Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

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as women could not attain high political positions and even the wives of the re-
owned Soviet functionaries did not appear publicly.76

Conclusions

The Ninth Fort Museum, which was created by the Soviet Lithuanian elite itself,
presented the commemorative idiom of the antifascist ideology. Nevertheless, the
commemoration of World War II in the Ninth Fort Museum during the commu-
nist period revealed that despite ideological aspects of its exhibitions and their
publicization, Jewish victimhood was not entirely erased, and they could com-
memorate the Holocaust. The museum included Lithuanian Jewish narratives, es-
pecially focusing on the heroic fight of the Lithuanian Jewish partisans against
the Nazi regime. Jewish narratives were voiced by the survivors themselves during
the commemorative events taking place on the ground of the Ninth Fort’s site.
Their experiences, even if partly censored, also appeared in media and their mem-
oirs were published by the state publishing house. Even if they were aware that
they were serving as witnesses to the ideological Soviet narrative of the war, still,
they saw it as a possibility to transmit their specific Jewish memories of the histor-
ical events and to leave their mark in history. However, this paper has also revealed
that the war memory in the Ninth Fort Museum was mostly a narrative of male
martyrdom, despite Soviet ideology which presented itself as attempting to liber-
ate women from their traditional roles. During the war, female Jewish combatants
were not always welcomed as active fighters either and were regarded as weak and
not ready to take part in combat missions. After the war, this discrimination
based on gender did not disappear. The memories of the female survivors from the
Ninth Fort were neglected and they were excluded as active transmitters of mem-
ory during the public commemorative events at this site.

Post Scriptum: Changes in the Memorialization in the 1980s

The narratives presented in the Ninth Fort Museum remained unchanged until
the late 1980s, when the fascist-centered narrative was changed to a new nation-
alist one. This new perception of history focused on the crimes of the commu-

76 Solveiga Daugirdaitė, Švystelėjo kaip meteoras: 1965-ieji su Simone de Beauvoir ir Jeanu Pauliu Sartre’u [It
flew like a shooting star: Glimpses from the 1965 visit of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir] (Vilni-
us: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2015), 249.
nist regime, and as Lithuanian philosopher Leonidas Donskis observes, the idea that “the Nazis were a lesser evil” prevailed in Lithuania at that time. Communism, on the other hand, was seen as “the only form of real evil for Lithuania.”

Thus, after 1984, with the opening of the new memorial complex, the focus of the memorialization in the Ninth Fort shifted from the victims of World War II to the victims of the Stalinist regime. The museum was now composed of two main parts, the Ninth Fort and the Exhibition of Occupations. The Jewish victims were now overshadowed by the memory of the Lithuanian deportees and partisans, which was presented in the Exhibition of Occupations. This exhibition introduces the visitors to the first Soviet occupation in 1940 and the Soviet repressions carried out from 1944 to 1990. The focus of this historical narration lies on the Soviet deportations and the history of Lithuanian anti-Soviet resistance. Partisan activities are presented in a very positive light, neglecting the fact that among some of the partisans there were also people responsible for the mass murder of Lithuanian Jews, Poles, and Russians during World War II. Historian Makhotina observes that this historical site, “which had witnessed the suffering of Jews … had been transformed into a ‘temple’ of Lithuanian martyrdom.”

Today the Ninth Fort Museum is a place with two competing memories. These historical narratives are represented separately, one within the exposition in the cells of the Ninth Fort, which retells the history of the Kaunas fortresses in the interwar period and World War II, including the Holocaust, and the other within the exhibition of Soviet occupations and terror, which actually did not occur directly on the site of the Ninth Fort. This new conceptualization of the Ninth Fort Museum is similar to other Lithuanian history museums today, which “offer a very nationalistic interpretation of recent Lithuanian history” and where “guidelines developed in the late 1980s are still framing the musealization of the Soviet era.”

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78 Makhotina, “Staging Soviet (Hi)Story in Lithuania.”

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