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‘Our’ vs. ‘Inherited’ Museums. PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors

Abstract. The Polish and the Hungarian governing party, PiS and Fidesz, are mnemonic warriors who had already tried to enforce their memory politics during their first government terms, as their flagship museums, the Warsaw Rising Museum, opened in 2004, and the House of Terror in Budapest, opened in 2002, show. In museums they ‘inherited’ from their predecessors, the current governments either change content, as PiS at the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, or ‘only’ battle against the directors in office, as happened at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest. Yet even mnemonic warriors cannot ignore international developments like the ‘universalization of the Holocaust’. As the author shows, the Polish and the Hungarian governments favored opening new museums over changing existing museums identified as ‘Jewish’, including those that explicitly deal with Polish and Hungarian complicity. New museums, like the Ulma Family Museum in southeastern Poland, the House of Fates in Budapest, and the Warsaw Ghetto Museum, focus on rescuers of Jews and uplifting messages of Polish and Hungarian heroism.

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In their inspiring analyses of postcommunist memory politics, Michael Bernhard, Jan Kubik, and Anna Seleny have argued that both Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz in Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński’s Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) in Poland are ‘mnemonic warriors’.¹ In contrast to mnemonic pluralists and mnemonic abnegators, mnemonic warriors ‘draw a sharp line between themselves (the proprietors of the “true” vision of the past) and other actors

¹ Michael Bernhard / Jan Kubik, Roundtable Discord. The Contested Legacy of 1989 in Poland, in: Michael Bernhard / Jan Kubik, eds, *Twenty Years After Communism. The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, Oxford 2014, 60-84; Anna Seleny, *Revolutionary Road. 1956 and the Fracturing of Hungarian Historical Memory*, in: Bernhard / Kubik, eds, *Twenty Years After Communism*, 37-59.

who cultivate “wrong” or “false” versions of history’.² Collective memory appears to warrior-politicians as largely non-negotiable. The meaning of events is determined by their relationship to a ‘golden era’ of national height. Mnemonic warriors claim that ‘the problems of the present (and the future) cannot be effectively addressed unless the whole polity is set on the proper foundation, constructed according to the “true” vision of history’.³ Alternative narratives of the past are, by definition, understood as distorted and, therefore, need to be delegitimized or ostracized.

Bernhard’s and Kubik’s comparative study of seventeen postcommunist countries focuses on national mnemonic actors and the ways the 1989 transition has been commemorated in the context of their respective national memory regimes. This restriction on the national context seems conceivable when it comes to the commemoration of 1989 and the 1956 revolution in Hungary. Yet, I apply this concept of the mnemonic warrior to memory politics in connection to World War II and therefore must—instead of remaining at the national level—take international developments into stronger consideration. I compare memorial museums in two European countries, Poland and Hungary, currently run by mnemonic warriors. I examine parallels and differences in the development of the Hungarian and Polish museum landscapes, asking how these landscapes are affected by international trends. The comparison of Polish and Hungarian museums aims to demonstrate that even mnemonic warriors, whose aggressive memory politics succeeds in dominating the national narrative—combined with an authoritarian backlash in both countries and severe cuts in democratic checks and balances—are heavily influenced by international developments: the Europeanization of memory and, above all, the universalization of the Holocaust. I am interested in the varying ways in which the tensions between mnemonic warriors’ objectives and those international trends affect specific museums in Poland and Hungary: While PiS effectively changed the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, other museums—conceived as ‘Jewish’ and/or devoted to the Holocaust—remain unchanged in both countries. In Hungary, even the long-planned second Budapest Holocaust Museum, conceived by Fidesz, the so-called House of Fates, is still awaiting opening.

After briefly introducing the relevant international memory trends, I will show parallels between the two flagships of Orbán’s and the Kaczyński twins’ memory politics: the House of Terror in Budapest and the Warsaw Rising Museum. These two museums play a key role in understanding the memory politics of Orbán and Fidesz between 1998 and 2002, and of PiS between 2005 and 2007. From there, I will go on to explore how the current Fidesz and PiS govern-

² Michael Bernhard / Jan Kubik, *A Theory of the Politics of Memory*, in: Bernhard / Kubik, eds, *Twenty Years After Communism*, 7-34, 17.

³ Bernhard / Kubik, *A Theory*, 13.

ments have dealt with museums 'inherited' from their political predecessors: the Holocaust Memorial Centre (HDKE) in Budapest, the Warsaw Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ), and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk—the former two, in retrospect curiously enough, co-initiated by Viktor Orbán and Lech Kaczyński respectively. Finally, I will discuss the attempts to open new 'counter'-museums, aimed at supplanting the 'inherited' museums in order to represent the mnemonic warriors' dominant narrative on the Holocaust, in which the rescuers of Jews in both Poland and Hungary play a crucial part.

This article stands at the intersection of two projects. It draws from my recently completed five-year habilitation project 'World War II in Post-Communist Memorial Museums', in which I analyzed how memorial museums in all East European EU member states exhibit the World War II period, and I examined the role EU accession talks played in their transformation. The in-depth diachronic analysis of ten museums from Estonia to Croatia included the Warsaw Rising Museum, the House of Terror and the Holocaust Memorial Center. My new ERC project on Globalized Memorial Museums investigates how international museum aesthetics translates into respective national contexts.⁴

In this article, the museums I visited several times during the five years, their permanent exhibitions, guidebooks, and museum officials' publications and interviews serve as the main sources for the analysis.⁵ For the comparison, I apply critical discourse analysis of museums' narratives, visual history, and hybrid media analysis. Even when dealing with well-researched museums like the House of Terror and the Warsaw Rising Museum I hope to show the innovative aspects of this endeavor: My understanding of museums as hybrid media that are more than merely the sum of texts, photographs, and objects allows a stronger focus on aesthetics and visual elements. In some cases, museums even send opposing messages when aesthetically copying international role models while transporting nationalist, historically revisionist messages on the text level. Furthermore, the comparison of the Hungarian and Polish cases allows discussion of the limits of the mnemonic-warrior concept when the internationally highly relevant topic of the Holocaust is involved. I argue that

⁴ This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No. 816784). The article is based on my lecture at the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin in the context of the colloquium 'Identitätsfabriken? Museen & historische Bildung in Polen' in November 2019.

⁵ I hired native speakers for the analysis of newspaper coverage and key articles in Polish and Hungarian. Whenever I do not give a source for a quote from an exhibition, this quote is from my own research at the museums respectively from the photo-documentation I brought back home from each museum—except the House of Terror, which was the only one not to grant me a photo permit.

while international criticism has drawn a lot from domestic political criticism and scholarly analyses within Hungary and Poland, domestic critics would have remained unsuccessful were it not for the international interventions.

The Universalization of the Holocaust and the Europeanization of Memory

The post-Cold War ‘memory-boom’ in the West has placed the Holocaust center stage as the ‘negative icon’⁶ of the 20th century. In the course of what was termed ‘universalization of the Holocaust’, the Shoah has come to stand for a universal imperative requiring respect for human rights, in general, and a ‘container’ for the memory of various victims and victim groups.⁷ In engagements with violent pasts, the figure of the hero and/or martyr has been replaced by that of the victim—capturing either the individual and his/her ‘ordinary life before’, or referring to collective victimhood.⁸ The latter allows for an externalization of responsibility, creating a ‘Europe of victims’.⁹ Victimhood narratives compete and various victim groups stress that they too have suffered ‘just like the Jews’.¹⁰

In Europe, the memory of the Holocaust became a negative founding myth at the beginning of the 21st century—thus adding a specific European dimension to the ‘universalization’.¹¹ Postwar Europe was now understood as a collective that had developed shared structures in order to avoid a recurrence of the Holocaust. In response to the search for an identity that goes beyond a merely economic and monetary union, this founding myth provided a compelling common narrative for European politicians and those scholars who chose to participate in identity-construction. This is one of the reasons the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)—founded in Sweden as a network of politicians and experts in 1998—aroused so much interest at the time, and today includes thirty-four countries, most of them European. The internation-

⁶ Dan Diner, *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse. Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust*, Göttingen 2007, 7.

⁷ Daniel Levy / Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter. Der Holocaust*, Frankfurt/M. 2001.

⁸ Henry Rousso, *History of Memory, Policies of the Past. What For?*, in: Konrad H. Jarausch / Thomas Lindenberger, eds, *Conflicted Memories. Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*, New York/NY 2011, 23-38, 32.

⁹ Katrin Hammerstein / Birgit Hofmann, *Europäische ‘Interventionen’. Resolutionen und Initiativen zum Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit*, in: Katrin Hammerstein et al., eds, *Aufarbeitung der Diktatur. Diktat der Aufarbeitung?*, Göttingen 2009, 189-203.

¹⁰ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford/CA 2009.

¹¹ Claus Leggewie / Anne Lang, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt*, Munich 2011.

al Holocaust conference that took place in Stockholm on 27 January 2000, the fifty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz–Birkenau, recommended that countries introduce a Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January or another date connected to the murder of the Jews.¹² While not officially defined as a precondition for membership during the eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004, these ‘standards’ were followed by the future member countries. Acknowledging the Holocaust became an implied, yet unuttered, entrance ticket to the EU.¹³

Yet, alongside this ‘Europeanization of the Holocaust’, since 1989 another re-narration of history has taken place in the eastern European countries.¹⁴ In the context of democratic transition, writing about the communist past ‘was also a means to get involved in politics. Historians were not the only producers of history but had to compete with former dissidents, journalists, and politicians.’¹⁵ Along with the communist regimes, the narrative of the heroic antifascist struggle has been delegitimized too. When it comes to monuments from the communist era, those were relocated rather than destroyed in most post-communist countries,¹⁶ for example to statue parks in Budapest and Sofia or the Museum of Occupation in Tallinn, while in Croatia over 3,000 memorials for the Tito partisans’ antifascist struggle were destroyed.¹⁷ The trauma of communist crimes, often evoked with symbols familiar to those specific for representations of the Holocaust (railway tracks, carriages), has since 1989 become the principal focus of public memory discourses in postcommunist countries.¹⁸

¹² Harald Schmid, ‘Europäisierung des Auschwitzgedenkens? Zum Aufstieg des 27. Januar 1945 als ‘Holocaustgedenktage’ in Europa, in: Jan Eckel / Claudia Moisel, eds, *Universalisierung des Holocaust? Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik in internationaler Perspektive*, Göttingen 2008, 174–202.

¹³ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*, London 2005. In contrast to the EU, when it came to NATO membership, a representative of the US State Department in 2003 explicitly stressed that the IHRA was ‘part and parcel of the creation of a community of values in the Euro-Atlantic world. [...] We have in each of the seven NATO candidate-countries and in Central and Eastern Europe more broadly made clear that when you do business in an institution like NATO, you do it by appealing to the cooperation of your friends and allies on the basis of shared goals and values.’ James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution. Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe*, London, New Haven/CT 2010, 112.

¹⁴ Marek Kucia, ‘The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe’, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 30, no. 1 (2016), 97–119.

¹⁵ Valentin Behr, ‘Historical Policy-Making in Post-1989 Poland. A Sociological Approach to the Narratives of Communism’, *European Politics and Society* 18, no. 1 (2017), 81–95, 83.

¹⁶ Kenneth E. Foote / Attila Tóth / Anett Árvay, ‘Hungary after 1989. Inscribing a New Past on Place’, *Geographical Review* 90, no. 3 (2000), 301–334.

¹⁷ Juraj Hrženjak, *Rušenje antifašističkih spomenika u Hrvatskoj 1990–2000*, Zagreb 2002.

¹⁸ This dominant discourse is contested to different degrees within the respective countries, cf. Stefan Troebst, *Jalta versus Stalingrad, GULag versus Holocaust. Konfligierende Erinnerungskulturen im größeren Europa*, in: Bernd Faulenbach / Franz-Josef Jelich, eds, *‘Transformationen’ der Erinnerungskulturen in Europa nach 1989*, Essen 2006, 23–50.

The resulting 'divided memory' between 'East' and 'West' has prompted representatives of postcommunist states to demand that communist crimes be condemned 'just as emphatically' as the Holocaust. Therefore, after the eastern enlargement of the EU, the new member states managed to reintroduce a narrative focused on totalitarian crimes, yet, in contrast to the Cold War, this time they established it themselves for their own countries and the EU. In 2009, the European Parliament recommended that another memorial day be introduced, the date of the Hitler–Stalin pact of 1939, on 23 August, as the day when the victims of Nazism and Stalinism to be commemorated together. While the memory of the victims of Stalinism is thereby finally added to the European canon, the victims of both regimes are explicitly equated, which raises new problems. While the Holocaust Memorial Day includes the crimes of their own collective, the European Day of Remembrance externalizes responsibility to alien powers, the Nazis and the Soviets: National memory politics depicts one's 'own people' as innocent victims of foreign oppression, while participation in the communist regime is omitted when speaking only about 'the significance of the Soviet order and occupation on and for citizens of the post-Communist States'.¹⁹

In this field of conflicting memories, museums are key producers of knowledge about history. Public museums showcase which version of the past is canonized for identity purposes. Consequently, they are definitely not neutral spaces of knowledge transfer; they do not simply depict 'what actually happened'. The museums are, rather, manifestations of cultural patterns and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that govern the relations between social, ethnic, and religious in- and out-groups—and are, therefore, contested spaces.²⁰ Memorial museums combine information about the past with commemorative elements and thereby spell out an inherent contradiction. While memorials set a certain version of history in stone, it is assumed that historical museums are 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.'²¹ The fact that so many recent memorial museums find themselves instantly politicized reflects the uneasy conceptual coexistence of reverent remembrance and critical interpretation.

¹⁹ Declaration of the European Parliament on the Proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, 23 September, 2008, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0439+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>. All internet references were accessed on 8 April 2020.

²⁰ Monika Sommer-Sieghart, *Historische Ausstellungen als 'contested space'*, in: Johannes Feichtinger et al., eds, *Schauplatz Kultur – Zentraleuropa*, Innsbruck 2010, 159–166.

²¹ Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums. The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, Oxford 2007, 8.

Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, opened in 1973, and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), opened in 1993 in Washington/D. C., were the first institutions to be designated 'memorial museums' in order to distinguish them from their *in situ* counterparts, located where the crimes were committed. The Yad Vashem museum was by no means a role model right from the start; this happened only in the course of the universalization of the Holocaust—and especially since the opening of its Holocaust History Museum in 2005. Today, the universalization of the Holocaust has rendered the memorial museum approach paradigmatic for dealing with twentieth-century atrocities, especially in postcommunist countries. USHMM and Yad Vashem have provided core reference points for the construction of museum narratives and designing aesthetic solutions: a universal moral orientation based on the 'lessons' of the Holocaust;²² a strong focus on individual victims, their personal stories, testimonies, photographs and objects; and aesthetic standards, such as darkened rooms with victims' names written in white letters or auratic objects. Interestingly enough, nowadays also museums *in situ* refer to this archetypical aesthetics, even if they portray communist crimes as the greater evil. As I will show in the following, these 'borrowed' aesthetic solutions serve to deliver a completely opposite—collective—message.

Flagships of Fidesz's and PiS's Memory Politics

The most obvious sign that today's Hungarian and Polish governments have a lot in common is the fact that the EU has initiated Article 7 procedures against Poland (in 2017) and Hungary (in 2018) for a 'clear risk of a serious breach' of basic EU values by a member state: the 'values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities'.²³ The initiation of the procedures was a reaction to the authoritarian backlash and the weakening of democratic checks and balances that has defined Fidesz's politics since 2010 and PiS's since 2015.²⁴

This authoritarian development is closely connected to the mnemonic regimes the two parties have been trying to enforce. One commonality is that both former Polish president Lech Kaczyński and Hungarian prime minister

²² Jeffrey C. Alexander, The Social Construction of Moral Universals, *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002), 5-85.

²³ Treaty on European Union, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2012/art_2/oj. Article 7 procedures need unanimity, so Hungary can veto measures against the Polish government, and vice versa.

²⁴ Waldemar Hummer, Rechtsstaatlichkeitsprobleme in Ungarn und Polen – Misst die Europäische Kommission dabei mit zweierlei Maß?, *EU-Infothek*, 12 May 2017.

Viktor Orbán participated in the transformation of 1989 and thus consider it something that was supposed to become a turning point, yet both Fidesz and PiS imagine the 1989 roundtable pacts as “rotten deals” that resulted in “unfinished,” “corrupt,” or “stolen” revolutions and/or processes of democratization.²⁵ Therefore, the mnemonic warriors have initiated memory wars against the ‘pseudo-transition’ that failed to sweep away the socialists and provide ‘moral clarity’. PiS calls this *polityka historyczna*, their politics of history meant not as the analytical concept many scholars work with, but as a warrior’s undertaking, a weaponized term.²⁶ In order to show how this politics, based on historically revisionist nationalist narratives, was shaped between 1998 and 2002 in Hungary and 2005 and 2007 in Poland, I will look at two flagship museums developed by Fidesz and PiS during the first government terms. Back then, both parties established institutions reflecting their visions, but were far from being able to enforce them as the sole legitimate narrative about the past.

The House of Terror in Budapest (2002)

Prime minister Viktor Orbán inaugurated the House of Terror state museum in a big rally during the election campaign in 2002, as a campaign goody for Fidesz voters.²⁷ The museum is located at the historical site where people were detained, interrogated, tortured, or killed, both during the regime of the Arrow Cross Party (1944-1945) and by the communist regime after 1945. This institution is essential for understanding Fidesz’s narrative about the past: Although the building was only used by the security police until the 1950s, the chronology displayed in the museum covers also a speech delivered by Orbán in postcommunist Hungary and the opening of the museum, as if to suggest that Orbán himself was involved in liberating Hungary.

²⁵ Michael Bernhard / Jan Kubik, The Politics and Culture of Memory Regimes. A Comparative Analysis, in: Bernhard / Kubik, eds, *Twenty Years after Communism*, 261-296, 278. While this is a key argument for other PiS officials, it was somewhat more difficult for Lech Kaczyński himself to maintain it, given that he participated in the roundtable negotiations. Orbán on the other hand can stress his role in 1989, first of all his speech during the reburial of Imre Nagy, and at the same time criticize the ‘pseudo-transition’ that failed to vanquish the socialists. Cf. Seleny, *Revolutionary Road*, 40.

²⁶ Katrin Steffen, Ambivalenzen des affirmativen Patriotismus. Geschichtspolitik in Polen, *Osteuropa* 56, no. 11-12 (2006), 219-233, 219; Peter Oliver Loew, Helden oder Opfer? Erinnerungskulturen in Polen nach 1989, *Osteuropa* 58, no. 6 (2008), 85-102, 102.

²⁷ Péter Apor, Eurocommunism. Commemorating Communism in Contemporary Eastern Europe, in: Małgorzata Pakier / Bo Stråth, eds, *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, New York/NY 2012, 233-246, 233.

The museum symbolically equalizes the Nazi and the communist eras. The parallelization of the symbols of the Arrow Cross and the red star already dominates the façade and the entrance hall to the building. Yet, the Nazi era is only displayed in two-and-a-half rooms, out of more than twenty, and the Holocaust is represented mainly by a projection of ice flowing down the Danube, referring back to the fact that members of the Arrow Cross Party used to shoot Jews on the bank of the river. Where the exhibition does once refer to the Budapest ghetto, it argues that it was 'lucky' to be liquidated only in 1945—a strange choice of words, to say the least. When criticized for effectively marginalizing the Holocaust, the director of the House of Terror and front-woman of Fidesz memory politics, Mária Schmidt, responded that the Holocaust belonged in a separate Holocaust museum.²⁸

The Horthy era (1920-1944) is depicted as a functioning multiparty system, while its antisemitic and authoritarian aspects are ignored. The museum guidebook says: 'Up to the time of the Nazi occupation of 1944, Hungary's affairs were conducted by an elected, legitimate parliament and government, with representatives of active opposition parties sitting in the chambers.'²⁹ Hungarian Jews murdered before the German occupation in 1944 are completely omitted.³⁰ The fact that most Hungarian Jews were deported immediately after the Nazi occupation, most of them in May 1944, while Horthy was still in power, and long before the Arrow Cross Party came to power, is blurred.³¹ Jews are depicted as leaders of the communist state in the 1950s, while it is not mentioned that many of them also became victims of communist terror after the 1945-1948 period.³²

The vast majority of Hungarians are depicted solely as victims—except for the 'Hungarian Nazis' from the Arrow Cross Party, who allegedly 'in great numbers'³³ simply changed uniforms after 1945 and became communist state security. The 'changing clothes' room features very prominently fairly at the beginning of the exhibition tour. This puts forward a historically incorrect

²⁸ László Seres, Andrassy út 60, *Élet és irodalom* 46, no. 6 (2003); Regina Fritz, Gespaltene Erinnerung. Museale Darstellungen des Holocaust in Ungarn, in: Regina Fritz / Carola Sachse / Edgar Wolfrum, eds, *Nationen und ihre Selbstbilder. Postdiktatorische Gesellschaften in Europa*, Göttingen 2008, 129-149, 137.

²⁹ Mária Schmidt, ed, *House of Terror*. Andrassy Street 60. Catalogue, Budapest 2008, 6.

³⁰ Jeffrey Blutinger, An Inconvenient Past. Post-Communist Holocaust Memorialization, *Shofar. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 29, no. 1 (2010), 73-94, 84.

³¹ Gerhard Seewann / Eva Kovács, Juden und der Holocaust in der ungarischen Erinnerungskultur seit 1945, *Südosteuropa* 54, no. 1 (2006), 24-59, 53.

³² István Rév, The Terror of the House, in: Sophie Wahnich et al., eds, *Politics of Collective Memory. Cultural Patterns of Commemorative Practices in Post-War Europe*, Vienna 2008, 47-89, 65.

³³ House of Terror Museum, Changing Clothes, https://www.terrorhaza.hu/en/allando-kiallitas/second_floor/changing-clothes.

claim that the same people—and thus a limited number of Hungarians—were supposedly responsible for the crimes committed by communist state security as well.³⁴ Therefore, when individual Hungarian perpetrators are shown and named in the ‘Gallery of Victimizers’ toward the end of the exhibition, this is the highly politicized prelude for the 1989 video in which Orbán features prominently: The selection of victimizers looks arbitrary, but a closer look shows that the fathers of two Hungarian liberal politicians who were active when the museum opened, Iván Pető and Tamás Bauer, are shown, while prominent ‘victimizers’, relatives of members of the museum’s board of trustees, are left out.³⁵ Even some of those responsible for World War II atrocities are featured in the museum only in their subsequent capacity as ‘victims of communist dictatorship’.³⁶ Their photographs and short biographies are exhibited in the prison cells in the basement: Here all anticommunist fighters are depicted as heroes ‘who sacrificed their lives or freedom in the fight against oppression’.³⁷ The museum presents individual stories only insofar as they contribute to the narrative of the heroic struggle for the ‘Hungarian cause’.

While most contributions about this well-researched museum focus on the narrative, this article goes beyond text analysis and contrasts the museum narrative with aesthetic elements. On the aesthetic level, the House of Terror has adopted the model of the ‘Tower of Faces’ from the USHMM: Here, a three-story installation is exhibited, comprising private photographs shot between 1890 and 1941 of members of the Jewish community of Eišišķės in present-day Lithuania, who fell victim to a massacre in 1941. The House of Terror, too, exhibits portraits of the victims on a wall that ranges from the ground floor up to the roof. The apparent similarity notwithstanding, the photographs displayed in Budapest are not private in nature. In the case of the USHMM, Yaffa Eliach, the granddaughter of the village photographer, invested many years searching for those private photos and did her best to attribute them by name. In contrast, the House of Terror exhibits photos the communist police took for their own records. They are uniform mug shots of humiliated victims taken by the perpetrators. Thus, the Hungarian museum appears to copy the USHMM, but turns the individualizing installation into the opposite when exhibiting anonymous and humiliating shots of the perpetrators’ gaze, which all blur into collective victimhood. Moreover, the installation comprises only victims of the commu-

³⁴ Krisztián Ungváry, *Der Umgang mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit in der heutigen ungarischen Erinnerungskultur*, in: Bernd Faulenbach / Franz-Josef Jelich, eds, ‘Transformationen’ der Erinnerungskulturen in Europa nach 1989, Essen 2006, 201–220, 213.

³⁵ Krisztián Ungváry, *Orte der Erinnerung an kommunistische Verbrechen. Das ‘Haus des Terrors’ und der ‘Zentralfriedhof’*, in: Matthias Weber et al., eds, *Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa. Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit und Perspektiven*, Oldenburg 2011, 219–233, 222.

³⁶ Schmidt, ed, *House of Terror*, 86.

³⁷ Schmidt, ed, *House of Terror*, 84.

nist era. Here, suffering under communism has not only been prioritized over the narrative of suffering under Nazism, but also the latter has been omitted entirely. Also, the so-called 'Hall of Tears' in the basement reminds strongly of the Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem. This aesthetics originating from the turn toward the individual victim in 'Western' museology is placed here in a narrative of collective (Hungarian) suffering at the hands of communists, a few Hungarians, and German Nazis. This does not imply that Holocaust museums do not present collective Jewish suffering—all museums contribute to identity building and are thus highly political. Decisive is the degree to which (heterogeneous) individual victims are given a voice and represented in ways in which they chose to portray themselves, as against blurring them into an anonymous mass to signify organic national suffering.

The permanent exhibition at the House of Terror enforces this closed narrative on the visitors—for instance, by controlling their path through the building: Visitors are forced to wait for an elevator, are then crowded into the narrow space of the painfully slowly descending hoist, while they listen to stories of the person who had to wipe away blood from the torture cells, on their way to the very same (reconstructed) torture cells in the cellar.

As mentioned before, this museum was the first Orbán government's gift for its domestic audience: a museum that gives simple answers, externalizes guilt, promotes Hungarian collective victimhood, and does not afflict one's own collective. Yet the need to signal Hungary's EU-fitness in the course of EU accession talks, as well as sharp domestic and international critique³⁸ of the House of Terror, motivated Orbán to initiate also the Holocaust Memorial Center. The House of Terror museum had been proposed by Fidesz MP József Szájer in 1998 and the foundation that was responsible bought the building for the museum in 2000. In 2001, Minister of Culture Zoltán Rockenbauer announced in parliament that in addition a Holocaust museum was to be opened in Budapest, but Fidesz approved its funding only in March 2002, weeks after the House of Terror opened.³⁹ Since Orbán lost power in the 2002 elections, Fidesz could not control the content of the new Holocaust museum's exhibition. This has led to opening up a space for a pluralistic museum landscape in the country.

³⁸ Péter Morvay was the first to point out how important the international critique was in this regard, Péter Morvay, Alibimúzeum, *Hetek*, 22 March 2002. Cf. Richard Chaim Schneider, Wie Ungarn sich erinnert. Das Holocaust-Museum von Budapest, *Die Zeit*, 3 June 2004; Regina Fritz / Imke Hansen, Zwischen nationalem Opfermythos und europäischen Standards. Der Holocaust im ungarischen Erinnerungsdiskurs, in: Eckel / Moisel, eds, *Universalisierung des Holocaust?*, 59-85, 76.

³⁹ Brigitte Mihok, Erinnerungsüberlagerungen oder der lange Schatten der Geschichtsverzerrung, in: Brigitte Mihok, ed, *Ungarn und der Holocaust. Kollaboration, Rettung und Trauma*, Berlin 2005, 157-168, 165; Gábor Csillag, 'Little House of Terrors'. The Premises and Practices of the 'House of Terror' Museum, Budapest, *Transversal* 3, no. 1 (2002), 18-46, 21.

Warsaw Rising Museum (2004-2006)

The Warsaw Rising Museum has a similar flagship function for PiS. Lech Kaczyński was the first PiS chairman when the party was founded in 2001, and Warsaw's mayor before he became the president of Poland in 2005. Child of parents who had fought in the uprising of 1944,⁴⁰ he initiated the Warsaw Rising Museum as a milestone for the Polish 'Fourth Republic' that he and his twin brother Jarosław had envisioned.⁴¹ Once PiS had won the 2005 parliamentary elections, and Lech Kaczyński had become president at the end of the year, the Kaczyńskis tried to enforce their version of the past. PiS's first 'memory law' was an attempt to target those who publicly claimed Polish complicity in the murder of Jews during World War II. An amendment to the Penal Code—referred to as *Lex Gross*, a reaction to Jan T. Gross' book on non-Jewish Poles who murdered their Jewish neighbours in the village of Jedwabne—was first passed in 2006. The law was eventually struck down in a ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal at a time when democratic checks and balances were still functioning.

A key element of the so-called Fourth Republic idea was to install memory politics as a guideline for the national political strategy. Its founding myth is a 'patriotic' heroic narrative embodied first in the Warsaw Rising Museum. Financed by the municipality of Warsaw, it opened in 2004; the permanent exhibition was finalized in 2006.⁴² Just as in the Hungarian case, there is no doubt what the visitors are being induced to feel: At the core of the museum beats the 'heart' of the uprising. It even reproduces the uprising's soundscape and recreates 'the atmosphere of those days', as the text about it explains. Even stronger than the textual level, this central aesthetic element transports the message of the museum: Visitors are supposed to touch and feel this 'heartbeat'. In a museum that focuses on a heroic and martyrological Polish past and fades out any negative and controversial aspects,⁴³ the Poles, the uprising, and the museum are thus depicted as an organic unit. *All* wartime civilians appear to have quasi-naturally supported the uprising. Despite the huge losses after the Nazis

⁴⁰ Paweł Ukielski, Das 'Museum des Warschauer Aufstandes' als Erinnerungsort, in: Matthias Weber, ed, Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa. Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit und Perspektiven, Munich 2011, 209-218, 213.

⁴¹ For PiS the 1989 roundtable compromised the Third Republic and required a new, re-founded Poland (the Fourth Republic), in which the former communists would be completely purged from public life. Bernhard / Kubik, Roundtable Discord, 79.

⁴² Monika Heinemann, Die Musealisierung des Ghettos. Die Darstellung der Verfolgung von Juden während des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Warschauer Museen, in: Etienne François et al., eds, Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989. Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen im internationalen Vergleich, Göttingen 2013, 470-490, 476.

⁴³ Cf. Eugeniusz Cezary Król, Perzeptionen des Aufstands in Polen, in: Hans Jürgen Bömelburg / Eugeniusz Cezary Król / Michael Thomae, eds, Der Warschauer Aufstand 1944. Ereignis und Wahrnehmung in Polen und Deutschland, Paderborn 2011, 171-192, 185.

suppressed the uprising, in the museum, as some critics have observed, visitors may gain the impression that heroic Poland and Warsaw won the battle.⁴⁴

In contrast to the House of Terror, and given the huge number of Polish victims of Nazism, the museum does give a lot of space to the crimes committed against Poles during the Nazi occupation. On the other hand, this exhibition, too, foregrounds Soviet betrayal to a large degree. The exhibition begins with the persecution of the insurgents in the People's Republic. In the guidebook, the uprising is defined as 'the last attempt to save Poland from Soviet enslavement'.⁴⁵ The analysis of the guidebook shows that it devotes a lot of space to the equalization of the two totalitarian regimes: 'The Germans wanted to destroy Polish national identity and Warsaw lay at its heart. [...] The other invader—the Soviet Union—had the same aim: to exterminate the Polish elite.'⁴⁶ In 2007, a room 'The Germans in Warsaw' was added in the cellar in response to visitors' critical feedback—before, only a tiny part of the exhibition dealt with the German perpetrators.⁴⁷ Thus, while the Nazi crimes feature prominently, when it comes to perpetrators the Soviets are more prominent. Also, the Soviet perpetrators and traitors are characterized using a more emotionally charged language. The guidebook mentions Hitler in seven paragraphs, Stalin in twenty-five.⁴⁸

Individual biographies can be found in numerous drawers throughout the exhibition. The guidebook shows seventeen objects that evoke empathy with individual insurgents, whose stories are told. One is a prayer written by an eight-year old girl for her father, who had fought in the uprising: 'Shot in combat, the bullet stopped at the paper with the prayer written on it by his child'—informs the guidebook.⁴⁹ Yet, only Poles are individualized in this manner, while members of other groups are not depicted in a way that would evoke similar empathy. The only 'Jewish' object shown in the guidebook is an anonymous armband with a Star of David. The guidebook also includes twenty-four short biographies with portraits of the protagonists: insurgents, civilian helpers, Nazi and Soviet perpetrators. The only person cast as a victim in the 2007 guidebook is a Jew: Edith Stein, who converted to Catholicism and was

⁴⁴ Piotr M. Majewski, *Die Musealisierung des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Polen*, in: Stefan Troebst / Johanna Wolf, eds, *Erinnern an den Zweiten Weltkrieg. Mahnmale und Museen in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Leipzig 2011, 151-158, 156.

⁴⁵ Lena Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., *Guidebook to the Warsaw Rising Museum*, Warsaw 2007, 51.

⁴⁶ Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., *Guidebook*, 63-64.

⁴⁷ Monika Heinemann, *Krieg und Kriegserinnerung im Museum. Der Zweite Weltkrieg in polnischen historischen Ausstellungen seit den 1980er-Jahren*, Göttingen 2017, 79.

⁴⁸ Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., *Guidebook*.

⁴⁹ Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., *Guidebook*, 58.

sainted by the pope in 1997.⁵⁰ I am not arguing that Jews are underrepresented; the ghetto uprising and the Holocaust are, understandably, no more than marginal topics in the exhibition. Yet, what is striking are the different ways in which Poles and Polish Jews are represented in order not to let the Holocaust narrative overshadow that of 'our' suffering.

The guidebook calls the murder of the Warsaw population a genocide (*ludobójstwo*)⁵¹ twice. Other terms, such as 'systematic extermination of Poles' (*eksterminacja*) and 'selection' (*selekcja*) aim at equalizing Polish suffering with the Shoah: At the transit camps, 'the Germans carried out a "selection" procedure, which decided the fate of the detainees—deportation to the territory of the General Government or to the Third Reich to forced labour, and in the worst case scenario—to concentration camps.'⁵² The terms 'extermination' and 'selection' wrongly imply the same mass murder process for Jewish and non-Jewish Poles.

The section devoted to the period following the crushing of the uprising depicts the collective victim of both totalitarian regimes:

'The city slowly died. [...] The Germans achieved their objective—not only to destroy Polish culture, but also to erase all its traces. The Soviet troops, stationed on the other side of the river, did not take any action to stop the Germans. Once again, the aims of Hitler and Stalin, deadly enemies, turned out to coincide, as far as policy towards Poland was concerned. It was very convenient for the Soviet dictator that the "bourgeois" elite of the nation be destroyed and no trace of prewar Warsaw remain.'⁵³

Paweł Ukielski, the deputy director of the museum, described the ultimate outcome of the uprising as a 'victory postponed'.⁵⁴ While its immediate results were tragic, the memory of having resisted totalitarianism sustained and strengthened people during communism. Real victory—informed by the memory of the rising and the legacy of the Polish underground state—comes about with the end of communism (still to be fully achieved according to PiS), a parallel to how the Hungarian uprising of 1956 is portrayed by Fidesz. Ukielski portrays the Third Republic of the 1990s as ignorant toward the past, while in the 21st century Poles realized that such a 'cold' community concept does not

⁵⁰ Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., Guidebook, 68. The newer version of the guidebook from 2015 is almost identical, yet Stein's biography was substituted by that of Marek Edelman who fought both in the ghetto and the Warsaw uprising. Lena Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., Warsaw Rising Museum. Guidebook, Warsaw 2015, 65.

⁵¹ Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., Guidebook, 101-102.

⁵² Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., Guidebook, 168.

⁵³ Dąbkowska-Cichocka et al., Guidebook, 165.

⁵⁴ Monika Żychlińska / Erica Fontana, Museal Games and Emotional Truths. Creating Polish National Identity at the Warsaw Rising Museum, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 30, no. 2 (2016), 235-269, 248-249.

work and that only a 'memory community' can bring real change. That is why the Rising Museum was founded, he claims.⁵⁵

Analogous to Orbán's role in Hungary, Lech Kaczyński initiated not only the Rising Museum, but also—supporting the Jewish Historical Institute's initiative—the Warsaw MHPJ. In 2005, the future museum was formally established as a public–private partnership of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute, which was responsible for the permanent exhibition, the City of Warsaw, and the Ministry of Culture, which paid for the museum building. The first PiS government lost the election in 2007, and in 2010 president Lech Kaczyński died in an infamous plane crash. By this time, PiS had both laid the domestic founding myth for the Fourth Republic at the Warsaw Rising Museum and supported the international trend of Holocaust musealization, enabling a pluralistic development of the museum landscape.

'Inherited' Museums

Between the first and the second Fidesz and PiS governments, new museums opened in the two countries. Two of them, the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest and the MHPJ were, as noted above, even initiated by Orbán and Kaczyński, respectively. Yet, all of them came to pose a problem once the warriors had returned to power and 'inherited' the museums from their predecessors, whom Bernhard and Kubik framed as 'mnemonic pluralists'.⁵⁶

The Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest (2004-2006)

The Holocaust Memorial Center (HDKE) in Budapest is by no means as well known as the House of Terror. Unlike the latter, located centrally at the grand boulevard of Andrassy út, HDKE is situated on a tiny street, and hidden behind high walls.⁵⁷ This was criticized as ghettoization of the Holocaust, along with the fact that the museum is located in and under a synagogue. Nevertheless, the former Ferencváros synagogue at Páva Street was transformed into an extraordinary museum. It has been the first Holocaust museum in a central European postcommunist country oriented toward international, 'Western'

⁵⁵ Paweł Ukielski, *Der Warschauer Aufstand im Bewusstsein der Polen. Das Museum des Warschauer Aufstands als Erinnerungsort*, *European Network Remembrance and Solidarity* 136 (2006).

⁵⁶ Bernhard and Kubik depict for example Tusk as 'conciliatory and inclusive in his approach', cf. Bernhard / Kubik, *Roundtable Discord*, 72. This of course by no means implies that Tusk and the Civic Platform were not pursuing their own political agenda, albeit never enforcing memory laws and a proud, patriotic memory as the only acceptable one.

⁵⁷ Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ. *Emlékeztető*, *Magyar Narancs*, 19 February 2004.



Fig. 1: The Holocaust Memorial Center (All photographs courtesy of the author)

role models, first of all the USHMM, one, moreover, relentlessly confronting the question of Hungary's share of responsibility for the Holocaust. The exhibition presents a counter-narrative to the nationalist House of Terror.⁵⁸ It is thus somewhat surprising that the exhibition still exists in its original form in today's Hungary, where memory is increasingly morphing into a direction imposed by Fidesz's historical narrative.

The HDKE opened a few weeks before Hungary joined the EU, although only with a small temporary exhibition since the permanent one was not to be ready for another two years. Its establishment was as a result of the Europeanization and universalization of the Holocaust. The HDKE aesthetics is modeled upon abovementioned role models: dark spaces, with white life lines of the victims on black background, belongings of victims in glass showcases, and other aspects. As its director, Szabolcs Szita, puts it, the HDKE follows a program 'based on museum techniques from Western Europe'.⁵⁹ The recent trend to focus on the individualized victim is clearly visible at the exhibition. Screens with the biographies of four Jewish and one Roma family accompany the visitor from room to room, through the deprivation of their rights, property,

⁵⁸ Apor, Eurocommunism, 233.

⁵⁹ Judit Molnár, Pictures at an Exhibition. The Story of the Permanent Holocaust Exhibition From Deprivation of Rights to Genocide, 2004-2011, *Cultures of History Forum* (2012). Text in possession of the author (today unavailable at the online *Forum*).

freedom, human dignity and life. Beside the diary of Anne Frank, a diary of a Hungarian–Jewish girl is introduced: Lilla Ecséri, a year older than Anne, had to leave her flat taken over by the Germans, was separated from her mother and forced to perform hard labor, but managed to escape back to Budapest, and, eventually, survived the war. The last room, dedicated to Jewish reactions to the Holocaust, features quotes from the diaries of Adam Czerniaków and Samu Stern, leaders (*Älteste*) of the Jewish Councils of Elders (*Judenrat*) in the ghettos of Warsaw and Budapest, respectively. This allows the victims to speak with their own voices, which is crucial for an ‘integrated history’⁶⁰ that combines the victims’ and perpetrators’ perspectives and gives agency to the victims.

Although a strong focus on individual victims’ stories bears the risk of fading out the perpetrators’ perspective, the HDKE extensively deals with perpetrators as well. Not only the German personnel responsible for organizing deportations are named, but also Hungarian officials and gendarmes who systematically robbed Jews, raped, or tortured them. Some of them are shown and introduced by name. My comparison of memorial museums in all postcommunist EU member states has shown that the three photographs of Hungarian population looting a ghetto featured in this museum are rare examples of self-critically confronting the past on the visual level.⁶¹ While usually museums show representatives of authorities, police or military, here the unhesitant enrichment by civilians is documented—even showing female perpetrators.

The exhibition furthermore unsparingly displays the Horthy regime as ‘right-wing, antisemitic, nationalist and anticommunist’, and refuses to externalize responsibility to German occupation. One of the accompanying texts reads:

‘It was not under pressure from German leadership that Hungarian governments prepared the first anti-Jewish bills, and the Parliament and Regent Horthy passed them into law not in fear of the Nazi army, but under pressure from the Hungarian extreme right, and at most in emulation of the German model.’

The HDKE can thus be considered an outstanding example of ‘negative memory’⁶² as it does not blend out negative sides of the history of a country, but focuses, instead, on the crimes committed by perpetrators within society.

After Orbán became prime minister for the second time in 2010, the foundation responsible for the museum dismissed its director, László Harsányi, after two years in office. At the same time, state secretary Levente András Gál

⁶⁰ Saul Friedländer, *Nachdenken über den Holocaust*, München 2007, 159.

⁶¹ Ljiljana Radonić, *The Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest. An ‘Impossible’ Museum?*, *Der Donauraum* 1-2 (2014), 11-21.

⁶² Volkhard Knigge, *Europäische Erinnerungskultur. Identitätspolitik oder kritisch-kommunikative historische Selbstvergewisserung*, in: *Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e. V.*, eds, *kultur.macht.europa—europa.macht.kultur. Begründungen und Perspektiven europäischer Kulturpolitik*, Bonn 2008, 150-161, 157.

demanded a more positive depiction of Horthy's role, and stressed the need to make clear that the Hungarian invasion of Romanian territories was in no way connected to the later deportations—as the exhibition suggested and as was in fact the case.⁶³ Although Fidesz discussed changing it several times, the permanent exhibition of the HDKE has not thus far been replaced. The Hungarian copyright law of 1999 protects exhibitions from smaller changes.⁶⁴ There was only one short-term non-invasive exception: Nationalist critics objected to a photograph of bishop Ottokár Prohászka next to one of Hitler. Prohászka had been jointly responsible for the antisemitic *numerus clausus* passed in Hungary in 1920, and died in 1927.⁶⁵ A curtain briefly hid Prohászka's picture, but because any curious visitor would peer behind it, attracting even more attention, it was soon removed.

In 2011, renowned historian Szabolcs Szita was appointed as the new director of the HDKE. Szita focused strongly on the issue of Hungarians who saved Jews—the topic of his postdoctoral research. Yet he did not prompt a change of the exhibition. In 2014, his contract was not extended and the position was vacant for a long time. The institution was managed *ad interim* by György Haraszti, the Chairman of the Board of the Foundation. Salaries were not paid for several months in 2014 and the idea emerged to locate the HDKE under the management of the planned 'House of Fates' museum. In this phase, well-respected researchers from the HDKE, such as László Csósz, searched for employment elsewhere, which would grant a safer perspective. Finally, the remodeling plans were shelved for no obvious reason and Szita was reappointed in 2015.⁶⁶ Since January 2019, another renowned historian, Tamás Kovács, has run the HDKE. What is interesting is that the Fidesz government has not tried to remove the permanent exhibition or to close the museum, but has used more 'subtle' mechanisms to marginalize it, like not paying wages.

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews (2013-2014)

The MHPJ opened in 2013, the core exhibition in 2014. The MHPJ is situated at the site of the last headquarters of the Warsaw Jewish Council of Elders (*Judenrat*), where the ghetto uprising broke out in 1943. The building is situated opposite Nathan Rappaport's and Leon Marek Suzin's Ghetto Heroes

⁶³ Gyula Varsányi, Új úton az 'Emlékezet Háza'. A Páva utca új vezetői szerint nem lesz értermetlen racionalizálás, *NOL*, 20 May 2011.

⁶⁴ Kiállítás mint gyűjteményes mű szerzői jogi védelme, April 2014, <https://www.szttnh.gov.hu/kiadv/ipsz/201402-pdf/szerzoijog.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Molnár, Pictures at an Exhibition.

⁶⁶ Péter Hamvay, Bosszú a Holokauszt Emlékközpontban, *Magyar Narancs*, 3 September 2015.

Monument, inaugurated in 1948.⁶⁷ In 2006, the museum expert, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, a professor of performance studies at New York University and of Polish-Jewish background, was appointed to head the Academic Team of the Core Exhibition.⁶⁸ Together with the museum's former director, history professor Dariusz Stola, she repeatedly stressed that the MHPJ is not a Holocaust museum. It is a museum that deals with centuries of Jewish-Polish coexistence. And yet, most debates about this internationally much praised, yet within Poland much criticized, institution circle around antisemitism and the Holocaust.⁶⁹

Whereas the Warsaw Rising Museum is highly praised by Polish nationalist politicians and scholars, while non-nationalist scholars heavily criticize its heroic narrative, the MHPJ is criticized by both sides of the political spectrum. Polish nationalists perceive it as a 'Jewish institution' and claim that the MHPJ overemphasizes that 'Poles did not help Jews enough' during the Holocaust.⁷⁰ Critical antinationalist scholars, on the other hand, sometimes overdrew their critique, arguing that the exhibition was based on 'the obsession with life and erasure of death' attempting to 'close the mourning after the Shoah, but also fit it into a sort of a new *grand récit* of the Red Sea: about life, salvation and time that heals all wounds'.⁷¹ While the direction of such critique is understandable, the verdict's absoluteness is not.

The Polish studies expert and photographer Elżbieta Janicka criticizes the name POLIN, which was added to the museum's name in 2014: the Hebrew word *po-lin* ('rest here') refers to the legend about Jews coming to Poland, which Janicka calls a 'self-persuasion' that Poland was a less hostile environment than it actually was.⁷² In Jews' relations with non-Jewish Poles the 'myth served as an instrument of mercy-evoking persuasion'. Finally, she argues that 'the Polin

⁶⁷ The exhibition includes two fictional street reconstructions along the old Zamenhof Street, which the Jews of Warsaw had to take to reach the holding area prior to transportation to camps (*Umschlagplatz*). This *in situ* information is omitted, however, at both the 'typical' Jewish interwar street and the 'Aryan' street that are exhibited. Elżbieta Janicka, The Embassy of Poland in Poland. The Polin Myth in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ) as Narrative Pattern and Model of Minority-Majority Relations, *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 5 (2016), 1-76, 5; Konrad Matyjaszek, Wall and Window. The Rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto as the Narrative Space of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 5 (2016), 1-33, 25.

⁶⁸ David G. Roskies, POLIN. A Light unto the Nations, *Jewish Review of Books*, Winter 2015, <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/1435/polin-a-light-unto-the-nations/>.

⁶⁹ Bryce Lease, Shared Histories and Commemorative Extension. Warsaw's POLIN Museum, *Theatre Journal* 69, no. 3 (2017), 383-401; Janine Holc, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018), 1267-1269.

⁷⁰ Anonymized statement obtained from a Polish museum official on 16 November 2019.

⁷¹ Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Polin. 'Ultimate Lost Object', *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 5 (2016), 1-8, 4.

⁷² Janicka, The Embassy, 15.

myth has been seamlessly overtaken by the dominant group and included in the arsenal of symbolic violence as a tool of blackmail'.⁷³ She thus insinuates that the museum gave in to portraying Jewish–Polish relations way too positively in order to get a museum at all.

In her extensive analysis, Janicka paraphrases a Polish nationalist aphorism: It is the MHPJ, therefore it has 'Polish duties'.⁷⁴ This seems to be an absolute no-go for her, whereas one might question her expectation that this museum be the one exception of a museum by no means compromised by memory politics. Considering that the museum was co-initiated by Lech Kaczyński and is co-funded by the Polish state, it is not so surprising that it had to compromise trying to fulfill 'Polish duties' as well. Those ambivalences need to be identified analytically. One can maybe sum up this problematic tendency as follows: While antisemitism is acknowledged, 'the exhibition does not permit the story of suffering to cast too long a shadow over Polish-Jewish history'.⁷⁵ It portrays Jewish–Polish relations using aesthetics akin to a fairy-tale, which clashes with the topic of antisemitism 'presented in a dispersed way and on the periphery of the master narrative'.⁷⁶

Undoubtedly, the exhibition tries to shed light on different perspectives, for example in the post–World-War-II arena on those Jews who left Poland as well as on those who stayed despite the persistence of antisemitic sentiments. The guidebook discusses postwar events as follows:

'Dispersed units of the anti-communist underground attacked not only officials of the government apparatus, but also Jews, whom they considered "Commie Jews", based on a common perception dating back to the early twentieth century. In addition, Jews wanting to return to their hometowns looked to the new authorities, and initially to the Soviet army, as their only guarantee of safety. This, too, contributed to the identification of Jews and communism.'⁷⁷

The exhibition also deals with the village of Jedwabne, where non-Jewish Poles murdered Jewish Poles in 1941, as it deals with postwar pogroms. Nationalist critics see that as an unacceptably strong focus. Other critics have pointed to the unfortunate positioning of text in the exhibition, saying that 'the information comprising the weak message is placed below eye-level. One is forced to

⁷³ Janicka, *The Embassy*, 22.

⁷⁴ Janicka, *The Embassy*, 25.

⁷⁵ Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Mixed Metaphors in Muranów. Holocaust Memory and Architectural Meaning at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*, *Dapim. Studies on the Holocaust* 30, no. 3 (2016), 258–273, 259.

⁷⁶ Janicka, *The Embassy*, 40.

⁷⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett / Antony Polonsky, eds, *Polin. 1000 Year History of Polish Jews*, Warsaw 2014, 361.



Fig. 2: The Mass Murder in the Village of Jedwabne Exhibited at the MHPJ

assume a position that is physically impossible to maintain for a prolonged period of time.⁷⁸

In regard to musealization techniques, the way the curators chose to display historic photographs is state-of-the-art. Shots taken by perpetrators are exhibited in the context of the albums they came with, and their antisemitic context is explained in detail. The museum does show humiliating pictures of half-naked victims before their execution, but they are hidden in symbolic woods and displayed in the size of the historical copy; the visitor has to decide whether to make an effort to see them. These photographs are contextualized through texts written by the people who took them. In contrast to that, the four 'images in spite of all'⁷⁹ from Auschwitz–Birkenau, taken by a member of the Jewish Sonderkommando responsible for burning the corpses, are displayed in a way that highlights their uniqueness while also contextualizing them.

Finally, whereas the Warsaw Rising Museum displays the Warsaw ghetto as something visitors can peer into through goggles, a 'fotoplastikon' showing rotating stereoscopic images of the ghetto, the MHPJ first shows the perspective of Jews inside the ghetto and later of non-Jewish Poles who drove through it

⁷⁸ Janicka, *The Embassy*, 41.

⁷⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All. Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, Chicago/IL 2008, 11.

by tramway, thus offering both an inside and an outside perspective. However, this depiction of non-Jewish Poles as witnesses or bystanders is highly problematic, since it depicts them as mostly indifferent, omitting that they also acted in antisemitic ways. In contrast, Jewish testimonies prove that indifference would have been much better than what the ghettoized Jews actually experienced in many cases.⁸⁰

Although the fact that the MHPJ discussion of antisemitism in Poland and Polish perpetrators stands in contrast to the ruling memory politics, it is clear that (for now) the Polish state is not in charge of the content of the permanent exhibition. The exhibition has not been changed after PiS won the elections in 2015 and made 'Down with the pedagogics of shame!'⁸¹ its new buzz phrase. Yet, PiS representatives heavily criticized director Dariusz Stola for the temporary exhibition 'Estranged. March '68 and Its Aftermath', dedicated to the state-staged antisemitic campaign, which opened in March 2018. PiS's anger is connected to the fact that the exhibition closed with a wall of quotes: xenophobic and antisemitic statements uttered between 1968 and 2018, mixed together, unattributed—but two of them clearly stemming from journalists close to PiS.⁸² As a result, Stola's contract was not prolonged; the Ministry of Culture insisted, instead, on an open call for applications for the position. Although Stola won, the minister refused to appoint him. In February 2020, Stola gave up so that the unclear situation would not block the museums' work. Former deputy director Zygmunt Stepiński was appointed, first as interim and finally as permanent head of the museum.⁸³

The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk (2017)

In 2008, then prime minister Donald Tusk, of the party Civic Platform (PO), initiated a state-run Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, and appointed Paweł Machcewicz, a historian and university professor, as its founding director. Machcewicz conceptualized the museum not as a military museum, but one that focuses on the brutality and catastrophic impact of the war on civilians. The curators embedded World War II in Poland in the international context. Compared with other postcommunist memorial museums, the exhibition is

⁸⁰ Janicka, *The Embassy*, 39.

⁸¹ Adam Leszczyński, Poland's Leading Daily Feels Full Force of Jarosław Kaczyński's Anger, *The Guardian*, 23 February 2016.

⁸² Maria Kobielska, History and Memory of 1968 in Poland. Debates Around the 'Estranged '68' Exhibition, *Cultures of History Forum*, 28 September 2018, DOI: 10.25626/0090.

⁸³ Poland: After Contentious Standoff, the POLIN Museum's New Director, Zygmunt Stepiński, Begins a 3-Year Term Today (March 1), *Jewish Heritage Europe*, 1 March 2020, <https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2020/03/01/poland-the-polin-museums-new-director/>.

highly innovative, including not only the presentation of everyday life during the war, but also topics like gender relations, emotions and sex, relationships between peasant women and forced laborers, as well as camp brothels. Like the MHPJ, this museum also deals with the events at the village of Jedwabne and with other crimes non-Jewish Poles committed against Jewish Poles.

PiS, then an opposition party, attacked the plans for the museum from the very beginning. After it won the election in 2015, it tried to gain control over the institution by merging it with a not-yet-existing museum of the Westerplatte, where one of the first battles in German's invasion of Poland marked the start of the Second World War. This plan was halted by the Voivodeship Administrative Court in Gdańsk, and so the museum was able to open, first to selected visitors in January 2017, then to the public in March. Given PiS's objective to end, with the establishment of the Fourth Republic, the 'pedagogics of shame', it is only consequential that PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński would attack the museum. While still in opposition, he explained the aim of his new *polityka historyczna* (history politics): 'We will defend Polish interests, Polish truth. We will reshape the Museum of the Second World War so that the exhibition in the museum shows the Polish perspective.'⁸⁴ Young Poles' schooling should reflect pride and dignity, 'not shame' as it did thus far, he claimed. Dariusz Piontowski, a PiS MP, repeated in 2016: 'It is our right that museums built in Poland should portray the Polish perspective.'⁸⁵ The parliament debated 'whether the museum should be a cosmopolitan one in which British and American historians tell us how we Poles should conceive of the Second World War'.⁸⁶ A former curator argues that because of PiS's attacks against the museum a professional critique of the exhibition—which he thinks reproduced the Polish perspective too strongly despite its international parts—was impossible.⁸⁷

The PiS government appointed three scholars to review the museum's concept. One of them, Piotr Niwiński, criticized the exhibition for lacking 'the most noble motifs triggered by extreme situations. [...] The exhibition is meant to warn against the horror of warfare, but few of its elements set such behaviours as patriotism, civic stance, or devotion to others as examples to be followed.'⁸⁸ Another reviewer, Piotr Semka, wanted the exhibition to focus on Polish mar-

⁸⁴ Kaczyński zapowiada aktywną politykę historyczną, *Dzieje.pl. Portal Historyczny*, 29 June 2013, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/kaczynski-zapowiada-aktywna-polityke-historyczna>.

⁸⁵ As quoted in Daniel Logemann, On 'Polish History'. Disputes over the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, *Cultures of History Forum*, 21 March 2017, DOI: 10.25626/0061.

⁸⁶ As quoted in Logemann, On 'Polish History'.

⁸⁷ Daniel Logemann, Rosenkranz vs. Bordell oder polnische Geschichte im Kontext. Eine kursorische Einschätzung zum Museum des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Gdańsk, in: Ljiljana Radonić / Heidemarie Uhl, eds, *Das umkämpfte Museum. Zeitgeschichte ausstellen zwischen Dekonstruktion und Sinnstiftung*, Bielefeld 2020, 55-72.

⁸⁸ As quoted in Logemann, On 'Polish History'.

tyrdom and the glory of the Polish army. The rest is history—at least to those readers familiar with the internationally infamous dispute: Only two weeks after the official opening of the museum, the Supreme Voivodeship Court overruled the Administrative Court and the museum was, indeed, merged with the planned Westerplatte museum. This paved the way to replace the director by a new head of both institutions, Karol Nawrocki, a representative of the local branch of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN).⁸⁹

In contrast to the HDKE in Budapest and the MHPJ in Warsaw, this museum's exhibition was changed and continues to be changed, as I recorded through photo-documentation from my repeated visits, including to the initial exhibition. In November 2017, the new director replaced the five-minute film at the exhibition's end. The initial film, a reflection on the long-term consequences of war around the globe, emphasized the universal meaning of the exhibition: a split screen showing the end of World War II; the founding of Israel; civilians' experiences in wars after 1945; the death of Stalin; a few sequences from Poland including an antisemitic rally in 1968 combined with many international references, for instance, to the Ku Klux Klan and Martin Luther King; 9/11, and the rise of Islamism. This was replaced by an animated heroic-patriotic film that focuses exclusively on Poland. It includes phrases such as: 'We saved Jews'; 'We give life in the name of dignity and freedom'; 'We were betrayed'; 'The Pope gave hope of victory'; and 'We do not beg for freedom, we fight for it'. Changing the film with which the exhibition ends changed the message from one of reflection on the horrors of war to one of patriotic glory.

Furthermore, two new text boards deal with 'The Soviet Genocide on Poles and the Communist State of Mass Terror', termed here as a 'systematic ethnic genocide' of the Polish minority in the Soviet Union before the war. Other minorities had also been liquidated, the museum argues, but only in the Polish case as much as 18 % of the overall population were persecuted, of which 80 % were executed. Other changes in the exhibition include the addition of Polish 'heroes', like the mathematician and cryptologist Marian Rejewski, who was the first to decrypt the Enigma code in 1932, as well as the Polish inmates of Auschwitz-Birkenau, friar Maximilian Maria Kolbe and Witold Pilecki.

One prominent change concerns the new focus of both Polish and, as I will show later, Hungarian memory politics, on 'our' citizens who saved Jews. Accordingly, in Gdańsk, a new board with a huge photograph of Wiktoría Ulma and her six children from Markowa were added in the middle of the Holocaust section. The Nazis killed the whole Ulma family in 1944 for hiding the Jewish family Szall and the sisters Golda und Layka Goldman, who were all

⁸⁹ Estera Flieger, *The Populist Rewriting of Polish History Is a Warning to Us All*, *The Guardian*, 17 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/17/populist-rewriting-polish-history-museum-poland-gdansk>.



Fig. 3: The Ulma Family at the Museum in Gdańsk

shot immediately after being discovered. Honoring rescuers and helpers during the Holocaust is essential for an 'integrated history' of the Shoah. Yet, the way this 'savior-turn' works is that all the empathy is devoted to the non-Jewish Polish rescuers, whose story is told in an individualizing way, while the persecuted Jewish Poles remain anonymous. Accordingly, the exhibition text reads as follows: 'On 24 March 1944, all members of the Ulma family were murdered by Germans for hiding Jews in their house. At the time of the murder, Wiktorina Ulma was in very late pregnancy.' That the 'Jews' were murdered as soon as the Nazis discovered them, and that their names and stories are known, is omitted, and their photographs are not shown. To present one's own suffering as genocide, while referencing the murder of the Jews in the respective country merely as a side aspect suited to highlight the role of 'our' countrymen in saving Jews, is what I have called elsewhere the 'Holocaust template'.⁹⁰

Given the growing number of modifications, the founding director together with the museum's other founding historians, Janusz Marszalec, Rafał Wnuk,

⁹⁰ Ljiljana Radonić, Introduction. The Holocaust/Genocide Template in Eastern Europe, in: Ljiljana Radonić, ed, *The Holocaust/Genocide Template in Eastern Europe*, New York/ NY, London 2020, 1-7.

and Piotr M. Majewski, have sued the new director over the infringement of their copyright for the exhibition's content.⁹¹ In contrast to Hungarian law, where something similar would not be possible, the case could set a precedent in Poland in arguing that authors' rights must be protected when it comes to exhibitions in the same way that publications are. The court's decision is still pending.

'Our' Rescuers of Jews and 'Counter'-Museums

Several new museums and memorial halls reflect PiS's and Fidesz's focus on Polish and Hungarian rescuers of Jews. The best known example is the 'Ulma Family Museum of Poles Who Saved Jews in World War II' in the village of Markowa in southeastern Poland.⁹² It opened in 2016 and is run by the PiS-dominated Subcarpathian Province's administration and by Poland's Ministry of Culture.⁹³ The exhibition focuses on the Ulma family and other rescuers, while the wall in front of the museum displays plaques with names of Poles who saved Jews. Only ethnic Poles feature as rescuers, while those from the Ukrainian and Greek Catholic communities are omitted.⁹⁴ On the other hand, a member of the Polish police involved in the murder of the Ulma family is portrayed as a non-Pole: 'He was Greek Catholic and therefore some considered him a Ukrainian.'⁹⁵

Another case in point is the Chapel of Remembrance in Toruń, 'created to pay tribute to these Poles who risked their lives and the lives of their family members to save Jews during World War II'.⁹⁶ It was initiated by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the founder and director of the radio station Radio Maryja and 'infamous for his anti-Semitic enunciations'.⁹⁷ The chapel is co-financed by the Polish Foreign Ministry. The chapel's website repeats the pattern of naming Polish rescuers, but not the persecuted Jews. Details are given about 'Józef Ulma, his wife Wiktoria, who was heavily pregnant at the time, and their six children (the eldest one was

⁹¹ Estera Flieger, 'To Muzeum powinno być dumą', *Oko.press*, 24 November 2019.

⁹² Jan Grabowski / Dariusz Libionka, 'Distorting and Rewriting the History of the Holocaust in Poland. The Case of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews During World War II in Markowa', *Yad Vashem Studies* 45, no. 1 (2017), 29-60; Jörg Hackmann, 'Defending the 'Good Name' of the Polish Nation. Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015-18', *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 4 (2018), 587-606.

⁹³ Its founding director, Mateusz Szpytma, a historian and employee of the Kraków branch of the IPN, comes from Markowa. Zofia Wóycicka, 'Global Patterns, Local Interpretations. New Polish Museums Dedicated to the Rescue of Jews during the Holocaust', *Holocaust Studies* 25, no. 3 (2019), 248-272, 251.

⁹⁴ Wóycicka, 'Global Patterns', 261.

⁹⁵ Wóycicka, 'Global Patterns', 261.

⁹⁶ The Chapel of Remembrance, <http://www.kaplica-pamieci.pl/eng#StageOne>.

⁹⁷ Wóycicka, 'Global Patterns', 257.

8 and the youngest one was 1.5 years old). Yet again, the 'eight Jews who were hiding [and] were killed as well'⁹⁸ are not named. The room is dominated by an already familiar aesthetics: the names of the Polish rescuers written in white letters on a black background. In contrast, as shown above, the MHPJ in Warsaw portrays protagonists, Jewish and non-Jewish, in an individualizing way. The main protagonists here are the persecuted Jews.

Historian Jan Grabowski sums up why the savior-turn is problematic: 'The Righteous were a desperate, hunted, tiny minority. [...] They were not the norm. They were the exception.'⁹⁹ The Shoah seems to threaten the narrative of one's own suffering, given that 90 % of Polish Jews were killed, compared with 10 % of non-Jewish Poles. Therefore, tribute is paid to the universalization of the Holocaust, albeit in this very selective way, which is actually a 'de-Holocaustization of the Holocaust' that 'goes hand in hand with the Holocaustization of the history of the Polish majority'.¹⁰⁰

In Budapest, Fidesz also plans to open a 'counter'-museum to the 'inherited' Holocaust Memorial Center, in which Hungarian rescuers shall feature prominently. The so-called House of Fates was planned to be the highlight of the seventieth anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary, in the commemoration year 2014. The museum's building is located in the reworked Józsefváros Railroad Station, from where Jews from the suburbs of Budapest were deported in 1944, mainly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The name corresponds with the sister-museum's name, the House of Terror—both museums are supposed to be run by Mária Schmidt. Yet, the House of Fates has not been opened, due to heavy criticism centered on its designated founding director as well as on the planned focus on deported Jewish children, as the most innocent victims, and—in a strong parallel to the Polish case—on Hungarians who saved Jews. Mária Schmidt intended the museum as a 'story of love between Hungarian Jews and non-Jews'.¹⁰¹ She added: 'The tragedy of the Holocaust must be brought to life for those who are in the lucky situation to be citizens of a free, democratic country.'¹⁰² Besides the questionable plan to bring the Holocaust 'back to life', Schmidt at the same time uses the opportunity to stipulate that Hungary is a democratic state—in times of an increasingly disputable character of the Hungarian political system. While Schmidt insisted on implementing this historically revisionist agenda, János Lázár, head of the prime minister's

⁹⁸ The Chapel of Remembrance, www.kaplica-pamieci.pl/eng.

⁹⁹ Donald Snyder, Poland's Dueling Holocaust Monuments to 'Righteous Gentiles' Spark Painful Debate, *Forward*, 27 April 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Janicka, *The Embassy*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Mária Schmidt, *A Love Story*, *Hungarian Globe*, 3 October 2014.

¹⁰² As quoted in Keno Verseck, *Budapester Versprechungen*, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 24 October 2013.



Fig. 4: The House of Fates

office, who co-initiated the museum, took a more reconciliatory stand with domestic and international critics, evidently fearing to cause too much political damage. There are pragmatics even in a party dominated by mnemonic warriors. Lázár argued that if the Jewish community does not ‘support it, then the House of Fates will not be built’.¹⁰³

In 2014, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ) had refused to take part in this distortion of history meant to improve the image of the Orbán government, and it still boycotts the House of Fates. But a smaller orthodox Jewish community, the Chabad-affiliated Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH), headed by Rabbi Shlomo Köves, as of late supports Fidesz’s Holocaust museum, designated to open finally in 2021, at the earliest.¹⁰⁴ The different stands of the two Hungarian–Jewish communities reflect their different positioning toward the Fidesz government, and the difficult choices one has to make in increasingly authoritarian times, when the freedoms of speech and of the press are being eroded and democratic checks and balances are put into question. Both Jewish communities keep close relations with

¹⁰³ House of Fates, Mária Schmidt versus János Lázár, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 6 March 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Will Orbán Retreat on Two Key Issues: CEU and the House of Fates?, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 3 January 2019.

Israel and are well aware of Fidesz's struggle to maintain good relationships with Israel, in contrast to the anti-Zionism dominant in the communist era. Yet MAZSIHISZ has chosen to criticize Fidesz for its historical revisionism, while EMIH has not done the same.

Gergely Gulyas, the head of the Hungarian prime minister's office, who has been overseeing the establishment of the museum, sought to counter 'fears' that the involvement of Hungarians in the Holocaust might be downplayed in the new museum. Yet, for him, Hungarian responsibility goes no further than a failure of the state to 'protect its citizens' following the beginning of the German occupation in March 1944.¹⁰⁵

On 5 September 2019, the Hungarian weekly *Magyar Narancs* leaked EMIH's 'Vision Document' for the House of Fates, which EMIH had presented to IHRA in June.¹⁰⁶ So although an exhibition does not exist yet, it is possible to analyze this concept, which gives a quite clear idea about the plans. Given that its topic is the Holocaust, the tone of the document is disturbingly cheerful. It claims that the history of Jews in Hungary 'offers an extraordinary opportunity to tell a rich, textured, engaging, relevant, and largely unknown story. It opens the door to weaving a distinctly Hungarian narrative, creating an institution and experience unlike any other.'¹⁰⁷ The anonymous authors want to generate 'a buzz'¹⁰⁸ by highlighting individual stories, evoking emotions and creating an immersive environment. The document tries to make sense of and draw positive conclusions from the Holocaust. Even when 'the worst exclusions of the war era' are mentioned, this happens in order to say that 'lively interactions between Jews and their neighbours' continued even in this period.¹⁰⁹

The 'anti-Jewish laws of the 1930s' are mentioned four times, yet no one is named as being responsible for them.¹¹⁰ The Arrow Cross Party is mentioned only towards the end, yet wrongly referred to as the 'Hungarian Iron Cross movement.'¹¹¹ Hungarian perpetrator-ship is reduced to two mentions of 'active collaboration of the Hungarian authorities'.¹¹² The focus still lies on chil-

¹⁰⁵ Jeremy Sharon, Hungarian Chabad Affiliate Gains Ownership of Budapest Holocaust Museum, *Jerusalem Post*, 16 September 2018.

¹⁰⁶ EMIH, House of Fates. Vision Document, [Budapest] 2019, <https://m.magynarancs.hu/belpol/ilyen-lesz-a-sorsok-haza-122682>. Cf. Ferenc Laczó, 'Authentic and Acceptable'. On a Certain Vision of Jewish Fates in Orbán's Hungary, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 11 September 2019.

¹⁰⁷ EMIH, House of Fates, 5.

¹⁰⁸ EMIH, House of Fates, 11.

¹⁰⁹ EMIH, House of Fates, 10.

¹¹⁰ EMIH, House of Fates, 14.

¹¹¹ Yitzchak Mais, former director of Yad Vashem's historical museum and new head of the museum's steering committee since 2019, stated that the English proofreader 'corrected' the original text wrongly. Veszprémy László Bernát, Yitzchak Mais: I Don't Want to Be Popular, I Want to Be Authentic, *neokhon*, 30 September 2019.

¹¹² EMIH, House of Fates, 14.

dren and ‘unique personal stories of Hungarian rescuers who chose, often at the risk of their own lives, to follow their conscience’.¹¹³ The goal is to

‘strike a balance, avoiding the implication that Hungary was simply a victim of outside forces, while equally steering clear of indicting Hungarian society as a whole. More importantly, suggesting collective blame can create a sense of hopelessness and/or defensiveness in visitors [...]. People will understand the complexity of the Holocaust, and empathize with its victims, only if we avoid stigmatizing Hungarians generally, and only if we offer an uplifting message of hope by citing those who acted nobly.’¹¹⁴

One such uplifting message is that ‘Budapest Jewry, for the most part, survived’¹¹⁵—without mentioning that most Hungarian Jews outside of Budapest did not. The other ‘uplifting’ claim is that the murderous slave labor in the Forced Labor Battalions ‘may, for some, have offered a sense of national solidarity [...] as a way for Hungarian–Jewish citizens to do their civic duty in the defense of their country’.¹¹⁶

One can hardly imagine such an ‘uplifting’ Holocaust museum to be accepted, nor acceptable—even if Fidesz has claimed to have taken Schmidt off the project. That the international critique has the ability to affect mnemonic warriors is demonstrated by the fact that the Fidesz government has not been able, thus far, to open such a museum. The party struggles to find a balance between the benefit of historical revisionism for its nationalist cause and the need to give in to critique from abroad for the sake of international relations and at least partially include Hungarian perpetrators. We will see whether the House of Fates will really open in 2021.

In contrast to the Holocaust museum, a new memorial that the Fidesz government did erect during the Holocaust commemoration year 2014 is the Monument for the Victims of German Occupation on Budapest’s Freedom Square—although it was inaugurated in the middle of the night without a public ceremony due to heavy criticism. It shows the archangel Gabriel, which represents Hungary, being attacked by the German Imperial Eagle (*Reichsadler*). The monument omits the collaboration of Hungarians in the Holocaust and externalizes all responsibility to the Germans. But it has become a symbol of the unwavering resistance of Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians against their government’s historical revisionism: before and after the opening, there has been a constant protest against it in the form of a self-organized counter-exhibition in front of the monument. One of the self-printed posters exhibited there

¹¹³ EMIH, House of Fates, 9.

¹¹⁴ EMIH, House of Fates, 13.

¹¹⁵ EMIH, House of Fates, 15.

¹¹⁶ EMIH, House of Fates, 15.

shows private photographs of the 'Spiegel family, deported to Auschwitz by archangel Gabriel'.¹¹⁷

In Poland, the most recent museum aimed at challenging the narratives of 'inherited' institutions is the envisaged Warsaw Ghetto Museum, to be opened in 2023, on the eightieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The museum is to be located in a former Jewish hospital, the Bergsohn and Bauman Children's Hospital, next to the only remaining fragment of the ghetto wall. Given that the MHPJ does not integrate the ghetto site into its exhibition and stresses that it is not a Holocaust museum, the idea to create an *in situ* museum actually focusing on the ghetto sounds logical. Yet, as a Polish colleague told me,¹¹⁸ the Ghetto Museum is supposed to focus on the Polish perspective—in contrast to the MHPJ, which is perceived as a Jewish institution and accused of putting too much emphasis on the lack of help for Jews from Polish citizens. In fact, the museum concept is clearly based on the *polityka historyczna* of the PiS mnemonic warriors. It was established by minister of culture Piotr Gliński (PiS), who stated in 2017: 'I would like this institution to speak of the mutual love between the two nations that spent 800 years here, on Polish land. Of the solidarity, fraternity, historical truth too, in all its aspects.'¹¹⁹ This quote shows that the museum is meant to challenge the MHPJ with this very similar focus—and at the same time self-authorize its own version by being located at the only 'authentic' ghetto wall location and in a building from the ghetto. The parallel to the Hungarian plan to tell a 'love story' between 'us' and 'the Jews' is striking. At the initial press conference devoted to the museum, the Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki argued that 'responsibility lies with Germans, with the German nation, but also with those who did not come to help, with the Allies',¹²⁰ in other words with everyone—except the Poles.

Albert Stankowski, the museum's Polish-Jewish founding director, and the former head of the digital collection department of the MHPJ, insists that authorities had not made any political demands, nor given any steering over the museum's content. 'If anybody gives any demands I will leave immediately.

¹¹⁷ Ljiljana Radonić, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg in postsozialistischen Gedenkmuseen. Geschichtspolitik zwischen der 'Anrufung Europas' und dem Fokus auf 'unser Leid'*, Habilitation thesis, University of Vienna, 2019, 77; Mark MacKinnon, *Statue in Budapest Based on Second World War Evokes Dark History*, *The Globe and Mail*, 15 December 2014 (updated 12 May 2018), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/statue-in-budapest-based-on-second-world-war-evokes-dark-history/article22099406/>.

¹¹⁸ Anonymized statement obtained from a Polish museum official on 16 November 2019.

¹¹⁹ As quoted in Poland. Warsaw Ghetto Museum Will Show the 'Mutual Love' between Poles, Jews, *Times of Israel*, 8 March 2018.

¹²⁰ As quoted in Poland. Warsaw Ghetto Museum.

But already the gossip has started to destroy the project.¹²¹ Also the museum's chief historian, Daniel Blatman, an Israeli professor of contemporary Jewry and Holocaust studies, promises an accurate and thought-provoking look on the Warsaw ghetto. But critics claim that he 'is at best being used by the Polish government, and at worst is a willing participant in historical distortions'¹²² that are already showing in the museum plans. In a *Haaretz* article, Blatman is critical of those scholars who focus on Polish antisemitism ignoring that many Poles 'died at the hands of the same murderers who separated the Jews, imprisoned them in ghettos and finally sent them to Treblinka'. Therefore, his starting point is the alleged 'almost complete absence of consideration for the existential fears of the non-Jewish population living under Nazi occupation'. Finally, he asks: 'Is it really so terrible to tell the history of the Warsaw Ghetto from the perspective of the entire occupied, tormented and devastated city where the ghetto existed?'¹²³ In fact, in his scholarly work, Blatman demands that Holocaust scholarship enter a post-uniqueness era. He takes side with Ernst Nolte in the 1986-7 West German Historians' Dispute (*Historikerstreit*) in agreeing that 'the Nazi era should be studied using the same scholarly tools applied to all other historical periods'. He also argues — allegedly in agreement with Lizzie Collingham — 'that food shortages were one of the most important factors that led to the Final Solution'.¹²⁴

To some degree Blatman's positions seem to fit that of PiS quite well. In the brochure 'Warsaw Ghetto Museum. Institution under Construction' he writes of 'genocidal murder' of Poles committed 'by the totalitarian regimes during the occupation' and attests Poland being 'a democratic country that emerged from the totalitarian era',¹²⁵ thus ignoring the country's authoritarian backlash.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Shaun Walker, Holocaust Historians Divided over Warsaw Ghetto Museum, *The Guardian*, 22 June 2019.

¹²² Walker, Holocaust Historians.

¹²³ Daniel Blatman, A Tale of History, Force and Narrow Horizons, *Haaretz*, 4 January 2019. When it comes to Israel, Blatman speaks of National Zionism, 'a branch of European neo-fascism'.

¹²⁴ Daniel Blatman, Holocaust Scholarship. Towards a Post-Uniqueness Era, *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 1 (2015), 21-43, 39.

¹²⁵ Warsaw Ghetto Museum. Institution under Construction [Warsaw 2019], 4.

¹²⁶ What the PiS government could not achieve during the short period between 2005 and 2007, it has pushed forward since its election victory in 2015 (confirmed in 2019): it has moved aggressively to assert control over the judiciary; it has altered, lowered, or simply removed many criteria for the staffing of public institutions, allowing for appointments based on party loyalty and personal connections; it has purged the public media and their governing bodies of independent or dissenting voices. Cf. Freedom in the World 2020: Poland, Freedom House, n. d., <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/freedom-world/2020>; Joanna Berendt, E. U. Court Rules Poland Must Suspend Disciplinary Panel for Judges, *The New York Times*, 8 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/world/europe/poland-judges-eu-court.html>.

My analysis of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum's brochure shows that it does not say much about the future museum's actual content, but what is to be found in it amounts to a problematic approach. For instance, the brochure announces that 'the museum's offer includes lessons on the religion, tradition, and culture of Polish Jews, as well as those dealing with the problematic aspects of the Holocaust' — as if there were any 'unproblematic' aspects of the Holocaust. Antisemitism is only mentioned once, in the broader context of 'prejudice' and 'racism'.¹²⁷ A historical column reprinted from the museum's website mentions four cases of Poles as collaborators: a denunciation, a murder, one betrayal, and the role of the Polish Blue Police.¹²⁸ This is contrasted with, and followed by, an interview snippet with a child of ghetto survivors, who is asked if any Poles helped his family during the war, and who elaborates on such help.

The exhibition concept has not been published yet. It remains to be seen if anything historically accurate will come out of an institution established by a government that regulates by law how the past should be remembered. PiS ruled in 2018 in an amendment to the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) law that 'whoever claims, publicly and contrary to the facts, that the Polish Nation or the Republic of Poland is responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich [...] shall be liable to a fine or imprisonment for up to 3 years'.¹²⁹ When it comes to this so-called Holocaust law, the government at least dropped the criminal sanctions after severe domestic and international criticism. I argue that in Holocaust-related issues even mnemonic warriors are forced to adapt their plans — not primarily due to the elaborate and loud domestic criticism that they successfully ignore in most of the other cases, but because of pressure from abroad. As to how far PiS will accept international criticism in the case of this newest museum project is to be seen.

Conclusion

After Fidesz won the 2010 election, the Hungarian deputy prime minister Tibor Navracsics claimed that 'this is the true beginning of democracy'.¹³⁰ Prime minister Viktor Orbán called it a 'revolution of the ballot boxes'.¹³¹ Today Orbán's

¹²⁷ Warsaw Ghetto Museum, 9.

¹²⁸ Warsaw Ghetto Museum, 27-32.

¹²⁹ Marta Bucholc / Maciej Komornik, The Polish 'Holocaust Law' Revisited. The Devastating Effects of Prejudice-Mongering, *Cultures of History Forum*, 19 February 2019, DOI: 10.25626/0094.

¹³⁰ Seleny, Revolutionary Road, 56.

¹³¹ Gábor Halmai, A Coup Against Constitutional Democracy. The Case of Hungary, in: Mark A. Graber / Sanford Levinson / Mark Tushnet, eds, *Constitutional Democracy in Crisis?*, Oxford 2018, 243-256.

Hungary is—as he said himself—an ‘illiberal state’.¹³² Bernhard and Kubik, when elaborating on their concept of mnemonic warriors, asked: Do mnemonic warriors necessarily threaten democracy? Writing before the Polish election of 2015, which saw PiS victorious, they argued that while democracy was effectively threatened in Hungary, Donald Tusk’s Civic Platform (PO) government was an example of successfully overcoming the destabilizing effects of Polish mnemonic warriors. Given how things have evolved after PiS took over, it seems solid to argue that when mnemonic warriors are in power, they threaten democracy. Their self-understanding leads them to do everything they can to assert their values and memory politics, and to discard their opponents.

After the 2010 and 2015 elections in Hungary and Poland respectively, Fidesz and PiS mnemonic warriors have proven able to enforce a—never uncontested, but clearly dominant—memory regime pertaining to historical events of national relevance. The flagship museums of previous governments have been an important pillar of this memory war in both countries. Even though many analysts portrayed Orbán as a liberal or a liberal conservative during his first term in government (1998–2002), it was back then that he initiated the House of Terror—a museum with a closed narrative, staging Hungarian collective victimhood and Orbán himself as Hungary’s liberator. In contrast, the Kaczyński twins were never mistaken for liberal democrats because they openly enforced their ‘Fourth Republic’ policy and the patriotic ‘uplifting’ narrative that went with it, still exhibited at the Warsaw Rising Museum. In contrast to the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), whose members are to some degree still torn between PiS’s politics of history and the IPN’s tradition of critically confronting also Polish collaborators, the PiS party itself has proven surprisingly coherent when it comes to crafting narratives about the past.

When it comes to museums ‘inherited’ from its mnemonic pluralist predecessor party, the PO, massive international protests did not hinder PiS to change the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk toward a more comforting narrative of Polish heroism and genocide against Poles. In contrast, memorial museums perceived as ‘Jewish’ or as Holocaust museums have not been changed. This is in fact a point of convergence between the Polish and Hungarian cases: In both countries, the mnemonic warriors did not try to change or replace the ‘inherited’ permanent exhibitions, be that at the MHPJ in Warsaw or at the HDKE in Budapest. Instead, they initiated new *in situ* Holocaust museums, the House of Fates and the Warsaw Ghetto Museum—both yet to be actually established. Both in Hungary and Poland, mnemonic warriors issued strikingly similar statements about planning to exhibit a ‘story of love’ between ‘us’ and

¹³² Hungarian Government, Viktor Orbán’s Speech, 30 July 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp>.

'the Jews'. Both chief historians in charge of the institutions made sure to name the respective country a democratic one. And in both cases the international outcry has had a huge impact on the initial plans. The House of Fates project in Hungary has been blocked for over six years now — which proves my argument that even parties and politicians who are free to act as mnemonic warriors on the national level, cannot act freely when their 'war on memory' comes to the issue of the Holocaust.

In terms of content, the tendency in both Hungary and Poland has been to de-Holocaustize the Holocaust by drawing away attention from the Jewish protagonists and victims, and by bringing rescuers of Jews to the fore — a trend already more advanced in Poland while present primarily on the verbal level and still in implementation phase when it comes to Hungarian museums. This goes hand in hand with the 'Holocaustization' of the history of the ethnic Polish and ethnic Hungarian majority, depicted by PiS and Fidesz as the real victims of genocide, through the use of wording and aesthetics from Holocaust memorialization and musealization. Finally, both trends serve the mnemonic warriors to end what they perceive as a 'pedagogy of shame' — to stop speaking about the complicity and perpetrator-ship of their own countrymen.

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