7-1-2012

Reviving Heritage in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe: A Visual Approach To National Identity

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Abstract

This paper seeks to demonstrate the controversial nature of heritage as it is expressed through visual media in the former Soviet republics. I explore Soviet-era emblems of cultural heritage in a post-Soviet context specifically to illuminate their influence on national identity. Drawing from imagery in the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine I demonstrate how today's lingering symbols of communist nationalism obscure the realization of national identity from being completely non-Soviet. Examples such as Grutas Park, Freedom Square and Minsk's steadfast urban design illustrate how remembrance of the Soviet past through visual media poses a social conflict to transitional change in Eastern Europe.

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Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, countries across Eastern Europe have gained their independence. This independence however, has come at a cost as each former Soviet republic has struggled to strengthen its unique national identity and heritage. I focus on the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine to demonstrate the diverse responses to change; as countries emerging from years of Sovietization. In this article, I argue that visual symbols of cultural heritage are inherently controversial in Eastern Europe because they reflect Soviet ideology and preserve its memory. Places of public gathering, monuments and human performance, which contain key symbols about peoples' heritage, are pivotal factors in restructuring notions of national identity. Although symbols of the Soviet era have been partially dismantled since the collapse of communism, I argue that these visual reminders make a strong contribution to incorporating Soviet heritage into national identity today. I examine how interpretations of imagery by the public are complex and often controversial, and illustrate the difficulties of maintaining a strong national unity in the post-Soviet era.

Visual Heritage in Soviet and Post-Soviet Eastern Europe

Constructing national identity was remarkably successful during Stalinism because its foundation was heavily built upon symbols of Soviet heritage. From an anthropological point of view, heritage refers to the contemporary and selective use of the past and exists at the local, national and multinational levels (Graham et al.

2000:17). While heritage in all of its complexity incorporates both tangible objects and the intangible ideas that surround them, it is generally thought by heritage scholars that national heritage strictly involves the tangible[1] . Referring specifically to what archaeologist Laurajane Smith describes as the "monumental" (2006: 29); the tangible aspect of heritage is often characterized by what is known as *Authorized Heritage Discourse* (AHD). The focus of AHD constitutes historical legitimacy of groups with power, along with the incentive to produce objects and places that are aesthetically pleasing for the public (Smith 2006: 29). The message of Stalinism was visually successful in its time because of this monumental influence and proliferation in public spaces.

In the early 20th century starting with Vladimir Lenin and exemplified under Joseph Stalin, totalitarian art and socialist realism were administered by the government at the national level. The incentive was to promote a sense of uniformity among the diverse peoples coalesced into the USSR, which would unconsciously lend allegiance to the communist state (Groys 2005:113). Sovietization in the Eastern Bloc countries utilized a manipulative environment by combining visual messages with an enforced political ideology. Aesthetics in designing urban landscapes and the utilization of propagandist imagery were intended to unify any political controversies felt by oppressed populations. Lenin's initial idea was to educate masses of people without the need for literacy, and he encouraged this phenomenon by visually altering public

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[1] See Harrison, Rodney. 2010. Understanding the Politics of Heritage. New York: Manchester University Press and Smith, Laurajane. 2006. Uses of Heritage. New York: Routledge for further discussion of the tangible sphere of *national* of heritage.

spaces. Lenin passed the "Plan for Monumental Propaganda", a decree that allowed him to tear down tsarist monuments and rename streets and cities that no longer represented what he thought to be nationalistically important (Wanner 1998: 176).

What began during Lenin's influence was amplified to a much greater degree under Stalin's totalitarian regime. Monuments to Lenin were intentionally re-characterized with more aggressive facial expressions and body language, and statues of Stalin exhibited paternalistic yet intimidating features. Stalin was the face of "socialist paternalism", a term that anthropologist Katherine Verdery (1996:25) describes as a contract made between the Soviet Father; the Communist Party and his Children; the subjects of Soviet ideology. Citizens of the USSR would have their basic needs met by this father figure, so long as they paid head to his political message and did not seek an alternative source (1996:25). To have Stalin's image in public spaces served as a reminder to fear deviation from this contract.

Constructivist architecture, charact-erized in part by the aesthetic homogenization of public buildings, also flourished under Stalinism. No building was to stand out against the other, an ideal that incorporated the destruction or conversion of historical buildings to fit the profile Stalin stressed (Groys 2005:117). These changes are reflective of Stalin's goal to homogenize millions of people into one dominant national identity, an effort which has had a lasting effect on how people view themselves and the Soviet era today.

When considering AHD as discussed, its tangible sphere has significantly shaped collective notions of heritage because of its strong publicity. According to archaeologist Rodney Harrison however, differential access to the public

realm and thus "heritage knowledge" further influences how visual, tangible objects are socially evaluated (2010:11). In this view I am primarily concerned with the monumental objects of national and multinational heritage, but as loci for multi-vocal, subjective interpretation. Although the focal point of AHD scholarship is the tangible sphere, the meaning of heritage and thus nationalistic ideas is socially negotiated over time and space, and can either separate or bind people together. This is why visual reinforcement has so much credence in times of crisis; creating what cultural historian Robert Hewison calls a "nostalgic impulse" to memorialize heritage objects as historically significant (1987:47). The monumental objects of heritage installed under communism sought to create a collective identity, but they offer disparate notions of national identity in contemporary discourse. In the following pages I explore visual symbols of Soviet heritage and Soviet remembrance in Eastern Europe to illuminate the controversies of national identity.

Communism Enclosed: An Outdoor Museum in Lithuania

To demonstrate the concept of visual heritage, the southernmost of the Baltic States illustrates how national identity has been rekindled in the post-Soviet era. Lithuania has an extensive history of freedom and independence and was once a vast political territory that stretched over much of Eastern Europe. After enduring intermittent occupation from Polish, German and Russian forces, Lithuania was the first of the Baltic States to declare its independence from the USSR, and has since been fighting to reclaim its forgotten history (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993:323-4). In the post-Soviet era, research has shown that the Lithuanian people have taken initiative in defining who they are as a nation by

recuperating traditions and historical figures suppressed under communism. According to anthropologist Gediminas Lankauskas, these emblems of heritage are symbolic of Lithuania's pre-Soviet values and have reappeared in the community as ceremonies, museum exhibits and memorials to the country's heroic, medieval rulers (2006:33). The visual impact has been significant, but a memorialization of considerable controversy demonstrates how Lithuania has acknowledged its recent Soviet past.

Grūtas Park is an outdoor museum and recreational park in southern Lithuania. The park displays more than eighty Soviet-era monuments of Lenin, Stalin and communist party leaders. Designed in the style of socialist realism and emulating a Soviet gulag, the park is intended to have its visitors, in the words of its founder Viliumas Malinauskas, "understand what dictatorships are capable of and what tools they use to brainwash people" (Anusaite 2007:1). The statues are situated along a two-kilometer pathway in which visitors are guided through a space reflective of Siberia. Imitative watchtowers and remnants of concentration camps confine the former Soviet idols to a place of exile. The statues are also no longer on pedestals or the focal point of aesthetic design that would have attracted attention in an urban setting. Ultimately, the goal of the monument exhibit is to render Soviet ideology as if in a mock retribution, or as if "naked" in order to expose the oppression it yielded (Grūto Parkas 2004:1).

In addition to the statues, the late USSR is further evoked through reenactments of Soviet ceremonies and holidays, museum exhibits of Soviet relics and iconography, and a café where faux Red Pioneers; members of a pro-Soviet youth group, serve "nostalgic" dishes from the communist era (Grūto Parkas 2004). Whether or not these dishes are meant to encourage longings for a time when food variety was limited but nevertheless stable, in the minds of many the Soviet-style meals are a success. For others, the nostalgic café ironically represents the Soviet political *menu* as distasteful.

The additional elements of Grūtas Park are meant to symbolize what founder Malinauskas described as "tools…to brainwash" (Anusaite 2007:1), they engage visitors in an encapsulating experience in order to understand at least a glimpse of what Soviet communism was like. The monuments in particular, which were once politically imposing in public Lithuanian spaces, have become neutralized in their current position at Grūtas Park. When a monument is neutralized, it is stripped of its political significance it once maintained as a centerpiece in public spaces. In this way, the park allows people who lived under communist rule to look at the Soviet regime from a different angle, to critique it without suffering any form of repercussion (Lankauskas 2006:37-38). The fact that the park draws on memory and visual entities for a constructive purpose exemplifies visitors as participants in a material and ideational relationship. Additionally, Grūtas Park's location in Druskininkai, a rural town surrounded by forest, is the complete opposite of the Soviet statues' former setting, making them all the less powerful.

Monuments have often been used for political purposes, and those erected during Soviet communism were designed to homogenize diverse national identities under a single ideology. This is a major reason why Grūtas Park is so controversial, because the monuments serve as a reminder of the Soviet regime. Many Lithuanians see the visual irony of Grūtas Park as disrespectful to the memory of citizens who suffered or were killed by communists, and want the contents of the park destroyed (Anusaite 2007:2). Like many of the other former

Eastern Bloc countries, Lithuania's current socioeconomic instability as a transitional state also comes into question when visiting Grūtas Park. Its viewers are exposed to the conformity yet perceived stability of the Soviet System, and encouraged to contemplate the adversities of both communism and Western ideals of capitalism. The rapid pace of change in Lithuania has produced socio-economic stress, and it has been psychologically taxing for much of the population (Groudis 2009:3B).

The question of what to do with monuments that have caused negative experiences for people has not yielded easy or unified answers in the post-Soviet republics. Thousands of monuments were dismantled following the break-up of the USSR, but not all of them were destroyed. Stanford Levinson describes the destruction of monuments as a way of forgetting, which is hardly an act that will bring about any form of resolution (1998:69). Outdoor museums such as Grūtas Park have provided an alternative solution for statues that no longer recognize the authority of the Soviet regime. A park of similar significance, Statue Park resides on the outskirts of Budapest, Hungary. Like Grūtas Park in the south of Lithuania, its location in an isolated, socially unknown area is also intentionally neutralized, a "place without spirit" according to art historian Hedvig Turai (2009:97). Rather than forgetting, Statue Park actively remembers the past in order to learn from and to ascertain that similar situations do not occur in the future. The outdoor museum houses monuments of both the Nazi and Soviet ideologies, which brings two historically powerful regimes to mind when visitors walk through the exhibit. Turai states that the monuments are not placed in the park as artwork; a motive some statue museums use to "avoid responsibility", but to visually provoke

discourse about fascism and communism (2009:101).

What is intriguing about Hedvig Turai's argument for Statue Park is the theory she draws on to compare Fascism and Communism. The monuments in the park visually provoke recollections or perceptions about the Nazi and Soviet regimes in which the crimes of the former are equated with *hot memories* and the latter equated with *cold memories*[2] (Turai 2009:99). Turai suggests that contemporary, hot memories of Fascism and events such as the Holocaust are equivalent to an "open wound" because they are more difficult to forgive and move on. Conversely, the events implemented under Stalinism in this hot-cold concept are thought to be cold memories, or "closed" (2009:99) because recalling the communist past can be more ambiguous or neutral depending on the topic. This is especially true of a country like Hungary where the Nazis had greater presence during World War II than did the Communist Party.

The concept of cold memory is also not suggesting that Stalin is free of blame; committing genocides and implementing oppressive political policies are certainly emotional memories, but are often understood through closed mentalities. Turai references the common knowledge that there is a specific "etiquette" for discussing Nazism and Hitler because of how delicate and traumatic the topics are, while discussions of communism do not have the same level of caution (2009:99). It is evident in both Statue Park and Grūtas Park however that as visitors, viewing the monuments will inevitably make people uncomfortable and uncertain of what is considered appropriate behavior (Hwang

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[2] Turai adapts this metaphor from the work of historian Charles S. Maier. See Maier, Charles S. "Hot Memory…Cold Memory: On the Political Half-life of Fascist and Communist Memory", *Transit* N.22 (2002).

2009:71). One of the most important elements of Grūtas Park is the position visitors take when being reminded of a recent, grievous history. Visually engaging the monuments out of their original, Soviet context reverses the role of authority; the viewer becomes empowered by confronting the repressive regime (Lankauskas 2006:37).

It is a reasonably similar environment at Statue Park, with the additional dynamic of some monuments that have commemorated the Soviets' victory over the Nazis (Levinson 1998:72). Although Hedvig Turai reflects on the use of irony in both parks, she criticizes Grūtas Park for utilizing "easy, mocking solutions" to address the recent Soviet past, while Statue Park's solutions for acknowledging Fascism and Communism possess a more intellectual attitude (2009:101). Turai is incorrect in her statement here because the pursuit of both parks is to actively remember the past, however offensive or controversial it is to do so. Statue Park and Grūtas Park are unique places in post-socialist countries where after the fall of communism, imagery symbolic of oppression has more space for critique. As long as the ability to remember rather than forget is apparent, the parks are positively constructive. And while there may be more room for laughter in Grūtas Park, by drawing on memory to alleviate unsettled issues, laughter is just as well one of the best remedies (Lankauskas 2006:34).

Engaging with monuments in these sanctioned, neutralized spaces has allowed people to learn from the past and to conceptualize hopes for the future. The monuments themselves are neutralized because they are situated outside of an area of any political or social relevance, and in that context do not make a biased statement. Having the freedom for dialogue about the past generates ideas about heritage and, likely stirring ideas about what heritage used to mean, aids in the reconstruction of national identity. Despite the fact that Soviet-era monuments are contentious no matter where they are on display in post-Soviet countries, the public exhibitions serve a constructive purpose because they allow the past to be open for discussion.

A Country Divided: Contested Monuments in Ukraine

Soviet-era statues are not limited to Grūtas Park and Statue Park, but still permeate much of the post-Soviet landscape in Eastern Europe. In Ukraine, there is little neutralized space for the contemplation of communist leaders; monumental statues continue instead to be the source of much tension in occupying central public spaces. Essentially, the nation has been politically divided between the more democratically-moving west and the eastern region, which shares strong ties with Russia and is heavily influenced by the Communist Party. In the footsteps of the Soviet use of aesthetics to meet political ends, a "war of monuments" of sorts is currently taking place in Ukraine (Etkind 2011:1). Today's Communist Party is still actively involved in adding to or refurbishing the more than two thousand monuments that continue to occupy space in central and eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian nationalists have been characterized negatively as "hooligans" or even as far as "terrorists" in response to the damages they have inflicted upon a number of monuments to Lenin and Stalin (Union 2009).

One such Lenin monument, located in Kiev's Besarabsky Market, has been the target of several rounds of vandalism and political anguish. In early 2009, a nationalist group damaged the face and hand of the Lenin monument. Several months later, the Communist Party held a ceremony for the unveiling of the restored monument, which was promptly splattered with red paint by Ukrainian nationalists (Interfax-Ukraine 2009). Besarabsky Market is clearly a site of

competing identities and contradictory feelings about the communist past.

On the border of Russia in Ukraine's eastern region, the city Kharviv possesses one of the largest public squares in the world. Like many public locations and street names subject to being renamed since the Soviet era, the square was renamed from Dzerzhinsky Square to Freedom Square after Ukraine's independence in 1991 (Ukraine 2011:1). According to anthropologist Catherine Wanner (1998), the renaming of the square and reconfiguration of its physical surroundings, which include constructivist architecture, has caused many Kharkiv residents to become psychologically disoriented. She further asserts that many locals of Kharkiv feel ambiguous toward political changes and their subsequent meaning in the community (1998:181). The key focus of Freedom Square is the Lenin monument, an inherent contradiction, which commands the entranceway into the square.

The monument was erected in 1963, and while it continues to dominate the attention of the park, its audience is characterized by multiple histories and experiences in response to the Soviet Union. In order for a monument to represent its political vision successfully, it has to appeal to the public by being persuasive and in a way that fosters unity without conformity (Miles 2006:58). Similar to the other former Soviet republics, monuments were certainly utilized for being visually persuasive and to even cause fear from what is being represented by it. Since the collapse of the USSR, many Ukrainians appreciate monuments as a reminder of a past to learn from rather than to forget. Catherine Wanner references a Ukrainian informant who stated, "We should keep all of these horrible monuments as a reminder of our history" (1998:174). Yet with a Lenin monument in Kharkiv's Freedom Square; in a largely pro-

Soviet region, freedom from communist influence is not readily apparent.

While the sociopolitical division of Ukraine is not limited to an "east-west dichotomy" (Wanner 1998:17), the eastern region is characterized by a linguistically Russian, and extensively pro-communist population. (Yekelchyk 2007:199) Reflectively, the grand monuments of Soviet and communist leaders such as the one in Freedom Square dominate the landscape. This is not the case in cities across western Ukraine however. The region is largely made up of ethnic and nationalistic Ukrainians; who have been forward in recent years in presenting their Ukrainian, if not "anti-Soviet" (Wanner 1998:126-8) heritage.

In the city of L'viv, located in the heart of western Ukraine, a refurbishing of national identity has taken place. Although a small, quaint city compared to Kiev and Kharviv, the dominance of a new visual heritage has taken root in L'viv. In the center of L'viv there was once a monument of Lenin, but in 1992 that monument was taken down and replaced with a new icon; Taras Shevchencko. Shevchenko, who lived from 1814 to 1861, never actually visited L'viv but his image represents something greater than himself (Yekelchyk 2007:138). He was a poet, often referred to as the Ukrainian Bard, who represents a symbol of Ukrainian national identity. Shevchenko's position in Ukraine's history has been tampered with for the Soviet cause. Historian Serhy Yekelchyk describes how during the Soviet era, communists used his image to portray him as a supporter of Soviet culture and by extension its political agendas (2007:138). The Soviets erected monuments of Shevchenko across Ukraine specifically to unify Ukrainian and Soviet identity. Over time, the location of his monuments became meeting places for Ukrainian nationalist groups, who by then

had accepted him as a spiritual "father", to fight against Soviet imposition (2007:138-140). It is in this way that a pre-Soviet, Ukrainian-born icon such as Taras Shevchenko, refurbishes and reassesses what it means to be united under a free Ukraine.

The ability of the Ukrainians to have freedom of expression is clearly shown in their ability to redefine visual symbols. Yet since their independence in 1991 Ukrainians have had more leisure to express their discontent in the political arena. In 2004, the first democratic elections since Ukrainians gained their independence took place. The presidential elections were held between the supporters of Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych; the polls resulted with Yanukovych in the lead (Yekelchyk 2007:216). Evidence proving that the election was disturbed by massive fraud was promptly revealed to the public (Bilaniuk 2005:195). The results had immediate and enduring effects for the Ukrainian people who saw this as political corruption.

A second round of voting was organized in late 2004 with Yanukovych's party ready to announce him as the winner. In protest against the corruption, thousands of Ukrainians and supporters from other countries gathered in Kiev's Independence Square for what was called the Orange Revolution (Yekelchyk 2007:216-217). Dressed and carrying imagery in Yushchenko's campaign color of orange, masses of people gathered in the square for non-violent sit-ins and strikes each day until Yushchenko was successfully brought into office as Ukraine's first democratically elected president. The symbolism of Kiev as both the capital of Ukraine and a central point in between a divided country makes the protest of the Orange Revolution a national moment for Ukraine. Taking place in Independence Square, the Orange Revolution was a political statement demonstrating the values held by Ukrainians, and the direction in which they wanted to steer their country in the future.

No Space for Remembering: Social Repression in Belarus

While there is much externalized tension and controversy over political issues and their materialized symbols in Ukraine, there is little tolerance for anti-Soviet expression in the country's northern neighbor; Belarus. Since 1994 President Alexander Lukashenka, as part of a government of former communists, has administered a dictatorship in the model of Soviet ideology and nostalgia (Szporer 2000:474). As one of the most politically and socially repressed states in Europe; Belarus and its sense of national identity is considerably tied to Russia and the former USSR (Szporer 2000:476-7). Their historical relationship arises from the Slavic origin myth of *Kieven Rus,* which in addition to defining Russians, defined Ukrainians as the *little Russians* and Belarusians as *white Russians* among the Slavic nationalities (Wilson 1997:184). In contemporary discourse, Belarus' identity on the national scale is so deeply tied to this conceptual origin that the country hardly has a distinct national identity of its own (Szporer 2000:477, Wilson 1997:183-5). Lukashenka's policy does not only stress its relationship with Russia, but ties his ideology specifically to the concept of Soviet Russia, so much so that even Belarus is more pro-Soviet than Russia in the post-Soviet era (Titarenko 2000:233).

Belarus's capital city Minsk, exemplifies this influence. Independence Avenue, *praspekt Nezalezhnasci*, connects the Minsk House of Government where a monument of Lenin stands proudly in front, to Victory Square at the opposite end in the city's center. Victory Monument stands at the square's center, which does not represent

Belarusian victory or independence specifically, but is a memorial to the victory of Soviet leaders in the defeat of Nazi Germany. The monument is decorated with a replica of the Order of Victory, one of the highest recognitions given to soldiers in the Red Army who served with distinction (Bates 2007). Beneath the monument in the city's metro underpass is another memorial, which also honors the Soviet party for *liberating* the Belarusians from the Nazis.

Pro-Soviet expression in Minsk is evident at the national level, which is made clear by the city's visual organization and monumental decorations. The aesthetics of the city and its governmental choice of whom to commemorate is reflective of Lenin's original plan to "educate" the urban masses through socialist imagery (Wanner 1998:176). The presidency of Alexander Lukashenka has proven difficult to speak out against in Belarus, especially in the capital of Minsk. Following the reelection of Lukashenka on December 19th 2010, riots broke out in front of the House of Government (RT 2010). Thousands of protestors believing the election to be undemocratic and fraudulent gathered outside of the building carrying flags, some trying to break into the building. Many of the protestors were beaten by riot police, and about 600 people were detained for participating in "mass disturbances" (BBC 2010). Lukashenka accused demonstrators of "banditry", and refused to acknowledge any criticism that the election was undemocratic (BBC 2010).

Like many of its East European neighbors, the future in Belarus is politically and economically unstable. Rather than breaking free from communist control and a Soviet mentality, many Belarusians have experienced "social inertia" in regards to moving forward (Titarenko 2000:246). Still more are afraid in speaking out against oppression in fear of Lukashenka, which makes little room for embracing a Belarusian identity detached from the former USSR.

Theoretical Reflections: Heritage as Performance

Speaking out in the name of independence requires the realization that national, ethnic and personal values have been rejected in favor of a repressive regime. For people to reflect on their heritage and externalize nationalistic meaning is a profound accomplishment, especially after years of enforced Sovietization. The repression of ethno-nationalism as well as cultural values has spurred many people to participate in public movements that oppose political occupation. To further my analogies discussed so far in this article, I utilize the ideas of symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner. His theory of performance pertains to social roles in the context of interactive, human behavior. For Turner these social roles are recognized in public and are often dramatic in nature; resembling a theatrical drama itself or a significant event initiated by a group of people (Turner 1988:81).

The activity and discourse taking place around visual symbols of Soviet ideology exemplify Turner's theory of performance. Visitors to museums hosting Soviet-era monuments perform a reciprocal exchange of ideas with the exhibit; interpretations are made of what is seen and returned with personal thoughts and emotions. A city aesthetically designed on the basis of a rejected ideology reflects a controversial process of slow change or stagnation. And massive crowds gathering together in opposition of a corrupt presidential election are intrinsically engaged in performance. They are actors in a social setting designed to generate ideas in response to imagery, and by harboring diverse perspectives of what is being

experienced, people recognize a sense of identity.

A component of Victor Turner's performance theory is the concept of *communitas;* described as a transitional state of mind that develops as a response to atypical experiences (Moore 2009:247). The mentality that *communitas* evokes is directly involved with effecting change. According to Turner it is a "law of natural wholeness" in which separate, dynamic entities interact with one another and figuratively create a sense of wholeness (Turner 1988:83). There are individual performances, and there are collective performances that together embody human process. By making a performance in a public arena, especially during what is referred to as a liminal or transitional period, ideas are generated that appeal to a wider audience. Performance theory's notion of liminality is especially applicable to the transitional experience of the former USSR and its republics.

Turner (1988) also states that his theory of performance is self-reflective, and can be applied to the concept of constructing a sense of national identity. Performance is reflective on an individual level in a way that allows a person, through social performance, to learn more about oneself. Performance allows a group of human beings, whether a few people, a community or entire nation to learn more about themselves as an entirety by interacting with or observing other groups (Turner 1988:81). Without making an individual or collective performance in public, the ideas put forth by that performance cannot be scrutinized or learned from. The point here is to communicate important ideas through cultural performances, which Turner (1988:82), expresses can be just as effective in a non-verbal and, I suggest, visual format.

If performance is dynamically self-reflexive, then the act of drawing from ideas about heritage in pursuit of expressing national identity is also a performance. Furthermore, a visual approach to this goal, in light of Turner is communicatively expansive. National identity cannot be realized or properly conveyed without drawing on historical events and traditions. Metaphorically people are bound together with these elements, especially during a period of liminality as suggested above. In the transition from the collapse of the USSR into the post-Soviet era, national identity is such a contested issue because there is now space to identify as more than Soviet. In forging a renewed sense of national identity, visual reminders of peoples' heritage can effectively communicate who people are in a reflexive way. Soviet heritage has become part of how people form identity in Eastern Europe today because several generations lived through it, and it is not an easy concept to erase or separate from.

To demonstrate the public character of human performance as it applies to heritage and national identity, Turner (1988) describes a final component to his theory of performance. I agree that meaning is created in public spaces, at least with the exchange of ideas at the national level. Furthermore, I contend that certain circumstances render a performance, symbolic icon, or heritage site of great or little worth. For Turner, performance is public because it is a social role that allows people to be self-reflexive based on what others are doing. However, he describes performance as a structure that has a beginning, middle, and an end (Moore 2009:251). He clearly states that the meaning generated from social performances is "bound up with termination", and that the significance or value of something is not evident or relevant until after it is over and passed (Turner 1988:97).

I disagree with Turner's assertion that performance is conclusive. Meaning is not condemned to termination, nor does it become important after the fact. Rather I

draw on the ideas of anthropologist James Fernandez to support the concept that the meaning of heritage and national identity is constantly at play and in flux. Rather than termination, people fight for their identities through imagery and support it through what Fernandez calls the "play of tropes", or a series of metaphors that are constantly interacting with one another to create meaning (Moore 2009:300). In response to Turner and Fernandez in the context of post-Soviet Eastern Europe, meaning is generated during performance and it does not cease to be of importance when it comes to heritage and national identity. This is why Soviet-era imagery and contemporary memorialization of these political signifiers continue to generate meaning into the present day and reinforce the proliferation of nostalgia for a socialist lifestyle. The Communist Party performed a political statement under Stalinism and people are still thinking about it.

As discussed above, scholars refer to heritage as a form of "the contemporary… use of the past" (Graham et al. 2000:17), and as a "social practice" that is not limited to the material world (Smith 2006:11-13). Heritage as a practice is a continuous force, and like national identity it is not something that simply ends. When visiting a museum for example, the participant is physically guided through an entrance and eventually exits the museum space. Yet, the visitor participates in the museum as a performance because he or she actively engages with what is on display, and interprets the imagery and concepts (West 2010:127). The experience continues in the mind of the observer. On a greater level, a collective effort to bring about change, even if people join in opposition for one day will have a lasting effect. A historical event that has changed peoples' lives does not terminate but it continues to influence people into the future. The collective group or individual

participants are examples of Turner's self-reflexivity, but this concept does not terminate in the way he suggests. In the following section, I demonstrate that by engaging in practices of heritage and expressing national identity, human performance is a continuous process.

In Pursuit of Heritage: Performances of Freedom

Although much of today's post-Soviet population has experienced economic instability and pine for the security of a socialist lifestyle, the mentality of East Europeans just before the collapse of communism was to externalize nationalistic sentiment and reclaim independence. I suggest that Turner's concept of performance and achieving *communitas* is applicable to the demise of the USSR as well as events in the post-Soviet era.

A powerful demonstration of human agency in utilizing a non-Soviet heritage was the Baltic Way; the organization of a pan-national human chain between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1989 (Kesekamp 2010:68). While recognizing the cultural diversity and individual nationalities of each state, the political histories were similar enough to unify the three nations together for the peaceful protest against Soviet occupation. On August 23rd more than two million people joined hands in a chain that connected Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. The human chain spanned roughly six hundred kilometers (Kesekamp 2010:68). The initial protest was followed by candlelit demonstrations in each of the Baltic capitals, in which people displayed flags and ribbons of symbolic color to honor the victims of Soviet oppression (Groudis 2009:B3, BalticWay.Net 2008).

Thought to have helped with the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Baltic Way was celebrated again on its 20th anniversary in 2009. A relay race entitled

"Heartbeat to Baltic" was initiated at one end in Tallinn and the other in Vilnius, so that participants ran the Baltic Way's original path and finished at Riga's Freedom Monument (BalticWay.Net 2008). This monument specifically commemorates freedom from the Soviet Union prior to Latvia's second occupation (Taubman 1997:A14). Its choice as the destination for reliving and celebrating the Baltic Way signifies the strength of visual heritage. The use of a common Baltic heritage in place of a Soviet heritage expressed by AHD directly, if not ironically rejects the Soviet political agenda and national identity. Furthermore, a chain of youths gathered in Cathedral Square, Vilnius to replicate the joined hands and patriotic environment that elevated hopes twenty years prior. The masses of people that gathered together for a peaceful cause were visually expressive, and became a form of heritage in practice through reliving and celebrating past events, and acknowledging a life lived under communism. Much of the population is frustrated with the ongoing hardships of rapid change, but the Baltic Way is a reminder of the unity the three nations felt in an effort to stand against former Soviet oppression (Groudis 2009:B3).

Catherine Wanner has suggested that social remembering is important for fostering closure to traumatic events and controversial issues from recent history (1998:175). As I have discussed in this article, visual media in Eastern Europe has symbolized a prominence of Soviet heritage, and has had significant impact on shaping the public's concept of national identity and political allegiance. Since the collapse of communism, icons of Soviet ideology have been subject to reinterpretation, in many ways that are just as contentious as assimilating to the Soviet ideology in the first place. From an anthropological perspective, the concept of utilizing heritage is crucial to understanding how people shape their cultural identities according to national values. Especially in countries like the Baltic States, Ukraine and Belarus that have experienced political and socioeconomic stress, national identity should be a strengthening factor toward stability. As these countries move forward into a brighter future, much ethnographic research must be done in order to understand peoples' changing relationships with the past. This is an important area of inquiry because the physical alterations of heritage sites and public values are shaped by one another and continue to change over time and space. While my primary focus has been to demonstrate the power of visual heritage in lieu of Soviet ideology, further research should be done on the intangible, local and private spheres of heritage and its influence on national identity. Visual expressions, if harnessed in a way that allows people to reconcile with the past, can positively rebuild and strengthen notions of national identity in the future.

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