Handbook on the Politics of Memory

Edited by

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Edward Elgar PUBLISHING

Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA

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Handbook on the Politics of Memory, edited by Maria Mälksoo, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/univie/detail.action?docID=7242998.
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9. The politics of commemoration and memorialization

Ljiljana Radonić

For almost a decade now, the Hungarian political party Fidesz has been attempting to open a second Holocaust memorial museum in Budapest to overshadow the first one from 2004, which critically addresses Hungarian perpetratorship. Mária Schmidt, the frontwoman of Fidesz's memory politics and the originally designated director of this new House of Fates, wanted the museum to engage primarily with children victims and to "touch the hearts of visitors, especially those of young people. The tragedy of the Holocaust must become relivable to them, who are in the happy position to be citizens of a free, democratic country" (Verseck 2013; see also Laczó 2019; Gadó 2019). As this example shows, commemoration and memorialization serve the purposes of contemporary identity and memory politics: to mobilize the youth for a patriotic historical narrative; to enforce the narrative of a "Hungarian–Jewish love story" (Schmidt 2014) to be "relived" at a Holocaust museum; or to use commemoration practices as a stage for claiming that one's own country is democratic, despite or probably exactly because of the current authoritarian backlash Hungary is going through. There are, nevertheless, clear differences when it comes to *which* history is asserted as dominant and *how*, as this chapter will demonstrate. The politics of commemoration and memorialization are entangled in the dynamics of power relations and struggles over authorizing hegemonic visions of the past.

In this chapter, I will first outline the related dynamics on a theoretical level and later empirically on the example of commemoration practices and memorial museums devoted to World War II, with a particular focus on transformation processes in post-Communist countries and during the eastern enlargement of the EU.[1] The struggles over hegemony,[2] attempts to install one's own narrative about the past as *the* history, shape the formation of memory, memory politics, commemorative trends, and museums, the latter being understood as a central mnemopolitical field. They unfold at all levels – from individual to collective memory, to national and international planes.

When it comes to transnational commemorative trends, which I will discuss in the second part of this chapter, we can observe that in the "era of victims" (Rousso 2011: 32), which has, to a large degree, replaced the "heroes and martyrs" narratives, the "Holocaust/genocide template" (Radonić 2020a) serves as a role model for one's own victimhood narrative. On the one hand, this development proves how universalized the Holocaust has become as the negative icon of our era (Diner 2007: 7). On the other, this development is driven by competing victimhood narratives. As the claim of "double genocide" – the twofold suffering caused by the Nazis and the Soviets – in Eastern Europe shows, there is a strong drive to install a genocide narrative as a foundation of national identity in CEE countries. Another variant of this "Holocaust template" applies to the more recent Yugoslav wars: the Croat and Bosniak mnemonic agents depict the Serbs as the new Nazis and Fascists and themselves as the new Jews

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in the wars of the 1990s (Subotić 2019: 9). Serbs, however, justified their crimes in the 1990s as the prevention of a new Holocaust against themselves and the Jewish population.

Public memorial museums as flagships of national identity construction constitute an important mnemopolitical terrain, which will be the sample I discuss in the third part of this chapter (Williams 2007; Sodaro 2018; Zombory 2018; Radonić 2021). Museums vary considerably along several lines, depending on whether they were initiated by mnemonic pluralists or warriors, aggressive proprietors of the "true" vision of the past to whom, in contrast to the first group, collective memory appears as largely non-negotiable (Bernhard and Kubik 2014). Are they supposed to mobilize a nationalist domestic audience or are they devised as an international signal to gain status in the international community? I will discuss these questions on the example of my project "World War II in Post-Communist Memorial Museums" (2013–2019), in which I analysed how different museums in European post-Communist countries communicate with "Europe".

During the eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU), one group of public memorial museums was designed in order to prove the Europe-readiness and maturity of their host countries. Another group of museums was purposefully designed by the governments and other mnemopolitical agents, who used them as their mnemopolitical tools and argued that "Europe" and "the West" must acknowledge their country's suffering under Stalinism. Both groups of museums referred to Holocaust memorial museums as their role model, yet sometimes copying their aesthetics in order to deliver the completely opposite message of collective suffering of the non-Jewish majority population, while marginalizing Holocaust victims. Finally, the chapter discusses – on the example of memorial museums – what happens when "mnemonic warriors"[3] are in government, start abolishing democratic rights, checks and balances, and remodel the memorialization and museum landscape.

MEMORIALIZATION AS POLITICAL IDENTITY-MAKING

Scholars dealing with politics of commemoration and memorialization, regardless of their disciplinary roots in history, political science or cultural studies, mostly agree that memory serves contemporary identity purposes (Assmann 1995; Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2006). Yet, the extent to which they stress how political these processes of memorialization are and which role power relations play therein differ significantly.

In the German-speaking academic world, the 1988 article by Egyptologist Jan Assmann titled "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", in which he distinguishes between communicative and cultural memory, became the founding text for the "memory boom" in scholarship. In that article, Assmann suggests that there is a clear-cut distinction between "communicative memory", which is based on everyday communication "between partners who can change roles" (Assmann 1995: 126; German original: Assmann 1988: 10), and "cultural memory", which is "characterized by its distance from the everyday" and has its fixed points, "fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)" (Assmann 1995: 129). Assmann completely leaves out power relations from his notion of everyday communicative memory and discusses them only in one sentence when conceptualizing cultural memory: "It is self-reflexive in that its draws on itself to explain, distinguish, reinterpret, criticize, censure, control, surpass" (Assmann 1995: 132).

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In contrast, British cultural historians Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (2006) have later argued that it is neither possible nor desirable to think about communicative and cultural memory, or in their terms private and public remembrance as clearly distinguishable categories. Further, they conceptualized both as highly political. The authors of "The politics of war memory and commemoration" argue, "individuals expressing their direct personal memories of war may invoke elements drawn from experiences and representations which originate before the lifetime of current living populations. Even the 'eyewitness' memory of war, then, is constructed both from personal experience and in relation to pre-existing cultural templates" (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2006: 34). Consequently, "whilst these templates may be consciously manipulated by political elites, to some extent this misses the point. Their efficacy lies in the fact that they circulate in cultural spaces which antecede, and thus are part of the constitution of, personal memory" (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2006: 36). Rather than idealizing bottom-up grassroots processes as "authentic", while being sceptical towards official memory politics as "manipulation", we can thus look at how both are constructed and intertwined.

There are, of course, huge differences between different regimes of memory construction, especially when dealing with political violence. In most democratic countries, memorialization and scholarship in general and historiography in particular build upon each other; in others, debates around memory are fuelled by arguments disproven by the state of research. For example, the Croatian president Franjo Tuđman repeatedly claimed during his semi-authoritarian presidency in the 1990s that the Ustaša concentration camp Jasenovac (1941–1945) was used as a prisoners' camp also by the socialist Tito regime after 1945, although research has proven that the camp had been fully destroyed and no inmates were kept there afterwards (Bašić and Kevo 1997). Polish Law and Justice party claims that its infamous memory law is not targeting research about Polish collaboration with the Nazis, and still attacks acknowledged scholars such as Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski for dealing with this subject.

Further, the involved mnemopolitical agents – politicians or other influential proponents – can be acting as hardcore "mnemonic warriors" or as "mnemonic pluralists". In contrast to the warriors, the pluralists would not challenge the fact that different groups have different memories that need to have a space in the society. While clear-cut "mnemonic pluralists" are difficult to find, "mnemonic warriors" are on the rise. The latter "draw a sharp line between themselves (the proprietors of the 'true' vision of the past) and other actors who cultivate 'wrong' or 'false' versions of history" (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 17). To warrior-politicians, collective memory appears as largely non-negotiable. The meaning of events is determined by their relationship to a "golden era" of national height. Mnemonic warriors claim, "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" (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 13). Alternative narratives of the past are, by definition, understood as distorted and, therefore, need to be delegitimized or ostracized in order to create a proud, patriotic identity.

Beside attacks against opposing media and politicians, annual commemorations, and the erection of (disputed) monuments, memorial museums function as a particularly fruitful terrain for memory warriors to pursue their agendas. Especially such theatrical–immersive museums that tell a black-and-white story of "us" and "them" such as the House of Terror in Budapest and the Warsaw Rising museum, have succeeded in mobilizing masses, including youth like Boy Scouts from over the country assembling to commemorate the Warsaw Uprising from

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1944, for their "militant memocracy" (Mälksoo 2021). Commemoration and memorialization can on the one hand mean that memorial institutions and actors encourage a self-critical confrontation with the past, perpetratorship and collaboration of one's own collective, and an empathic encounter with the individual persecuted victims and survivors. Or it can, on the other hand, mean that memorial museums and other mnemonic institutions organize graphic novel contests and pop concerts for the benefit of a simplifying "patriotic" education in which "we" are the good ones. Before discussing the rise of this phenomenon against the backdrop of the Fidesz party in Hungary and the PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) party in Poland on the example of memorial museums, let us first turn to the processes of globalization, universalization and Europeanization of memory, especially at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

TRANSNATIONAL MEMORIALIZATION TRENDS

The "memory boom" in the West after the end of the Cold War emphasized the Holocaust as the negative icon (Diner 2007: 7; Radonić 2012) of the twentieth century. The Holocaust has become a universal imperative for the respect of human rights in general and a "container" for the memory of different victims and victim groups (Levy and Sznaider 2005). In engagements with violent pasts, the figure of the hero and/or martyr, formerly associated with those who had resisted the Nazis, has been replaced by that of the victim (Rousso 2011: 32), capturing either the individual and his/her "ordinary life before", or referring to collective victimhood (Radonić 2020b: 47). The latter allows for an externalization of responsibility, creating a "Europe of victims" (Hammerstein and Hofmann, 2009: 203). Victimhood narratives compete and various victim groups stress that they too have suffered "just like the Jews" (Radonić 2018: 512).

In Europe, this "universalization" (Eckel and Moisel 2008) includes another dimension: the memory of the Holocaust has become a negative European founding myth (Leggewie and Lang 2011: 15). Post-war Europe is understood as a collective with a common destiny that developed shared structures in order to avoid a recurrence of the catastrophe of the Holocaust. In its search for an identity extending beyond economic and monetary unity, this founding myth provides a compelling common narrative that is otherwise lacking. The international Holocaust conference, which took place in Stockholm on 27 January 2000, on the 55th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, brought together the heads of state with renowned experts and survivors from forty-six states for the first time in history. Among the resulting declarations was the recommendation that countries introduce a Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January or another date connected to the murder of the Jews (Schmid 2008), the first step towards some kind of a 'European standard'. While not officially applied during the eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004, these standards were accepted by future member countries, as suggested by the fact that Hungary's Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest opened a few weeks before the country joined the EU, despite no permanent exhibition having been installed at that point (Fritz 2010: 173; Radonić 2020b: 59).

Running parallel to the "Europeanization of the Holocaust" has been a re-narration of history in eastern European countries from 1989 onwards. At its core is challenging the Soviet/Communist historiography and in particular the invention of a "golden era" before the Communist rule (Cornelißen 2006: 48; Kucia 2016). In the context of democratic transition, writing about the Communist past "was also a means to get involved in politics. Historians

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were not the only producers of history but had to compete with former dissidents, journalists, and politicians" (Behr 2017: 83). The narrative of the heroic anti-fascist struggle has been delegitimized along with the Communist regimes. Monuments from the Communist era were relocated rather than destroyed in most post-Communist countries (Foote, Tóth and Árvay 2000), for example to statue parks in Budapest and Sofia or the Museum of the Occupations in Tallinn, whereas in Croatia over 3,000 memorials dedicated to the anti-fascist struggle by the partisans of Tito were destroyed (Hrženjak 2002). "The 'new Europeans' are contesting the memorial status of their experiences of World War II in the EU-endorsed remembrance of this war as ultimately a 'good war' where the Allied Coalition was supposedly acting on the common ground of anti-Nazism" (Mälksoo 2009: 654). The memory of Communist crimes was often evoked using symbols familiar from Holocaust memory (railway tracks, carriages). A divided memory between "East" and "West" has prompted representatives of post-Communist states to demand that Communist crimes be convicted 'to the same extent' as those of the Holocaust. This dominant discourse was of course always contested to different degrees within the respective countries (Troebst 2006). The 2008 proposal for a "European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism" stressed "the similarities between the Nazi and the Communist regime and calls for equal treatment of victims of both ideologies. […] An analysis of the document texts shows clearly that the already well-institutionalised remembrance of the Nazi crimes served as a model for the remembrance of Communist crimes but that it was also understood as a competitor within an all-encompassing European heritage" (Sierp 2017: 447).

In reaction to these conflicting memories, the European Parliament recommended in 2009 that another memorial day be introduced on 23 August, the date of the Hitler–Stalin pact of 1939, commemorating the victims of Nazism and Stalinism together. While the memory of the victims of Stalinism has thereby finally been added to the European canon, the victims of both regimes are explicitly equated, raising new problems. The new memorial day is not, in fact, an addition to the Holocaust Memorial Day, but its antithesis: while the Holocaust Memorial Day concerns the crimes in which the own non-Jewish population participated, the European Day of Remembrance externalizes responsibility to the Nazis and the Soviets. One's "own people" are understood as innocent victims of oppression from outside, while participation in the Communist regime is denied and externalized.

In the former Yugoslavia, the memory of the Holocaust is universalized in another way: victims of the more recent conflicts feel the need to shore up the legitimacy of their victim status by referring to a new Holocaust. In the post-Yugoslav space, Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs, when referring to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, often present themselves as the "new Jews" and their adversaries as the "new Fascists" or "new Nazis". In Bosnia–Herzegovina, the memory of the annihilation of the huge Jewish community during World War II has been displaced entirely by the "recent Holocaust" during the post-Yugoslav war (MacDonald 2002; Subotić 2019).

MEMORIAL MUSEUMS AND EASTERN ENLARGEMENT OF EUROPEAN MEMORIALIZATION

In this field of conflicting memories, museums are key producers of knowledge about history. Public museums that serve as flagships of national identity showcase which version of the past

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is canonized for identity purposes, while counter-museums such as Jewish museums often challenge the dominant narrative. Consequently, museums 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 (Sommer-Sieghart 2010). 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" (Williams 2007: 8). The fact that so many recent memorial museums find themselves instantly politicized reflects the uneasy conceptual coexistence of reverent remembrance and critical interpretation.

The process of "Europeanization of memory" had a huge impact on memorial museums in post-Communist countries in the process of the eastern enlargement of the EU. In my project "World War II in post-Communist memorial museums", I have been comparing the museum landscape of all post-Communist EU member states. I found out that there are basically two ways in which post-Communist memorial museums[4] "communicated with Europe" during the EU accession talks: some alluded to "Western standards" and made an effort to "prove" their Europeanness, while others demand that "Europe" or "the West" acknowledge their experience of Communist crimes. Mälksoo (2014: 8) argues about the latter group: "By seeking recognition to the inclusion of their encounters with communism into the established European mnemonical narrative of the twentieth-century totalitarianisms, the East European mnemonic actors concurrently seek recognition for their agency as Europeans."

Both kinds of museums clearly refer – either explicitly or implicitly – to the archetypical aesthetics of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the Israeli Holocaust memorial museum Yad Vashem. Thus, at first sight, institutions engaged with Holocaust memory seem to set international musealization standards – such as the focus on individual victims – even for museums equating Nazism and Communism. Yet, how can the Holocaust be *the* European founding myth and, at the same time, be equated with the Gulag in order to incorporate the memory of Communist crimes into the European memory landscape? While the group of museums that concentrates on the "invocation of Europe" hardly mentions the Communist era and implements Holocaust memory into the post-Communist narrative, the second group predominantly uses narratives about Nazi occupation to frame an anti-Communist interpretation of history. They attempt to "contain" threatening aspects of the memory of Nazism and the Holocaust so that they do not compete with stories about Soviet crimes (Mark 2008).

MUSEUMS INVOCATING EUROPE

Museum of the Slovak National Uprising

The most typical examples for the first group of museums are the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica and the Jasenovac Memorial Museum in Croatia (Radonić 2014). At the Slovak museum, the Slovak National Uprising, the armed insurrection

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against the Third Reich in 1944, is no longer presented – in contrast to the previous exhibitions of the past forty years – as an isolated historical event having "an exclusive class (regime) or national meaning[,] but rather in a European historical context", as an "inseparable part of the European history" (Lášticová and Findor 2008: 237). The current exhibition was developed in 2004, the year Slovakia joined the EU. As early as 2000, the museum's director explained his plans to expand the museum's sphere of interest in order "to fill empty areas in the historical memory so as to be able to correspond to a European standard" (quoted in Sniegon 2014: 190). There was no external pressure to do so since Slovakia was considered to be catching up surprisingly quickly in that period, following the period of international isolation under Vladimír Mečiar who had ruled the country until 1998. In the concept for the 2004 exhibition, it says: "Even today when Slovakia is striving to take part in the European integration process the anti-fascist resistance and the SNP have significance as political capital which cannot be lost" (Sniegon 2014: 190).

This invocation of Slovakia's Europeanness is obvious in the titles of the chapters "Europe and Slovakia after the year 1938" and "SNU [Slovak National Uprising] as a part of European antifascist resistance during World War II." The emphasis on the European dimension of the SNU refers to an alleged "Slovak contribution" to the "building of Europe", as the museum officials put it (Stanislav and Halaj 1996: 18).

Another level on which the reference to international trends clearly shows is that of aesthetics of the permanent exhibition. While the rest of the exhibition is dominated by numerous medals, guns and uniforms, the Holocaust section looks different: it includes a pillar with portraits and names of the Holocaust victims. This is a clear allusion to the archetypical individualization of the victim narrative at the "Tower of Faces", a wall with private photographs of victims from their life "before" the Shoah at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

However, the exhibition depicts the collaborationist regime of Jozef Tiso (1887–1947) in an ambivalent way, suggesting that the "invocation of Europe", as I came to call it (Radonić 2017), remains mere lip-service to a certain degree. Tiso's party, the Hlinka, is introduced as "fighters for Slovak autonomy" in the interwar period and the Nazi satellite is called a republic: "In spite of the authoritarian regime the Slovak Republic achieved many positive results in the areas of economy, science, schools and culture, owing to the war boom."[5] The fact that, during the uprising, Slovaks fought against Slovaks and not only against Nazis is avoided. That the nationalist display of the "positive side" entered the museum's narrative together with the "Europeanization" proves Tomas Sniegon (2014: 166) correct in speaking about a "national-European" narrative trying to incorporate both ways to re-narrate Slovak history post-1989.

It is a proof of the "Europeanization of the Holocaust" that the extermination of the Slovak Jewry is now presented "for the first time in an autonomous block" (Lášticová and Findor 2008: 251). In the exhibition section on "The Tragedy of Slovak Jews", it is made clear that "1942 Slovak Government deported by its own legal-administrative means almost fifty-eight thousand Jews from Slovakia to Nazi extermination camps" and "Slovakia paid five hundred Reichsmarks to the Third Reich for each deported Jew as an evacuation fee. The deportations were brutally organized, particularly by the members of Hlinka's Guard." Thus, despite the hitherto-questionable characterization of the Slovak state, there is no relativization of Slovak responsibility taking place here.

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The Jasenovac Memorial Museum

The Jasenovac Memorial Museum is situated at the site of the largest Ustaša-led concentration camp on the territory of the "Independent State of Croatia" (1941–1945). The current permanent exhibition opened in 2006, when Croatia was still struggling to join the EU. In the preface to the museum's publication, the Croatian Minister of Culture, who is in charge of the museum, stresses that the Jasenovac Memorial Site with its "specific architecture of the exhibition" (which alludes to the fact that it looks like Holocaust memorial museums),[6] is "part of European cultural heritage" and symbolizes a site seeking memory and encouraging learning about the history of a nation "that has actually always communicated with the world and Europe" (Biškupić 2006: 5). Nataša Jovičić, the director appointed by the minister of culture, stresses, "we want to be part of the modern European education and museum system and follow the framework we get from the institutions dealing with these topics" (*Vjesnik*, 24 July 2004). Again, there is no indication of external political pressure being exerted before EU accession here; the need to design a "European" exhibition seems internalized.

The exhibition had been conceptualized together with international experts in order to be "internationally recognizable and in the context of international standards" (*Vjesnik*, 24 July 2004). However, these experts only came from institutions concerned with the Holocaust, such as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Anne Frank House or Yad Vashem. The Croatian curators did not orient themselves towards memorial museums at the sites of former camps in Germany or the Nazi-created General Government (German: *Generalgouvernement*) in today's Poland, which try to show the complex character and daily routine of a concentration camp, but towards other institutions. "Like at the Anne Frank House", Jovičić wants to "tell a tragic life story with the help of a few objects" (*Vjesnik*, 24 May 2004). Of course it is understandable that the current focus on individual victims' stories is dominant at the Anne Frank House, which is dedicated to the history of one family and one girl. In Jasenovac, a former concentration camp site, however, a hypermodern exhibition also uses new media in order only to spotlight individual victims' stories. Referring directly to the "illustration of the executioner and the victim in world museology", Jovičić did not want to show anonymous corpses and deadly weapons as had been the case before in Communist-era exhibitions, but rather to make Jasenovac a "site of life", with an affirmative message. Jovičić combines the legitimate criticism of the shock aesthetic, on the one hand, and tries to make sense of the events by "sending a message of light to the site of crime", on the other (*Vjesnik*, 24 May 2004).

Since the core narrative is to allow "space for the individual victims to speak, so that their dignity is experienced" (JUSP Jasenovac, no year), the names of the victims, the survivors' interviews and the belongings of the victims dominate the exhibition. The broadsheet publication contains 221 photographs, most of them – in sharp contrast to the collectivist approach focusing on medals and guns at the museum of the SNU – portraits of victims, pictures of them both from before the war and from inside the camp. The exhibition clearly acknowledges that "Jews, Roma and Serbs" were deported to Jasenovac in mass transports and were often liquidated immediately after that. Still, perpetrators, for example Hitler and the Ustasha leader Ante Pavelić (1889–1959), are rarely shown, informing us that, during Pavelić's first visit in June 1941, Hitler gave him his "full support" for the policy of genocide against the Serbian population. It is emphasized that the mass murder of Serbs must be seen in the broader context of the Nazi crimes. While this is obviously true for the Holocaust, it is not the case when it comes to the Ustaša-initiated murder of Serbs. Furthermore, the issue that almost all other concentration

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and extermination camps were operated by Nazis, rather than by their local collaborators as in the case of Jasenovac, is not broached. Furthermore, an anti-Semitic Ustaša poster is shown, and the exhibit tries to argue against anti-Semitism, while there is no such approach when it comes to the hatred of Serbs or Roma. There is an emphasis on the Holocaust, primarily in the aesthetics of the museum (focus on the testimonies, belongings and names of the victims in a dark room), which reminds us very strongly of the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest and the USHMM in Washington.

Why are these two museums the ones that "invocate" Europe the most? There are obvious historical parallels: the first and only time that Slovakia and Croatia had existed before the 1990s was as Nazi satellites, one called a "Republic", the other an "Independent State". Both were regarded, by a significant part of the population, as having been liberated from interwar multinational states. In the 1990s, both countries were at least deficient democracies: Vladimír Mečiar's authoritarian style manoeuvred the country into international isolation and pushed NATO and EU membership into a distant future (Haughton 2003). In Croatia, even long after the war of the 1990s, Franjo Tuđman (1922–1999) severely limited checks and balances and the freedom of the press. This, as well as his aggressive policy of supporting the autonomy of the Croatian part of Bosnia–Herzegovina, left Croatia isolated until he died in 1999. This authoritarian style went hand in hand with historical revisionism concerning the character of the Nazi satellites. Following Vladimír Mečiar's inclusion of the ultra-nationalist and revisionist Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana*, SNS) in his authoritarian government in 1994, the Minister of Education from the SNS distributed Milan Ďurica's anti-Semitic book about the *History of Slovakia and the Slovaks* (1995) as supplementary teaching material in schools (Bútora 2007: 15). Tuđman himself was also a World War II historian, who claimed that the "Independent State of Croatia" was "not only a 'quisling creation' or a 'Fascist crime', but also an expression of the Croatian nation's historic desire for an independent homeland" (Goldstein 2001: 597). Both countries canonized a historical narrative based on the need to prove that they had "become truly European" following a phase of international isolation.

MUSEUMS DEMANDING EUROPEAN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF NATIONAL SUFFERING

The second group of museums demands from "Europe" to acknowledge their countries' suffering under the Soviets while marginalizing the memory of the Holocaust through diverse curatorial strategies. The most radical case in point is the former Museum of Genocide Victims, today Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius, located in the former Soviet and Gestapo prison (Makhotina 2017: 311), which, despite a tiny Nazi period and Holocaust exhibition added in a cell in the cellar in 2011 after a decade of omission, depicts itself first and foremost as a KGB-museum (Radonić 2021). Until then, all there was in the permanent exhibition was a tiny textboard at the end of the first room, which read: "To visitors willing to get acquainted with the period of Nazi occupation in Lithuania and the Holocaust more extensively we suggest visiting the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum" (Radonić 2018: 519). Jelena Subotić (2019: 9) speaks of "memory appropriation" when the "memory of the Holocaust is used to memorialize a different kind of suffering, such as suffering under communism […]. It is Holocaust remembrance turned inward, away from the actual victims of the Holocaust itself."

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In contrast to the Lithuanian case, the museums of occupation(s) in Tallinn and Riga and the House of Terror in Budapest included the Nazi period from the beginning. Yet, they all started their initial permanent exhibitions with a symbolic equation of Soviet and Nazi crimes, the Red Star and the Swastika, or Hitler and Stalin. But the main parts of exhibitions try to show that the Soviet crimes were by far worse and to "contain" the Holocaust memory, which appears to threaten the victimhood narrative of the majority population.

The 1998 permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia opened with huge portraits of Hitler and Stalin in the section on the Hitler–Stalin pact. Paulis Lazda, the American–Latvian history professor who initiated the museum in 1993, wanted to ensure the recognition of the Soviet and Nazi occupation as unjust and not as acts of liberation from the other regime (Michel and Nollendorfs 2005: 118). He conceived the acceptance of the "*okupācijas fakts*" (Lazda 2003), the "occupation fact", as a basis for ensuring the stability of the young Latvian state. According to Lazda (quoted in Velmet 2011: 192), the museum tries to subvert the deliberate or accidental misinformation that dominates nationalist Russian discourses about the Latvian occupations. The museum is supposed to furthermore defend Latvia against "defamation" (Lazda quoted in Blume 2007: 36) concerning the role of the Latvian people in the Holocaust in Latvia. Instead, it seeks to inform Latvian society and other countries about the tragic history of the Baltic states, which has been forgotten by the world.

In stark contrast to the 2003 exhibition at the Museum of the Occupations in Tallinn and the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius, the exhibition does devote a significant section to the period between the two Soviet occupations of 1940 and 1944, i.e., the Nazi occupation. This museum does not depict Latvians only as victims or factor out "unpleasant" facts such as the murder of 6,000 members of the Communist party by the *Pašaizsardzība*, the "self-defense" commandos, on the eve of the Nazi occupation in 1941 or the mass murder committed by the Arājs command (Blume 2007: 46).

Yet, when it comes to the range of objects and photographs, which score high in what I call the "hierarchy of visibility" and have the power to evoke empathy on the side of the visitor (Radonić 2021), we see a completely different picture. The exhibition shows a reconstructed Gulag barrack and hundreds of original objects from Gulag victims. The guided tours emphasize touching personal stories, such as a fake wooden piano built only for practice or impressive drawings from a girl deported by coincidence on her birthday. Thus, the individualization of victims is implemented here as a musealization strategy. In contrast to the hundreds of Gulag and forced settlements objects, however, there are only one object and two photographs devoted to Holocaust victims. On the board titled "Holocaust", there are a Star of David, not attributed to a person or a location, but labelled simply as "identifying symbol for Jewish clothing" and a photograph showing two Jews walking on the road, since they were not allowed to walk on the pavement; above the boards, there is a life-size photograph of four Jewish women and a girl hiding behind them, from the famous photo series of victims before a mass execution in Liepaja, Latvia, in 1941. Other objects, such as a Nazi propaganda poster and photographs of Latvian rescuers of Jews, give a general impression of the events, but do not contribute to the individualization of the victims evident in other parts of the museum. The curators themselves claim that this is too little and say that changes have been planned in the new exhibition (Nollendorfs 2008: 231) for years and years now, only to be postponed over and over again because of the economic crisis and tensions between the museum and the city authorities. The museum has been closed and relocated to a smaller setting during the con-

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struction of an extension to the initial museum building, and it remains to be seen if the new permanent exhibition will again reserve empathy exclusively for "our" victims.[7]

The House of Terror, which opened in 2002 as a state-funded museum in the course of Viktor Orbán's re-election campaign (Apor 2012: 233; Mihok 2005; Kovács 2003; Csillag 2002), is located at the historical site where people were detained, interrogated, tortured or killed both during the regime of the Nazi-collaborationist Arrow Cross Party (1944–1945) and during that of the Communists after the end of World War II. The Nazi era is only displayed in two-and-a-half rooms, out of more than twenty (Blutinger 2010: 83), and the Holocaust is represented primarily by a projection of ice flowing down the Danube, symbolizing that the members of the Arrow Cross Party used to shoot Jews at the bank of the river in the winter of 1944/45. The Horthy era (1920–1944) is depicted as democratic, while anti-Semitic and authoritarian aspects are ignored (Rév 2007: 60). The fact that most Hungarian Jews were deported immediately after the Nazi invasion, most of them in May 1944, while Horthy was still in power and *before* the Arrow Cross Party came to power, is neglected. 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 the Communist terror after 1945/48 (Ungváry 2006: 214). Although the museum deals with Hungarian perpetrators, it tries to limit this issue to a small group by claiming that the very same Arrow Cross members simply changed clothes after 1945 and put on socialist state security uniforms. Thus Hungary is depicted as a collective victim of a few Hungarian Nazis turned Communists and of external powers. The symbolic equation of the Arrow Cross and the Communist star that can be found in front and all over the museum in this case again yields to arguing that the Communists were the greater evil.

Interestingly enough, the House of Terror adopted the principle of the "Tower of Faces", a several-floors-high installation at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington D.C. (Radonić 2021: 189). The Budapest exhibition also shows portraits of the victims on a wall that ranges from the ground floor up to the roof. However, this aesthetic, originating from the turn towards the individual victim in "Western" museology, is placed here into a narrative of collective (Hungarian) suffering at the hands of Hungarian Nazis and Communists. In contrast to the private photographs taken by the village photographer in an annihilated Jewish village in today's Ukraine and donated to the USHMM by the photographer's granddaughter, the House of Terrors used uniform mug shots, photos taken by perpetrators. They are all exhibited in a uniform way and merge into one organic victimhood installation. Furthermore, they were all taken by the Communist state security. Here again, the Arrow Cross and Nazi victims are left out, despite the fact that they had been tortured in the building as well. Accordingly, Mária Schmidt, the museum director and frontwoman of Fidesz memory politics,[8] claimed that World War II was not about Jews or genocide. She stated: "We are sorry, but the Holocaust, the extermination or salvation of the Jews was a side-, so to say, a marginal aspect, which was not the war objective of any of the opponents" (Schmidt 1999).

CONCLUSION AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Memorial museums serve both as sites of commemoration for the lost loved ones and as flagships of national identity. These are not two separate sides of memorialization, but closely interwoven and always political. Interestingly enough, in one way or another, museums from both groups react to the process of the "universalization" and "Europeanization of the

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Holocaust." The second group of museums applies aesthetics and museum techniques familiar from Holocaust museums as well. Yet, in this case, Holocaust and Nazi victims are not represented with individual, private photographs or objects, in order not to threaten the victimhood narrative of the majority population.

While the phase around the eastern enlargement of the EU has been driven by the need to prove Europe-readiness in the one case and demand from "Europe" to acknowledge the suffering under Communism in the other case, the current phase is dominated by an authoritarian backlash, anti-European and anti-Western sentiments – first of all in Hungary and Poland.[9] Currently the ruling Fidesz party is abolishing democratic checks and balances, and pushing a revisionist narrative in which the German occupation is conceived as responsible for all evils while Miklós Horthy is rehabilitated (Rév 2018). In 2014, a Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation was inaugurated secretly at night on the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the deportations of Hungarian Jews. It shows archangel Gabriel symbolizing 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 shows private photographs of the "Spiegel family, deported to Auschwitz by archangel Gabriel".

Furthermore, Fidesz had to postpone its plan to open the so-called "House of Fates" in 2014, a second Holocaust museum in Budapest alongside the already-existing Holocaust Memorial Center, which openly addresses the role of Hungarians as perpetrators. The main reason why the museum is long finished, but not opened yet, is the criticism of Mária Schmidt as the designated director, who wanted to focus on the Hungarian–Jewish love story at this Holocaust museum (Schmidt 2014). Back 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 EMIH, headed by Rabbi Shlomo Köves, as of late supports Fidesz's Holocaust museum, designated to open finally in 2023 at the earliest (*Hungarian Spectrum*, 3 January 2019). The different stands of the two Hungarian–Jewish communities reflect their different positioning towards 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.

In Poland, the most recent museum aimed at challenging the narratives of established museums is the envisaged Warsaw Ghetto Museum, to be opened in 2023, on the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The museum is to be located in a former Jewish hospital, the Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital, next to the only remaining fragment of the ghetto wall. Given that the already-existing Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ) does not integrate the ghetto site it stands on into its exhibition and stresses that it is not a Holocaust museum *per se*, the idea to create an *in situ* museum that actually focuses on the ghetto site it is situated at has promise. Yet 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*, the memory politics of the PiS mnemonic warriors. It was established by minister of culture Piotr Gliński (PiS),

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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" (*Times of Israel*, 8 March 2018). 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, "responsibility lies with Germans, with the German nation, but also with those who did not come to help, with the Allies" (*Times of Israel*, 8 March 2018), in other words with everyone – except the Poles. Neither Polish perpetrators in Jedwabne in 1941 nor in the Kielce pogrom in 1946 have a space in such a concept.

This chapter has aimed to show that both communicative and cultural memory, private and public commemoration, are political and always informed by today's purposes, never an "authentic" reconstruction of the past as it once was. Power relations between the local, regional, national and transnational levels must be taken into account to make sense of the ways commemoration and memorialization unfold in the present time. Last, but not least, it is crucial to scrutinize who asserts which past, how far from the scholarly state of research, and by which means – whether those of a "mnemonic pluralist" or a "mnemonic warrior".

NOTES

1. This research stems from my project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (GMM – grant agreement No 816784).
2. The concept of mnemonic hegemony "highlights discursive agency in specific political contexts (interests), the public adscription of narrative credibility, and access to media and spheres of social knowledge production and signification; a concept that encompasses not only the competitive relations between hegemonic and proactively counter-hegemonic agencies often described as memory wars, but also the coexisting communities of passive remembrance; and that describes the interactions between these fields" (Molden 2016: 127).
3. Such politicians enforce their history as *the* history, even with undemocratic means, as Bernhard and Kubik (2014) have shown.
4. In my analysis of the transformation of memorial museums from the Communist to the post-Communist era, I also focused on gender representations in the permanent exhibitions. While there was clearly no feminist approach in today's sense to be observed in the exhibitions before 1989, women were represented in less traditional roles than in many "Western" museums, especially since they have fought in uniform and armed in many partisan contexts (Radonić 2021). In contrast, the Museum of the Homeland War in Karlovac, opened in 2019 and devoted to the Croatian war of the 1990s, excludes the female fighters and only shows one medal and one backpack belonging to women, without telling the stories of the two out of many female veterans to whom these items had belonged.
5. Whenever there is no source to the quote, I am quoting directly from the permanent exhibition.
6. However, Jasenovac is actually not primarily a site of the Shoah, since Serbs were by far the largest victim group in this Ustasha camp, followed by Roma.
7. Update: the new permanent exhibition opened in 2022 after the deadline for this chapter; see Wezel (2022).
8. While most mnemonic warriors in Poland and Hungary are men, in this case it is a woman who represents the hardliners – opposed by more moderate actors such as János Lázár, head of the prime minister's office, who co-initiated the museum and took a more reconciliatory stand with domestic and international critics, evidently fearing to cause too much political damage.

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9. Mária Schmidt defined her role, for example, as fighting against "the influence of Western European so-called political correctness" (Schmidt 2011: 166, my translation). Authoritarian trends could be observed in Croatia for a short period in 2016 as well. An anti-European government that attacked the freedom of expression and installed a historical revisionist as the minister of culture was in power for 146 days before it lost a confidence vote in parliament because of an economic conflict of interest. The next government, led by the very same "Croatian Democratic Union" (HDZ), is headed by the Europe-friendly Andrej Plenković, whose government takes a more moderate stance. Currently it is Slovenia where prime minister Janez Janša provokes heavy mass protests because of attacks against the freedom of expression and judicial independence as well as because of historical revisionism.

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