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A Baltic Struggle for a “European Memory”: The Militant Mnemopolitics of *The Soviet*

Story

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Biographical Note

Maria Mälksoo is Senior Lecturer in International Security at the Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent. Her research interests lie at the intersection of critical security studies, memory and identity politics, international political sociology and critical International Relations theory. She is the author of *The Politics of Becoming European: A Study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold War Security Imaginaries* (Routledge, 2010) and a co-author of *Remembering Katyn* (Polity, 2012). She has published on European security politics, liminality, memory wars and memory laws in eastern Europe and Russia in the *European Journal of International Relations*, *International Political Sociology*, *Security Dialogue*, *Review of International Studies*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *The Estonian Historical Journal*, and in various edited volumes. Dr Mälksoo earned her PhD and MPhil degrees from the University of Cambridge. She has held visiting fellowships at the Centre for International Studies, LSE and Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, and has previously worked at the University of Tartu, Estonia. Currently, she serves at the CEEISA Executive Committee and the EISA Governing Board.

Abstract.

This article examines the Latvian documentary *The Soviet Story* (by Edvīns Šnore, 2008) as a militant Baltic memory project which seeks to establish the parity of East and West European experiences with totalitarian crimes in the pan-European memory narrative of twentieth-century wars and genocide. The film offers a useful vantage point for investigating the interaction between memory politics and identity-building across the post-communist space and beyond. Claiming the inner similarity and moral equitability of Soviet communism and German National Socialism, *The Soviet Story* constitutes an epitome of the *Historikerstreit* in the Baltic fashion, debating the uniqueness of the Holocaust next to the crimes of communism. The so-called Holocaust template has been essential for the makers of the documentary in their insisting on the pan-European condemnation of totalitarian communist regimes in Europe, along with an invitation to critically review the role of the USSR in the Second World War. *The Soviet Story* is particularly critical about the Western discriminative standard of remembering the mass killings of Nazi Germany and the USSR, claiming such position's unsustainability on intellectual, moral, and political grounds. The article investigates *The Soviet Story* as an example of the cultural front in the Baltic-Russian "memory war" over remembering the Soviet legacy, reading the film's message in the context of the broader East European politics of seeking pan-European condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian communist regimes. It further discusses the transnational efficacy of such mnemopolitical projects against the backdrop of intensified activity on the information operations front in the Baltic-Russian relations in recent years.

Keywords: Baltic states, *The Soviet Story*, European memory, militant mnemopolitics, totalitarian crimes

Introduction

Ever since the gradual unravelling of the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, a vigorous search for the “usable pasts” in order to make sense of the current political predicament has been going on in the region. Reaching for “memory”¹ in order to establish a sense of continuity with the alleged original (national) self, untainted by the traumatic experience of communism, has become the order of the day. “Memory” has consequently been generally understood as an emotional source of healing and national reconstruction rather than yet another device vulnerable for political engineering, drawing upon which could possibly create as many new lines of division as it hopes to resolve the old ones. In the course of the attempted rebuilding of political subjectivity amidst fragmented memories of various encounters with multiple totalitarian regimes, the singularity of Holocaust as the negative foundational myth of the European Union (EU)² has been challenged by the post-communist additions to the Union. The East European states have sought to make their experiences with communist regimes part of the pan-European mnemonical master narrative of the twentieth century next to the generally condemned Nazi legacy through the denunciation of

¹ The concepts of social and/or collective memory are generally invoked to refer to intersubjectively shared views of the past, as held by a society/nation/community/group in (and from the demands of) the present. For good overviews among the considerable and burgeoning literature, see Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105-40; Jeffrey K. Olick, “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures,” *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 333-48; Siobhan Kattago, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Memory Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

² Claus Leggewie, “Battlefield Europe: Transnational memory and European identity,” *Eurozine*, April 28 (2009), <http://www.eurozine.com/battlefield-europe/> (accessed February 2, 2018).

totalitarianism as such.³ Meanwhile, they have wrestled with ebbing and flowing “memory wars” with Russia on the assessment of the Soviet legacy in the region.⁴ Yet again, these historic “bloodlands” of Europe⁵ have fallen in between the hegemonic forces in the continent – only this time in relation to the established European and Russian narrative orders of

³ Maria Mälksoo, “Criminalizing Communism: Transnational Mnemopolitics in Europe,” *International Political Sociology* 8, no. 1 (2014): 82-99; Laure Neumayer, “Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations Around the ‘Crimes of Communism’ in the European Parliament,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 3 (2015): 344-63; Laure Neumayer, “Advocating for the Cause of the ‘Victims of Communism’ in the European Political Space: Memory Entrepreneurs in Interstitial Fields,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 45, no. 6 (2017): 992-1012. For the European institutional playground of such attempts, see Siobhan Kattago, “Agreeing to Disagree on the Legacies of Recent History – Memory, Pluralism and Europe after 1989,” *International Journal of Social Theory* 12, no. 3 (2009): 375-95; Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, “The EU Politics of Remembrance: Can Europeans Remember Together?,” *West European Politics* 35, no. 5 (2012): 1182-1202; Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, “Explaining Policy Conflict Across Institutional Venues: European Union-level Struggles Over the Memory of Holocaust,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 51, no. 3 (2013): 489-504; Aline Sierp, *History, Memory and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014); Oriane Calligaro, “Legitimation Through Remembrance? The Changing Regimes of Historicity of European Integration,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 3 (2015): 330-43; Philippe Perchoc, “Negotiating Memory at the European Parliament after the Enlargement,” *European Review of International Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015): 3-14.

⁴ Nikolay Kopolov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁵ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). See also the Review Forum on the book in this journal: John Connelly et al., “Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 13, no. 3 (2011): 313-52. Cf. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

remembrance, or “collective memory regimes”⁶ concerning the twentieth-century totalitarian crimes.

This article focuses on a relatively recent “memory event” in this mnemonic struggle: the production and reception of the historical propaganda film,⁷ *The Soviet Story* by a Latvian director Edvīns Šnore (2008).⁸ Alexander Etkind describes memory events as “secondary to the historical events that they interpret, usually taking place many years or decades later.”⁹ Memory events are thus defined as temporal units of memory, as performatives that are “simultaneously acts and products of memory”, whose power depends on their truth claims (“whether the community perceives it as a true description of the past”), originality claims (“whether the community perceives it as new and different from the accepted version of the past”), and identity claims (“whether the community perceives the changing vision of the past”).

⁶ On memory regimes, see Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For a constructive critique of their framework on the Baltic cases, see Eva-Clarita Pettai, “Debating Baltic memory regimes: A discussion of Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik: Twenty years after Communism: The politics of memory and commemoration,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 47, no. 2 (2016): 165-78.

⁷ On *The Soviet Story* as propaganda, see Ivars Ījabs, “Cienīga atbilde: Soviet Story,” May 23, 2008, <http://www.lvportals.lv/emuari.php?id=44> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

⁸ *The Soviet Story*. Directed by Edvīns Šnore. Riga: Perry Street Advisors, 2008. Edvīns Šnore (b. 1974) was elected to the Latvian Saeima as a member of the National Alliance coalition in 2014. See further http://titania.saeima.lv/personal/deputati/saeima12_depweb_public.nsf/0/6ce92a3b970461e5c2257d7b0032da07?opendocument&lang=EN (accessed: February 2, 2018).

⁹ Alexander Etkind, *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 178.

as central to its identity”).¹⁰ Hence, memory events revisit the past, creating ruptures with its established cultural meanings.¹¹ *The Soviet Story* as a memory project, which was aimed at promoting a militant anti-Soviet narrative of twentieth-century history, offers a useful vantage point for examining the interaction between mnemopolitics and identity-building across the post-communist space and beyond. As a documentary, *The Soviet Story* is striking for its distinct medium of representation, “laying claim to (parts of) truth and reality” and “moving smoothly between fact and fiction, education and entertainment.”¹² Sponsored by conservative European parliamentarians¹³ as a counterpoint to the Russian documentary *The Baltic Nazism*,¹⁴ and aimed at a global audience, *The Soviet Story*, together with the history of the controversies that it sparked, can serve to illuminate the interaction between the transnational, regional and national dimensions of the ongoing struggle between competing narratives of the Second World War and the communist experience, and their wider political ramifications. *The Soviet Story* depicts eastern Europe as the historical meeting point of totalitarian terror in twentieth-century Europe, and an important trope in the debates over remembering the crimes of totalitarian regimes. If dealing with the past generally takes the shape of “trials, purges, or history lessons,”¹⁵ *The Soviet Story*’s main gist is of the latter category. At least metaphorically,

¹⁰ Etkind, *Warped Mourning*, 178-79.

¹¹ Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, “Introduction,” in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6-7.

¹² Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest, “Documenting International Relations: Documentary Film and the Creative Arrangement of Perceptibility,” *International Studies Perspectives* 16, no. 3 (2015): 229-45, 229.

¹³ See further Neumayer, “Advocating for the cause of the ‘victims of Communism’”, 1003.

¹⁴ *Natsizm po Pribaltyski* [Nazism Baltic style]. Directed by Boris Chertkov. Moscow: Third Rome, 2006.

¹⁵ Timothy Garton Ash, “Trials, Purges and History Lessons: Treating a Difficult Past in Post-Communist Europe,” in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University

the film also seeks justice via a broad condemnation of the Soviet experiment, effectively striving for an abolition of its allegedly prevalent remembrance as an enterprise flawed in practice, yet still commendable in ideology.

This article dissects the political intervention *The Soviet Story* seeks to make in the European memoryscape of the Second World War and the totalitarian legacies of the twentieth century. Whereas previous academic takes on *The Soviet Story* have investigated the social media “afterlife” of the film,¹⁶ my primary objective here is to offer a conceptual diagnosis of the film as a symptom of contemporary memory politics in eastern Europe. To pursue this aim, I engage a critical interpretive reading of *The Soviet Story*, applying Lene Hansen’s inter-visual/intertextual analytical model which calls for a simultaneous examination of the visual and its immediate intertextual context, along with the wider policy discourse and the constitutions of the visual material ascribing meaning to it.¹⁷ In order to explore the mnemopolitical productivity of *The Soviet Story* from a broader ethico-political angle, I proceed from van Munster and Sylvest’s threefold typology of the political efficacy of documentary films, entailing exposition, disclosure and/or destabilization, respectively.¹⁸ I set out from the hypothesis that even though *The Soviet Story* seeks to destabilize the familiar and accepted narrative of the Second World War where the “good” Allies beat the evil “Nazis,” it falls short of offering “the framing through which reality is rendered perceptible to critical

Press, 2004), 265–82, 271.

¹⁶ See Mārtiņš Kaprāns, “Hegemonic Representations of the Past and Digital Agency: Giving Meaning to ‘The Soviet Story’ on Social Networking Sites,” *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (2016): 156–72.

¹⁷ Lene Hansen, “Theorizing the Image for Security Studies: Visual Securitization and the Muhammed Cartoon Crisis,” *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 1 (2011): 51–74, 51.

¹⁸ Van Munster and Sylvest, “Documenting International Relations,” 233.

scrutiny,”¹⁹ and thus misses the mark of the politics of destabilization in the vein of critical history.

The article unfolds in three moves. The following section examines *The Soviet Story* as an example of the cultural front of the Baltic-Russian “memory war” on remembering the Soviet legacy. Consequently, the core message of this “spectacular act of political communication”²⁰ is read in the context of the East European politics of seeking pan-European condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian communist regimes. The article concludes with a concise discussion of the transnational productivity of mnemopolitical projects such as *The Soviet Story* in light of the increasingly robust Russian (mis)information campaigns regarding the historical and contemporary issues of political relevance.²¹

The Soviet Story as a Cultural Front of the Baltic-Russian Memory War

I propose to interpret *The Soviet Story* in the context of the contested right to memory in contemporary Europe against the backdrop of the broader East European politics of seeking pan-European condemnation of totalitarian communist regimes in explicitly universalist moral and political terms.²² This film is a noteworthy event in the series of moves launched by various East European state and non-state actors struggling for the recognition of the region’s particular historical legacies as part of the pan-European normative verdict on twentieth-century

¹⁹ Ibid., 241.

²⁰ Kaprāns, “Hegemonic Representations of the Past,” 157.

²¹ For background and discussion, see Jukka Rislakki, *The Case for Latvia: Disinformation Campaigns against a Small Nation*, trans. Richard Impola (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2014).

²² Mälksoo, “Criminalizing Communism.” Note that this East European recognition-seeking is hardly unvarying across the region: the Baltic states, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia have been comparatively more vocal in these struggles across the distinct EU and Council of Europe fora.

totalitarianisms.²³ Formatted as a cinematic show trial on the Soviet Union, and sponsored by the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) group in the European Parliament,²⁴ along with the Riga City Council, the film was premiered at the European Parliament on 9 April 2008, with an aim at exerting pressure to the representatives to condemn the criminal legacy of the communist regimes in Europe. While a more immediate contextual impetus for the film was provided by the mnemopolitical resurgence of Vladimir Putin during his second term in office as the president of Russia, *The Soviet Story*'s linking of the two-headed danger of totalitarianism in the Europe of 1930s and contemporary Russia carried a clear political message for the then recently enlarged EU. Pursuing the understanding of Russia as still a threat to the European values in general and the Baltic statehood in particular, *The Soviet Story* constituted, on the one hand, a politically supported move in the information offensive against the allegedly resurgent Russia, as well as an attempt to win broader European support to the Latvian/Baltic assessment of the communist experience, on the other. It speaks volumes in this context that the director of the film was immediately decorated with state honours by his own native Latvia as well as by the president of Estonia. Meanwhile, the screening of the film sparked a series of protests in Russia and elsewhere, with the youth organisation *Rossiia Molodaia* burning an effigy of *The Soviet Story*'s director outside the Latvian embassy in May 2008.²⁵

²³ See further Maria Mälksoo, "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe," *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 653-80.

²⁴ Union for Europe of the Nations was a political group of the European Parliament active between 1999 and 2009, combining national-conservative and Eurosceptic forces. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_for_Europe_of_the_Nations (accessed: February 2, 2018).

²⁵ *The Economist*, "Telling the Soviet Story," May 22, 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/11401983> (accessed February 2, 2018). For a more recent "memory war" along the similar lines, largely fought out in the

While an artefact of cultural memory, such as a novel or a film, might theoretically open some avenues of thought concealed by the politically promoted “national” discourse, or at least broaden the prevailing official narrative, *The Soviet Story* as a historical documentary rather seconds to the central Latvian script of the Second World War, and the background and meaning of the Soviet period in Latvia, the Baltic states, as well as in the broader East European region in general. *The Soviet Story* folds into the predominant mnemopolitical narrative that Latvia as a state has been pursuing after re-establishing its sovereignty in 1991. Yet, it is also a cultural artefact, or an expression of a paramount social memory of the communist experience among the Latvians. The central elements of this narrative are the condemnation of the illegal annexation of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union in the course of the Second World War, the restoration of the independent Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian statehood on the principle of legal continuity with the pre-Second World War republics, and the consideration of the Soviet Union as one of the major aggressors in the war. Latvia has become one of the most persistent pursuers of criminal and historical justice²⁶ vis-à-vis former communist regimes. Along with

social media, see NATO’s short clip about the Baltic post-World War anti-Soviet partisans (the so-called “forest brothers”), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5rQFp7FF9c> (accessed: February 2, 2018). For the Russian reactions, see <https://www.rt.com/politics/396208-historical-perversion-russian-officials-blast/> (accessed: February 2, 2018) and <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russian-spokesperson-slams-nato-film-baltic-resistance-58379> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

²⁶ See Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) for this taxonomy of transitional justice. On transitional justice in the former communist bloc in general, see Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (Abingdon, Oxon. and New York: Routledge, 2009), and in the Baltic states in particular, see Eva-Clarita Onken, “The Politics of Finding Historical Truth: Reviewing Baltic History Commissions and their Work,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007): 109-16; Eva-Clarita Pettai, “The Convergence of Two Worlds: Historians and Emerging Histories in the Baltic States,” in *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History: Inclusion and Exclusion in History. A Festschrift for John*

the other Baltic states and Poland, it has incessantly argued for a pan-European moral, political and legal condemnation of the totalitarian communist crimes in Europe. Latvia was among the six East European states in 2010 calling the European Commission to criminalize the denial of crimes perpetrated by communist regimes in the same way a number of EU countries have banned the public condoning, denial and gross trivialization of the Holocaust.²⁷

The film departs from a similar premise that has informed the work of Latvia's Commission of Historians²⁸ which has studied the crimes against humanity during the country's consecutive subjugation to Soviet and Nazi German rule after the Second World War: namely, the alleged Western ignorance (if not general misinformation) about the darker chapters of the Soviet legacy in eastern Europe. Just as the Commission of Historians of Latvia took notice of an "urgent need to respond to Western misconceptions and official Russian

Hidden, ed. Martyn Housden and David J. Smith (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2011); Eva-Clarita Pettai and Vello Pettai, *Transitional and Retrospective Justice in the Baltic States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁷ Mälksoo, "Criminalizing Communism."

²⁸ The Baltic "history commissions" were set up to sort out the records of the totalitarian regimes during and after the Second World War in the Baltic states by the respective presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1998. See The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, <https://www.komisija.lt/en/> (accessed February 2, 2018); the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, <http://www.historycommission.ee/> (accessed: February 2, 2018), and the Commission of Historians of Latvia (Latvijas vēsturnieku komisija), <https://www.president.lv/lv/darbibas-jomas/komisijas-un-padomes/vesturnieku-komisija> (accessed February 2, 2018). For an overview of the Latvian commission's work, see Andrejs Plakans, "The Commission of Historians in Latvia: 1999 to The Present," *Journal of Baltic Studies* (August 8, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2014.93790>.

positions that are still based on Soviet ideological myths” in 2005,²⁹ the dramatic opening of *The Soviet Story* follows the pitch by claiming that after the Second World War, “the memory of millions innocent victims was erased from history.” While the initial emphasis of particularly the Latvian and Lithuanian state-sponsored “history commissions” was on the Holocaust and the question of the local involvement in Nazi mass killings (due to their pre-war and wartime ethnic composition), the deliberate significance attributed to the analysis and evaluation of the two totalitarian regimes in the interactive framework, and the choice to “compare their structures and impacts without relativizing one over the other”³⁰ nonetheless sent a clear political message to the West and further to the East from the founders of these commissions. Evidently, *The Soviet Story* carries on this very torch by its strive to enlighten the world about the “real face” of Soviet communism. Herein lies the film’s expository zeal regarding the “false beliefs” about the Soviet experiment and legacy, and its ambition to “persuade or convince an audience about the real (but not immediately perceptible) state of affairs.”³¹

Latvia’s way of working out its twentieth-century past has been rather bold in general.³² Compared to its Estonian counterpart, for instance, the Latvian Commission of Historians has used the g-word (i.e. “genocide”³³) in a more permissive manner, applying it

²⁹ Valters Nollendorfs and Erwin Oberlander, eds., *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupation 1940-1991. Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia 14* (Riga: Institute of the History of Latvia, 2005), 10.

³⁰ Onken, “The Politics of Finding Historical Truth,” 110.

³¹ Van Munster and Sylvest, “Documenting International Relations,” 234.

³² But cf. Pettai and Pettai, *Transitional and Retrospective Justice*.

³³ Defined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) as an act “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Yet, as a concept, “genocide” entails legal, empirical, moral and political dimensions, and remains fiercely contested along

also to the losses among the titular population through mass deportations and terror during the 1940s, whilst the Estonian commission has restricted its usage of the notion only to the mass killing of the local Jewish and Roma population during the Nazi occupation of Estonia.³⁴ It is hardly surprising, against the backdrop of the Latvian Commission's diligence in insisting on the "Soviet genocide,"³⁵ that the fourteenth volume of the intermediate reports by the Commission of Historians of Latvia, titled as *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991*,³⁶ has been found to be "almost too politically contentious and thus rather vulnerable to scholarly criticism" for the way of presenting its research findings.³⁷ Meanwhile, Olaf Mertelsmann and Aigi Rahi-Tamm, historians at the University of Tartu, Estonia, have suggested "different waves of cleansing and repression," rather than "genocide," as a more apt descriptor of the nature of Soviet violence in Estonia, considering the diversity of its victims, targets and means, for arguably criminal neglect rather than deliberate genocidal intent was behind the majority of related deaths.³⁸

them all. See further Scott Straus, "Contested meanings and conflicting imperatives: a conceptual analysis of genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 3, no. 3 (2001): 349-75, 359.

³⁴ For a sweeping analysis of post-1989 Central and East European "history wars" as the "search of lost genocide," see Evgeny Finkel, "In Search of Lost Genocide: Historical Policy and International Politics in Post-1989 Eastern Europe," *Global Society* 24, no. 1 (2010): 51-70.

³⁵ See further Lauri Mälksoo, "Soviet Genocide? Communist Mass Deportations in the Baltic States and International Law," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 14, no. 4 (2001): 757-87.

³⁶ Nollendorfs and Oberlander, *The Hidden and Forbidden History*.

³⁷ Onken, "The Politics of Finding Historical Truth," 114.

³⁸ Olaf Mertelsmann and Aigi Rahi-Tamm, "Soviet mass violence in Estonia revisited," *Journal of Genocide Research* 11, no. 2-3 (2009): 307-22.

Compared to Estonia, Latvia has also pointed its attempts of transitional criminal justice more directly to the hornet's nest of the legal-political dispute with the Russian Federation about the universal versus the particularistic applicability of the Nuremberg law³⁹ in charging and convicting a former Soviet partisan Vasily Kononov with *war crimes* for his killing of the civilians in the German-occupied Latvia in 1944.⁴⁰ In its purposefully evocative style, *The Soviet Story* matches the courageous example set by the Latvian legal battle against the discriminatory concept of war crime in the Kononov case. Both *The Soviet Story* and Latvia's case against Kononov are instances of the country's attempt, via cultural and legal means respectively, to universalise the Nuremberg standards, rendering them applicable to the victorious Allies (i.e. the USSR) as well as to Nazi Germany.⁴¹ By its absolute moral detestation and political denunciation of the Soviet regime, *The Soviet Story* fits the general Baltic pattern of condemning the communist legacy.⁴² The thrust of *The Soviet Story* further

³⁹ "Nuremberg law" in the comprehensive sense refers to the Charter of the International Military Tribunal for Nuremberg; the judgment issued at the trial, and the later established Nuremberg Principles building on the former two.

⁴⁰ Lauri Mälksoo, "Kononov v. Latvia," *The American Journal of International Law* 105, no. 1 (2011): 101-8.

⁴¹ For an extensive discussion of the case, see Maria Mälksoo, "Kononov v. Latvia as an Ontological Security Struggle over Remembering the Second World War," in *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*, ed. Uladzislau Belavusau and Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 91-108.

⁴² Estonia's official declaration *On the Historical-Legal Evaluation of the Events of 1940 in Estonia* (1989) qualified the Soviet takeover of the country as "an act of aggression," "a military occupation" and "an annexation." In 2002, the Estonian parliament Riigikogu adopted a resolution *On the Crimes of the Occupation Regimes in Estonia*, condemning the crimes of all the occupation regimes in the country. In Latvia, the first paragraph of the *Law Concerning the Determination of Repressed Status for Persons Who Suffered Under the Communist and Nazi Regimes* (1995) considers as criminal "the ideologies of communism and Nazism, the communist and Nazi

resonates closely with the Baltic “memory offensive” launched by the Latvian president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in 2005 in order to shake the selective ignorance about the role of the Soviet Union in the Second World War and enlighten the European political circles about the complicated predicament of the Baltic states during the war.⁴³ It further resonates with the endeavours of the conservative Baltic and Polish Members of European Parliament (MEPs) at seeking equal recognition for the victims of communism and Nazism.⁴⁴

The mnemopolitical pivot of *The Soviet Story* is nonetheless considerably more controversial than the official mnemonical narrative pursued by the Latvian state at the international level. Not only does *The Soviet Story* insist on the co-responsibility of the Soviet Union for the outbreak of the Second World War, as well as depict the USSR as one of the main aggressors in the war, but the film portrays communism as criminal in nature, that is, in its ideological essence, not just in the way the USSR put it into practice. The film points to a

totalitarian regimes, and the political repressions.” Latvian Saeima issued a *Declaration on condemnation of the totalitarian communist occupation regime implemented in Latvia by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* in 2005. In Lithuania, the *Resolution on the 1939 Pacts between Germany and the USSR and the Annulment of their Consequences to Lithuania* (1989) condemned Soviet aggression against Lithuania in 1940, and declared the occupation and annexation international crimes. Importantly, the Constitutional Act no I-2622 of 1992 prohibits Lithuania’s participation “into any political, economic and military state unions built on the basis of the former USSR.”

⁴³ Maria Mälksoo, “The First Lady of the Baltic ‘Memory Offensive’”, *Diplomaatia* 47, <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/the-first-lady-of-the-baltic-memory-offensive/> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

⁴⁴ Katja Wezel has characterized Latvian memory politics at the European level as a continuation of Latvia’s quest for acknowledgement of its suffering and victimhood. See Katja Wezel, “The unfinished business of perestroika: Latvia’s memory politics and its quest for acknowledgement of victimhood in Europe,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 44, no. 4 (2016): 560-77, 567.

distinct genocidal intent behind the man-made famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine, as epitomized in the thesis of the Soviet Union having helped Nazi Germany to “instigate the Holocaust” in the context of the Second World War. Emphasizing that the Katyń massacres were the first mass killings of this scale in the Second World War,⁴⁵ and that the Kremlin strategically orchestrated the ethnic cleansing in the Baltics in order to make space for the Russian-speakers, the main message of the film is directly targeted at the heart of the alleged Western moral and political consensus about Holocaust as the ultimate and universal standard of the twentieth-century political atrocities – one that has implicitly justified the fight against those responsible for this super-crime with any means possible. Claiming the inner similarity and moral equitability of Soviet communism and German National Socialism, *The Soviet Story* thus constitutes an epitome of the *Historikerstreit* in the Baltic way. The so-called “Holocaust template”⁴⁶ has been essential for the makers of *The Soviet Story* in their encouragement of a pan-European condemnation of totalitarian communist regimes in Europe, along with an invitation to critically review the role of the USSR in the Second World War. Šnore is particularly critical about the Western discriminative standard of relating to the mass killings of Nazi Germany and the USSR, claiming its unsustainability on intellectual, moral, and political grounds. *The Soviet Story* maintains that the criminality of Soviet communism has not been sufficiently acknowledged thus far, as it appears to be still morally acceptable to use and

⁴⁵ For various rememberings of Katyń, see Alexander Etkind et al., *Remembering Katyn* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

⁴⁶ Jüri Luik, “Our duty,” *Diplomaatia* 54 (special edition), 16-18, <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/our-duty/> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

commodify the symbols of communism.⁴⁷ The film is keen on underscoring the close resemblance and moral equitability of Soviet communism and German National Socialism, as both ideologies and regimes attempted to build a “new man;” both were arguably “doctrinally based on Marxism”⁴⁸; both did “not just commit criminal acts,” but were “criminal enterprises in their very essence,” utilizing similar tactics of eliminating people. The film seeks to engage in further myth-busting by emphasizing that the criminality of Soviet communism did not find its climax in Stalinism, but the pattern of atrocities was launched already by Lenin. Likewise, it is maintained that the myth of Khrushchev as a “good communist” should be taken with a grain of salt. Most importantly, the ideological immorality of communism is depicted as stemming from the Marxist idea of political genocide. As one of the interviewees of the film, the late University of Cambridge scholar George Watson⁴⁹ puts it: “Marx was the father of modern political genocide. Killing off the parasites of society was what Marxian socialism was about.” Yet, *The Soviet Story*’s criticism of Engels and the moral bankruptcy of the latter’s

⁴⁷ In early 2005, soon after the EU’s enlargement to the former communist countries of eastern Europe, an initiative was spearheaded by József Szájer from Hungary and Vytautas Landsbergis from Lithuania to urge the EU ban of the communist symbols (i.e. sickle and hammer) alongside with the Nazi ones. The European Commission rejected the extension of the Europe-wide ban to cover communist symbols shortly thereafter.

⁴⁸ See the interview with George Watson in the film.

⁴⁹ For some context, see <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/people/george-watson-1927-2013/2006968.article> (accessed: February 2, 2018). The other prominent interviewees of *The Soviet Story* include Norman Davies, the renowned historian of Europe; Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky; French, Ukrainian and Russian historians, and Members of European Parliament (MEPs), such as, Inese Vaidere, Christopher Beazley, Girts Valdis Kristovskis, Ari Vatanen, and Wojciech Roszkowski.

scathing remarks on the so-called *Völkerabfälle* has been challenged by historians.⁵⁰ The English translation provided for the word by Watson in the film is indeed deceiving – “racial trash” does not quite capture the original meaning of the word as used by Engels in his quoted article of 1849 in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. A more precise translation would be “residual nations” or “refuse of nations,” that is, those left behind, or discarded, by the dominant civilizations. The synonyms in the political lexicon of Engels, used in parallel to the *Völkerabfälle* are more illuminating here: *Völkertrümmer* (the left-overs of nations), or *Völkerruinen* (the ruins of nations) imply the left-overs of previously existing, then disappeared nations, or the remnants of the great historical nations (e.g., southern Slavs which had formerly lived in Austrian territory). The issue for Engels was really about whether these nations were sufficiently strong for establishing their own nation-states, not their destruction. Engels rather pointed to the inevitable assimilation of the stateless nations in case they were unable to construct the states of their own, but he did not argue for their physical destruction as claimed by Watson in the film.

Last not least, the film’s underpinning message points at Russia’s persisting non-acceptance of the criminal legacy of the Soviet regime as a security problem for contemporary Europe. With a link drawn between the pompous celebration of the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Moscow in 2005 and that of the first anniversary of the war – where the Soviets and Nazis celebrated together due to the Hitler-Stalin, or as it is more known in the Baltic states, Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, it is implied that contemporary Russia is effectively the heir of the political tradition of its predecessor state.

⁵⁰ See further Mart Kivimäe, “Ajalugu õpetab kineast: Edvins Snore, ‘Nõukogude lugu’ ja selle didaktiline probleem” [History taught by a Cineast: Edvins Snore’s *The Soviet Story* and its Didactic Problem], *Sirp*, October 15, 2009, <http://www.sirp.ee/s1-artiklid/c9-sotsiaalia/ajalugu-opetab-kineast/> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

Hardly surprisingly, the mnemopolitics of *The Soviet Story* have been reciprocated with a strongly wounded reaction from Russia, where the film has been frequently quoted as an epitome of crude “falsification of history.”⁵¹ In 2009, the Presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests was established in Russia in order to retaliate symbolic initiatives to establish an official equivalence between Stalinism and Nazism. While the Commission has been dissolved by now, Russia’s State Duma passed a “memory law” in the spring of 2014, criminalizing the public remembrance of certain aspects of the Second World War, aimed directly against the “dissemination of false information on the activities of the Soviet Union during the Second World War,” and stipulating concrete penalties in case of its violation.⁵² In its openly revisionist ambition, *The Soviet Story* would clearly fall within the remit of this legislation.

The Soviet Story as a Memory Event in the Struggle for a “European Memory” of Totalitarian Crimes

The Soviet Story was thus aimed to be a particularly sensational stir-up of the conventional Western narrative of the Second World War as ultimately a “good war” where the Allied

⁵¹ For a symptomatic example, see Alexander Dyukov, “*The Soviet Story* – The Tissue of Lies,” April 13, 2011, <http://rugraz.net/index.php/ru/istoricheskoe-dostoinstvo/mifi-o-rossii-i-cccp/1009-alexander-dukov-the-soviet-story-the-tissue-of-lies> (accessed: February 2, 2018). See also “The Soviet story: первый просмотр,” *The New Chronicles*, June 6, 2008, novchronic.ru/1393.htm (accessed: February 2, 2018). Meanwhile, the film was generally well received in the West: for instance, it won the Mass Impact Award at the Boston Film Festival of 2008.

⁵² See Art. 354.1. on the Rehabilitation of Nazism of the Russian Penal Code. For discussion, see Nikolay Korosov, ‘Память в законе: Про историю’, *Russkii Zhurnal*, April 8, 2014, <http://www.russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Pamyat-v-zakone> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

Coalition was supposedly acting on the common ground of anti-Nazism. By graphically building the case for exposing the Nazi-Soviet wartime “partnership in crime,” the film presents a powerful demand for reconsidering the “good” and the “evil” in the context of the war, as well as including the experiences of the subaltern participants in the war, most prominently the Baltic states, Poland, and Ukraine – with the respective emphases on deportations, the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Katyń, and Holodomor – in the pan-European remembrance and moral verdict of the war. The film constitutes an exemplary attack in the mnemopolitical struggle against a version of the victors’ history and victors’ justice, fought by a representative of a small nation that was first caught in between the totalitarian powers in the Second World War, and later discovered itself as trapped in between the dominant Western and Russian narratives of the war. Content-wise, the central argument of *The Soviet Story* is very close to the recent scholarly attempts to dispute the popular assumptions about the central dates, geography, and methods of the Second World War, such as Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands* (2010) and Norman Naimark’s *Stalin’s Genocides* (2010).⁵³ Šnore’s style of presentation is quite a different matter, however, as the narrative of *The Soviet Story* is shaped in a way it would fit a propaganda film format. The willfully propagandistic tone and the deliberately shocking montage of the imagery in order to expose the ideological, moral, and criminal equitability of the two totalitarian regimes of the twentieth-century Europe is only part of the debatable tastefulness of the film director’s approach.⁵⁴ The far more problematic issue that potentially seriously undermines the historical thrust of the film is its diffusion of Marxism, Bolshevism, and Stalinism in a rich brew of Soviet totalitarianism without properly distinguishing between the different ideological forms and social movements,

⁵³ Norman Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ See also Neil Genzlinger, “Atrocities Magnified,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2008.

between the strands of political thought and practice.⁵⁵ Interestingly enough, this old debate over the (in)distinguishability of the idea and praxis of communism was recently reinvigorated in Estonia, against the backdrop of the refusal of Greek Minister of Justice, Stavros Kontonis, to take part of the meeting of the EU Ministers of Justice on the crimes of communism in Tallinn on August 23, 2017.⁵⁶

The mnemopolitics of Šnore's film has an obvious agenda vis-à-vis securing a pan-European moral and political condemnation of the "Soviet story" as it emphasizes the psychological difference of the so-called "new" Europe from the "old,"⁵⁷ examining the impact of the Soviet experiment on the eastern side of the continent, and asking for the reconsideration of the alleged Western ambivalence toward the criminal legacy of the Soviet Union. The film

⁵⁵ Kivimäe, "Ajalugu õpetab kineast."

⁵⁶ See Ahto Lobjakas, "Tänapäevase kommunismi ja natsismi lühike ABC" [A Brief ABC of the Contemporary Communism and Nazism], *Postimees*, August 25, 2017, <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/422425/ahto-lobjakas-tanapaevase-kommunismi-ja-natsismi-luhike-abc> (accessed: February 2, 2018); Mihhail Lotman, "Ka kommunism vajab oma Nürnbergi protsessi" [Communism Has to Have its Nuremberg as well], *Postimees*, August 28, 2017, <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/4224411/mihhail-lotmani-vastus-ahto-lobjakale-ka-kommunism-vajab-oma-nurnbergi-protsessi> (accessed: February 2, 2018); Rein Ruutsoo, "Üks tont käib ringi mööda Eestit" [A Specter is Haunting Estonia], *Postimees*, August 29, 2017, <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/4226243/rein-ruutsoo-vastus-ahto-lobjakale-uks-tont-kaib-ringi-mooda-eesit> (accessed: February 2, 2018); Andres Herkel, "Praegused rahvuslikkuse muttatampimise talgud ei pruugi meile sugugi hästi lõppeda" [The Current Stampede of Nationalism May Not End So Well For Us], *Delfi*, September 4, 2017, <http://epl.delfi.ee/news/arvamus/andres-herkel-praegused-rahvuslikkuse-muttatampimise-talgud-ei-pruugi-meile-sugugi-hasti-loppeda?id=79397104> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

⁵⁷ For an extensive discussion of the tropes of "new Europe" and "old Europe" in the post-Cold War era, see Chapter 4 in Maria Mälksoo, *The Politics of Becoming European: A Study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold War Security Imaginaries* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), 55-82.

accuses both Russia as the political heir of the main culprit, the USSR, and the “West” for its complicity in leaving the East of Europe up for grabs to the Soviet Union after the Second World War, and its current indifference vis-à-vis its eastern counterparts’ pains of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It seeks to explain via dramatic illustrations, to shatter and stun. As an instance of visual securitization, “that is, when images constitute something or someone as threatened and in need of immediate defense,”⁵⁸ the sought political intervention of *The Soviet Story* needs to be explored in the broader context of political, media, and academic discourses interacting with it as texts (intertextuality) and visuals (intervisuality).⁵⁹ By constant inter-visual references to the archival materials on Nazi crimes, the political work of *The Soviet Story* is situated within an intertextual context of the earlier historians’ debates about the comparability of German National Socialism and Soviet communism.⁶⁰ The film is furthermore part of a broader campaign launched from multiple East European quarters, calling for the pan-European condemnation of totalitarian communist crimes on par with the Nazi crimes in Europe. Yet, considering the flow of political declarations and resolutions by the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the OSCE, condemning the crimes of totalitarian communist regimes in various ways, some of which preceded the film by a few years, the pivot of *The Soviet Story* comes across as rushing to open a door already ajar.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Hansen, “Theorizing the Image for Security Studies,” 51.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁰ In particular, Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶¹ Still, two important resolutions followed suit only in 2009: the Vilnius Declaration of the OSCE’s Parliamentary Assembly of July 2009 (“On Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century”) that, in turn, recalled the initiative of the European Parliament of 2 April 2009 “to

The pan-Europeanisation pursuits of the largely East European reckonings with communism – of which *The Soviet Story* is among the most noteworthy cultural advances – have attempted to create a European memory of totalitarianism, thereby considerably swaying the hegemony of the traditional Holocaust-centric mnemonical narrative of the twentieth-century atrocities conducted in Europe. Featuring strong rhetorical undercurrents with the so-called Cold War liberalism, the struggle for the recognition of the assessment of the Soviet legacy as part of the pan-European understanding of criminal totalitarianism brings home the discursively contested nature of the “European memory,” and the way it is interwoven with power relations constituting it.⁶² This political campaign has been fuelled by long-hidden grievances over allegedly insufficient recognition of the eastern Europeans’ particular historical experiences in the context of the Second World War and their suffering under both

proclaim 23 August, when the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was signed 70 years ago, as a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, in order to preserve the memory of the victims of mass deportations and exterminations.” As of 2017, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, as well as Canada, Georgia, and the United States have followed the call. While the Vilnius Declaration acknowledged “the uniqueness of the Holocaust,” it still equated “two major totalitarian regimes, Nazi and Stalinist, which brought about genocide, violations of human rights and freedoms, war crimes and crimes against humanity,” and expressed deep concern at the glorification of the totalitarian regimes. See European Parliament, “European Conscience and Totalitarianism,” *Resolution P6_TA(2009) 0213* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2009); OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, “On Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century. Final Vilnius Declaration” (Vilnius: OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 2009). For discussion, see Mälksoo, “Criminalizing Communism.”

⁶² Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, “Introduction. A European Memory?,” in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 6-7.

Nazi and Soviet (or the latter's puppet communist) totalitarian regimes.⁶³ While the concept of totalitarianism has gone out of fashion due to its Cold War associations in scholarly literature,⁶⁴ Adam Michnik's outcry that "there is no such thing as non-totalitarian ruling communism. It either becomes totalitarian or it ceases to be communism" still holds considerable appeal for those who have directly experienced the daily realities of Soviet and East European communist regimes.⁶⁵ In European mnemopolitics, the notion of totalitarianism has thus been brought back in vogue by the informal Reconciliation of European Histories Group in the European Parliament, tilted towards eastern European representatives, and seeking to include "the experience of the postcommunist nations into common narrative of the European History."⁶⁶ *The Soviet Story*, in spite of its controversial tone and occasionally debatable integrity, has clearly been a significant milestone, or memory event, in the course of this struggle as the sponsors of the film included notable Baltic MEPs, providing also the original target group (i.e. the European Parliament) for its mnemopolitical message.

Hence, in addition to the bilateral and regional dimensions of the Baltic-Russian "memory war" on the remembrance of the Second World War and the overall assessment of the communist legacy, animating the mnemopolitical agenda of *The Soviet Story*, this film was designed with an aim of provoking further transnational resonance for the broader European

⁶³ Mälksoo, "Criminalizing Communism," 85.

⁶⁴ Richard Ned Lebow, *The Politics and Ethics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

⁶⁵ Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, trans. Maya Latynski (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press), 47. See further Maria Mälksoo, "Introduction," in *Historical Memory versus Communist Identity*, ed. Meelis Saueaok (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2014), 9-18.

⁶⁶ See <http://eureconciliation.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

community. From the vantage point of its director and international sponsors, *The Soviet Story* was intended to become a transformative opportunity for the wider European remembrance of the complex legacies of the Second World War and the deep scars left on eastern Europe by the subjugation under the Soviet power. Striving to forge a particular kind of remembrance of the communist legacy at the European level broadly conceived, *The Soviet Story* seeks to provide a compelling set of “visual nodal points” – privileged discursive/visual signs that supply a partial fixation to structures of meaning.⁶⁷ Although the operational logic of disclosure takes a back seat of the generally argumentative and explicitly instructional tone of the film wherein saying is privileged over showing,⁶⁸ *The Soviet Story* nonetheless invokes strong emotions via its rich visual tapestry supporting the voice-over argument.

Conclusion

The transformation of the commonly held public perceptions about the Soviet legacy in and after the Second World War has clearly been the aim behind making and breaking *The Soviet Story*. Yet, it remains debatable whether its mono-narrative accusatory format that presents history in the black-and-white framework of aggressor and occupying nations, perpetrator and victim nations, claiming objectivity, has actually helped to reach out and engage the allegedly ignorant masses of the West. Although ascertaining reception and impact of documentary genre

⁶⁷ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 112, cited in Lene Hansen, “How Images Make World Politics: International Icons and the Case of Abu Ghraib,” *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 2 (2015): 263-88, 265.

⁶⁸ Cf. Van Munster and Sylvest, “Documenting International Relations,” 233-35.

remains challenging,⁶⁹ it is fair to suggest that *The Soviet Story*'s replay of some themes from the German *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, even though from an idiosyncratic Baltic perspective, might have contributed to increased wariness instead of sympathy among those who have been subjected to the blunt attempt of convincing them about the true archetypicality of the Soviet totalitarian model and the depiction of Nazi Germany as essentially its younger mimicker.

The film fails to meet the criteria of critical history, in spite of its pretensions for representing the documentary genre.⁷⁰ There are sweeping generalizations regarding, for instance, the alleged uniformity of the Western public opinion on the assessment of the legacy of communism in Europe, or the lack of attention to nuances between the manifold Marxist ideologues and the Soviet practice of communism. The film utilizes a tactic of crude information offensive while criticizing the Soviet and implicitly also the current Russian version of such conduct, in historical and contemporary contexts concurrently. Regardless of the nominally documentary format, *The Soviet Story*'s "arrangements of perceptibility" or "the creative arrangement of sensorial perceptions (speech, sounds, music, visuals)"⁷¹ work purposefully to achieve a particularly dramatic effect of presenting a historical narrative. In the helpful schema developed by Rens Van Munster and Casper Sylvest, differentiating between three operational modalities of documentary films, *The Soviet Story* represents the genre wherein saying is privileged over showing, as its aim is "to expose false beliefs" and to reveal

⁶⁹ Ibid., 231.

⁷⁰ For a resonating criticism, see Katja Wezel, "Latvia's 'Soviet Story'. Transitional Justice and the Politics of Commemoration," October 25, 2009, <http://www.satori.lv/article/latvias-soviet-story-transitional-justice-and-the-politics-of-commemoration#sdendnote20sym> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

⁷¹ Van Munster and Sylvest, "Documenting International Relations," 231.

“the hidden truth” with the support of images, sounds, and other effects. Due to its aspirations to enlighten the audience via a particular perspective, this type of documentary film is overtly political, taking a stance in an ideological struggle and seeking to influence contemporary political mobilization around a particular cause (such as the acknowledgement of continuity between the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia).⁷²

The jury is still out on the mnemopolitical efficiency of *The Soviet Story*'s propaganda film format. It could easily be the case that the works by such mnemopolitical artisans as an Estonian writer and documentary film-maker Imbi Paju and a Finnish historical novelist Sofi Oksanen manage to touch and convince the public about the crimes of the Soviet regime more profoundly than a fly-in-your-face-type of campaign launched by *The Soviet Story*.⁷³ In their films and books, Paju and Oksanen have opted for the psychoanalytic collages of real people's memories and historical facts, as well as for openly fictionalized ways of working through the communist experience of the Estonians. As a result, their works have a potential to communicate the experiences of the Soviet-subjugated nations in a more nuanced way compared to the rather monolithic *Soviet Story* told in the tradition of *j'accuse*, externalizing the totalitarian atrocities from the Baltic nations' own behaviour during and after the war, and leaving thus the complex questions of war-time collaboration and complicity untouched. While equally condemning the attempts of condoning and denial of the Soviet criminal legacy,

⁷² Ibid., 233-35.

⁷³ See *Memories Denied: The Repression of Memories of Stalinism*. Directed by Imbi Paju. Helsinki: Allfilm, Fantasiafilmi, 2005; Sofi Oksanen, *Purge* (New York: Black Cat, 2010); Sofi Oksanen and Imbi Paju, eds., *Kõige taga oli hirm: kuidas Eesti oma ajaloost ilma jäi* [Fear Was Behind Everything: How Estonia Lost Its History and How to Get It Back] (Tallinn: Eesti Päevaleht, 2009); Sandra Kalniete, *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snows*, trans. Margarita Gailitis (Riga: Latvijas Okupācijas muzeja biedrība, 2006).

Oksanen and Paju's oeuvre has chosen a subtler way of narrating the repressed memories of the Baltic nations through the focus on individual human experiences. Instead of pouring all vigour in proving the point of which totalitarian 'evil' came first, their accounts have sought to grasp the sufferings of the subjugated people under the communist regime in order to arouse universal empathy via the narration of the individual experience. As Imbi Paju explained the story behind the *Memories Denied* – indeed a very personal documentary about her own mother and aunt's repressed memories of the sufferings under the Soviet regime:

*I believe that any kind of pain that is recreated on film, in a book, in a work of art, changes the source of its meaning, creating a new event. The screen is like a mirror in which the viewer does not directly see oneself; what the viewer sees gives birth to a feeling, which in turn creates an experience, an experience through which the viewer becomes a participant in the process of laying open this pain. And this pain often has universal significance.*⁷⁴

As an emblematic piece of the Baltic mnemonic militancy, *The Soviet Story* has nonetheless proven to be a great mobilizer of political passions with its offering of a radical political alternative to the set-in patterns of public remembrance of the Second World War and the hierarchy of totalitarian crimes. The production and reception of *The Soviet Story* underscore the pertinence of Jay Winter's observation about memory amounting to "history seen through affect."⁷⁵ With its clearly defined mnemopolitical position, *The Soviet Story*

⁷⁴ <http://imbipaju.wordpress.com/> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

⁷⁵ Jay Winter, "The Performance of the Past: Memory, History, Identity," in *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 12.

embodies the power of the actual confrontation between different ways of remembering and relating to the Soviet Union.⁷⁶ Perhaps inevitably, it also exemplifies the tendency of such robust mnemopolitical messages to invoke violently disagreeing responses (as the painful popular and governmental reactions in Russia indeed affirm), reproduce and amplify spirals of mutual insecurity. In all, both the accuser and the defendant in the case of *The Soviet Story* seemingly share the assumption that a state's biographical self-narrative can only be made secure by utterly busting its main contesters' version of its own.⁷⁷

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⁷⁶ See further Maria Mälksoo, "The Memory-Political Horizons of the Estonian Foreign Policy," *Diplomaatia* 82 (2010), <https://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/the-memory-political-horizons-of-estonian-foreign-policy/> (accessed: February 2, 2018).

⁷⁷ For an elaboration on the political and ethical pitfalls of "mnemonical security-seeking," see Maria Mälksoo, "'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security," *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (2015): 221-37. For a theoretical elaboration on the ethical ways of dealing with one's past, see Maria Mälksoo, "The Transitional Justice and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Inefficient Causation of State Ontological Security-Seeking," *International Studies Review* (in press).