Demolition of Monuments as a Phenomenon of Culture in Global and Local Contexts: Iconoclasm, 'New Barbarity', or a Utopia of Memory?

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This article is devoted to the study of 'demolition' (destruction) of monuments as a cultural phenomenon, which unexpectedly emerges in certain historical periods. Whereas for a long time it was believed that one of the main functions of culture is the preservation of material achievements and the conservation of memories of the past in monuments and other 'memorial signs', recent years have demonstrated that, occasionally, various nations undergo a 'civilizational explosion' as a result of which representatives of the nation feel a need for a radical change of the memory, prompting a rejection of the past that is expressed in the destruction (demolition) of monuments. The purpose of this article is to analyze the cultural semiotics of the destruction, their origins, and the results of these radical transformations of the signs of the memories of the past. These transformations in people's cultural behavior are studied in global and local contexts. Considerable attention is paid to the semantics of the demolition of monuments in Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine, in the context of the historical experience of this city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Keywords: demolition of monuments, rejection of the past, semantics of trauma

Introduction[1]

Traditional opinion states that the preservation of the memory of the past is one of the main functions of culture: the prolific Russian semiotician Juri Lotman pointed out that communication (i.e., the transmission of information), creativity (i.e., the ability to generate new messages) and the mnemonic function (i.e., the recording and saving of knowledge and texts of the past) are the core elements in the functioning of any culture,[2] and the culture as a whole should be considered as the sum of all non-hereditary 'collective memories' of the past.[3] These collective memories are discovered by new generations through myths, customs and material objects such as monuments, which present the symbolical forms of the important cultural meanings of the past. According to Michel Foucault's concept, history in general can be understood as a selective memory of certain 'discourses', that is, practices that express some form of 'ideology', and having an attitude to objects and events and their political connotations as 'rhetorical gestures'.[4] The idea of discourses as 'ideological' signs and 'rhetorical gestures' was developed by Roland Barthes in his work *Mythologies*.[5] According to this semiotic theory, emphasizing the absence of any object can be seen as a rhetorical gesture that is more powerful than the presence of a multitude, just as a long pause has a stronger effect than a flow of speech that dulls the attention of the audience.

The goal of my article is to research the demolition of monuments as a cultural phenomenon, as a semiotic and rhetorical sign which is controversial towards the cultural function of 'saving' the past and the collective memories.

In recent years, studies have put the 'demolition of monuments' as a historical phenomenon and as a symbolic act in two scholarly traditions: memory studies and 'iconoclasm' studies. 'Iconoclasm'[6] means the destruction of icons or other sacral objects of previous era in view of

radical and rapid political[7] or religious[8] changes. In many cases, sacred meanings can be given to political objects, thus combining both a political and a religious symbolism of rebellion in the act of destroying monuments.

Memory studies, which were first developed in the works of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs[9] and the historian of the *Annales* School Marc Bloch,[10] were devoted to the collective cultural memory, its expression, and its construction. Analyzing different forms of collective memory, Pierre Nora considered monuments, museums, celebrations and other material or non-material objects of commemoration as ‘memorial heritage’ which are used by society (or its elites) for the construction of a national and political identity.[11]

I, however, will analyze the semantics of the ‘demolition of monuments’ in another way: from a historical and semiotic perspective, as part of a global re-thinking of memory that takes place in certain periods of human development and marks a new turn in history. The novelty of my research is that semiotic aspects of the purposeful destruction of monuments (as signs of the ‘past of (a) former power’) have not been the subject of study until now. Combined with my methodology - which is primarily based on Foucault's theory of power and archaeology of knowledge, the works of A. Assmann, as well as J. Lotman and R. Barthes, and finally Anderson's ideas of 'constructing' the nation through 'maps, census, museum' – this results in a reinterpretation of the demolition or damage of monuments as the establishment of a new power and the destruction of the old one, as well the sacralization and legitimization of violence through the destruction of sacred objects of the past.[12]

The main object of my investigation is the public space and monuments in Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second largest city, located at its eastern border. However, I will put the history of the Kharkiv monuments into a wider cultural-semiotic context. The article consists of two parts: in the first

part I consider the most well-known examples of the demolition of monuments (as objects that hold a 'mnemonic function' in culture) in recent (modern) history from the semiotic point of view. The second part is devoted to the public space of Kharkiv and the demolition of Kharkiv monuments in the context of the Eastern European history of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

I should add that this paper was prepared a year before the start of the Russian war against Ukraine, which has resulted in a huge number of monuments, residential buildings, and other material objects being destroyed, as well as thousands of human lives being lost. However, the total (non-selective) destruction of monuments, residential infrastructure and other architectural objects is not a focus of this paper and requires an additional study of the military, legal and political contexts. The main object of my study is the destruction of monuments that during the conditionally peaceful time or during revolutionary times that were laden with purely ideological or symbolic goals.

'Demolition' of Monuments in World Culture as 'Revising' the Past or as the Construction of a Utopian Future

Based on the general thesis that culture is the 'home ('Cosmos') of humans, as opposed to 'nature' and archaic 'chaos' (in which humans cannot exist), it is reasonable to assume that the functions of the preservation of the memory of the past are dominant in culture because it provides a sustainable development of human civilization. The destruction of cultural memory, which is embodied (among others) in monuments, libraries and museums, is typically recognized as an act of 'vandalism' because the destruction of one link in the memory-chain can lead to a failure in the subsequent chain of evolution, to the regression or even the death of a culture. However, the destruction of monuments

in certain historical periods is considered by certain political or social groups as an urgent need for the renewal of a national or public spirit, the rejection of an unjustified past, or as a form of struggle against the enemy (in the context of war). Culture to the greatest extent tries to preserve the memory of the periods that highlight its ingenuity, flourishing or booming development, or carefree and peaceful life, while simultaneously confirming its own memory through visible and/or material images. By contrast, prolonged or abrupt processes of destruction in the history of world culture are usually referred to as 'periods of barbarism' or 'invasion of hostiles'. The most ancient examples of symbolical destruction were the Global Flood, the destruction of the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the end of the world, described in mythologies of India, Maya, and others. From an occult point of view, 'destroying' symbolizes 'human guilt' and the 'punishment of Gods' and is perceived more negatively than positively in culture.

The most well-known example of 'destroyers' of a culture became the so-called 'barbarians' of ancient history that ruined Roman buildings and monuments which symbolized Rome's greatness . Unlike the barbarians, Romans themselves did not destroy the monuments of foreign gods during their conquests, but imported statues of the foreign gods to their own cities, believing that the foreign gods could serve the Romans as successfully as they served other peoples.[13] The attitude of Romans towards the pre-Roman past was therefore pragmatic and rational: they believed the foreigners' past could not be deleted if it existed, but they preferred to use the past for contemporary goals. Much later, during the era of colonial wars, invaders used two complimentary strategies: they destroyed buildings and sanctuaries deemed 'worthless', whilst simultaneously transporting monuments made of gold or having artistic value to European museums and palaces. So, in this second case, both

pragmatism and commercial gains played key roles in deciding whether or not to destroy a monument.

The most radical destruction of monuments in European history which was evaluated 'positively' or at least ambivalently, happened during two of the most influential revolutions in modern times, namely in France in 1793 and in Russia in 1917. The ideas of the French Revolution ('freedom, equality and brotherhood') formed the basis of the contemporary principles of liberal democracy and inspired emancipatory movements all over the world, especially those for the abolition of slavery and for universal suffrage. However, the revolutionary events in France were accompanied by excessive public and street violence: tens of thousands of people were executed and thousands of French people fled their own country. Moreover, following the French queen and king's execution, monuments of the royal family were also destroyed by rebellious crowds, whilst the adoption of a new, revolutionary calendar designed to replace the old one associated with Christianity indicated how both the monarchy and the church (as fundamental vestiges of the Ancient Regime 'power') were targeted by the crowds. Consequently, these political transformations resulted in the closing of Catholic churches, humiliation of priests and destruction of Christian temples.[14] This destructive spree reached its apotheosis at the November carnival of 1793, when one of the actresses of the Paris Opera, (who was dressed as the 'goddess of reason') was placed on the throne in the altar of the Notre Dame Cathedral, and the tombs of the nobility were ruined, thereby signifying a farewell to the symbols of the aristocracy's supremacy. That destruction had an obvious symbolic meaning in the eyes of French revolutionaries: it was perceived as a reversal of power, and, using terminology of the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin,[15] highlighted the semiotic change of the 'top' and the 'bottom' of the power body from a visual perspective. So, the pathos of destruction constituted one of the fundamental revolutionary emotions, although

destroying monuments and aristocratic tombs could not 'delete' the memory of the past. In reality, it was a construction of a new semiotic system which rejected previous values and contrasted itself with the former one.

The French Revolution became a sort of template for future 'revolutionary destructions': it was perceived as a model of 'right behavior' and was given an unexpected opportunity in 1917 during the revolutionary transformations in Russia. As the American historian Dmitry Shlapentokh wrote,[16] Russian intellectuals and revolutionary theorists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considered the French revolutionary mode of conduct (which included terror, atheism, and destroying monuments dedicated to the heroes of the past) as a 'model' to foment social and political changes in their own country. Bolshevik leaders in Russia, educated by French revolutionary concepts, 'fell in love' with France, and believed that a maximum of bloodshed was the only right way of inducing revolutionary changes. Russian Bolsheviks almost completely repeated the practices of the French revolutionaries in their own country without any remorse: they destroyed monuments and churches on a large scale, killed the tsar's family and slaughtered representatives of the nobility, upper classes, military and police officers as they were perceived as the embodiment of the hated regime.

The emotional basis of that process was understandable: the complete destruction of the monuments, palaces, churches and other 'sacral' objects of the imperial past was perceived as a sort of symbolic compensation for social injustices committed in the past, and simultaneously indicated the 'preparation' of a public space designed to commemorate the new heroes. In other words, revolutionaries wanted to be like 'God' from the point of view of creating a new world from 'nothing'. Symbolism of that practice was connected with the desire of revolutionary groups to change the cultural code through the refusal of the memory of the past.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, the Bolsheviks' attitude to the past of their own country and the destruction of monuments demonstrated that they strove to construct a kind of social and political utopia, a 'paradise' for people 'without history'. In reality, the memory of imperial Russia that the Bolsheviks aspired to destroy, was preserved in the poetry and songs of Russian emigrants and exiles, the generations who survived the Bolshevik terror, and the memoirs, literature, and nostalgic longing 'for the empire' which resurfaced following the collapse of the Soviet state.[17]

Semiotically, it turned out that the revolutionary practices of destroying monuments, which arose spontaneously in revolutionary France and constituted a kind of revolutionary experiment, were used in revolutionary Russia as a kind of 'template' for revolutionary practices. Thus, from a semiotic point of view, the destruction of monuments of the past passed from the semiotics of revolutionary 'negativism' into the category of 'revolutionary normality', and began to be perceived in the public mind as one of the common 'routines' or 'conventions' associated with a revolutionary period.

Is it possible to detect such large-scale destruction of monuments in the twentieth century that exemplified this perceived revolutionary template? Undoubtedly, they existed, but, in our opinion, they had another socio-political basis and semiotic meaning. During World War II for example, the Nazis not only destroyed Soviet military objects and Red Army soldiers on a massive scale, but also Soviet citizens: according to the official statistics,[18] 27 million Soviets perished, including both military and civilian losses. This was the result of the Nazi racist policy which described Soviet Jews, Slavs and other Soviet peoples in the Nazi hierarchy of races as 'sub-humans', 'Untermensch', or 'inferior races'.[19] But an important fact is that the Nazi racial doctrine resulted not only in the unprecedented slaughter of Soviet soldiers, POW's, representatives of the communist underground, Jewish, Roma, and Slavic people,[20] but

also the destruction of Soviet factories, educational institutes, museums, and artistic objects, along with Soviet monuments, especially those devoted to political leaders. Because the Nazi-German attack against the Soviets constituted a racial war of the 'Aryans' against 'sub-humans' in Hitler's propaganda, the demolition of monuments by the Nazis in the territory of the Soviet Union had a symbolic meaning of both the self-perceived racial superiority and the elimination of the 'Soviet idea', in addition to the practical goal of the extermination of the strategic potential of the ideological opponent. This is why this example of destruction cannot be analysed via the usage of the 'revolutionary template'.

The large-scale destruction of monuments, which had a great resonance in the world, several times took place at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, and almost always accompanied or was the result of serious political changes in different national communities. One of the most-wide scale example was the demolition (or removal) of socialist monuments in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the bloc of the socialist countries.[21] It was, in the terms of Aleida Assman,[22] a start of 'new modes of time': the rejection of the communist ideology in the post-socialist countries was expressed in more or less active 'decommunization'[23], a revision of the socialist history,[24] and searches for alternative sources of a national identity in the trauma of the totalitarian past.[25] However, in fact, this era constituted the second period of the demolition of the socialist monuments, as the first one already occurred in the 1950s (following Stalin's death) and was called 'de-Stalinization'. In 1956, the Soviet leader N. Khrushchev exposed Stalin's 'cult of personality' at the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party. It was the first public denouncement of the Stalinist repressions and the beginning of a period of liberalization in the Soviet Union which was called *'Ottepel'* ('Thaw'). During this time, the gradual release of

political prisoners from the Gulag, the winding down of censorship and the expansion of contacts with Western countries started. Moreover, in 1956, Stalin's body was removed from the Mausoleum in Moscow, his name was removed from cities and streets, and the city of Stalingrad was renamed into Volgograd. At the same time, monuments dedicated to Stalin were being removed in cities all across the Soviet Union, a process which was decided by the regions' local authorities and was carried out without publicity until 1962. Only a very small number of monuments remained in small places in Georgia and North Ossetia because local residents revered Stalin as a national hero and repeatedly went out to protest against the demolition of these monuments. The countries of the socialist bloc followed the example of the Soviet Union and also destroyed monuments dedicated to Stalin. This demolition of Stalin's monuments had a symbolic meaning, as it indicated a confession of Stalin's guilt and his fundamental role in the deaths of thousands of repressed people. Semiotically, it signified radical changes of the political course.

The discourses of trauma and the annihilation of the socialist cultural and political heritage dominated media in the Eastern European countries,[26] and was connected (in a global mentality) at the end of the twentieth century with the end of socialism and the rejection of the recent history of the 'Soviet' political identity. However, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the movement of demolishing monuments unexpectedly continued in different parts of the world. Between 2014 and 2017, the whole world paid attention to the destruction of ancient monuments and museal rarities by Islamic extremists in Palmyra, Aleppo, and Mosul.[27] In this case, the phenomenon of the destruction of unique monuments of a bygone civilization not only signified a symbolic meaning of religious and civilizational confrontation, but also contained a commercial element: the destruction of a large number of monuments and sculptures and the

'rarefication' of the remaining archaeological objects resulted in a significant increase in the price for rare museum valuables at art and archaeological auctions. This 'commercialization' of destruction was a non-obvious specificity of the destruction of Middle Eastern monuments in the last decade.

Another movement discussed in global media in recent years which was connected with the destruction of historical monuments, was the American antiracist movement 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM). It expressed its demand for racial equality by, among other things, destroying or removing monuments dedicated to white American leaders and the founders of the American state, which was perceived as perpetuating racial segregation. Starting with Roland Barthes and Benedict Anderson, researchers have pointed out the significance of using symbols in politics, and especially the impact of visuality on the masses' emotional persuasions. The destruction of monuments in some American cities put in the center of the discussion the issues of repentance of the white people for slavery, the ubiquity of white supremacy, and the humiliation of the black community. The symbolic meaning of the destruction of the monuments was an expression of the trauma of racial and gender minorities, and their search for social equality in comparison with the previous generations of black people in the USA. Simultaneous with the destruction of the monuments, some white people publicly repented for slavery of the previous centuries. It follows that the destruction of the statues was a form of symbolic canceling of a specific interpretation of the past and its representatives, which was regarded as unacceptable and offensive from the point of view of racial justice, and thus required a 'deletion' from cultural memory. In this context, a philosophical question can be posed: how is it possible to reconstruct or transform the past from the future, or does this destruction constitute a kind of 'socio-political' utopia?

Another phenomenon of destroying monuments which was represented in international media originated in Ukraine. After the 'revolution of dignity' which started with the Maidan in Kyiv in 2014, the 'decommunization' and 'desovietisation' were officially announced in Ukraine. These processes resulted in the so called *Leninopad* ('Leninfall'), when monuments to Vladimir Lenin and other Soviet leaders were demolished,[28] and Ukrainian streets and even cities were renamed.[29] In only one year, 504 statues of Lenin were removed from Ukrainian cities and towns.[30] This process sparked controversy inside Ukraine, its different regions and abroad: one part of the researchers considered the destruction of the socialist monuments as a symbolic and 'real', physical rejection of the Soviet past and a 'cleansing' of the political space in Ukraine.[31] Another part of the historians and journalists by contrast were sure that a 'war with monuments' was the result of a 'non-adequate commemoration policy in Ukraine',[32] and a legacy of the controversial past of the two (Western and Eastern-South) parts of Ukraine. So, we can see that during the most recent decade the demolition of monuments – which, from a semiotic point of view, signified a 'revolution of justice' and the 'struggle against the unacceptable past' for a (utopian?) future – became a hot issue and engendered strong emotional responses in different regions of the world. The interesting thing is that the demolition of socialist memorials not only stimulated political discussions but also active debates on the aesthetic semiotics of the monuments devoted to Lenin,[33] on the impact of aesthetics on politics,[34] and on the transgressive role of demolishing as a 'performative gesture'.[35]

Demolishing city monuments in Kharkiv and its controversy in the context of local history and geography

In this part of my paper, I study the demolition of monuments in Kharkiv in the context of its socialist and post-socialist history. Geography also plays a crucial role in understanding the phenomena in Kharkiv, as the city is located in the north-eastern part of Ukraine, at the border with contemporary Russia, and this city is described by contemporary scholars as a 'borderland city'[36] and 'frontier city'.[37] Kharkiv is the second largest city in Ukraine with official data registering 1,419 million residents today. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Kharkiv was the center of the Slobozhanschina region, a kind of 'free economic zone' on the border of the Russian empire which became 'a shelter' for people escaping from the center of the empire for political, religious or social reasons. Being East-Ukrainian, Kharkiv was strongly connected with Russian centers from its beginning. Besides the Ukrainian and the Russian nations, Kharkiv was home to more than one hundred ethnicities, including Jews, Armenians, Azerbaijanians, Poles, Germans, Roma, and many others, and had dozens of Christian churches, two synagogues, a Catholic cathedral, a Lutheran church, and a Muslim mosque. Kharkiv became an important mercantile and industrial center from the nineteenth century onwards, with the establishment of the (first) imperial university in Ukraine in 1805 as a key event in the city's history.[38] Establishing the university stimulated development of the city's culture, scientific and educational institutions, and provided new professional opportunities. The advantageous logistical location of Kharkiv contributed to the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century it had become a major railway, industrial and cultural hub, housing a large number of banks, international firms and factories.

Russian and Ukrainian languages were diffused in Kharkiv on a same level, but the Russian language was the official language of the empire,

sciences and education: this was highlighted in the fact that the first public monument that was erected in Kharkiv was a bust of Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837), the famous Russian poet. The monument was constructed in May 1904 on the initiative of locals who decided to install a monument to the poet who was venerated by different generations who knew Pushkin's poetry since their own childhood. The monument was placed near the Dramatic theater in the center of the city, but five months after its placement, on the night of 1 November 1904, activists of the 'Defense of Ukraine' group which was created on the initiative of the ideologist of Ukrainian nationalism Nikolai Mikhnovsky, tried to blow up the monument. While the explosion hardly damaged the monument, it did have an impact on the near surroundings, as the windows in the nearby houses were shattered. The reaction of the Kharkiv society was negative: even among the nationalists of that time, Mikhnovsky was considered as 'too radical'.[39] Mikhnovsky's motivation was as follows: a bust of a Russian poet must not stand in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv before the installation of a monument dedicated to the great Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861). Also, he considered the explosion of the monument to Pushkin as a useful way to draw public attention to the necessity of Ukraine's independence. In reality however, the first bust of the Ukrainian poet Shevchenko was already erected in Kharkiv prior to that of Pushkin, in 1899, though it was not placed in the center of the city, but in the private estate of the Kharkiv philanthropist A. Alchevsky. Whereas Pushkin was the symbol of the 'Golden era of the Russian culture', for many people the Ukrainian poet Shevchenko personified the suffering of 'mother-Ukraine'. Thus, the monument to Pushkin was seen by Ukrainian nationalists as a sign of the 'greatness of the empire', and damaging it could symbolize the destruction of the Russian empire and the assertion of Kharkiv's Ukrainian identity. Semiotically, such damage can't be considered as a part of 'iconoclasm': it was a conscious struggle of political ideologists for national priorities of the city residents in the public space of Kharkiv.

It should be noted that the monument dedicated to Pushkin in Kharkiv was nevertheless dismantled by anonymous activists on 9 November 2022.[40] Despite the dissatisfaction of some part of Kharkovites, who posed the rhetorical question on the internet 'Is it Pushkin's fault, that after his death Putin came to power?', an influential part of the cultural intelligentsia and military groups argued that Pushkin is to blame for the fact that the ideology of the empire was based on his works, and that in a situation of Russian aggression, Kharkiv residents were dissatisfied to see signs of Russian culture in their city.[41]

From 1919 to 1934, Kharkiv served as the first capital of Soviet Ukraine, and during the Soviet era the state mostly decided which monuments and memorials should be present in the public space. Several groups of monuments dominated in socialist Kharkiv: the monuments devoted to the October revolution of 1917 and the heroes of the Civil War of 1918-1921; to the Soviet political leaders, and to the heroes of the socialist labor movements; and finally to Soviet workers and collective farmers that symbolically expressed the Soviet ideological concepts of internationalism and the value of the working people. In addition, dozens of monuments were dedicated to Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union and Soviet Ukraine, and the idea of the 'new Soviet man' – which was fundamental for the early Soviet state – was embodied in the monuments to both Soviet and classic writers and poets.[42] Moreover, in 1935, the talented sculptor Matvei Manizer created a monument devoted to Taras Shevchenko in the Kharkiv city center which is considered by many art historians and Kharkiv locals to be one of the most impressive in the world.

The period of the 1930s became an important time for the development of academic and applied sciences in Kharkiv, especially in the areas of physics, radiophysics, microbiology and pharmacology. Many talented scientists worked in the Kharkiv research institutes, including, amongst others, the nuclear physicists Lev Landau (who won a Nobel Prize),

Anton Valter, Kiril Synel'nikov, and Lev Shubnikov.[43] The fission of an atomic nucleus was for the first time carried out in Kharkiv in 1932 and gigantic industrial plants were constructed in Kharkiv during the 1930s, such as the Kharkiv Aircraft Plant, the Kharkiv Turbine Plant etc. The monumental buildings of that time were erected in the center of the city, close to the scientific research institutes and polytechnic university which occupied several quarters in the city center. One of the most famous monuments of Soviet Kharkiv was the House of the State Industry called *Derghprom* (1928), a unique building in the 'constructivist' style. So, during the Soviet time, Kharkiv moved from the search for a national identity (which was not encouraged during Soviet times) to the deepening and strengthening of its professional and social identity, since the city's status as the 'city of science and students' and 'the largest industrial center of Ukraine' proved very influential in the Soviet division of labor and corresponded to the large number of scientific and technical intelligentsia who lived and worked in Kharkiv.

During World War II, Kharkiv underwent a harsh Nazi occupation (1941-1943) which gravely afflicted its population: of the 1.5 million residents in Kharkiv, only 200.000 remained when the Red Army liberated the city in August 1943. During the two years of occupation, the Nazis widely used a policy of intimidation on the Kharkiv locals: the corpses of executed hostages were hung on the balconies of the central houses of the city, and about 15.000 Jews were killed or left for dead in the nearby ravine *Drobitzky Yar*.[44] In addition, the Nazis burned Soviet prisoners of war alive in a Kharkiv hospital, and took blood and spinal cords from Kharkov orphans from an orphanage.[45] Moreover, the Kharkiv scientific libraries and physical labs were robbed and the socialist monuments were destroyed. The reason why Kharkiv was devastated so harshly was because of the Nazis' ideological concept which associated big industrial cities such as Kharkiv with the high technological and academic potential of Soviet Ukraine, and as such industrial cities were targeted more

harshly by the Nazis than non-industrial towns. The result was devastating: every Kharkiv family had relatives who perished during the war as soldiers or as victims of the Nazi death camps, or at forced labor camps in Germany.

That is why the postwar memory of the Kharkiv tragedy during World War II was omnipresent in the many monuments devoted to the Soviet fighters and civilian victims of the Nazis. Today there are more than 63 war graves officially registered in the city of Kharkiv and more than 1900 graves in the whole Kharkiv region, even as anonymous graves of the war time continue to be discovered. The construction of memorial signs on the battlefields and graves devoted to the war events and heroes continued in Kharkiv during the entire socialist era, with the grandiose Memorial Complex of the 'Soldiers' Glory' and the 'Grieving Mother' with the eternal light which was erected in Kharkiv in 1977 as a typical example. The most famous memorial devoted to the Jewish and other civilian victims of the Nazis was the *Drobizky Yar* complex which was created after Ukraine attained independence.

These memorials devoted to the memory of the war and struggle against Nazis were mostly constructed in the Soviet time and were understood as 'socialist'.[46] After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, many Soviet war monuments were demolished or (re)moved in different post-socialist countries, as well as in western-Ukrainian cities.[47] They were considered as objects with 'higher' Soviet semiotics[48] and its semiotics became 'undesirable' in the 'anti-socialist' revision of the past.[49] Contemporary scholars have analyzed in detail the transformations of the memory politics on the Great Patriotic War/World War II, their content,[50] and forms,[51] in three East-Slavic states – Ukraine, Russia, Belarus – in the context of the political regimes that were established in these countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[52] They argue that the practice of demolishing and erecting war memorials should not be considered as a homogenous act, but as a practice that on the one hand

is shaped by public policies of commemoration of the war in this region,[53] and on the other hand has to be placed in the context of other tragedies of the mid-twentieth century, i.e., the memory of the Holocaust, Stalinist repressions, prisoners of war and Soviet forced laborers.[54]

Despite the practice of active de-Sovietization of the memorial space of Ukraine, the war memorials were not demolished in Kharkiv because for many local people the trauma of the Nazi occupation and memory of the Soviet 'glorious' victory in World War II had a personal and positive connotation, as it was connected to family stories about their survival during the Nazi occupation and the severe battles against Nazism. On the eve of Victory Day, on 8 May, many Kharkiv families traditionally come to the war memorials to lay flowers, since they consider it their moral duty in relation to their ancestors and perished unknown heroes. For the younger generations in Kharkiv, the war memorials personified a kind of 'post-memory' (in terms of Marianne Hirsh[55]) because their grandparents did it as a ritual and told about their own memories of the war and the Nazi occupation, and these memories were subsequently connected emotionally to the war memorials. Due to the fact of the extremely brutal Nazi occupation and bloody struggle for Kharkiv's liberation, the memory of World War II, the victims of the Holocaust and heroes of the liberation of Kharkiv remained an 'uncontested commemoration' for many Kharkiv residents. Their semiotics are understood by many locals in terms of 'ontological gratitude' to the heroes and victims of the past and were tied to the semiotics of religious veneration and the veneration of saints in church. The religious connotations in the residents' adherence towards the memory of the war became apparent in the last decades, when small churches were erected next to the Kharkiv war memorials.

However, several socialist monuments were removed from the city center after achieving Ukrainian independence: in spite of the Russian language being widespread in Kharkiv,[56] two monuments devoted to

Russian writers were removed in the 1990s, signifying an appreciation towards Ukrainian independence. They were the monument to Maksim Gor'ky in the central park and the monument dedicated to Anton Makarenko. The monuments of Maksim Gor'ky and Anton Makarenko were transferred to the places which these writers visited during their lifetime. In addition, a big monument in the Konstituzii central square which was erected in honor of the proclamation in Kharkiv of the Soviet power in Ukraine, was replaced by the city's new symbol: a statue of a flying Mercury, the Roman god of trade, communication, speech and writing, who was considered by the city authorities as more corresponding with the image of historical Kharkiv as a dynamic and vibrant mercantile city. So, the post-socialist semiotics of the city moved from the 'Soviet center of science' to the center of trade and communication, and it was reflected in the public space. The decisions about replacing and erecting new monuments were adopted at the level of the city authorities and the symbolism of new monuments in the city was developed under the personal auspices of the Kharkiv mayor, with the participation of a group of Kharkiv historians and architects, whose task it was to emphasize the 'golden past' and the best qualities of Kharkiv for the future. The socialist monuments which reflected the academic, cultural, artistic achievements of the past remained in the Kharkiv public space and were even complemented by new monuments devoted to Soviet artists, poets, and scientists who lived in Kharkiv but were not commemorated during the socialist period. It entailed the sculptures of people who originated from Kharkiv or could be considered as 'emblems' of Kharkiv's 'flourishing' eras in the locals' collective memory: beloved singers and composers (such as Ludmila Gurchenko, Klavdia Shulzhenko and Maksim Dunaevskiy), popular actors (for example Leonid Bykov), or outstanding scientists and doctors (for example Leonid Girshman, Nikolai Trinkler and Aleksei Beketov). In addition, various Kharkiv national and professional communities were

given an opportunity to express their 'collective memories' which were not presented in the Kharkiv public space during the socialist time.

After the Euromaidan in 2014 and the adoption of the law on the 'decommunization' of the Ukrainian public space in 2015, the demolition of socialist monuments in Kharkiv became more extensive. Six monuments commemorating Lenin in different Kharkiv districts which 'survived' the decommunization in 1990s were destroyed and the biggest monument dedicated to Lenin which was located in the central Svobodu square was targeted several times following the onset of the Maidan revolution. Igor Baluta, the governor of the Kharkiv region, ultimately signed the official order on the dismantling of the Lenin monument on the square, which was further supported by the central administration in Kiev.[57] This demolition of the Lenin monument however provoked an ideological split in the city: some groups of Kharkiv locals (pensioners, elder women, members of the communist and socialist parties, as well as veterans of World War II and the Afghan wars, and even youth representatives) tried to surround the monument in order to protect it, asserting that Lenin was the creator of the state in which they lived.[58] However, on 28 September, 2014, a group of anonymous activists of the Maidan drove a crane and were breaking the monument for several hours in the presence of a crowd.[59] Kharkiv major Gennaduy Kernes promised after the demolition to restore the monument and to transfer it to another appropriate place. In addition, as a part of the decommunization process, about twenty socialist monuments dedicated to the leaders of the Bolshevik revolution were demolished in different districts of Kharkiv: they mostly constituted monuments commemorating Lenin's comrades-in-arms, such as Ya. Sverdlov, N. Rudnev, P. Postyshev, S. Ordzhonikidze, I. Kotlov, S. Kirov, the revolutionary leader Artem, and several others. At the same time some socialist decorations and mosaics which were inseparable parts of architectural ensembles of the city and had artistic value, remained in

Kharkiv buildings because of the protection of some artists, art critics, educators and city activists who wanted to preserve the best pieces of Kharkiv architecture and art of the socialist era.[60]

The destruction of the monuments provoked conflicting feelings among the inhabitants of the city: along with support for the process of 'decommunization', many locals expressed irritation with the destruction of the 'old' monuments that made up the familiar and recognizable urban environment and were perceived as works of art. At the official level, the semiotics of the dismantling of monuments dedicated to Lenin and other socialist realities was presented in the media as a struggle of activists to liberate the city from signs of communism and signified a return to the city's Ukrainian roots. Some critics of the dismantling of monuments argued that the demolition of monuments was too symbolic and constituted a 'mediatized' action, since it did not fundamentally affect the principles of life in the country. The dismantling advocates argued that changing the semiotics of the urban space should transform the national and political consciousness of people towards more Ukrainian patriotism. At the level of everyday life, the semiotics of dismantling was perceived as the 'destruction' of the collective memory of Kharkiv's prosperous scientific, economic, and literary past, which largely coincided with the socialist era, and which was part of the personal histories of many residents. If the demolition of the socialist monuments in Eastern Europe was recognized as the expression of a 'post-socialist trauma',[61] the perception of the destruction of monuments in Kharkiv retained a controversial feeling: for a big part of the Kharkiv intelligentsia (which consisted, among others, of military engineers and professors in the fields of air space and physics[62]), the commemoration of socialist Kharkiv was connected with the commemoration of scientists of their profession and their contribution to the development of Kharkiv. In the context of the arrival and prominence of the new (post-Soviet) values, the status of 'victim' of

a socialist past was not appropriated by the majority of the Kharkiv community: in contrast, the community returned to the preservation and even 'glorification' of the former (socialist) values of the society which felt as a 'comfortable chronotope' by many people. That is why the city's administration decided that the recognition of the Kharkiv socialist past as an 'imaginary blossoming' could give some kind of 'moral satisfaction' to some Kharkiv residents and many new monuments erected in the recent years referred to this history of Kharkiv. They can conditionally be called as a semiotic 'compromise' between the 'socialist' form of expression and post-socialist senses. The Swedish scholar Irina Sandomirskaya, using the philosopher Zigmund Bauman's concept of 'retrotopia', has described this as a nostalgia for the 'communist visuality' which is spreading in contemporary Europe.[63] Extrapolating her idea to the situation in Kharkiv, we can find that personages of the new monuments in the Kharkiv public space can embody the 'socialist visuality' (as a kind of 'socialist romanticism') without having a connection to the socialist ideology. Using Eric Hobsbawm's concept of the 'invention of tradition',[64] one can see that the Kharkiv city community aspires to heal the trauma of several radical transformations during the lives of the current generations, constructing a 'tradition' to romanticize the past in order to keep its positive image as the basis of self-respect. It is possible by saving the monuments that correspond with the 'uncontested' commemorations for the majority of the local community. So, searches for 'positive heroes' in the 'collective memory' of the past, is a part of the strategy in contemporary Kharkiv to unite the local community. The new Kharkiv monuments devoted to the scientists, singers and actors were chronologically connected with the socialist period of the history, but they lost any 'connotations' of socialism for many locals, and the legendary Kharkovites that are symbolized in these monuments were perceived more like representatives of a 'Kharkivness' identity than one typifying a certain 'Sovietness'.

Conclusions

As the American scholar James Young pointed out, the motives of commemoration depend on national traditions and their contemporary meanings.[65] We can tell the same of the demolition of monuments which can have different semiotics of meanings. Although radical transformations in society were periodically accompanied by the destruction of monuments in the past, cultural memory more often fixates on 'creation', since the 'destruction' of monuments is a way of destroying culture itself, which can be dangerous to the survival of human society.

The removal of monuments in the public space as if 'clearing a place' for the establishment of a new 'mode of memory' however can polarize society if it does not provide positive substitutes from the collective past which are 'uncontested' for the majority of the society. Over the years, a monument can lose its emotional content, and many historical monuments are transformed from 'signs of living memory' into objects of art, or into a 'routine of space', i.e., the world in which a person lives. But the demolition of monuments as a rule can actualize the emotional meaning of monuments as 'witnesses' of the past and become contested because it never received the support of the whole society. Due to it, searches for 'local' memories which are 'uncontested' for the majority of people are a kind of 'positive decision' in the context of rapid political transformations. For example, due to the fact that the 1960s-1980s was the era of the scientific glory of Kharkiv, and a significant part of the technical intelligentsia and educated people among Kharkiv residents are traditionally oriented towards the development of science and industry, commemoration of the achievements of the previous generations of Kharkiv scientists can be perceived as a 'successful' strategy, because people who associate themselves with the 'successes' of the past regime are unlikely to accept the identity of a minority. In this

situation, the onus falls on the city's administration, since it is required to make decisions that can reconcile parts of society with differing views, and strike a balance between different types of memory. Therefore, a compromise is needed to maintain peace in society. This historical experience of Kharkiv determined the construction of new monuments which emphasized the scientific and artistic glory of Kharkiv as the 'first capital' of Ukraine, and as a peaceful multiethnic and scientific center with a high degree of professionalization. As we have seen, the destruction of monuments can precede, accompany or initiate violence against humans, as individuals or as representatives of certain groups. The demolition of monuments as rhetoric gestures can provoke civil conflicts and even wars, and that is why it constitutes a dangerous sign in culture that may indicate serious internal tension in a society, which does not find a political or social solution, and therefore expresses itself in direct physical violence. As a rule, violence against people of certain groups becomes the next step after the destruction of monuments. In contrast to demolition, the restoration of monuments that unite or revive the 'collective' plans for a joint future among different parts of urban society can be seen as the most productive strategy of a society. Since monuments largely symbolize the image of a 'collective agreement' between society (social groups) and authorities, the recognition by society of the value of its own property and the responsibility of the authorities to fulfill their obligations to society illustrate a shared effort to protect local values, peace and the collective future.

Endnotes

[1] Acknowledgements. I want to thank SNM's Managing Editor Eva Bidania Ibargutxi for the invitation to take part at the international conference "National

forgetting and memory: the destruction of "national" monuments from a comparative perspective" in Antwerp. Some materials for my research I collected during my EHRI-Fellowship at the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich, and a special thanks to the coordinator of the program Dr. Anna Ullrich. Also my big gratitude to Prof. Dr. Claus Arnold who was the head of the 'ReiReis' program at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, where I worked at library during my fellowship, and to Alexandra Nusser, coordinator of the program for their comprehensive support. All ideas expressed in this paper are my own.

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