came a site of mass executions, where from October 1941 to August 1944 more than 50,000 people were murdered. The fascists eliminated more than 30,000 Jews there, including inmates of the Kaunas ghetto and Jews from various European countries such as France, Austria, Germany, Poland, and others.

Nonetheless, the neglect of the specifically Jewish victimhood and the narrative of resistance became the most prominent elements of the fort’s history in Soviet times. However, in this paper, I argue that despite the political instrumentalization of this site and its ideologically conceptualized exhibitions, Lithuanian Jews, especially male partisans, managed to voice, at least partly, memories of their traumatic experiences on the grounds of the Ninth Fort. They spoke publicly during the commemorative events, published memoirs, and tried to leave some mark in the historical understanding of World War II. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to trace the construction of memories of the Nazi occupation in Soviet Lithuania based on the case study of the Ninth Fort Museum. I will focus on two questions: (1) Who were the key actors who created the museum? (2) How was the memory of the war constructed, medialized, and gendered at the site of the museum?

Agency and Power: Creating the Ninth Fort Museum

On July 16, 1958, following Decree No. 300 of the Soviet Ministers’ Council, a Museum of Revolution History was established in the Ninth Fort. The Council chose the year 1958 intentionally as this date was the 40th anniversary of the October revolution. The establishment of the Ninth Fort Museum was not only initiated on the highest political level, but it was also conceptualized by the Soviet Lithuanian communist elite itself. Motiejus Šumauskas, the chair of the Council of Soviet Ministers, who was interned in the fort during the interwar years, even offered a conceptual design for the memorial site. The establishment of the Ninth Fort Museum was part of the broader communist cultural policy of commemorating World War II in Soviet Lithuania. In 1960, two other
important museums began operating: the Ponar Memorial Museum\textsuperscript{13} and the Pirčiupis Museum of the Victims of Fascism.\textsuperscript{14}

Historian Ekaterina Makhotina, a researcher of museum representations of World War II in Lithuania, noticed that the 1960s was “a boom time for war museums in Soviet Lithuania.”\textsuperscript{15} These museums, as similar sites in other communist countries, were conceptualized as places of collective memory and social cohesion that avoided any ethnic identification of the victims.\textsuperscript{16} Their aim was to honor and mourn the death of Soviet national heroes and victims, not commemorate individual deaths.\textsuperscript{17} The commemorative idiom of this site was antifascist ideology, which divided the world into oppositional fascist and antifascist camps. Antifascism was a foundational ideology that “mythologized the very existence of the Soviet Union” and legitimized its expansion.\textsuperscript{18} Following Stalin’s death in 1953, the Soviet political elite found it important to strengthen the ideological foundations of the Soviet Union in many of its member states, including Soviet Lithuania. Therefore, it is not surprising that just between 1959 and 1960 three museums related to the memory of World War II opened in Soviet Lithuania.

The main actors in the establishment of the Ninth Fort Museum, as mentioned above, were the communist elites of Soviet Lithuania. Such high political motivation for establishing a memorial site could be explained through the personal experiences of the Lithuanian communists. During the interwar period, the newly reestablished Lithuanian state lacked prisons and detention sites.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{13} The Ponar Memorial Museum was founded in 1960 as a branch of the Museum of Revolution in Vilnius. It was located at the former site of the mass murder of Lithuanian Jews near Vilnius. In the Ponar forest, around 100,000 people, mostly Lithuanian Jews, were killed between 1941 and 1943. After Lithuanian independence in 1990, the Ponar Memorial Museum became a branch of the Jewish State Museum in Vilnius.

\textsuperscript{14} Pirčiupis Museum of the Victims of Fascism was established in 1960 as a branch of the Museum of Revolution. Pirčiupis is a village that was burnt down by the Nazis during the war. It is located 44 kilometers away from the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. On June 3, 1944, a group of Nazi Germans was attacked by pro-Soviet partisans in the surrounding forest of the village. The German military took revenge by burning almost all the inhabitants of Pirčiupiai alive. 119 people were murdered and only 13 managed to escape. A monument, “The Mother of Pirčiupiai,” next to the memorial museum was erected in 1960. The museum was closed in 2010 because of the decline in popularity.


\textsuperscript{17} Kattago, “Commemorating Liberation,” 56.

\textsuperscript{18} Kattago, “Commemorating Liberation,” 57.

Therefore, in 1924, a division of the Kaunas Hard Labor Prison was established in the fort.\textsuperscript{20} In this prison, the state detained criminals and political prisoners, mostly members of the Communist Party of Lithuania, which “was outlawed as inimical to independent Lithuania.”\textsuperscript{21} For example, Motiejus Šumauskas, later Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Soviet Lithuania, and Antanas Sniečkus, later First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, both served sentences in the fort. Therefore, it is not surprising that the highest-ranking Soviet Lithuanian political figures of that time later supervised the creation of the museum.

Due to the ideological dictates of the state, the Ninth Fort Museum had to commemorate both the victims of Nazi violence and pay tribute to the Soviet resistance heroes of World War II and the Soviet partisan fighters of the interwar years. These earlier Soviet partisans fought for the socialist revolution during the ruling years of the authoritarian president of Lithuania, Antanas Smetona, who was in power from 1926 to 1940. Thus, the Ninth Fort Museum was both a site for the commemoration of the dead and for honoring the living Lithuanian communist elite in power in the 1960s and their former fights for communist ideals. Such memorialization sought to strengthen the legitimacy of the ruling communist elite in the country. The persecution of the Lithuanian communists during Smetona’s regime was beneficial to the state’s narrative for the museum in that it allowed for a clear continuity of communist resistance rather than Jewish victimhood and martyrdom in the Ninth Fort.

However, it is also important to mention that in addition to the communist elite, Lithuanian Jewish partisans were also given agency, mostly a passive and representative one, in the creation of the Ninth Fort Museum. The majority of Lithuanian Jewish survivors who stayed in postwar Soviet Lithuania were former Jewish partisans from the Kaunas ghetto, whose relatives were murdered at the site of the Ninth Fort. Many of these partisans joined the units of the Soviet partisans in the surrounding forests after having escaped from the ghetto. Following the war, Lithuanian Jewish partisans received high positions\textsuperscript{22} in the Soviet state apparatus and, therefore, could influence the process of memorializa-

\textsuperscript{20} Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum, “Hard Labour Prison.”
\textsuperscript{22} For instance, the Lithuanian Jewish partisan Alex Faitelson graduated from the economics faculty of Vilnius University while working as assistant director of a factory. Later he worked as an economist in the Ministry of Light Industry.
tion. Thus, they were included in the memorial activities taking place at this site. Survivor of the Kaunas ghetto and former Jewish partisan, Alex Faitelson, writes in his memoirs that he gave numerous lectures in Soviet Lithuania, and even in Moscow, where he spoke about the Nazi crimes and even called for the fort to be turned into a museum.23

**Creation of a Commemorative Idiom: Antifascism and the (Im)possibility of the Jewish Narrative of the Holocaust in the Ninth Fort Museum**

On May 30, 1959, the museum officially opened with an exhibition in four cells that presented Nazi war crimes in Lithuania. The museum’s exhibition confronted visitors with emotionally charged texts and objects (see figure 5.1). It aimed at displaying “evidence”: documents, photographs, inscriptions on the walls, and personal belongings of the murdered, including prosthetic limbs, human hair, and bones. These objects were often left unexplained; they evoked deep emotions but had limited didactic value. The failure to identify specifically Jewish victims in the exhibition was a historic oversight, as during World War II the Ninth Fort had primarily been a mass murder site for Jews. In the 1960s, new research work and excavation of the mass graves began to search for more forensic evidence of the Nazi crimes in the Ninth Fort, which led to more and more objects for exhibition. The aim of this research was to define the exact boundaries of the mass murder site and to collect proof that could be displayed in the museum exhibits.24

The Soviet authorities declared the opening ceremony of the Ninth Fort Museum to be a public demonstration against the Nazis and their collaborators.25 During this event, the First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party Antanas Sniečkus delivered a speech. In it he declared that the Ninth Fort Museum was not only a reminder of the victims of fascist violence but, first and foremost, symbolized the heroic struggle of the Soviet people that ended in victory.26 In his speech, he also identified the ethnic background of

---

25 “Garbė žuvusiems kovotojams! Amžinai atminsime fašizmo aukas! Mitingas skirtas Kauno devintojo forto muziejaus atidarymui [Respect to the dead fighters! We will remember forever the victims of fascism! Demonstration dedicated to the opening of the ninth fort museum],” *Tiesa*, May 31, 1959.
26 The speech was quoted in Zigmantas Kondratas, ed., *IX fortas* [The ninth fort] (Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1961), 48.