a meticulous examination of the past events or crimes, or trying to understand how the dictatorship worked, it engages in myth-creation: the "reconstruction" of the past in a way that would make it more comfortable to live with."⁹

By analyzing the mythologized biographical narratives of these states, researchers were able to identify the main images where the communist system was represented as an evil foreign power, and the occupied nation was likened to an innocent eternal entity. As well, these images

were associated with two corresponding topics: overwhelming communist repression and genuine anti-communist resistance.¹⁰ Péter Apor has summarized the formation of the templates in representing national pride on the basis of a nation's biographical narrative:

The politics of history in contemporary Eastern Europe, which also embrace the interpretation of the communist dictatorship, represents the nation as an eternal entity, a set of virtues and values, whose history is described as a success story of the realization of these qualities. Shameful periods of national history are regarded as regrettable historical accidents caused by various external forces. Representing the communist regime exclusively as a terrorist rule imposed by such external sources and maintained solely by violence is a crucial means of implementing this concept-rooted historicist understanding of nationalism. If the communist dictatorships in these countries can be successfully isolated as events of non-national history, it is possible to claim that a range of resilient qualities and features characterize the nation and that these remained unchanged despite and during communism."¹¹

Therefore, instead of justice and reconciliation, such narratives create internal tensions conflicting with other narratives about the communist past and "memory wars" where victimhood storytelling of one country is conflicts with a narrative from other country.¹²

Criminalizing communism in Central and East European countries has been practically synchronized with their efforts to become members of the European Union. As would be expected, when several former socialist countries were admitted to the EU, they started to advocate condemning communism at the pan-European level. As Maria Mälksoo reasons, efforts for criminalizing communism does not foresee the practical potency of the criminalizing measure but is a way of implementing the "politics of recognition," further explaining that "it is not *either* universalism *or* particularism, but *both* a push for a universal condemnation of communist legacy *and* a call for a simultaneous recognition of the specifically East European contribution to the European remembrance of totalitarianism."¹³ In other words, this becomes a way for former socialist countries to claim their "Europeanness."

The experiences introduced by these newer EU members inevitably changed the landscape of "European memory" heavily shaped by the memory of the Holocaust, the main mnemonical signifier for European identity after WWII. Adaption of the standards set for remembering Holocaust victims, which included moral and ethical values in interpretations of the Holocaust,

were the major tasks for any former socialist country to enter the EU. The universalized Holocaust remembrance now served as a template for remembering other atrocities, including communist rule. By introducing the practices of criminalizing communism, advocates were now pushing the Nazi and Stalinist regimes as totalitarianisms equally responsible for genocides and crimes against humanity. Many post-socialist countries currently promote this principle of “double genocide” to emphasize their unique history of suffering under both totalitarianisms but as Ljijana Radonić states “narratives of Nazi occupation were (and are) often used to frame an anticommunist interpretation of history that ultimately depicts communism as the greater evil.”¹⁴

Tensions in perceiving and remembering communist violence are reflected in museums representing “transitional museology” – “a specific type of museology born in times of transition from conflict and/or state repression in order to honor the victims and come to terms with a specific traumatic history.”¹⁵ After examining the “transitional museology” of post-socialist Romania, Simina Bădică argues that exhibitions about communism switched from praise to accusations, but were essentially the same style of political discourse.¹⁶ Bădică professes that Soviet museology was a form of propaganda intended to create a single master narrative to educate the public according to the ideology of the day – that a Soviet museum “seeks to explain, to convince, to transmit precise knowledge; [it is] a museum that knows exactly what the visitors should retain in their mind when they exit the exhibition halls.”¹⁷ Post-socialist museums appear to follow the Soviet museum’s role and way of perceiving and representing history – a phenomenon in transitional museology which Bădică shrewdly identifies as “same exhibition, different labels.”

Following the approach developed by Bădică, I will focus on the museum practices of constructing and delivering an occupation narrative which resembles Soviet museology, along with the political and cultural events which led to their creation. This research provides an additional case study of how anti-communist museums exploit this Soviet museology approach

and problematizes contradictory national perceptions of the communist past when representing it in museums.

Soviet Occupation as a Term (Ukrainian Context)

To understand the circumstances of the occupation narrative found in Ukrainian museums, we need to examine the terminology of “Soviet occupation” in a Ukrainian context. This term can be identified in three aspects: juridical, historical and ideological.

Genetically, the term “occupation” begins through jurisprudence with its meaning determined by the Hague Convention of 1907: “Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army.”¹⁸ Anastasiia Ivanova pointed out that “from a juridical viewpoint, it is difficult or even impossible to evaluate Soviet power as a military authority within the definition of the Hague Convention, even when considering the repressive and punitive actions the Soviet authority held against the Ukrainian people over a long period. World historical evidence proves that totalitarian authority succeeds to mass determination of its own country’s population no less than occupational authority, but it does not let us recognize it as an occupation.”¹⁹ Among arguments against legislative use of the term, the researcher details the issue of succession. On September 12, 1991, Verkhovna Rada, Supreme Council of Ukraine, passed the law “About legal succession of Ukraine” which states that Ukraine inherited its constitution, territories, governance, and international obligations from Soviet Ukraine. The passage of this law undermines numerous attempts to implement “Soviet occupation” into the Ukrainian legislation system.

In considering this term, historians have filtered two cases of occupation regarding Western and Dnieper Ukraine. The Red Army’s 1939 arrival in Western Ukraine as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is recognized as an occupation. Whether the term “Soviet occupation” is legitimately being used in regard to Dnieper Ukraine is less clear. One group of historians prefers to identify the former regional Soviet authority as having been occupational. Mykola Doroshko, while discussing the establishment of “an occupational power of Soviet Russia in Ukraine,” states

that it only became possible due to the “arrival of over 1,000,000 troops of the Red Army to Dnieper Ukraine and the support of the Russian occupation of Ukraine by the local ‘fifth column’ consisting of representatives of the Ukrainian Communist Parties.”²⁰ Vladyslav Hrynevych shares the same opinion.²¹ Of importance, both historians openly state that their views are motivated by the need to reconsider how Soviet power in Ukraine was established in light of contemporary political circumstances i.e. annexation of Crimea by Russia and the conflict in Donbass.

Another group of historians prefers to use the “occupation” term more subtly. Stanislav Kulchycky believes that “communism in Ukraine came as a consequence of conquest and was a product purely of national origin.”²² Kulchycky asserts that Soviet Russia occupied Ukraine three times, creating an appropriate political atmosphere for establishing the Soviet authority. At the same time, he investigates the “autochthonous” nature of communism or how the communist experiment was supported by Ukrainians. Hennady Iefimenko’s opinion is similar, and he states that “during the existence of the Ukrainian Soviet State from 1917-1991, the form and content of the powers granted to the state by the Communist Party and Soviet leadership have repeatedly changed; however, with the exception of the first five years of existence, the issue of its elimination was never raised.”²³

We can distinguish three periods when the term “occupation” was a tool used for political purposes in party’s programs, and the activities of politicians primarily driven by nationalistic views. One example is during Soviet Ukraine’s final years when the platforms of the Ukrainian National Party (1989) and Ukrainian Popular Democratic Party (1990)²⁴ called for the dismantling of the Soviet Union in order to establish an independent Ukraine. The narrative of occupation was used to dissociate Ukraine from its Soviet history and to bind it with the legacy of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR), the latter having been the “true” predecessor of contemporary Ukraine. The political platforms also resolved that Soviet Russia should be recognized as an occupier who used their occupational government to establish the USSR.

During Viktor Yushchenko's presidency, the occupation rhetoric also became quite influential due to his involvement with memory politics.²⁵ The narrative was important for Yushchenko because it legitimized, justified and illuminated victimhood and resistance as the main ways in portraying Ukraine's Soviet past. Thus in Yushchenko's memory agenda, this narrative supported two main programs: to consider the Holodomor as having been caused by the occupational regime, and to glorify UPA soldiers as combatants for the liberation of Ukraine.

Another wave of interest in the occupational narrative arose in 2014 when the military conflict in Donbass began. This geopolitical event actualized the necessity to reconsider the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, including their common Soviet history, and mobilized national memory politics by making it a matter of a national security. Preparations for the centennial celebration of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1920 also stimulated a reinterpretation emphasizing Soviet Russia's military occupation of Ukraine.

During 2014-2019 the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR), led by Volodymyr Viatrovykh, reestablished itself as the leading state institution to work primarily with memories of the Soviet past, and initiated the de-communization laws which were passed by Verkhovna Rada in 2015.²⁶ Laws included dismantling monuments glorifying the Soviet past and renaming Soviet toponyms, which vanquished the Soviet legacy from public spaces in Ukraine. In a 2016 interview held on Ukrainian Independence Day, Volodymyr Viatrovykh, stated that recognition of the former Soviet occupation should be the next step in de-communization. Viatrovykh also commented that a contemporary hybrid war was not an innovation, but was the legacy of the Soviet occupation.²⁷

Political parties again used the occupation term in their activities, particularly with legitimizing new laws. Towards examining a list of laws created since 2015, Anastasiia Ivanova concluded that the intentions of their creators were to promote recognition of the Soviet era as having been an occupation period and to accept the Ukrainian People's Republic as having been Ukraine's original act of succession. In providing a detailed analysis of the law "About Ukraine's

succession from UNR,” created by deputies of Verkhovna Rada, Ivanova demonstrates how the occupation narrative can be politicized.²⁸

Analysis reveals that the term “Soviet occupation” does not have any real juridical status in Ukraine’s legislative system, but is rather an object of long-term discussion among historians and circulates as a weapon in memory wars against Russia. The very controversies associated with this term determine the polemical aspects of Ukrainian museums exploiting it as the means for a master narrative. This continuing issue singles Ukraine out from other countries, especially from the Baltics where an occupation narrative has been officially recognized by those states and gets the highest level of attention whenever the Soviet period is portrayed.²⁹ For Ukraine the question remains of whether it is even appropriate to interpret and portray the Soviet time as having been an occupation.

Soviet Occupation as a Museum Narrative

When the Ukrainian Museum of the Soviet Occupation was established in 2007, other post-Soviet countries already had an experience with developing and exploiting an occupation narrative in their museums. Baltic countries in particular were the pioneers of implementing this narrative, remodeling “Soviet places” and filling them with anti-Soviet content: Lithuanian Museum of Genocide Victims was launched in a former KGB headquarters and security prison in 1992, and the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia was established in a former Memorial Museum to the Latvian Red Riflemen one year later. “The foundation struggle mythology”³⁰ as a driven motto of occupation museums foreseeing a story of the suffering majority who would capitalize on using victimhood nationalism. Hence the main initiators of such museums were those who best symbolized Soviet victimhood and were able to implement a victimhood narrative through state political and cultural agendas: politicians, former Soviet prisoners and the national diaspora.

Post-Soviet states have relied on the occupation narrative to separate themselves from their Soviet history and to support their own ideas of sovereignty. Memory projects with strong anti-Soviet tendencies, and primarily those using the occupation narrative, have been very successful

in re-imagining the political relationship with the Russia, as well as undermining Russia's self-aggrandizing role as "The Great European Liberator" from the Nazi occupation of WWII. In her analysis of the Museum of Genocide Victims, Neringa Klumbite points out that this museum offers a "political statement directed at the Russian Federation, as well as a claim for recognition aimed at the international audience."³¹ This qualification is potentially applicable to all occupation museums. Despite minor differences in the tellings of national histories, museums of occupation are similar in developing a "political statement" as a variation to the "narrative template" where Soviet Russia is recognized as the occupier and the occupied countries are presented as victims. With a narrative of occupation, instead of criminalizing an "abstract" communism or targeting particular persons who committed communist crimes, there is an intent to criminalize Russia as the totalitarian regime/state responsible for the imposition of communism upon other countries. It is worth noting that this occupation narrative is developed exclusively in museums of former post-Soviet republics exemplifying their unique way of dealing with the communist past.

And even though the Baltic museums have been objects of harsh international and domestic criticism,³² they still serve as a "museum template" for similar museum projects, particularly in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. After Mikheil Saakashvili, then the President of Georgia, visited the Latvian Museum of Occupation, he pushed for the establishment of a comparable type of institution in Georgia which then opened in May 2006.³³ A year later, Victor Yushchenko, then President of Ukraine, during an official trip to Georgia, visited their Museum of Soviet Occupation and stated that a similar museum should be created in Ukraine.³⁴ The Moldavian Museum of Occupation (2016) was also initiated by a political figure, Defense Minister Anatol Şalaru. These three museums represent the "second generation" of museums of occupation, and duplicate anti-Russian political statements previously developed in Baltic museums, but were promoted by the political will of high ranking politicians.

While the Baltic museums of occupation have been used as examples for establishing similar institutions in other post-Soviet countries, they are currently undergoing substantial

updates. Continuing along the victimhood “path,” the museums are looking for alternative ways to exhibit the communist regime. In some cases, the museums are expanding their exhibits, and now presenting “memory places” which served as a vivid testimony to Soviet crimes. In another cases, they are changing their names,³⁵ main messages and narratives by introducing a story about regaining independence and discussing the meaning of freedom and responsibility, or in other words, problematizing a wider context for perceiving the issue of the Soviet occupation. Yet these contemporary transformations demonstrate obstacles in dealing with Soviet past due to political agendas, the interests of different social groups and providing appropriate museum representation of the topics,³⁶ and continue to prove that portraying Soviet times in terms of an occupation is still a very controversial approach.

The Ideological Warrior:

Establishing and Functioning of the Museum of the Soviet occupation

The history surrounding the establishment and function of the Museum of the Soviet Occupation makes for a promising research topic when considering the roles of different memory actors such as President Yushchenko, various political parties, Vasyl Stus Kyiv City Organization “Memorial,” and historians in promoting the occupation narrative.

On May 26, 2007, less than three months after Yushchenko’s own call for a museum of occupation, as previously mentioned, the Kyiv “Memorial” conference made a decision to create the museum, accentuating that its mission would be “to dislodge myths from the history of Ukraine and show the younger generation of Ukrainians the true history of our people.”³⁷ An official announcement stated that an exhibition titled “Not to Be Forgotten: a Chronicle of the Communist Inquisition in Ukraine, 1917–1991” which had previously opened on November 30, 2001 under Viktor Yushchenko, then Prime-Minister of Ukraine³⁸ would serve as the basis for the museum.³⁹ The creators included Roman Krutsyk, the chief of the Kyiv “Memorial” and initiator of the exhibition; Yury Shapoval, a historian who conceptualized the content of the exhibition; and Oleh Kravchenko, a designer, stated that “the main purpose [of the exhibition] was to recreate the

chronicle of crimes of the communist regime, to record events and facts that can never be forgotten if we plan to build a civil society in Ukraine based on democracy and humanism.”⁴⁰

In the same announcement, the museum describes other exhibits such as “Ukrainian Solovky” (2003), “Kyiv Martyrology (Kyiv architectural monuments destroyed by the Bolsheviks)” (2002), and “The Holodomor in Documented Pictures,” as well as a new exhibit which was still in production called “People’s war.” Hence, even before launching the Museum, the Kyiv “Memorial” already had a number of usable exhibitions as part of its cultural and educational activities. Therefore, the Museum of the Soviet occupation was simply “created” by introducing a “museum” title as a terminological “umbrella,” covering different exhibitions which were not initially meant to illuminate the occupation narrative. However, a new title for the exhibitions not only lifted their cultural status, but also actualized them as being legitimate among other museums of occupation in clarifying and intensifying its mission to deliver a political statement. The sudden existence of the Museum of the Soviet Occupation signaled that Ukraine had joined with other post-Soviet countries in an attempt to dissociate with its Soviet past and accuse Soviet Russia for the occupation; this could be considered a “mnemonical security” act.

The title of the museum is also quite telling, providing a “feeling” for the Soviet occupation. The word “Soviet” is not translated into Ukrainian (*radiansky*), but transliterated from Russian (*sovietski*). By refusing to adopt the Ukrainian word *radiansky*, the managers of the Museum have accentuated the alien nature of communism for Ukrainians and simultaneously names Russia as the occupier. “The Soviet occupation is the Bolshevik system, [and is] in fact, the Russian occupation” stated Krutsyk in his interview.⁴¹

A disagreement between two creators of the exhibition “Not to Be Forgotten,” which was proclaimed to be the main project for the Museum, shows how an exhibition made by a professional historian can be used for ideological purposes, and then how history can be politicized. Right after the announcement about the establishment the Museum, Yury Shapoval, a creator of the original exhibition, declared he was against the idea of this museum, despite the fact

that he was devoted to disclosing crimes of the Soviet authority. Shapoval stated that “nationalization” of the Soviet period in Ukraine’s history and distinguishing “occupiers” and their “victims” was not a relevant approach for memory politics. Such an attempt requires an answer for the question of “who is the occupier?” which inevitably leads to the recognition that Ukrainians made contributions in the development of Soviet Ukraine. The researcher also accused the Ukrainian President of using an inappropriate strategy in dealing with history, and Kyiv “Memorial” members of being politically engaged and showing nationalistic views.⁴²

In a response to Shapoval, Krutsyk labeled him a “Soviet,” and argued that a “professional and objective historian should be at least a little bit of a patriot to his state and people.”⁴³ Krutsyk also stated the following: “We, the members of the ‘Memorial,’ no longer want to say that what we have been offered and allowed to do so far: ‘communist repression, Stalinist repression, totalitarianism, or mistakes of the past.’ We called the historical events by their proper name – ‘Soviet occupation’ and we believe that this phrase will dominate in the recent history of Ukraine.”⁴⁴ Krutsyk’s statement clearly demonstrates his intention was to prioritize the term “Soviet occupation” into contemporary vocabulary by replacing other victimhood terminology such as “repression” or “terror.” This replacement foresees a crucial difference in how Soviet victimhood is represented. Portraying Soviet repression and terror includes revealing crimes made by the Soviet state against humanity as well as providing a commemoration to the victims and paying tribute to their memory. Propagating “Soviet occupation” predetermines the usage of memory about victims for political purposes where the blamed “occupier” will always be represented as “Other.”

As the title of the Museum carries a blatantly political meaning, the launching this institution resulted in an immediate outcry and revealed a variety of concerns about the Museum, as well as with the memory politics about the communist past in general. While the Communist Party of Ukraine and its allies simply rejected the existence of the Museum of the Soviet occupation; historians, journalists and representatives of the civic society tried to discuss the

necessity for having an occupation narrative in a Ukrainian memorialization of the Soviet past. As would be expected, the discussion provoked a variety of topics ranging from accusing the Museum of “political provocation” and “ideology of radical nationalism” to praising and promoting the Museum for its “high historical truth” which needed to be accepted as state policy.⁴⁵ Still, participants of the discussion agreed that portraying the Soviet era was very important despite being painful and possibly contributing to a society’s unification or destabilization, and that memory actors should take into account a greater variety of Ukrainian experiences of the Soviet past from different parts of country. Some of them proposed that a museum of political repression would be a better solution for representing Soviet victimhood.

In 2011, the Memorial presented a new exhibition called “Peoples’ War” and since that time have assimilated it as a permanent exhibition in the museum. Roman Kruttsyk and his deputy Sergy Zhovty collaborated as authors on the project. Within the introduction of the guide book which supplemented the exhibition, Kruttsyk explained the determining principles of “People’s War,” stating that it was aimed to dismantle the Russian communist ideological myths used to describe the history of Ukraine during the Soviet period.”⁴⁶ In defining his goal for a rewritten history of Soviet Ukraine, Kruttsyk intentionally qualified his exhibition as a tool in an ideological war with Russia and with any Ukrainians who might also question the legitimacy of the narrative.

The exhibition tells the history of Ukraine during 1917-1932 and consists only of poster displays. The main aim for the first part of narrative which is devoted to the Ukrainian Revolution 1917-1920 is to prove that a civil war did not occur in Ukraine during this period, but rather a “nationally liberating struggle for national and social rights of the working Ukrainian people against the foreign exploiters and their servants.”⁴⁷ The second part of the exhibition tells about partisan detachments of peasants who fought against the Soviets during 1918-1924 and 1928-1932. The main purpose of this part of the exhibition is to demonstrate that the terror of famine was intentionally used to suppress the people’s war against the Soviets and to confirm the genocidal nature of the Holodomor.

Thus the exhibition proposed an ideological black-and-white master narrative about the Soviet (Russian) occupation and a mythologized “positive image” of Ukrainians as a nation of victims and rebellions. This is an example of a one-dimensional anti-communist agenda tied together by numerous references to archival findings. Krutsyk stated that all of the information taken from Soviet documents served as a testimony to Soviet crimes and for the accusations of perpetrators; he also used documents to illustrate his ideologically motivated point of view by further narrowing the narrative to prove the occupier characteristics of the Soviet (Russian) authority who were responsible for organizing the Holodomor-genocide of the Ukrainian nation.

Paradoxically, this deeply anti-communist exhibition reveals similarities to communist museology by delivering a politically important message. First, Krutsyk’s exhibition relies on an overemphasis of facts and figures serving to prove a “high truth” – an approach widely used in communist museums to justify communist propaganda, as Simina Bădică states. Second, this exhibition offers a display technique of didactic panels with a number of photographs which exemplifies the continuing endurance of communist museums practices through “pushy communications” with the visitors. Such techniques aim to impose the “right” and only way of perceiving history which leads to an “intellectual dead end” as Simina Bădică calls it.”⁴⁸

The “People’s War” exhibition shows a much deeper involvement in political battles than does the “Not to Be Forgotten” exhibition. Interestingly, the guidebook mentions the authors of the exhibition, but at no time does it associate the exhibition with the Museum of the Soviet Occupation. The book merely states that the exhibition is the result of cooperation between two institutions: “Memorial” and Public Institute of Historical Remembrance. The latter having been organized by the “Memorial” in 2010 and supported by Viktor Yushchenko’s Institute of “Strategic Initiative.” Public Institute of Historical Remembrance was designed to operate as an alternative to the state-run UINR led by Valeri Soldatenko, who previously had been a member of the Communist Party and took the position after Viktor Yanukovich won Ukraine’s presidential election of 2010. Since then, the Museum and the exhibition have become objects of a presidential

battle, showing their gravity towards memory politics. Yushchenko still actively and openly supports the Museum as he did during his presidency: he has since visited the “People’s War” exhibition and initiated a website to supplement the exhibition, financed by his political party “Our Ukraine.” The president who followed, Yanukovich did not tolerate the Museum; it was subsequently investigated by SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) and was under a constant threat of being shut down.⁴⁹

The absence of the Museum of the Soviet Occupation’s name in reference documents, casts some doubts as to its status as a museum. Its creator Roman Kruttsyk also has a simplified understanding of what makes a museum an institution.⁵⁰ The issue of how an exhibition should be designed to portray the Soviet occupation has never been discussed. As a result, the Museum’s space, management and activities have never been developed. The Museum currently consists of two rooms which host the main exhibitions through a series of informational posters and does not engage visitors to actively participate in museum communications. The Museum is located within a “Memorial” office which is neither centrally located nor easily accessible to tourists. And whereas Baltic museums are visited mostly by foreigners, this museum, as well as its counterpart the Kyiv Occupation Museum, are geared towards “internal usage,” primarily hosting students as the main target group. This practice of exhibiting for “special groups of visitors” was well known in the Soviet Union.⁵¹ Students, state factory workers and other Soviet citizens would be organized in groups to visit museums in order to perceive an appropriate Soviet vision of history. The Museum of the Soviet Occupation seemingly works in the same manner: delivering a simple narrative with a direct ideological statement, the Museum is intended to “educate” its visitors, imposing the “right” view of Soviet history. Thus this anti-communist Museum of the Soviet Occupation, aiming to create a nationalistic state biographical narrative, resembles stereotypical Soviet-style museums with its approach to create an ideological narrative and with its exhibiting and curating practices.

From the Soviet to Anti-Soviet:

How did the Museum of Partisan Glory Become the Kyiv Occupation Museum?

2015 was a busy year when de-communization laws began dealing with the Soviet past, and it was a very active time for renaming museums.⁵² Implementing a decision made by the Kyiv City Council, the Museum of Kyiv History issued an order to rename one of its dependents, the Museum of Partisan Glory, as the Kyiv Occupation Museum. It was not just a simple retitling but rather a large scale change of an entire exhibition completely eliminating the Soviet “glorification” narrative and presentation with an entirely new topic about occupations. This museum and its reestablishment are examples of how two opposing narratives – Soviet and anti-Soviet – were interchanged in less than 10 years (2008–2017) illuminating the vacillation of Ukrainian memory politics about the Soviet past and the using a “Soviet” approach in a museum narrative.

The Museum of Partisan Glory was part of a long-term project which saw its completion under the implementation of President Yushchenko’s decree “About celebration of the Day of partisan glory” issued in 2007. The Museum opened in May 2008, during the 65th anniversary of Kyiv’s liberation from Nazi occupation. It is located in the compositional center of the developed Park of Partisan Glory created in the suburbs of eastern Kyiv in 1970. When the museum opened, it joined a memorial sign erected in 1978 which honored the military cohesion of the partisan brigades during the WWII and an amphitheater where gatherings and celebrations by partisans on the Day of partisan glory and Victory Day would occur. With the installation of the Museum, the originally conceived partisan memorial complex which consisted of the park, the museum, the amphitheater and the memorial sign was now complete.

The exhibition at the Museum of Partisan Glory consisted of three parts: telling the story about how the partisan movement was organized at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, the development of this movement, partisan military strategies, and the role the partisans had in liberating Kyiv from Nazi occupation.⁵³ A dugout, a wagon and a boat which had been widely used by the partisans were at the center of the exhibition “to recreate the unforgettable atmosphere

of those years.”⁵⁴ Following in Soviet tradition, the museum was regarded as a place to educate the Ukrainian youth about the military and patriotism.

This Museum presents a very interesting case in managing the problematic “Soviet partisan topic.” Ukraine has a great number of partisan glory museums, with the vast majority of them having been established at the end of the 1950s until the 1970s, as this was a period of intensive growth for the narrative about the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union. Interest in “partisan glory” arose again at the end of the 1990s through the 2000s. The government had regulated for the continuation of Soviet standards for representing “partisan glory” as part of the memory about the Great Patriotic War. In 1998, Verkhovna Rada issued a decree “About Commission for the Former Partisans of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945,” adopting the Soviet commission as it was originally organized in 1948.⁵⁵ In 2001, then president Leonid Kuchma issued a decree about September 22 being the Day of partisan glory in order to distinguish these particular combatants who fought the Nazis. This event is celebrated annually at the regional, state, and even international levels.⁵⁶

In actualizing the partisan topic, three more museums of partisan glory were established in Ukraine during the 2000s: the Memorial Historical and Cultural Complex “Partisan’s Land” in Vinnytska Oblast (2008), the Museum and Memorial Complex of Partisan Glory “Lisohrad” in Chernihivska Oblast (2009) and the Museum of Partisan Glory in Kyiv (2008). During the time some pre-existing partisan museums also refreshed their exhibitions such as the Museum of Partisan Glory (“Spadshchanski Lis”) in Sumy Oblast. It is worth noting that except in one case, all of the museums, including those which were newly established, regurgitated the Soviet template of “partisan glory” even in their exhibition titles, constraining the narrative to the “glorification” tone and not offering space for any discussion of the more controversial points of the topic. These examples show how a Soviet era narrative can be adopted and utilized in independent Ukraine.

Museums of partisan glory have been the objects of heated discussion since 2015 when the de-communization laws were passed, and it raises the question whether these types of museums should even exist in Ukraine. A union of former UPA soldiers had been seeking to eliminate the Lopaten Museum of Partisan Glory in Volyn' Oblast to "implement historical justice" and erase the myths about Soviet partisans.⁵⁷ Local authorities found a benign solution by renaming the museum as the Historical and Natural History Museum Complex.⁵⁸ The Lobna Museum of Partisan Glory in the same oblast provides a different example of dealing with the partisan topic. Locals there protested against elimination of the institution and were also against any renaming. It was their belief that the museum which had been a very important cultural institution during Soviet times, was the only thing keeping their small settlement alive, so they wished to leave things unchanged. In a compromise, a decision was made to "fill" the museum "with a new meaning" and that it would include more recent history such as Euromaidan and war in Donbass region⁵⁹ – the name however remains unchanged.

Radically eliminating the "partisan glory" topic of its "predecessor," the Kyiv Occupation Museum launched its exhibition in 2017 with a completely new master narrative. It is important to note that although the museum was renamed and remodeled, the other partisan memorial places in the complex surrounding the museum were not. Hence, the Kyiv Occupation Museum is still located in the Park of Partisan Glory which now provides a cacophonous topography to symbolize the struggles of the Soviet and the anti-Soviet.

The main aim of revamped museum is to provide a history of Kyiv from the first part of the 20th century, more precisely from establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1917, until the liberation of Kyiv from Nazi occupation in 1943. The museum exhibition focuses only on Soviet and Nazi occupations, with an accent on the former. Similar to the Baltic museums of occupation, the Kyiv Occupation Museum uses this approach to emphasize the total cruelty and inhumanity of the communist regime which was responsible for millions of victims. This

approach, exploited in Baltic museums, is an object of heated critique for downplaying Nazi crimes and distorting history.⁶⁰

The exhibition has three main topics. The first, “Ideology of occupational regime” provides an understanding of the Soviet and Nazi ideologies as “alien” to Ukraine. The second, “Occupation terror” highlights that occupational regimes intentionally considered and then pursued policies to destroy and intimidate the local population as a primary means to secure their domination. Lastly, “Destruction of urban environment” tells how the occupational regimes deliberately destroyed or spoiled the cityscape in order to pursue their political goals.⁶¹

An examination of the exhibition shows that curators were aiming to implement an approach which avoided the heroic and “black – white” style of history incorporating “painful topics” for the Ukrainian public, such as Ukrainians collaborating with the Soviet authority, or how Soviet officials with Ukrainian decent were partially responsible for the Holodomor. The curators also tried to debunk the Soviet myth about Soviet partisans and to remove the taboo on the Soviet bombing of Kyiv. The narrative provides almost the same amount of space for representing “victim” and “perpetrator” images, and emphasizes that in totalitarian regimes, the fine line wavers between the two, and perpetrators often also became victims.

Although the narrative tends to show the curators’ intention to create an exhibition with an alternative thought to the “Soviet” vision of the early 20th century, it lacks the main supporting points in the story and its representation. The term “occupation,” the main focus in the title of the museum, should be providing the theoretical framework for the exhibition, yet does not get properly represented in the narrative at all. There are no theoretical reflections on this term and the word itself is hard to find in any captions/descriptions throughout the exhibition. It might be possible that by restricting the word’s use, the curators were trying to avoid the problematic issues of having to qualify the Soviet regime as an occupation. The “occupation” narrative is seemingly substituted by war, terror and repression, hence the victims are used to testify to the inhuman and

“alien” nature of the totalitarian regimes. As well, the exhibition offers a tremendous number of pictures displaying violence and murders, with distorted bodies and rotting corpses creating an impressive image of victimhood. The victimhood visualization approach used here communicates directly with the visitor’s emotions rather than with a discussion of the complex history of the first part of the 20th century.

An analysis of the new exhibition proves it has adopted the composition, tools (such as showcases and installations), as well as the narrative style from the former exhibition of the Museum of Partisan Glory. This can most likely be explained by a lack of financing which pushed the curators to simply reuse the previous exhibition as an example and template to fill with new information. The exhibition still consists primarily of pictures in showcases and informational posters (describing major historical actors and urban landscapes) as well as some prior displays, some of which were adopted from the exhibition about partisans (such as the wagon and dugout).

The history of the Kyiv Occupation Museum’s establishment clearly shows that a simple re-tweaking of the museum exhibition did not eliminate its former Soviet roots, nor did it modernize the language or curation practices of the museum. Called to life by a political decree, this museum carries an ideological statement about the Soviet occupation, yet does not explain the meaning of the occupation nor how this term is applicable to the Soviet period of Ukraine’s history. Thus similar to Soviet museums, rather than creating questions for discussion, the Kyiv Occupation Museum provides only one answer – the occupational vision of Soviet history.

Conclusion

Both Ukrainian museums of occupation follow the main requirement of transitional justice: they are intended to criminalize communism as the only way of dealing with the Soviet legacy. They can be viewed as Ukrainian examples of memory securitization since they were established during notable periods of political and military escalation with Russian Federation. As with other such institutions in Eastern Europe, the Ukrainian museums are designed to deliver a political

message with a clear anti-Russian bias to the radical revisionism of Soviet history, portraying Russia as an occupier and responsible for millions of Ukrainian lives lost under Soviet rule. The Museum of the Soviet Occupation provides an exceptionally nationalistic view of history, and is exclusively focused on the Soviet occupation, portraying Ukraine as the main target of Soviet totalitarianism. The Kyiv Occupation Museum chooses to depict the Soviet and Nazi occupations using the principle of “double genocide.” By setting the two regimes as equal, it highlights the evil, inhuman nature of the Soviet totalitarianism. And unlike their East European counterparts which criminalize communism, promote transnational remembrance of communism, and try to implement the politics of recognition found within the EU, Ukrainian museums address their exhibitions to the local population, trying to impose an appropriative vision of the Soviet history and ultimately – anti-Russian sentiment. Thus, “domestication” of the Soviet occupation narrative is the main feature of the Ukrainian variation of the narrative.

As such, museums of occupation which generate an anti-Soviet narrative paradoxically resemble Soviet museums that produce communist propaganda. Instrumentalization of history, predominance of appropriate ideology, and prevalence of the content on the forms of representation are the main features uniting anti-Soviet museums of occupation with typical Soviet museums of history. The Ukrainian Museum of the Soviet Occupation might serve as the most striking example of how exhibitions can be used in memory wars as a weapon in proclaiming a nationalistic view of the Ukrainian history. The Kyiv Occupation Museum shows how the former Museum of Partisan Glory which provided a Soviet-like narrative can be recrafted with an anti-Soviet tone through implementation of a political decision, and how elements of a previous “Soviet” exhibition can be adopted and used in developing an anti-Soviet narrative.

Ukrainian museums of occupation highlight the major problem in dealing with the Soviet legacy: the tension between the content and form of its representation. Delivering an anti-Soviet narrative by using Soviet museology approaches undermines the main intention of such a narrative – to condemn the Soviet violence. Such practices ensure an after-life for the Soviet depiction of

the history, making presentations of the Soviet past more complicated and less effective. Ukrainian museums of occupation exemplify the necessity for revisionism and critical discourse not only with the communist past but also with communist museology as an important way of reconsidering Soviet legacy.

¹ Anons: Vidkryttia Ekspozytcii Muzeiu Okupatscii Kyieva, <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/5950f88f645db/>

² the Museum of Genocide Victims (Lithuania, 1992), the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (1993), the Museum of Occupations in Estonia (2003), the Georgian Museum of Occupation (2006), the Moldavian Museum of Occupation (2016).

³ See different approaches of implementing transitional justice in various post-communist countries here: Horne and Stan, *“Transitional Justice and the Former Soviet Union.”*

⁴ Subotić, “Out of Eastern Europe,” 412.; Kiss, “Transitional Justice and the Politics of Memory in Europe,” 32.; Kiss, “Transitional Justice. The (Re)Construction of Post-Communist Memory,” 122.

⁵ Głowacka-Grajper, “Memory in Post-communist Europe,” 925.

⁶ Köresaar et al., “The Twentieth Century as a Realm of Memory,” 25.

⁷ Mälksoo, ““Memory Must Be Defended””.

⁸ Subotić, “Mythologizing of Communist Violence.” See about mythologizing practices in remembering communism here: Dobre, “Avatars of the social imaginary.”

⁹ Kiss, “Transitional Justice. The (Re)Construction of Post-Communist Memory,” 123.

¹⁰ Dobre, “Communism at the Museum.”

¹¹ Apor, “Eurocommunism,” 240.

¹² See Subotić, “Mythologizing of Communist Violence,” where researcher studies how victimhood myth worked for mobilization in Serbia and Croatia, and Mälksoo, “A Baltic Struggle for a “European Memory,” with analysis of “memory wars” on remembering the Soviet legacy.

¹³ Mälksoo, “Criminalizing Communism.”

¹⁴ Radonić, “From “Double Genocide” to “the New Jews,” 515.

¹⁵ Bădescu et al. “Curating Change in the Museum,” 9.

¹⁶ Bădică, “Same exhibitions, different labels?” 272.

¹⁷ Ibid.290.

¹⁸ Annex to the Convention.

¹⁹ Ivanova, “Pro pravonastupnytstvo.”

²⁰ Doroshko, “Okupatsiia radianskoiu Rosiieiu Naddniprianskoiu Ukrainy,” 53.

²¹ Hrynevych, “Podolannia totalitarnoho mynuloho.”

²² Kulchycky, *Chervony vyklyk*, 304.

²³ Ibid., 657.

²⁴ “Natsionalni protsesy v Ukraini,” 552, 569.

²⁵ Myshlovska, “Delegitimizing the Communist Past,” 389.; Kharkhun, “Museumification of the Soviet Past.”

²⁶ They comprise four acts: “On the Condemnation of Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and a Ban on Propaganda of Their Symbols”; “On Access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime 1917–1991”; “On the Perpetuation of Victory over Nazism in World War II”; and “On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century.” The most disputed issue was the fourth act, which anticipates the honoring of the OUN-UPA, whose ideology during its initial period was influenced by the Nazis. That particular act also complicated relations with Poland and various Jewish communities.

²⁷ Viatrovych: period radianskoiu vlady mozhna vvazhaty okupatsiieiu, 5 kanal, August 24, 2016

<https://www.5.ua/polityka/viatrovych-period-radianskoi-vlady-v-ukraini-mozhna-vvazhaty-okupatsiieiu-123855.html>

²⁸ Ivanova, “Pro pravonastupnytstvo.”

²⁹ See more about legislative issues regarding the term “occupation” in Baltic countries: Mälksoo, *“Illegal Annexation and State Continuity.”*

³⁰ Burch and Zander, “Preoccupied by the Past,” 60.

³¹ Klumbite, “Sovereign Pain,” 27.

- ³² See more in the following publications: Mark, "Containing fascism"; Burch and Zander, "Preoccupied by the past"; Velmet, "Occupied identities"; Radonić, "From "Double Genocide" to "the New Jews"; Rindzevičiūtė, "Institutional Entrepreneurs of a Difficult Past," Katz, "Is Eastern European "Double Genocide" Revisionism Reaching Museums?"
- ³³ Batiashvili, "Sites of Memory, Sites of Contestation."
- ³⁴ Shokalo, "Yushchenko: v Ukraini treba stvoryty muzei okupatsii."
- ³⁵ The Lithuanian Museum of Genocide Victims became the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in 2018, and the Estonian Museum of the Occupations was renamed to the Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom the same year.
- ³⁶ See about transformations in Baltic museums: Pääbo and Pettai, "A Museum of Memories," Weekes, "Debating Vabamu."
- ³⁷ <http://www.memorial.kiev.ua/novyny/221-pres-relez-muzej-sovjetskoji-okupaciji-poklyk-sumlinnja-i-chasu.html>
- ³⁸ Krutsyk, *Narodna viina*.
- ³⁹ See: *Educational Handbook*.
- ⁴⁰ <http://www.memorial.kiev.ua/expo/exposition2.html>
- ⁴¹ Romaniuk, "Pytina mozhyt 'zmesty' tilky sami rosiiany."
- ⁴² Shapoval, "Muzei okupatsii? A khto okupanty?!"
- ⁴³ Krytsyk, "A taky sovietska okupatsiia!"
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Kulchycky, "Chy perebuvala Ukraina pered radianskoiu okupatsiieiu?"; Martynov, "Naviazana dumka"; Stetsiuk, "Yakshcho komu ne do vpodoby"; Dubyniatsky, "Radianska okupatsia: pro et contra."
- ⁴⁶ Krutsyk, *Narodna viina*, 9.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.
- ⁴⁸ Bădică, "Same exhibitions, different labels?" 293.
- ⁴⁹ Romaniuk, "Putina mozhyt 'zmesty' tilky sami rosiiany."
- ⁵⁰ Krutsyk, "A taky sovietska okupatsiia!"
- ⁵¹ See about Soviet Ukrainian museums and their visitors: Yekelchuk, "Stalins' Empire of Memory," 114-120.
- ⁵² The Memorial in Commemoration of Famines' Victims was renamed to the National Museum "Memorial to Holodomor Victims," The National Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War was renamed the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War.
- ⁵³ Exhibition of the Museum of Partisan's Glory can be seen here: <https://museum-portal.com/ua/museum/museum-of-partisan-glory>
- ⁵⁴ <https://dk.kyivcity.gov.ua/content/muzei-istorii-mista-kyieva-ta-yogo-viddily-i-filii.html>
- ⁵⁵ Pro komisiuu u spravakh kolyshnikh partyzaniv Velykoi Vitchyznianoii Viny 1941-1945 see here: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/71/98-%D0%B2%D1%80>. This decree was canceled on 23.05.2017.
- ⁵⁶ The Embassy of Ukraine in Israel organized a ceremony on the occasion of Partisan Glory Day, 18 October, 2012: <https://israel.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/7982-organizovano-urochistij-zahid-z-nagodi-svyatkuvannya-dnya-partizanskoji-slavi>
- ⁵⁷ Na Volyni proponuiut demontuvaty muzei partyzanskoi slavy: <https://www.volynnews.com/news/society/na-volyni-proponuiut-demontuvaty-muzei-partyzanskoyi-slavy/>
- ⁵⁸ Lopatenski istoryko-pryrodneychi kompleks: http://volyn-museum.com.ua/index/lopatenskij_muzej_partizanskoji_slavi/0-34
- ⁵⁹ Na Volyni hochut' vidrodyty muzei. Nazvu partyzanskoi slavy maiut napovnyty novym zmistom: http://volyn-museum.com.ua/news/na_volyni_khochut_vidroditi_muzej_nazvu_partizanskoji_slavi_majut_napovniti_novim_z_mistom/2016-12-16-2900
- ⁶⁰ Mark, "Containing fascism"; Radonić, "From "Double Genocide" to "the New Jews"; Katz, "Is Eastern European "Double Genocide" Revisionism Reaching Museums?"
- ⁶¹ <http://www.kyivhistorymuseum.org/en/museum-affiliates/museum-occupatson-kjiv>

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