Introduction: The Problem of the Online Memory Work of the Far Right

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1. Introduction

As recent scholarly and civil society organisations' reports have pointed out, the far right has shown a great capacity for adaptability and resilience to twisting political discourses and cultural shifts on a global scale. Thanks to these qualities, and the perseverance of its activists, in the last thirty years the far right has easily penetrated national public discourses and established its views on a mainstream level.[1] Consequently, intolerance has become acceptable and organised intolerance has become a normalised political option across Europe and North America.

With the downfall of the Eastern block and the implementation of painful shock economies in Central and Eastern Europe, and with the collapse of the West European party systems (toppled by a dramatic economic recession), the anti-fascist consensus that had characterised the second half of the twentieth century disintegrated, together with the old political and cultural elites.[2] Exploiting the void left in the European conscience, the far right and its radical appeals reappeared in the mainstream in the reunited spaces of the continent. They were able to increasingly spread politics of fear, hate, and resentment. Memory work, in many ways, has been the far right's crowbar into mainstream politics from the 1990s onwards everywhere, as it had been in interwar Europe. While, from the 1980s onwards, the responsibility for Nazi crimes and the experiences of the victims of Nazism and Nazi-collaborators gradually but steadily emerged in the public sphere,[3] pleas for forgetfulness and amnesia of the national responsibilities for past violence and crimes were issued, along with invitations to societies to reconcile and heal

[1] Muhall & Khan-Ruf 2021; Zeller 2021; Mörner 2022.

[2] Stone 2014.

[3] Bryld & Warring 1998; Stenius, Österberg & Östling 2011, p. 12.

the wounds of the past. A new approach to memory, focused on the victims of past violence, brought the condemnation of communism also in countries that had never been ruled by communist regimes. In a process that included the entire European continent, the crimes of communism were recounted in the public discourse and their memory was ostracised. With the widespread, wrongful perception that the twentieth-century ideologies' downfall meant both the end of political options other than liberal democracy and the end of history, communism and Nazism were equally demonised; there were only victims. East of the former Iron Curtain, where the appeal to anti-fascism had been one of the means of legitimising national-communist and kleptocratic regimes, nationalism was normalised, and communism was labelled as anti-national. Among the victims of communism, former fascists and Nazi-collaborationists were included in the memory work performed publicly by the resurgent far-right groups; some were celebrated as "saints of the prisons", while others were sacralised as "martyrs of the nation". With one justification or another, post-communist European nations were presented as victims of external enemies and inner "fifth columns" of both Nazi Germany and Soviet communism.[4] The history of the normalization of the far right through memory work and state-endorsed memory politics in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Baltic Sea Region is well-known. What is perhaps less clear is the role of online media and communication technology advancements that have taken place over the last thirty years in the memory work performed by the far right with regard to the past.

Manuel Castells' theory of network society gives one or two ideas about this. Castells has described how the network society of the internet affords a good deal of visibility, even to small, under-resourced networks. Their audience is large, varied, and often responsive to appeals for on-site action ("triggers"). Castells's vision of a "space of flows" – the hubs in which networks crisscross – is useful in studying the dissemination of marginalised counter-histories.[5] Memory gardening, in the quest for a suitable past,[6] is simplified and magnified by the commodification of texts and images through editing software and digital connectivity, which make the digital front-line the most

[4] Luthar 2017; Kotljarchuk 2022, pp. 61–75; Zavatti 2021, pp. 949–970.

[5] For these concepts, e.g., Castells 2004 and Castells 2011, pp. 773–787.

[6] The expression is taken from Dobre & Ghiţă 2016.

important scenario of action for the work on memory by under-resourced groups. Jan Van Dijk advanced a corrective to Manuel Castells' understanding of a network society. Van Dijk pointed out that social and media networks do not equate to the whole society. Beyond the networks, which are environments, societies consist of individual and collective entities. The relations established between human beings in the networks do not equal its human material. Ultimately, actors have different positions in societies beyond social networks, and especially beyond the internet, which is the most globally extended data and mass communication network. Van Dijk's understanding shows that this network is not everything, and that living bodies continue to matter beyond the structure of network society, with their emotions, thoughts, and responsibilities for the words typed, the images uploaded, and more generally the messages spread through various media from behind PC keyboards, smartphones, and tablets.[7]

This brings us to the actors of this anthology, the far right, and their agency in exploiting digital communication technologies in order to establish themselves in societies through memory work. The far right, as we understand it, is a deliberatively generic umbrella term for a multitude of parties, movements, groupuscule, and individuals that endorse positions ranging from but not limited to radical conservatism, illiberalism, libertarianism, authoritarianism, and fascism.[8] Radical right formations may differ from extreme right ones in terms of their anti-system essence and their support for democracy. Furthermore, the far right's relationship with violence is vague and ambiguous: far-right formations may either openly endorse violence, or present violent actions as acts of self-defence. Third, these may present themselves as advocates of freedom of speech, justice, and the rule of law – when these favour their actions.

Similar ambiguities are evident also by looking at the organisational structures of far-right entities, and at individual patterns of militancy. Overall, double-speaking is an established rhetorical strategy implemented to normalise radical instances and gain consensus.[9] On an organisational level, far-right entities organise their intolerant actions under a myriad of different struc-

7 Van Dijk 2006, pp. 241–242.

8 Pirro 2022.

9 Feldman & Jackson 2015, pp. 12–13.

tures that can vary from hierarchically organised political parties to sparse networks, to cultural foundations, advocacy groups, or even religious and environmental movements. Furthermore, in the East European space, radicalised mainstream parties often predate on the rhetorical strategies of far-right entities, making it improper to set up rigorous terminological barriers.[10] A further reason for being sceptical about applying rigid definitions emerges from looking at individual activists' patterns, since ideological mobility is a constant factor in the behaviour of far-right agents. For example, some of those who join innocuous sub-cultures may shift to white power and neo-Nazis' formations after a process of radicalization. Furthermore, activists often change side and have multiple political identities. Some individuals prefer to speak in public about "controlled democracy" and to present themselves as "moderate right" and "non-extremists". Yet at the same time these can declare themselves supporters of neo-Nazi instances in closed digital communities, hidden behind nicknames.[11] Furthermore, mobility between far-right activism and organised crime shows that ideology is not always the exclusive drive of extremists. A further reason for maintaining a generic umbrella term is that every country under focus in this anthology has its own nomenclature tradition for far-right activism. For example, in Belarus the most popular umbrella term for different far-right groups is "ultranationalists"; in Romania, "extreme right" and "far right" have the same meaning in popular and journalistic jargon, while far-right entities identify themselves as "nationalists". It is thus salutary to take distance from the terms with which the entities under focus have chosen to present themselves.

Instead, it is important to emphasise the two main traits that far-right entities have in common: unmistakably, they endorse Manichean views which regard their national community as endangered by internal and external threats; second, they present themselves as saviours of their nation.[12] In this anthology, different concepts such as "populist ultra-nationalism", "neo-Nazism", "extreme far right", "far-right populism", "radical right", and "extreme right" are used for presenting far-right entities that adopt different behaviours in contemporary politics, but that exploit narratives on the fascist past

[10] Bustikova 2018, pp. 565–581.

[11] Zavatti 2022b, p. 27.

[12] Bjørgo & Aasland Ravndal 2019; Copsey 2013.

of their own country – and therefore, on movements and regimes that in the interwar era and Second World War Europe have endorsed palingenetic forms of ultra-nationalism.[13] In different ways, they mobilise those narratives as resources towards their goals in the present, in a mission devoted to radicalising societal perspectives towards Manicheanism, to feeding societies with illiberal values, and consequently to hegemonizing the resulting revolt against liberal democracy.

As recently shown by studies focused on West European countries and the USA, far-right entities know very well how to manoeuvre the past via online memory work.[14] With reference to far-right online memory work in the Central and East European space, much remains to be done.[15] In this anthology, we aim to highlight the deployment of far-right entities' memory work in digital environments that reshape social imaginaries through hyper-connectivity, and which insinuate dramatically the processes of remembering and forgetting.[16] We are also interested in the online dynamics of memory-making that are implemented through digital appeals, rituals and, more generally, through binary-coded information present on the infinite archive of the World Wide Web's indexed results, on search engines, websites, blogs, and social networks. What can these digital traces tell us about the far-right memory work in online settings and, in more general terms, about the threats that the internet-weaponised far right represents for civil societies? The broad dynamics and mechanisms of far-right online activism are well studied by social movements' scholars.[17] By exploiting the potential of digital communication, the far right increases its chances of establishing itself on a mainstream level in its societies, transnationalising its messages, and networking with like-minded peers.[18] Stephen Albrecht, Maik Fielitz, and Nick Thurston have analysed the *post-digital* cultures of the far right, a term coined to stress that connectivity makes the online and offline dimensions of activism increasingly

[13] Griffin 1991, p. 44.

[14] See, e.g., Esteve Del Valle & Costa López 2022; Wasilewski 2023; Richardson-Little, Merrill & Arlaud 2022.

[15] Rutten et al. 2013.

[16] Hoskins 2009, pp. 27–43.

[17] Caiani & Parenti 2016.

[18] Caiani & Kröll 2015, pp. 331–351.

interdependent.[19] Taking a step aside, we claim that how the far right meddles with memory and the past in online settings is not sufficiently clear, with special regard to the Baltic, and Central and East European online spaces.

2. This anthology

The present anthology provides a repertoire of studies on the nexus between the far right, its memory work, and the internet. It provides some useful theoretical tools and methodological instruments for scholars interested in charting the unexplored territories of the digital front-line on which the far-right attempts to assail, with memory work performed from behind digital devices, the values of inclusion, diversity, and justice. The wideness of the focus is evidenced by the wide span of the anthology's geographical coverage, media, and content, and it is justified by the variety of actors involved and the peculiarities of the narratives considered. All the chapters included here are original contributions focused on the far right's online meddling with the past in the Baltic Sea Region and in Central and Eastern Europe: Austria, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Romania, Sweden, and Ukraine are the countries under focus in dedicated chapters. From the point of view of the media, the anthology's chapters take into consideration outlets from both Internet 1.0 and Internet 2.0. In the age of social media, traditional digital instruments such as blogs and websites are still vital for the far right's plays with the past.

In Chapter 1, "To Weaponise the Future: Digital Posters and the Counter-narrative of the Second World War in the Belarusian Far Right", Andrej Kotljarchuk turns his attention to the digital work with the counter-narrative of the Second World War by ultranationalists in today's Belarus. In many European countries, the historical narratives that have built their post-war identity are under attack today, and Belarus is no exception. The country suffered more than most other European states in the Second World War. The war casualties of the Belarusian population were larger than the French, British, and American casualties combined. The human casualties amounted to more than 2 million people, in a country with a population of around 10 million. The Nazis and their collaborators killed between 500,000 and

[19] Albrecht et al. 2019, p. 10.

550,000 Jews (about 80% of the Belarusian-Jewish population) and thousands of the Roma. About 380,000 young Belarusians were taken to the Third Reich for forced labour. Six hundred Belarusian villages were burned, together with their residents; life never returned to 200 of them. An entire country – that is, every single major city – was left in ruins. The population only returned to its pre-war level in the 1970s. No historical event has had a greater influence on the collective memory, and the Second World War is a foundation for the creation of a modern Belarusian identity. The Soviet mono-memory narrative of the Second World War, known in Russia, Belarus and some other post-Soviet states as "the Great Patriotic War", collapsed in 1991. The major Soviet narratives remain a key factor in Lukashenka's memory politics, however with some modification.[20] Unlike many neighbouring countries, Lukashenka's government politically marginalises such ethnic referents as native language and national history, basing its nation building on the idealised past of Soviet unity. Moreover, a long-term dictatorship and brutal suppression of peaceful protests in 2020, as well as the state-run support of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, have led to a deep disagreement within civil society about the official narratives of the past, present and future of the country. The ongoing political crisis is used by present-day far-right activists, who promote alternative perspectives of the past in order to advance alternative values in the future. Using perspectives from visual and textual analysis the chapter examines contemporary digital posters about the Second World War made by anonymous artists and distributed via social networks in ultranationalist and other groups. Manuel Castells has described how the "networked" society of the internet allows even small, under-resourced networks a good deal of visibility.[21] Ruth Wodak and Rudolf de Cillia have explained how historical narratives vary in different public spheres; each has its own audience, genre rules, and rhetoric. The method presented by Wodak and Cillia for tracing major discursive tropes of counter-narrative, namely the creation of alternative myths, half-truths and significant silences, is used in this study.[22] What role do digital technologies play in the memory work of the Belarusian far right? How has the counter-narrative of the Second World War been fitted into the

[20] Kotljarchuk 2013, pp. 7–40.
[21] Castells 2011, pp. 773–787.
[22] Wodak & de Cillia 2006.

ongoing political crisis? These are the principal questions for the study. In a previous publication, the author has shown why and how the counter memory of the Second World War, which was constructed by Waffen-SS and Belarusian Home Guard (BKA) police veterans in exile during the Cold War, became a cornerstone for the identity and political mobilization of present-day Belarusian ultranationalists.[23] In this chapter, Kotljarchuk explains how the digital posters with great efficiency promote a revisionist narrative of the Second World War in which the Belarusian pro-Nazi military collaborators are presented as heroes, fighters for freedom and Europe, and martyrs for the fatherland. The 'goulash' made from myths, falsifications, and half-truths in popular packaging sells very well, especially for a new digital generation, and here the professional historians have very limited options for counteracting it.

Since its inception, the World Wide Web has offered possibilities to under-resourced groups to increase their visibility. The indexed results present on search engines bear witness to the far-right memory work through the decades since the 1990s, and to its impact on internet users. In Chapter 2, "The Digital Lives of Dead Legionaries: The Infinite Archive and the Online Memory Work on Romanian Interwar Fascism", Francesco Zavatti explores the "infinite archive" of the internet in search of the memory work performed on the Legionary movement, which has been the most powerful Romanian fascist entity in the interwar era. Commemorating the dead in post-communist Romania served to reclaim social and political agency in a space that has long been opened for resignification and re-sacralization.[24] The Romanian far right exploited this window of opportunity. Implementing an investigation that includes methods from digital history[25] and digital ethnography,[26] Zavatti focuses his chapter on the most clicked search results on Google Search for queries pertinent to the memory of the Legionary movement. This methodology allows him to analyse whether the apologetic memory work performed online by far-right memory entrepreneurs has been successful in reaching the Romanian audience or whether the critical accounts by professional historians and state institutions has better succeeded in attracting the interest of

[23] Kotljarchuk 2022, pp. 61–75.
[24] Verdery 1999.
[25] Winters 2018, pp. 277–288.
[26] Varis 2014.

the users, over the last thirty years. The chapter explores the queries "Legionary movement", as well as three well-known Romanian fascist leaders who died in violent circumstances: "Corneliu Zelea Codreanu", "Ion Mota and Vasile Marin". The same search was conducted again, adding the word "martyr(/s)", in order to investigate whether previous radicalization of users produced diverging results. Besides the qualitative analysis of the results of the queries, a quantitative analysis measures the extension of apologetic and critical internet pages, showing which kind of digital life the dead Legionaries were given between martyrs and violent fascists, and thus establishing which descriptions are trending most among the searches of Romanian internet users. The results disclose a memory arena that is extremely polarised between fascist apologists and fascist critics. However, the whole online discourse on the Legionary movement is utterly marginalised within Romanian public discourse, which focuses on more lay and present interests, in a state of collective amnesia that does not give much consideration to the narratives on the past by either professional historians or far-right groups. One remedy against this trend, Zavatti concludes, would be for historians to face the challenges posed by new communication technologies and to exploit the infinite potentialities offered by the internet in order to involve the broader audience in questioning problematic pasts and, in this way, achieve the first positions in mainstream online trends.

In Chapter 3, "Memory, Ritual, Violence: The Online Sphere of the Nordic Resistance Movement", Madeleine Hurd and Steffen Werther adopt a group-centered perspective focused on the Northern Resistance Movement (NMR), a violent, small, militant, and hierarchic group active all over *Norden*.[27] Werther and Hurd explain that the essence of NMR is not so distant from that of low-profile organised criminal groups: some of their members have criminal records; they use violence; they protect each other following a code of honour that is similar to those of the street gangs of Los Angeles; and finally, and most importantly, the group indulges in memory work. As the far right know from their ideological predecessors, sacralising group members as martyrs of violent enemies is a powerful instrument for constructing the group's innocence and pointing out the enemy's culpability and cruelty. Mobilising peers and the broader civil society against the perceived enemies is a

[27] FOI 2023, pp. 63–67.

powerful call for action: violence can be justified as self-defence or rightful vengeance. However, Sweden has no fallen Nazis to commemorate, therefore Swedish neo-Nazism lacks the human material on which to construct their pantheon of martyrs. In a process that is more commonly employed by fascist groups on the margins of history, celebrating peers and foreign fascist martyrs' fatal experiences in foreign wars is an opportunity that allows secluded groups to go international and to reconnect, through commemorative rituals, practices, and narratives, with like-minded peers on a transnational scale.[28]

Since the 1990s, the Swedish neo-Nazis have found their way out of a Swedish history in which they were marginalised by celebrating Danish and Norwegian Waffen-SS volunteers in Estonia, a country that, since its break away from the Soviet Union and its joining of NATO and the EU (2004), has shown that celebrating fallen Nazi-collaborationists, Estonian or not, is within the range of the permissible.[29] Similarly, they celebrated Gösta Hallberg-Cuula, a member of the Swedish Nazi party who had been a street fighter for National-Socialism in Sweden and who had fallen as volunteer in the Finnish Continuation War. It is important to remember that several Swedish volunteers joined the Winter War and the Continuation War. Whereas Finland and the Finnish cause had widespread support during the Winter War, the Continuation War had been primarily a concern for conservatives and fascists. The Nazi movement led by Sven Olov Lindholm established *Frontmannaföreningen Sveaborg*, an organisation for their members fighting in the Continuation War and for Waffen-SS volunteers. Thus, celebrating the death of Hallberg-Cuula in the present establishes a direct link with Swedish Nazism's war activism. Instead, the homicide of a young gang member near Stockholm in the year 2000 represented for NMR an unprecedented opportunity to rejuvenate the martyrs' cult and to establish the movement's martyrology both on- and offline. As shown by Hurd and Werther, the most recent of the commemorations are streamed afterwards. Online media, Hurd and Werther suggest, serve the purpose of aggrandising the commemorations and showing that NMR has control over well-known Swedish public spaces. The online settings serve to convey convincing narratives of heroic martyrdom, which are eventually constructed in real life through poorly attended sacralising prac-

[28] Zavatti 2022a, pp. 264–286.
[29] Hietanen & Krohn 2014.

tices of commemoration. Furthermore, in NMR's search for validation, the internet helps members to bear witness to all the sporadic cases in which the group has been confronted by "enemies": most of the clashes with competing groups from the anti-fascist galaxy of Sweden take place indirectly, in a battle for the public space fought with decals, sprayings, and covering up of neo-Nazi propaganda. These "battles" are successively showcased on NMR's website and social media, which allow the movement to present fragmented actions held in different towns as if the movement (and its "war") could cover the entire territory of Sweden. However, these actions are local and marginal performances of small street gangs that need validation through opposition. They engage in rituals to show that the group exists, but at the same time, the group exists only if others choose to engage with it. Therefore, as Hurd and Werther conclude, the mediatised versions of these rituals are an attempt to downplay the indifference that surrounds NRM from Swedish society – similar to the Romanian and Czech far-right actors examined respectively by Francesco Zavatti and Ilana Hartikainen in this volume.

In Chapter 4, "Antisemitism, Post-Fascism and Selective Remembering of the Past: A Case Study of Far-right Memory Discourses in post-1990 Lithuania", Justina Smalkyté examines the contemporary memory politics of two Lithuanian far-right groups: The National Alliance and its youth wing, Pro Patria. Since the last decade, numerous publications have appeared on the role of different memory agents (new established museums and research centres) promoting historical revisionism across the country. In Lithuania, a one-sided, apologetic attitude is very present in the historical narratives on a difficult past. The Nazi-collaborationist activities of the Lithuanian Activist Front (*Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas* – LAF), an anti-Semitic and anti-Soviet organisation established by Lithuanian expatriates and diplomats in Berlin during the Second World War, are presented as means towards national independence. In the days following Operation Barbarossa, the LAF mobilised segments of the Lithuanian population in an uprising against the Soviet occupants (June Uprising) and established the Provisional Government of Lithuania (June-August 1941). Their hopes for national independence were shattered by their allies, the Nazis, who instead established an occupation regime.[30] Very little has been written about Lithuanian far-right memory politics. Previous

[30] Vareikis 2009, pp. 249–264; Piotrowski 1998, p. 164.

research tended to focus more on the racist extremism and violence of neo-Nazi groups and less on far-right memory entrepreneurs. Possibly, this topic has been understudied also due to the general "overload of history" in the collective national memory of many post-communist countries, which makes it difficult to problematise the particular nexus between far-right and counter-narratives of the past in Lithuania.[31] Smalkyté examines the politics of the selective remembering of National Alliance and Pro Patria organisations in terms of their positioning *vis à vis* current memorial discourses in the country. Investigating the far-right mnemonic discourses as a form of social and political actions,[32] the author looks at the far-right relations with the dominant national narratives of the Lithuanian past. Smalkyté points out that the far-right memory activism does not challenge the dominant narrative of the past in Lithuania; this activism is rather a constitutive part of the dominant narrative itself. There is a strong overlap between state-sponsored research institutions, professional historians, and National Alliance and Pro Patria's historical revisionism online. The difference between the far-right discourses and the official narratives lies more in former's use of anti-Semitic references, and less in memory politics per se. The study suggests that contemporary far-right intellectuals in Lithuania do not shy away from anti-Semitic references in their political communication, but at the same time they avoid overt antisemitism, which instead characterises neo-Nazi and extreme-right groups. The study also hints at the ideological cohesiveness and philosophical literacy of the National Alliance and Pro Patria groups, which seem to distinguish them from other ultranationalist parties in Lithuania and, more generally, from other Central and Eastern European far-right movements.

Since the rise of social media in the 2000s, communication among social media users has been altered and normed by functions such as "share", "comment", and "like", which make the social morphology of the digital impact evident and immediate. As for all communication, social media has had an impact by altering and norming online memory work. Three of the chapters of this anthology take into consideration two social media outlets that are commonly used among the older demographic cohorts of users on a global scale: Facebook and Twitter.

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[31] Agh 2016, pp. 32–44.
[32] Van Dijk 1997.

In Chapter 5, "Wait, Who Were the Collaborators? Rhetorical Moves and Online Memory Practices of the Czech Far Right", Ilana Hartikainen investigates the contestation that the neo-Nazi DSSS performs on its Facebook page on the hegemonic Czech collective memory of the Second World War. Adopting an antagonistic conception of memory[33] is the strategy by which this far-right party attempts to create a new memory culture to normalise pro-Nazi and neo-Nazi stances. By examining the rhetoric performances of DSSS's discourse on the national past, Hartikainen shows that the pleas for collective amnesia of the most traumatic moments of national Czech history, advocated for by DSSS, serve the purpose of distancing the party from an uncomfortable past that would highlight the inappropriateness of its neo-Nazi ideology in the Czech settings. While silencing the narratives that would contribute to putting the neo-Nazi party in a bad light, DSSS attempts to construct a new history of the Czech experience during the Second World War in order to normalise the party's political offer. Utilising the rhetoric-performative analyses of Emilia Palonen,[34] Hartikainen shows how DSSS constructs its own version of history by using the rhetorical tropes of "paradiastole" and "catachresis". Paradiastole consists of linking a discursive element to a competing discursive construction: presenting the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia as an "external invasion" allows the omittance of National-Socialism from the picture, but at the same time links the Nazi invasion with the present-times' external forces that threaten the Czech nation. Catachresis consists of inserting new elements into an established discourse. By referring to the Czech MEPs as "collaborators", a strongly connoted word that recalls the Nazi-collaborationists, but also by shadowing the Nazi-collaborationism of Alois Eliáš, the Prime Minister of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and by highlighting his later participation in the resistance against the Nazis, DSSS twists established discourses on the national past, filling them with new significances. Interestingly, the core of DSSS's discourse on the present is aimed at highlighting the existence of threatening external Others that allegedly put the Czech state and nation in danger. While DSSS's discourse on the present openly attacks the European Union, multiculturalism, progressive ideologies, immigration, LGBTQ rights, and environmental activism, its discourse on

[33] Cento Bull & Hansen 2016, pp. 390–404.
[34] Palonen 2018, pp. 308–321.

the past is capable of celebrating the Czech nation's resistance in the Second World War without maligning Nazi Germany.

In Chapter 6, "A 'Shitstorm' of Emotion: Discomposure, Commemoration, and the Austrian Populist Right on Facebook", Vanessa Tautter shows that with a single, influential post, the far right may open the gates to the revisionism, whataboutism, and relativization of national responsibilities for past violence on a mainstream level. Tautter analyses the emotional responses given by the Facebook audience to a post in which the leader of the Austria Freedom Party and Vice Chancellor of Austria, Heinz-Christian Strache, condemns succinctly but unequivocally National-Socialism and the 1938 "annexation" of Austria by Nazi Germany. Notably, the analysis exclusively focuses on comments and reactions to the Facebook post. By combining the approaches of Graham Dawson ("composure")[35] and Penny Summerfield ("discomposure"),[36] Tautter shows that the digital arena of Facebook permits the audience to emotionally compose the national past and to decompose the hegemonic narratives about it. Those who intervened in the Facebook debate reimagined their subjectivity by positioning themselves within the commemorative lenses evoked by Strache's posting, which opened the door to the subjective revision of the past. The reactions, as shown by Tautter, came from users who supported Strache's statement and advocated drawing a line under an undefendable past, but also from users who pointed out the hardships of the Nazi system, and the suffering experienced by Austria and the Austrian Army during the Second World War and, finally, from those who openly rejected Strache's words by revisionist comments that accused Strache of accepting the "guilt complex". Others chose to express their dissatisfaction with Strache's message by using antisemitic and racist remarks. Tautter thus demonstrates the broad range of emotional reactions with which the Austrian far right has engaged with mainstream memory culture suddenly endorsed by Strache. The results are quite discouraging: the users show mainly an inability to compose themselves in relation to the difficult violent past. They engage in whataboutism, deflection, denigration of what is defined as a "cult of guilt", all of which were strategies established by the Austrian far right already in the post-war era. These strategies are redeployed online in emotionally loaded

[35] Dawson 1994.

[36] Summerfield 2000, pp. 91–106; Summerfield 2004, pp. 65–93.

comments that refuse to deal with the difficult national past by actors who prefer to reimagine it subjectively; a critical and direct engagement with the emotional aspects of discomposure in present-day societies provides relativising, apologetic and revisionist narratives; but at least, as Tautter concludes, it facilitates the critical reflection of an otherwise silenced past.

In Chapter 7, "Comparing Far-right and Mainstream Visual Narratives of the Second World War in Ukraine under Petro Poroshenko", Michael Cole investigates the impact of Ukrainian ultranationalists on the contemporary narratives of the Second World War. He shows how, during the ongoing conflict with Russia in 2014, the official Ukrainian narratives around the Second World War appear to have radicalised, incorporating some new components previously only promoted by far-right groups. These include the widespread adoption of OUN slogans and renewed reverence for Stepan Bandera.[37] The study examines social media posts published between 2014 and 2018, comparing those commemorating the Second World War by former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, with those by Ukrainian far-right groups. Although extreme far-right views are not widely held by Ukrainians, attempts to moderate the use of nationalist symbology to mark occasions such as Victory Day (a Soviet annual holiday on 9 May that commemorates the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945) risk drawing accusations of sympathising with Russian-promoted anti-Ukrainian narratives. Yet these uncompromising approaches to historical interpretation may have also allowed the far-right activists to significantly shape official interpretations of the Second World War and openly display admiration for controversial Ukrainian ultranationalists. The study demonstrates both similarities and differences between the memory work on the Second World War by Poroshenko's government and by far-right activists. Methodologically, the study is based on a visual analysis of four sites which, combined, give meaning to visual images: the site of "production", the site of "the image itself", "the site of circulation" and "the site of audiencing".[38] While a comprehensive analysis of all four sites is beyond the scope of the current study, the site of the image itself is considered the most relevant starting point for identifying narratives surrounding the

[37] The examination of Ukrainian official narratives about the Second World War's continuity and changes during the current Russian aggression is not part of this study.

[38] Rose 2016.

Second World War. To avoid potential subjectivity of the findings, the author's conclusions are based on a strong understanding of the socio-cultural contexts in which the visual data appear.[39] A substantial part of the content posted by Poroshenko and Ukrainian far-right groups is highly militaristic. This reflects conscious attempts to distinguish the Ukrainian narrative from the one presented by Russia. However, where Poroshenko sought to introduce new symbols and days to commemorate the war, far-right groups appear to have focused more on reinforcing those already familiar to the general public, e.g., the glorification of the military activity of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. At the same time, both Poroshenko and far-right groups appear to be shifting the focus of commemorative practices around the Second World War to new dates, in a common attempt to dissociate them from those established on 9 May during the Soviet period. Both the Poroshenko team and far-right actors have effectively used social media and digital networks to present their own narratives of the war, based on alternative discursive nodal points.

3. Recent crises

Over three years have passed since we first started to discuss the online memory work of the far right with the contributors of this anthology. How, if at all, did the recent global developments impact upon the topics treated here? The COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia are both connected, in different ways, to the far right and to its online plays with identities. During 2020, conspiracy theories have permeated the online space and circulated on a global level. The phenomenon is not new – think, for example, of the #stopsoros campaign launched by Viktor Orbán's government in 2017 and spread globally, and the G5 conspiracy disseminated in 2019.[40] With the pandemic, defending the online space from disinformation and misinformation became a priority for preserving the new normalcy. So far, the COVID-19 pandemic has not led to a dramatic shift in the topics treated in this anthology, and neither has the ongoing occupation of Ukraine. Although the 2022 full-scale invasion catalysed the global attention on the region, part of Ukraine has been occupied by Russian-backed forces since

[39] Patterson & Monroe 1998.
[40] Zavatti 2022b, pp. 23–32.

2014. By then, the European far-right groups were already divided between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Kremlin positions. How the ongoing military conflict and political crises from 2022 onwards have affected and will affect the memory work of far-right activists is a matter for further research. With no ambition to provide an encompassing guide to the far-right digital front-line, this anthology is a contribution to further research on the topic.

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