

Post-Communist Memorial Museums – Representations of “Our” and “Their” Victims

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In my five-year habilitation project on “World War II in post-communist memorial museums. Memory politics between the ‘invocation of Europe’ and the focus on ‘our’ victims” (Radonić, 2021) I analyzed ten memorial museums from Estonia to former Yugoslavia and asked how they changed their permanent exhibitions in the course of EU accession talks as well as most recently. In this paper I focus on different representations of “our” victims from the majority population of the respective country as opposed to “their” victims like Jews or Roma.

I argue that those museums which focus on their country’s suffering under communist occupation – the Baltic museums of occupation(s) and the House of Terror in Budapest – individualize their “own” victims with the help of private photographs, personal belongings, diary entries and other empathy-evoking means. In contrast to that, Jewish victims are represented as anonymous mass, corpses or through humiliating photographs taken by perpetrators – in order to “contain” the memory of the Holocaust and Nazism so that it cannot threaten the narrative of “our own” suffering. Roma are not represented in these museums at all.

Another group of memorial museums tried to prove their “Europe-fitness” during EU accession talks by copying “western standards” of musealization first of all from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. In museums like the Jasenovac Memorial Museum in Croatia, the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest or the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica being a ‘post-communist museum’ does not first of all mean a focus on communist crimes, but a re-narration of history which now also includes the victims of racist persecution marginalized or tabooed in the communist era. The ‘universalization of the Holocaust’ as the negative icon of our era has led to the inclusion of individualized Jewish victims. Roma victims were mentioned in the permanent exhibitions which opened in the context of EU accession, yet they are portrayed in a non-individualized, stereotypical and sometimes humiliating way.

I will show that who ‘our’ and ‘their’ victims are differs from museum to museum. The common element is a hierarchy of victims in the course of the post-communist re-narration of history and the victimhood narrative as the predominant approach – in contrast to the earlier focus on heroes and martyrs.

1. Theoretical Approach

Representations of cultural memory, particularly of the traumatic experiences of the twentieth century, became battlefields in the process of reconstructing and renegotiating the past in both post-communist and Western European countries after 1989. Those ‘wars of memory’ (Welzer, 2007) about interpretative authority between different social and political groups have included attempts to re-narrate the past as shared European history. Three international remembrance trends are crucial for understanding such Europeanization of remembrance: the universalization of the Holocaust, the Europeanization of the Holocaust, and divided memory in Eastern and Western Europe.

The memory boom in the West after the Cold War emphasized the Holocaust as a ‘negative icon’ (Diner, 2007, 7) of the twentieth century. This ‘universalization of the Holocaust’ (Eckel & Moisel, 2008) implies that the Holocaust has become a universal imperative for the respect of human rights in general and a ‘container’ (Levy & Sznajder, 2005, 195) for the memory of different victims and victim groups. This development brought about a change in the focus of remembrance: the figure of the hero-martyr, formerly associated with those who resisted the

Nazis, has been replaced by the victim (Rousso, 2011, 32). This transformation has had a strong impact on memorial museums. Although the term ‘memorial museum’ was developed for institutions that were not at the site of an atrocity (especially the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington and *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem), these institutions’ approach (and the term) have become archetypical for many other museums. The Washington and Jerusalem museums became role models for individualizing the victims by displaying their ‘ordinary life before’ (Köhr, 2007), evoking empathy with the individual victim instead of showing heaps of anonymous corpses.

The aesthetics of dark exhibition rooms and the focus on individual victims have been copied in many museums. Sometimes however the victim is represented as part of a collective, as an emotionalizing symbol for national suffering. In other cases universalization means that museums tell individualized victim stories with the help of objects and historical photographs. Yet this strategy is applied only to ‘our’ victims, members of the majority society in the respective post-communist country, while ‘their’ victims, which is how for example Jews are conceived, as I will show, are depicted in a reserved de-individualized manner – for example by using only few often humiliating photographs taken by perpetrators as in the *Museum of Occupation of Latvia* in Riga. In the European Union (EU), this universalization includes another dimension: the Holocaust has become a ‘negative European founding myth’ (Leggewie & Lang, 2011, 15). Although European integration after 1945 was in no way a reaction to the Holocaust, Tony Judt has argued that ‘the recovered memory of Europe’s dead Jews has become the very definition and guarantee of the continent’s restored humanity’ (Judt, 2005, 804) since it ‘seemed so important to build a certain sort of Europe out of the crematoria of Auschwitz’ (pp. 831-2). Post-war Europe is understood as a collective that developed shared structures and institutions in order to avoid a recurrence of the catastrophe of the Holocaust.

In the European search for an identity that goes beyond economic and monetary union, this founding myth provides a compelling common narrative that is otherwise lacking. This is one of the reasons why the *Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research* (renamed *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*) attracts such interest and includes 34 countries, most of them European. The ‘suggestion’ that – especially post-communist – countries join the Task Force and implement a Holocaust Memorial Day was the first step towards some kind of European standard. While no official political pressure was applied during the EU’s eastern enlargement in 2004, these standards nevertheless seem to have been internalized by the new member countries, not in the sense of implementing defined policies or guidelines, rather a set of conventions around depicting certain subjects in a similar vein to western policies and in our particular case western museums. Thus, Hungary’s *Holocaust Memorial Centre* opened in Budapest a few weeks before EU accession – despite no permanent exhibition having been installed at that point.

Finally, since 1989 East-Central European countries have experienced, in parallel with the Europeanization of the Holocaust, a re-narration of national history, in particular the invention of a golden era before Communist rule. The narrative of the heroic anti-fascist struggle has been delegitimized along with the communist regimes, and the trauma of communist crimes is placed at the core of remembrance strategies. The resulting divided memory between East and West has prompted representatives of post-communist EU member states to demand that communist crimes be condemned to the same extent as those of the Holocaust. Narratives of Nazi occupation are often used to frame an anti-communist interpretation of history that even depicts Communism as the greater evil.

Memorial museums are a case in point. They are not neutral spaces of knowledge transfer. Rather, they are core sites for the negotiation of historical narratives and contested spaces for the

manifestation of cultural patterns, inclusion and exclusion mechanisms as well as social, ethnic and religious in- and out-groups (Sommer-Sieghart, 2006, 159). Memorial museums spell an inherent contradiction. While a memorial is seen to be safe in the refuge of history, a history museum is presumed to be concerned with interpretation, contextualization, and critique. 'The coalescing of the two suggests that there is an increasing desire to add both a moral framework to the narration of terrible historical events and more in-depth contextual explanations to commemorative acts. That so many recent memorial museums ... find themselves instantly politicized itself reflects the uneasy conceptual coexistence of reverent remembrance and critical interpretation.' (Williams, 2007, 8) Thus, memorial museums represent identity, canonize official memory, and make visible the dominant historical narrative.

2. Post-Communist Memorial Museums Communicating with 'Europe' – Two Trends

This paper draws on the five-year research project for my 'habilitation' (something like a second doctorate in Central Europe) on the representation of World War II in post-communist memorial museums, in which I examined the museum landscapes of all post-communist EU member states. I systematically analyzed how ten memorial museums from Estonia to the former Yugoslavia have changed their permanent exhibitions in the context of their countries' EU accession talks. In the course of my research, I have identified two distinct ways in which post-communist states and the state-funded memorial museums sought to communicate with 'Europe'. On the one hand, some felt a need to prove their belonging to 'Europe' and acknowledged international musealization standards, adopting the aesthetics of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem with their focus on the individual victims. While this invocation of Europe has often amounted to little more than lip-service, it has also precipitated some measure of self-critical confrontation with the crimes committed by their own respective communities. On the other hand, there are those memorial museums, especially in the Baltics, which demand that 'Europe' acknowledge their suffering during the communist era. Here narratives of Nazi occupation are predominantly used to frame an anti-communist interpretation of history. In those post-communist states, which prioritize their suffering under communist rule, the memory of Nazism and the Shoah is contained to ensure that it does not threaten the narrative of their own collective's suffering.

I will now show that different victim groups are portrayed very differently in the permanent exhibitions. Whoever is considered as belonging to the group of 'our' victims is depicted as an individual, with the help of private photographs, biographical objects, testimonies, short biographies or similar – in a way that evokes empathy with the persecuted. In contrast, the group that is 'othered' as 'them' by the respective museum is portrayed as mere victim numbers, anonymous corpses or through uncritical reproduction of humiliating photographs taken by perpetrators. Which group gets presented in which way depends on the group the museum belongs to.

2.1. 'Our' and 'Their' Victims in Museums that Demand: Europe, Accept 'Our' Suffering

Within the scope of my analysis, this group of post-Communist memorial museums comprised the Museums of Occupation(s) in the three Baltic countries devoted to both the two Soviet and the Nazi Occupation as well as the House of Terror in Budapest. They are devoted to the occupation from both sides and the permanent exhibitions often start with an equation of Hitler and Stalin or the red star and the swastika. Yet, soon the narrative turns to portraying Stalinism as the greater evil. In the course of EU integration, officials from this group demanded from 'Europe' and 'the world' to acknowledge how much their respective country had suffered under the Soviets.

Paulis Lazda, the American-Latvian history professor who initiated the *Museum of the Occupation of Latvia* in 1993, wanted to ensure the recognition of the occupations of Latvia – first by the Soviet Union, then Nazi Germany, and then the Soviet Union again – as unjust and not as liberation (Michel & Nollendorfs, 2005, 118). He conceived of the acceptance of the ‘okupācijas fakts’ (Lazda, 2003), the fact that Latvia was occupied and not liberated by the Soviets in 1944, as the basis for the stability of the young Latvian state. According to Lazda, the museum tries to subvert misinformation that dominates nationalist Russian discourses about the Latvian occupations (as cited in Velmet, 2011, 192). The museum furthermore seeks to defend Latvia against ‘defamation’ because of its citizenship and language policies concerning the Russian-speaking population – in effect since 1991 and improved in the course of EU accession talks – and the role of the Latvians in the Holocaust in Latvia (Lazda, 2003). Instead, it should inform Latvians and other countries about the “tragic” history of the Baltic States, which has allegedly been forgotten by the world (as cited in Blume, 2008, 36). Similarly, the historian, former dissident and conservative vice-president of the Estonian parliament, Tune Kelam, who had the idea for the Tallinn *Museum of Occupations*, expressed the hope that it would provide “younger generations as well as foreign visitors ... [with] an understanding of the difficult path of the Estonian people, but also of their unique experience of preserving their spirit, language and culture” (as cited in Burch & Zander, 2010, 57).

James Mark (2008) has claimed that the Baltic museums use the Nazi era to frame an anti-communist reading of history. From this perspective, museums dealing with both Nazi and communist terror seek to contain two threatening aspects of the memory of Nazism so that its crimes cannot compete with stories of Soviet crimes (Mark, 2008, 336). The first threatening aspect is the capacity of the horrors of Nazism to justify being attracted to the communist state or to evoke sympathy for the idea of the Soviet Union as a liberator. Secondly, the memories of victims of Nazism have the potential to drown out the appeals of those who suffered under communism.

The two most prominent examples of museums that depict ‘our’ victims from the majority population and ‘their’ Jewish victims differently are the Museum of Genocide victims in Vilnius, recently renamed into Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights, and the Museum of Occupation of Latvia in Riga, currently closed for renovation, but I will be referring to the previous permanent exhibition.

The Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius, inaugurated in 1992, classifies only the Soviet crimes as genocide while, initially, it basically omitted the Nazi history of the building in which it is situated altogether. Two consecutive rooms treat the first and second Soviet occupation, respectively. At the end of the first room, a tiny textboard had been the only mention of the Holocaust for years. It reads: “To visitors willing to get acquainted with the period of Nazi occupation in Lithuania and the Holocaust more extensively we suggest visiting the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum.”¹ In 2010, one cell in the museum’s basement was set aside to cover the Nazi occupation and an exhibit on this period and the Holocaust opened there in 2011. The way in which Jewish victims are portrayed there shows that this reference to the Holocaust merely has some kind of an alibi function because the museum has been severely criticized for the omission. On the ground and first floor dedicated to the first and second Soviet occupation, this large museum displays hundreds of private photographs and short biographies of victims of communism, especially deportees to Siberia, armed resistance fighters, and participants in the

¹ All quotations without indication of sources are from the texts or audio guides in the exhibitions which I documented during my research trips.

unarmed opposition. However, when it comes to the recently added exhibit on the Nazi era and the Holocaust, the photographs bear captions like: “Jews transported to concentration camps. 1943.” While the victims of the Soviets are “deported,” Jews are “transported.” Nor does the caption explain from where or to which of the camps the Jews were being “transported.” Yad Vashem has identified this photograph as actually showing the deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto in the summer of 1942, not 1943.⁴⁸ The caption of another photograph in the Holocaust exhibit reads: “Jews driven from their homes, 1941.” In this case, a far more detailed source has attributed the photograph, which shows elderly and sick Jews on a horse-drawn cart, to the Jewish photo journalist Henryk Ross who moved from Warsaw to Łódź shortly before being forced to move to the ghetto there in 1942 (not 1941). (Davies 2017) In this section of the museum, then, no attempt is made to identify individual victims and the photographs are presented with erroneous captions, both in stark contrast to the empathetic representation of ‘our’, i.e. the Lithuanian victims of communism with their names and short biographies.

A chart with the numbers of “Losses during the occupation” located on the ground floor of the exhibition may explain why the memory of the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust is apparently seen as a threat to the narrative of ‘our own’ suffering: During the two Soviet occupations (1940–41 and 1944–91), according to the chart, 20–25,000 people “died” in prisons, 28,000 “died in deportation” and 21,500 partisans and their supporters were “killed.” During the Nazi occupation (1941–44), on the other hand, 240,000 people were “killed (including about 200,000 Jews).” The victims of Stalinist terror must, of course, be commemorated and have been marginalized or forgotten way too long. However, this uneven treatment of Lithuanian suffering under communism, on the one hand, and the memory of the annihilation of the ‘Jerusalem of the North’, as Vilnius used to be called, and of Lithuanian Jewry in general, on the other, evokes a hierarchy of victims designed to foreground the narrative of the “physical and spiritual genocide against the Lithuanian people” perpetrated by the Soviets, as the museum’s guidebook informs us on its very first page. (Rudienė and Juozevičiūtė, 2003, 3)

The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia is another case in point for the containment of Holocaust memory, even though, compared to its two Baltic counterparts, it devotes the most space to the Nazi occupation. Yet when we look closely at the objects and photographs displayed there, which can be seen as the most empathy-evoking elements in an exhibition, we see significant differences in how the Soviet and Nazi victims are depicted. The permanent exhibition displays over three hundred individualizing objects – all of which pertain to victims of Soviet crimes. Objects like a mock piano build by a prisoner out of matches evoke empathy with the victims who are introduced by name. Some of the objects are specifically highlighted during the guided tours.

The victims of the Holocaust, by contrast, are represented visually by a nondescript Star of David, an antisemitic poster, a photograph that shows two people from behind – Jews walking on the street because they are not allowed to use the sidewalk; and an enlarged human-size photograph of terrified women in underwear – one of the infamous, humiliating photographs taken by perpetrators minutes before the execution of Jewish victims in Liepāja in 1941. While individualizing representations of Jewish victims through private photos or biographical objects are absent, we are introduced to individual Latvians who hid Jews, their portraits and names are exhibited. Again, the mass murder of Latvian Jews, many of whom were killed by Latvians, seems threatening to the victimhood narrative of non-Jewish Latvia.

2.2. ‘Our’ and ‘Their’ Victims in Museums that ‘Invoke Europe’

What I call the ‘invocation of Europe’ in the course of EU accession talks means taking ‘Western’, not necessarily European, Holocaust museums as role model for new permanent exhibitions to prove one’s countries ‘Europe-readiness. Cases in point are the Museum of the Slovak National

Uprising in Banská Bystrica and the Jasenovac Memorial Museum in Croatia. Both strongly allude to their intended adoption of Europeanization and European ‘standards’.

In Banská Bystrica, the permanent exhibition no longer presents the Slovak National Uprising (SNU), an armed insurrection against Nazi Germany in 1944, as an isolated historical event having “an exclusive class (regime) or national meaning but rather in a European historical context”, as an “inseparable part of European history” (Lášticová & Findor, 2008, 237). The current permanent exhibition was installed in 2004, the year Slovakia joined the EU. Already in 2000, the museum’s director and exhibition curator explained his plans to expand the museum’s scope “to fill empty areas in the historical memory so as to be able to correspond to a European standard” (Sniegon, 2008). The concept for the new exhibition, written before EU accession argued that,

even today when Slovakia is striving to take part in the European integration process the anti-fascist resistance and the SNU have significance as political capital which cannot be lost. ... This will increase the chances of the Slovak Museum of the National Uprising of presenting the anti-fascist resistance and the SNU as part of the European anti-fascist resistance during the Second World War. (as cited in Sniegon, 2008)

According to the guidebook’s introduction the exhibition “presents the decisive political, military and social events of Slovak history in the context of the history of Europe in the years 1918–1948” (Museum of the SNU, 2006). The invocation of Slovakia’s European character is obvious in the titles of the chapters “Europe and Slovakia after the year 1938” and “SNU as a part of European antifascist resistance during the Second World War”. The museum presents the uprising as a worthy example of European integration: “The Slovak National Uprising was an inseparable part of European antifascist movement. Inspiring for today’s effort to integrate Europe was the involvement of people of 32 nations and nationalities in the Uprising.”

Reflecting the Europeanization of the Holocaust, the new permanent exhibition discusses the extermination of Slovak Jews for the first time in a separate section (Lášticová & Findor, 2008, 251). The permanent exhibition is dominated by numerous medals, guns and uniforms. However, the aesthetics of the museum in the Holocaust section is more modern. It includes a pillar with portraits of victims from their lives before being sent to the death camps and their names. This representation is a clear allusion to the archetypical individualization of the victim narrative at the USHMM in Washington where the three story “Tower of faces” with private photographs from 1890-1941 shows a Jewish community from a village in what is now Lithuania, which was massacred in 1941.

In contrast to this use of numerous private photographs when it comes to Jewish victims, Roma victims are depicted in a depersonalizing, even stereotypical way. The first time this museum mentioned “Gypsies” in the guidebooks I analyzed starting from the 1960s is in the guidebook from 2000: “As part of the state persecution special military labour camps were founded for non-Aryan citizens. ... In the camps Jews, Gypsies, socially discriminate people – non-Aryans – were placed, having been deprived of all citizen and human rights” (Slovak National Uprising Museum, 2000, 15; see also Kamenec, 2007, 314-326). Currently, Roma victims are present in the outer commemorative part between the two halves of the museum and in the 1000-”pages” of information on the TV screens all around the permanent exhibition. In the permanently visible non-digital parts of the exhibition itself, Roma are not mentioned, but might be subsumed under the term “racially persecuted people” on the panel that deals with the “unification of antifascist forces” before the Uprising. Eight “pages” of the info-screen material deal with Roma under the title “Persecution and repressions against Romany population” – if the visitor click on this respective section, thus low in the ‘hierarchy of visibility’: “From autumn 1942 to autumn 1944

the Roma question in Slovakia was solved in form of labour camps for antisocial and difficult to adapt people. Over 5000 Roma were in the camps. In November 1944 the labour camp in Dubnica nad Váhom was transformed into a detainment camp, where whole Roma families were concentrated. It was reckoned that they would be deported into some sort of the [sic] concentration camps but because of a typhoid fever epidemic, the deportations did not take place.” Nazi argumentation is reproduced when using the terms “antisocial” and “difficult to adapt people” here.

There is no mention of Roma taking part in the Uprising on the info-screen. A map of “detainment camps for the Roma population” in Slovakia follows as well as a humiliating, not at all empathy-evoking photograph of the “exhumation and identification of the victims from the mass grave near Krupina”. It shows two men, pulling a dead, presumably Roma man who is hanging upside down out of a crevice after they have tied a rope around his thigh. Another text screen informs about 14 Roma men who were shot at the small town of Tisovec followed by two photographs showing the “exhumation and identification of the murdered Roma Pod Hradovou [a part of the town]”—corpses first scattered in the mud and then strung together on timber planks. While there are hundreds of private photographs from other victim groups on the info-screen, only two photographs show portraits of Roma, Jozef and Jakub Eremiaš, two young Roma murdered at Kremnička on November 20th 1944.

At the Jasenovac Memorial Museum the first permanent exhibition after Croatia’s independence only opened during the EU accession talks in 2006. (Radonić 2010) In the preface of the museum’s publication, the Croatian Minister of Culture stresses that the Jasenovac Memorial’s exhibition has a “specific architecture” – a phrase that alludes to the circumstance that it looks like other Holocaust memorial museums despite the fact that more Serbs and Roma than Jews were killed there and that it is thus not primarily a Holocaust museum. As such, the Minister claims, it is “part of the European cultural heritage and symbolizes a place which requires remembering and encourages learning about the history of a nation” that has – as the Croatian version but not its English translation continues – “actually always communicated with the world and Europe” (Benčić-Rimay, 2006, 5). As Nataša Jovičić, the long-term director, stressed in an interview for the Croatian state-owned newspaper *Vjesnik* (2004, July 24), “we want to be part of the modern European education and museum system and comply with the framework given by institutions dealing with these topics”. There were no such official guidelines for applicant countries, so external political pressure in the course of EU accession did not seem to have played a role. Rather, the need to design both a ‘Western’ and a ‘European’ exhibition appears to have been internalized by the curators. The exhibition explicitly names the USHMM as its role model (*Vjesnik*, 2004, 7 March).²

Given that over 16.000 Roma were murdered in Jasenovac, which makes them the second largest victim group after the Serbs, “Gypsies–Roma” are mentioned in the 1974 guidebook (Trivunčić, 1974, 28) as the first ones to be interned in the “Gypsy camp” Uštica. We learn that this part of the Jasenovac camp complex was founded in the first half of 1942. In the guide book from 1981 Roma are mentioned briefly when introducing the racist policy of the Ustaša who “wanted to annihilate all Serbs, Jews and Gypsies” (Jokić, 1981, 5).

The current exhibition’s approach is to allow ‘space for the individual victims to speak, so that their dignity is experienced’, as the Jasenovac museum website puts it (<http://www.jusp->

² I discuss the oddity that copying non-European Western museums serves as proof of Europeaness – and that the Croatian concentration camp memorial does not take for example German *in situ* memorial sites as role model in Radonić 2021, 108.

jasenovac.hr). The names of Roma victims are inscribed among the others on the glass plates hovering above the heads of the visitors in the exhibition and the Roma victims are always mentioned alongside the others. The panel on the legal legitimization of crimes reads: “By the legal provisions on racial affiliation Jews and Roma (Gypsies) were stripped of their rights and subjected to various forms of persecution and seizure of their property.” The text panel on deportations informs us that “Jews, Roma and Serbs were deported *en masse* from the whole territory of the NDH.” The panel which depicts Jasenovac as a death camp explicates: “Serbs, Jews and Roma were murdered with no verdict since they did not fit into the proclaimed Ustaša concept of racial and national purity.” There is one map in the exhibition, on which Uštica is marked, but there is no explanation why it mentioned there or what it was; it is not even said that it was a “Gypsy camp”. A central element of the exhibition are 16 video testimonies of survivors, one of them being Nadir Dedić who was arrested as a minor in the Bosnian part of the NDH in the fall of 1942, but not first of all because he belonged to the Roma community, but because he was blamed for setting a blaze as a signal for partisans.

The current museum’s publication consists of chapters on the “Independent State of Croatia” 1991–1945, the concentration camp and the destinies of each victim group written by a renowned expert. The second largest victim group, the Roma, is only mentioned once outside of the chapter dedicated to them, solely stating that “the Roma were virtually eliminated” (Jakovina, 2006, 30). Lengel-Krizman, the author of the Roma chapter, writes of the “forgotten holocaust” of Roma (2006, 159) This chapter differs from the others significantly since it addresses questions like Romany grammar or where the name Roma comes from—while the chapters on the other victim groups do not give such exoticizing background information. Only four out of twelve text pages of the chapter are devoted to the Roma in the NDH. We learn clichés about “the nomadic Roma”: “In time they learned the value of gold. ... Money comes and goes and is subject to change. Their experience of wandering through various countries taught them this golden wisdom” (157) Lengel-Krizman also raises the “fact” that “their women are still known for their colorful style of dressing” (158). Since she authored the first monograph on the Roma genocide in Jasenovac (Lengel-Krizman, 2003), which she also sums up insightfully in the chapter, one may assume that those “outliers” can be explained by some kind of weird pedagogical idea that ended up very close to racist cliché.

While such claims are unique within the scope of museums I analyzed, the non-individual depiction of Roma is rather typical. While the chapters on Serb and Jewish victims (written by a Serb and a Jewish scholar) include plenty of testimonies, there are none from Roma here, since—as the author argues in a shocking way – “the witness statements of the few survivors are so shocking that we may, although we are not bound to, accept them as trustworthy and authentic”, so she does not accept them (Lengel-Krizman, 2006, 170).

This broadsheet Jasenovac guidebook contains 221 photographs, most of them – in sharp contrast to the collectivist approach focusing on medals and guns at the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising – portraits of victims, from before and after the war as well as from inside the camp. Yet, Roma are the only ones who are represented with only four pictures, all of them solely taken by perpetrators and from inside the camp, no private photos from their lives before or after the war. One of the four shows Roma women and children, some barefoot and some sitting on the ground in the Uštica camp, on another we see an old woman with missing teeth wearing a scarf being pressed against a barbwire fence. The other, private photographs in the book give the person a name and include a short biography. I am probably not the only one who looked at face after face and dreaded to finish reading the biographical information because only for very few it says that they survived. In contrast, Roma are shown as the perpetrators chose to depict them: barefoot, sitting in the dirt and with missing teeth.

The fact that there is only one video testimony from a Roma in the exhibition can be explained by the fact that hardly any Roma survived Jasenovac. But some did survive and yet there is not a single visual representation of this group that was not produced by a perpetrator, while there are numerous portraits of Jewish, Serb and Croat victims from their life before and after the war.

Conclusion

Exhibiting individual victim stories with the help of private photographs, testimonies, biographical objects and short biographies is by no means the only curatorial strategy memorial museums use in order to evoke empathy. Yet, it is a strong tool – as the fact shows that many museums use it only for those victims whose suffering they want to emphasize. The ‘other’ victims are depicted as numbers; an anonymous mass; as piles of corpses; the way the perpetrators chose to photograph them even if this uncritically reproduces stereotypes; and in humiliating poses. For the first group of museums these ‘other’ victims are Jews because Holocaust memory seems to threaten the memory of ‘our’ own suffering under the Soviets which these museums want ‘Europe’ and the world to finally recognize. The second group of museums which tried to prove their country’s Europe-readiness through copying Western Holocaust museums in their musealizing techniques, Jewish victims are portrayed individually because of the ‘universalization of the Holocaust’ is understood as a ‘standard’ here. Partially probably also because of EU’s efforts to include the marginalized memory of the Roma genocide in the canon of European memory culture, Roma victims are for the first time included in the current permanent exhibitions in this group of museums. Yet, they here clearly feature as the ‘other’ victims, exhibited hanging upside down from a rope or barefoot and dirty sitting on the floor. Obviously, there is a long way to go from the introduction of a specific group of victims into the museum narrative to an individualizing, not impious representation of the persecuted.

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