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SHARED HISTORY IN SHATTERED SPACES: MEDIATISATION OF HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN UKRAINE AND BROADER EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract. *The article focuses on the increasing adoption of media logic and the corresponding change of habitus in the field of academic history in Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on Ukraine. Departing from both mediatisation theory and memory studies, authors consider a range of relevant phenomena from across the region, before considering in more depth the case of LikBez, a grassroots initiative of Ukrainian historians, aimed at debunking historical myths spread both inside and outside Ukraine. The amalgamation of historical knowledge and multiple media platforms to convey it, it is argued, ushers in the era of mediatisation of history.*

Key words: *history, media, memory politics, mediatisation, Eastern Europe, Ukraine, Likbez*

In “The History Manifesto” (Guldi & Armitage 2014) leading historians ruefully lamented “A spectre is haunting our time: the spectre of the short term” (1). They saw the problem of short-termism as the main problem of humanities and vigorously called for the return of *longue durée*. Rather optimistically, they presented history as the sole academic discipline capable of speaking truth to powers and giving perspectives that exceed the lifetime of a generation. Likewise, several media publications have recently lamented the decline of interest in history as an academic discipline as faculties and departments all over the world fail to attract students who would choose history as their major (Alterman 2019 in The New Yorker; Brands and Gavin in WarOnTheRocks.com 2018).

These discussions among both historians and general public point out that the role of historians and role of history as an academic field is transforming. We look at this

transformation as the change of habitus (Bourdieu 1990), a set of rules and norms governing a certain (professional) field and adopted by its participants as the necessary and successful way of behaviour. Habitus includes the entire range of practices, from types of discourse, vocabulary and rhetoric to the way an individual presents their body in a professional setting. The historical habitus, we argue, is changing in Eastern Europe, creating a new type of professional: a dynamic, media-savvy, blogger historian who is a public commentator and educator as much as a narrow expert. As a result of this work, a specific type of history—a “hashtag #history”—is produced.

This dynamic runs hand in hand with a more obviously problematic development, especially relevant for Eastern Europe recently: the frequent use (and abuse) of history as a means to political ends (Assmann, Aleida 2016, 2013; Erll 2008; Bell 2006; Blacker and Etkind 2013; Jilge 2006; Nijakowski 2008; Portnov 2009, 2013). The practices of memory politics in the region are sadly all too often infested with nationalism and extreme instrumentalisation, or even weaponisation, of history. Even though a critique of it is frequently heard from academic circles, little is said about another aspect: the knowledge regime that connects mediated representations, historical narratives and short-term tactical political tasks in a powerful network of domination and control based on the power of media storytelling besides simply coercion. We call the process of the constant adoption of media logic by history writing the mediatisation of history. Clearly, the merger of history and media product (often light-brow or outright entertainment) is central to this knowledge regime. Yet can mediatisation of history be not only the tool that drives this regime, but also the tool used to subvert it, or at least try and contain the most significant threats?

Taking our point of departure in memory studies and studies of uses of the past (Ankersmit 2001; Aronsson 2005; Assmann 2008; Karlsson & Zander 2014; Redin and Ruin 2016; Russen 1994, 2004), we lift the discussions on the uses of history and the role of media in memory to a new level of empirical and theoretical development aiming to explain how media logics influence history writing in Ukraine, specifically in a particular historians' project “Likbez”. To show that mediatisation of history is not unique only for Ukraine we put our discussion into a broader context of the countries of Eastern Europe, such as Belarus, Lithuania, or Poland. Due to the limits of this study, though, we cannot discuss the similar trends in history-writing in all the countries in detail.

History meets media: Theoretical framework

We propose the theoretical framework for analysing these cases based on mediatisation theory that posits the increasing adoption of media logic outside media, particularly in academia (in our case, in historical scholarship). This changes the acceptable habitus in the field of academic history, creating a space for publicly visible, media-friendly historians that dramatically differ from both the rigid Soviet academic establishment and the flexible post-Soviet intellectuals. Their activity creates a body of “prosthetic memory” allowing to experience history through a range of media products. The example of the Eastern European countries that share significant parts of their histories allows to trace this process on a rich material of shared history (for example, in the differences between

the mediatisation-driven “prosthetic memories” of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in present day’s Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine). These conceptual approaches interlink in a way that allows for a complex and multi-perspective view of the process we describe as mediatisation of history. Below, we are considering these elements of our theoretical approach in a more detailed way.

Mediatisation has of late become one of the key concepts to interpret social transformations in the current media-saturated environment. In one of the most popular definitions (Hjarvard 2008), mediatisation is explained as an increasing adoption of media logic by other spheres of life (such as politics, economy, education, arts, science etc). While in the classical Bourdieusian analysis the media are seen as dependent on other social fields (typically politics and business), the growing presence of media technologies and forms has led to intervention of the media field into other fields that have to adapt to its dominance and adopt patterns and types of behaviour ensuring public visibility and success.

“In late modern societies, media have become co-constitutive for the articulation of various social fields in their present form: politics, economics, education, and so on” (Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby 2015: 321).

Hjarvard (2008) regards mediatisation as a merger between media and other social institutes whereby the media “have become an integral part of other institutions’ operations” (106). Historically, the theory of mediatisation is regarded as “consonant” with the so-called medium theory initiated by Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and Joshua Meyrowitz (*ibid.*, 109) in its focus on an overall impact of the media but more empirical in its study of “specific mediatisation processes among different groups” (*ibid.* 110, following Krotz 2007).

Several approaches to mediatisation have been outlined (Bolin 2014) but it is the institutional one we rely on most since it facilitates the analysis of interaction between different institutions. From this perspective, mediatisation is understood in following terms:

It is “the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterized by a duality in that the media have become integrated into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions in their own right. As a consequence, social interaction—within the respective institutions, between institutions, and in society at large—takes place via the media. The term ‘media logic’ refers to the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules” (Hjarvard 2008: 113).

Following Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby (2015) we emphasise the importance of being media-centred rather than media-centric, which “involves a holistic understanding of the various intersecting social forces at work at the same time as we allow ourselves to have a particular perspective and emphasis on the role of the media in these processes” (316). Couldry & Hepp (2013) speak about social-constructivist tradition:

“The term ‘mediatisation’ here is designed to capture both how the communicative construction of reality is manifested within certain media processes and how, in turn, specific features of certain media have a contextualised ‘consequence’ for the overall process whereby sociocultural reality is constructed in and through communication” (196).

Even though not in the main scope of this article, we approach the national histories of Eastern Europe from the perspective of “shared” or “entangled history”, which is also sometimes called “transferts culturels” and “histoire croisée”. This approach emphasises the interconnectedness of societies. The main argument is that no singular units of studies (neither nations, nor empires) can be the exclusive and exhaustive units and categories of historiography (Kasianov & Ther 2009). This approach allows to overcome methodological nationalism, on the one hand, and put the whole region into a broader global perspective. The fact that once shared history of people who belonged to different transnational configurations is now written and interpreted in shattered spaces constrained by the boundaries of national states makes media’s role even more visible. Often, these are media that channel different historical narratives across the boundaries so that historians in different countries engage in dialogue or, indeed, polylogue (as it happened with the film *Wołyń* which will be discussed below). Approaching history of the region as entangled history helps us put a stronger focus on interferences, interdependencies, and entanglements, and highlight the multidirectional character of the transfers (Barkan, Cole and Struve 2007). We suggest, particularly for future studies of the problem of mediatisation of historical scholarship in Eastern Europe, focusing on exactly such episodes of “shared history”, such as the WWII controversies or the shared legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In our article, we are touching upon this approach, which must be extended and deepened further in future research.

Media representations of history are approached here through the concept of prosthetic memory. Introduced by Alison Landsberg, the concept “prosthetic memory” describes a new form of public cultural memory formed under the influence of media. Landsberg showed how films can produce historical knowledge. She argued that this knowledge has a potential to awaken social responsibility and political alliances that transcend the essentialism and ethnic particularism of contemporary identity politics (2004; 2015). Landsberg and other scholars interested in media representations of the past concentrated on the media side of the process of “telling history” in which the role of historians was overseen or just pre-supposed to be the same as that of media producers. In the same way, the scholars who are interested in “reception” end of the media representations of history are focused on the reception by the audiences while the historians are left out of the picture. We would like to put historians and their professional work into the light.

Habitus (Bourdieu 1990) is another important concept we are going to employ in relation to how the profession of historian is changing under the effects of media logic. Habitus includes a set of rules governing behaviour, work and competition in a specific social field, from abstract professional norms to body language. We are particularly alert to how the historical habitus is changing in Eastern Europe as a new type of professional historian, who is also a media persona, is increasingly normalised and popularised.

In search of the mediated past: Survey of the field

The mediatization of politics or cultural production is increasingly documented but there has been little to no research into how science and knowledge, particularly history as a discipline, transform and become mediatized. One can but mention Schäfer's (2014) account of the mediatization of science (dealing mostly with internal communication within the field) and Rawolle and Lingard (2014) pinpointing the mediatization of education. Hoskins (2014) traced how the mediatization of memory made the archive of memory more networked and hybridized, and Senie-Demeurisse's (2010) doctoral dissertation discusses the mediatization of history in France and shows that it results in vulgarized, oversimplified multimodal narratives. Other than these distant approaches, our article is a pioneering attempt to discuss the study of the mediatization of history, especially in Eastern Europe.

Different scholars have been emphasizing the role of communication in formation of memory since the very beginnings of memory studies as the field of research. The "father" of memory studies, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, emphasized that communication forms collective memory. Without interpersonal communication, there cannot be any memory shared by the community (Halbwachs 1992). Jan Assmann in his studies of memory underlined the role of communication on personal and institutional levels as he introduced his theory of communicative and cultural memory (2008). The role of media in this communication was constantly accentuated. The most important works in this regard are Alison Landsberg's "Prosthetic memory" (2004) and Marianne Hirsch's "Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory" (1997) where the authors show how media can allow a mediated access to the past for those who never experienced it. Media narratives can even substitute history understood as the experienced past, as in case of prosthetic memory formed under the influence of films we watch and books we read. Digital technologies have intensified the relationship between memory and media even more. As Andrew Hoskins pointed out,

"In 'post-scarcity culture' (Hoskins 2011, 2014, forthcoming) the flux of the digital ushers in a frenzy of seeing and imagining past and present; what was once scarce and relatively inaccessible from the past in the past is suddenly and inexorably visible, searchable, and mineable" (2014: 670).

The ever-intensifying "growth" of the past due to the media technologies influences the ways history is perceived in, and, as we argue, influences the way history is written nowadays. Aleida Assmann (2008: 98) suggested that "[t]he institutions of active memory preserve the past as present while the institutions of passive memory preserve the past as past". For her, the institutions of active memory are those that enable the daily communication and the institutions of passive memory are historians and archives which form the historical narratives. We follow Hoskins who suggested blurring of these boundaries between "passive" and "active" institutions (2014: 674) as media technologies enable these institutions be both passive and active at the same time. As Hoskins noted, "the productions of memory and the data used to forge history are made in an ongoing present" (2014: 673). It is exactly this "ongoing present" we aim to approach so as to

analyse which history is forged in the context of accessibility of “inexorably visible, searchable, and mineable” data and overwhelming presence of media.

A lot of research has been done on memory in this region. Scholars analysed memory discussing it in the context of political discourses, international politics, literature, and monuments (Karlsson, Petersson, and Törnquist-Plewa 1998; Törnquist-Plewa 1992, 2001; Shevel 2016; Mälksöö 2010; Lewis 2018; Etkind and Blacker 2013; Zhurzhenko 2013; Portnov 2009, 2013; Yurchuk 2014). Scholars also have written on media and their role in cultural memory construction (Erlil and Rigny 2008; Erlil and Nunning 2008). What is, though, largely overlooked by scholars working within memory studies is the relation between history-writing and media where the work of historians comes into the centre. Barbie Zelizer (2008) noted how historians have extensively used journalist’s works in history writings while journalism’s work of memory is not sufficiently recognised, this in spite of journalists producing the stories which form perceptions of the past in a similar way as historians do. We propose that, in order to fill this gap, the relation between history and media should in principle be approached from two directions: from the vantage point of historians who are using media in writing history and from the vantage point of media professionals who extensively use the past in producing their media content.

Mediatisation of history at work: Evidence from Eastern Europe

The region of Eastern Europe has lately shown an especially strong re-actualisation of the past in the present, most often driving and driven by political conflicts. Narratives of the past are constantly framed as matters of security (Mälksöö 2010; Horbyk 2013; Horbyk 2015; Budryte 2018; Yurchuk 2017a; Yurchuk 2017b; Törnquist-Plewa and Yurchuk 2019). In this regard, researchers even started to speak about “mnemonic security” (Mälksöö 2015). Historians and historical texts become key actors in the political conflicts. This can be observed, for instance, in the case of the feature film *Wołyń* (2016, dir. Wojciech Smarzowski, translated into English as “Hatred”, the same title as original Smarzowski’s screenplay) that encapsulated the argument between Poland and Ukraine about the 1943 massacres of civilians as the defining problem in relations between the countries (Motyka 2009; 2011). The film was banned in Ukraine while met with universal acclaim in Poland, and perceived on both sides as a historical account rather than a work of fiction (Yevropeiska Pravda 2016; Kozubal 2016). Leading historians took the position of cinema critics in this “film controversy” and participated in the discussions on the film on TV and in newspapers (Yekelchuk 2016; Khomenko 2016; Zychowicz 2016). This short example shows that historians at present take new roles in the society using media extensively for reaching the public. This influences the ways historians form their argumentation and even the way they write history. A media product, primarily designated to entertain or satisfy the audience’s cultural needs, practically set the agenda for the public debate on a historical problem, and to a large degree constituted (or substituted) the historical narrative. This case has also demonstrated the blurring of boundaries between institutions of active and passive memory (Hoskins 2014: 674) as historians actively sought to enter the field of representation where the past is projected as part of the

present rather than reflecting on the past as simply past. This is a rather powerful example of how history is currently being mediated by way of creating a “prosthetic history” of a shared—entangled, indeed—historical moment (as the histories of Ukraine and Poland are shared and entangled around the shattered space of Volhynia in 1943).

We argue that media play one of the leading roles in the process of reformation of the historians’ profession. In Poland itself, history became a burgeoning ground for media businesses, evident in the thriving environment for glossy historical magazines and supplements (*Nasza Historia*, *Pamięć.pl*, *Historia Extra*, *Historia Polski*, *Fokus Historia*, *Newsweek Historia*, *Wyborcza’s Ale Historia*, *Uważam Rze Historia* and others). The Ukrainian situation, at the same time, is characterised by the lack of a developed market for historical magazines (*Lokalna Istoriia* magazine founded in 2018 is perhaps the only exception), while at the same time popular historical books are increasingly in demand and historians engage en masse in educational activity on Facebook and in other social media and digital initiatives. With the beginning of the conflict with Russia, some Ukrainian historians gathered into the “*Likbez. Historical Front*” project and saw themselves as actors in the war (a more detailed analysis of this case follows in the next section). In Ukraine, film market is dominated by the state commissions of historical films that often create controversies in the historical community, such as *Krutyy 1918* causing a public scandal between a leading historian Kyrylo Halushko and the filmmakers in February 2019 (Shurkhalo 2019; Slipchenko 2019; Sakovska 2019).

In Belarus, oppositional historians are often trying to engage in a similar educational activity on a much smaller scale, but the format they use is more akin to the Polish case, an illustrated magazine (*Naša Historyja*); the popular historical books are much more few and far between than in Ukraine. At the same time, historians often voice their perspectives in the more independent media in interviews or opinion pieces, and several public initiatives produce easily accessible YouTube videos popularising Belarus-centric historical narratives. A small but active market of historical role-playing tours is burgeoning, typically inviting urban dwellers on trips to medieval or early modern castles and palaces with some performance and game activity.

In Lithuania, professional historians are becoming ever more visible figures in the mass media and are ever more active in the social media, for instance, Facebook. As an example: a historian Aurimas Švedas has his own radio show dedicated to history. A number of shows dedicated to historical issues gain popularity in Television and Radio (for instance, the TV show called *Istorijos detektyvai*, *The Historical Detectives*, Lithuanian Television channel) and are attracting bigger and bigger audiences. Many controversies, however, exist in the field of historical cinema, which is currently focusing on many controversial topics (such as the collaboration of Lithuanians with the Nazi Regime and their role in the Holocaust, as in the film called *Purpurinis rūkas*, *Purple Mist*, by Raimundas Banionis).

Considering mediation of history in Eastern Europe through the focal lens of shared history, we observe that one particular case that requires more attention (apart from the WWII entanglements) is the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth period, in which all four national histories were especially closely knit together in a single state formation.

As prosthetic memory increasingly takes over the institutions of passive memory in claiming authority of representation of the past, Polish media product focuses on glorifying the era as the time of the unquestionable Polish domination and prosperity, from glossy representations in popular historical magazines to the films and other audio-visual product. Lithuanian prosthetic memory (evident in the recent cases of blurred active/passive institutions of memory, such the newly reconstructed Palace of the Grand Dukes in Vilnius) seeks to delineate the Lithuanian state and its position in the Commonwealth while also glossing over the period as an unmistakable golden age of Lithuanian nation. Belarusian discourses, in both more oppositional narratives (such as presented in the *Naša Historyja* magazine) and to some extent the more official knowledge production of the state-controlled institutions of “passive memory”, try to claim the era for Belarus and frame the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the precursor of the modern Belarusian state formation, thus especially clashing with Lithuanian mediated representations of prosthetic memory. At the same time, Ukrainian active memory builds mainly on the Cossack myth as well as the Kyiv Rus origins for modern Ukraine (cf. recent movies such as *Pekel’na khoruhva*, *Storozhova zastava*, *Zakhar Berkut* etc) and rather looks away from the shared history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, thus presenting a deviation in the otherwise relatively high interest in the early modern period in the other countries; it is more evident in popular books as well as the work of the more traditionally academic passive memory institutions.

Through looking at key history writing and history representation projects we could see that quite often and to a large degree, historians in these countries act akin to journalists interested in explaining the present moment rather than the past. Here, Barbie Zelizer’s argument about journalism doing history’s work sounds especially relevant. The most resonant historical discussions happen in media (not in journals, academic books, etc.). To paraphrase, *Historikerstreit* in Eastern Europe ever more often takes the form of a Twitter storm, a comments war on Facebook, very often degrading into trolling and infamy of a “shitstorm”. Rather than a rigid and scrupulously guarded academic field, history in these countries is a communicative free-for-all where professional historians, state actors, journalists, public figures and celebrities, activists, NGOs, and ordinary people engage in often vitriolic debates on how exactly the present is determined by the past. Borrowing from Simon Cottle’s (2006: 415) conceptualisation of mediatised rituals, they engage in creating “those exceptional and performative media phenomena that serve to sustain and/or mobilise collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolisation and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be”. What we observe can be interpreted, therefore, as a merger of media and academic history.

Likbez: Between historical fact-checking and a memory war

Formally, the LikBez1 project was presented on 8 September 2014. But the prehistory of the project is quite long. In 2010 the Tempora publishing house released a book

¹ Likbez is the Soviet neologism that emerged in 1919 as a syllabic abbreviation of two words, “elimination” and “illiteracy” (in Russian, “ликбез” for “ликвидация безграмотности”). The term Likbez refers to the state

“Ukrainian nationalism: Likbez for the Russians, or Who and why invented Ukraine” written by the Ukrainian historian Kyrylo Halushko (Halushko 2014). The book was written in Russian, because its target group was the Russophone audience in Ukraine and abroad. In the preface the author emphasised: “This book is likbez for the uninitiated, i.e. the review of the facts, mostly vivid ones, well-known for the experts but unfamiliar for the majority of Russian-speaking (and not only) citizens of Ukraine (and former Soviet Union), because these facts are ‘forgotten’, ‘unpopular’, ‘unpleasant’, ‘politically incorrect’ or ‘unfavourable’” (ibid., 16).

First of all, the book aimed to fill the gap that existed in Ukraine between academic research and public history, where, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the folk-history² genre had been predominant (Volodikhin 1999; Makhun 2007). In that sense, the purpose of the project was not unlike a form of “historical fact-checking” tasked with creating an easily accessible alternative to conspiracy theories and “fake news” dealing with history. At the same time, it was likewise a reaction to the aggressive Russian public discourses that had become especially active since 2007 and presented Ukraine as failed and artificial state that had no profound historical background. Thus, history became a real battlefield.

During the Revolution of Dignity (November 2013–February 2014), Russian media actively used historical themes to discredit pro-European activists of Euromaidan as well as the whole idea of Ukrainian statehood (Okara 2014; Gaufman 2017). It was the continuation of the “memory wars” between the Russian Federation and Ukraine launched after the Orange Revolution. Mediated narratives, including popular entertainment genres such as period blockbuster movies and TV series, and not the least computer games, signified the advent of mediatisation of history in Russia. Since 2014, however, it was used to cover up and justify the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. One of the key moments in the Russian public discourse was the film *Project Ukraine*, released in 2015, where a group of Russian and Polish historians denounced the existence of Ukrainians as a separate nation as well as depicted the whole idea of Ukrainian statehood as sabotage inspired by the Austrian General Staff in order to weaken Russian Empire in World War I.

This was the background against which in 2014, after the annexation of the Crimea, a group of Ukrainian historians from different institutions joined forces in a volunteer project “Likbez: The Historical Front”. The idea as well as the name of the project were suggested by Kyrylo Halushko who became the coordinator of the project. Firstly, all texts were published in Russian because the target group was constituted by Ukrainian Russophone citizens, primarily in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. The Likbez official site lists the aim of the project as “to inform everyone interested in the key debate ‘what’s Ukraine’, ‘what’s the history of Ukraine’ and ‘what’s territory of Ukraine’”. We take major myths and stereotypes and give answers based on facts and documents. Our

campaign of elimination of adult illiteracy initiated by the Bolsheviks and aimed at teaching all illiterate adults to read and write in a short period of time.

² Folk-history is a term used in post-Soviet area to mark quasi-historical literature and concepts that became popular in 1990s and have remained popular with the mass public ever since.

readers can make their own conclusions and use this information as they please. Our aim is not to impose some perspective but to offer information”. Obviously, the logic of Likbez team was in synch with the logic of its coordinator as stated in his eponymous book. In such way, the experts tried to make knowledge available to a large audience as well as for journalists who deal with historical topics. Halushko ironically calls his team “the fighters against obscurantism” who debunk both Russian and Ukrainian patriotic myths. Since the project united historians with different ideological and political background, the credo of the Likbez team can be expressed as “we are not marching together”. This ideological diversity becomes apparent in personal books and interviews of the members of Likbez.

During the six years of the project’s existence, Likbez managed to publish a 10-volume series “History Without Censorship” covering Ukrainian history from the ancient period till the end of the Second World War. This series has become a phenomenon on the Ukrainian non-fiction market as the amount of sold copies totals over 120,000 (something of a “bestseller” status for Ukraine, where the book market remains notoriously underdeveloped and where leading writers’ novels often sell but several thousand copies). The other significant project was “The History of Ukrainian Army” that became a textbook for Ukrainian military institutions.

In 2018 the reach of the Likbez website reach was 21,000 per month. The average reader of Likbez is a Russophone aged 18 to 35. Top five countries whose citizens visited Likbez site in 2018 were Ukraine, Russia, the United States, Germany and Poland. The public interest towards the project culminated in 2015. Yet until now Likbez, together with the Istorychna Pravda web portal, has remained the most popular historical NGO and the only historical “mythbuster” in Ukraine.

Among other activities Likbez is carrying out are public lectures, historical reconstruction festivals, media publications, and even films—a vast range of media products catered to very different audiences. For example, a recent production saw Likbez cooperate with film professionals to release a documentary, including fictionalised scenes, on the Ukrainian State in 1918. Inspired by Kyrylo Halushko, who was deeply dissatisfied with the portrayal of history in *Kruty 1918*, the film has become one of the most large-scale media ventures of Likbez and marked the intervention of professional historians in media entertainment field. This case is a strong evidence for the fusion of “active” and “passive” institutions that create history (i.e., historians who do research and create the narrative, and the media that convey it to the broader audience), as postulated by Hoskins (2014). Undoubtedly this is also a key manifestation of history being mediated.

When it comes to confronting the shared history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, one interesting feature in comparison with the other three countries is the relatively lower interest to this theme. Ukrainian narratives of the era are presented in several book projects and website articles debunking certain historical myths (especially romanticised Ukrainian nationalist imagery); however, there seem to be other more pressing concerns of the twentieth century history to deal with.

In some projects, Likbez acts as a co-organiser. The last one was the common project with Internews Ukraine and Ukraine/World, where six Likbez team members contributed to the book “Re-vision of History: Russian Historical Propaganda and Ukraine”. The book gives a brief historical refutation of the most popular historical myths created by Soviet/Russian propaganda.

Therefore, Likbez is one of the NGO actors influencing the formation of public historical narrative in Ukraine. This activity has a lot of support as well as many critics. The major debate is about propaganda. How should one estimate the role of academic community in the promotion of public history? Where is the boundary between professional standards and propaganda? What is the role of intellectuals and experts in the formation of political agenda in the period when history became the object of mediatisation and instrumentalisation?

In Ukraine there are two opposite visions. The first one belongs to the former director of Ukrainian Institute of National Memory and promoter of de-Communisation policy Volodymyr Vyatrovych who believes that media messages start to form historical concepts, so professional community should be active and suggest its expert knowledge to the society (Vyatrovych 2016 in Ukraine Crisis Media Center). On the other hand, the leading historian Georgiy Kasyanov is rather sceptical about the active position of historians in the public sphere as well as the necessity for the institutions and laws that regulate historical policy (Kasyanov 2019). Though he defends the ideal of “pure” academic history, one can still find a lot of his interviews and columns in the media. The media, especially social ones, became platform not only for public but also for academic debate. This is the epitome of the mediatisation of history

It should be noted in general that Likbez has generated significant reception not only among the broad public (which is understandable, given the deficiencies and weaknesses of the national book market and media debates in general) but also in the professional community. For example, Georgiy Kasyanov in a different text (2017: 257–258) revived the Soviet concept “the fighters of the ideological front” to describe his interpretation of the activity of Likbez. While analytical or theoretical sophistication of such labelling can be questioned, it does reflect the historian’s conceptual toolkit and his emotional reaction to the project. In a different style and tone, Andriy Portnov (2014) reacted to the language Likbez was using finding it positivist and positional. At the same time, Iryna Vushko (2018) in her review explained it by the objective condition of Ukrainian historical scholarship marked by a turn towards the national narrative—de facto banned in the Soviet Union—since Ukraine became independent in 1991, when Western historians had already moved away from national narratives.

“The project brought together more than two dozen historians to write ten books in less than two years and sold thousands of copies of each volume. No other country, to my knowledge, has carried out such a major review of its history on a similar scale over such a short span of time. Designed to debunk historical myths and propaganda, it should mark a new phase in historical discussion in Ukraine as well as create new professional standards in Ukrainian historiography. By covering over one thousand years, it also demonstrates the contingency of history, drawing

our attention to events and processes from the Middle Ages and even earlier eras that affect memory, historiography and politics today” (Vushko 2018: 123–124).

Given this, we should acknowledge that mediatisation of history is an accomplished fact. In modern world the state has completely lost its monopoly on historical policy. Different actors have provided their own visions of the past. The main challenge for the community of historians is how to act in the media sphere and stay within the professional standard, especially when the history becomes politically instrumentalised as we can see in Eastern and Central Europe. The Likbez case is an interesting phenomenon that emerges on the brink of national mobilisation and acting in the era of extreme mediatisation of all spheres of everyday life. It is a telling case of blurring the boundaries between passive and active memory institutions as professional historians whose only task was ever supposed to consist of creating academic knowledge in an internal professional discussion begin to seek media presence and adopt media logic alongside their academic field’s logic in order to influence the formation of prosthetic memory, of course, in the shape of mediated representation. And this reaches farther than the change of logic; the habitus is modified and the rules and norms of behaviour accepted in the media field become domesticated by this emerging type of historians. The mediatised historian’s habitus includes, apart from the traditional professional norms, more informal, personal and direct style of speech and writing, broad use of storytelling techniques, soundbite-style rhetorical devices, social media management, cherishing of a certain persona and style (often more informal and/or more aimed at attracting the audience) when it comes to mere looks. Even though young women remain on lower positions in the hierarchy of Ukrainian academy, and often a minority in working teams and other formal and informal groups, they are uniquely positioned to benefit from this situation. Epistemologically, this new habitus may allow sacrificing superficial semblance of balance for the sake of presenting more emphatically what is accepted as historical knowledge when the media logic of storytelling demands it. What it also requires, rather self-evidently, is a recourse to technical resources pertaining to filming, editing, layout, design and other media production skills.

When this is contrasted with evidence from other fields, the case of Likbez also seems to fall within the range of similar grassroot, do-it-yourself “knowledge institutions” that popped up in Ukraine since 2014 to compensate for the deficiencies of the Ukrainian state at a critical moment, oftentimes taking advantage of modern technology and the changing media and communication trends. Just as the fact-checking resource StopFake organised by journalists and teachers of journalism has become a leading fact-checker in Eastern Europe and proved effective at debunking propaganda in a hybrid war (Horbyk 2015), or Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre—a communication professional’s initiative—took a central position in media relations and nation branding (Bolin & Ståhlberg 2016), Likbez serves a similar function: it helps activist professionals and intellectuals cover the gaps in Ukraine’s ineffective state policies and more official passive knowledge institutions. The media apparatus is becoming a vital element to this activity, and harnesses the potential of mediatisation of history to mitigate the flaws and weaknesses of the power/knowledge apparatus in the Ukrainian context.

Conclusion: Writing history for the mediatised age

“The glut of media is also a glut of memory: past is everywhere” wrote Andrew Hoskins (2014: 662) to emphasise the close link between media and perception of the past. This is especially perceptible in Eastern Europe, where so much public debate, from media polemic to trolling on Facebook, is rooted in historical problematic. As we have demonstrated, the countries in the region, including Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine, have all witnessed an increasing transfusion between fields of academic history and media/entertainment. Not only the media are intervening in history, setting the agenda and creating prosthetic memory artefacts, but also historians are actively pursuing the path of being visible, vocal and viral in both traditional and social media. Historikerstreit is happening on Facebook and in professional web forums as much as in peer-reviewed journals, sometimes even more intensively in the new and social media. Ever more often historians also create media product, ranging from popular articles for glossy magazines to popular books to YouTube videos to full-length films. The very habitus of historian is changed; no longer confined to a narrow problem or a cabinet hermit, the present-day historian in Eastern Europe—now more often than previously female—is in ever more cases a social media persona, skilful at using new media, and maintains a permanent media visibility.

Such situation creates opportunities for both hegemonic manipulation of history and counter-efforts to it. As demonstrated in the article, mediatised history opens up for memory wars around contested issues of shared, entangled histories, and suits well to propagating nationalist versions of those histories. Yet mediatisation of history also creates space for counterefforts striving to set the historical record right and debunk myths and conspiracy theories wherever it is possible. It is only logical that the media, where much manipulation takes place, becomes also a space contested by historians willing to mitigate the consequences of the “use and abuse of history for life”, to use the title of the famous essay by Nietzsche. Perhaps, mediatisation of history is as much of a blessing as it is a curse—not unlike Platonian “pharmakon” in Derrida’s reading; both poison and medicine for the region shattered by mutual attacks on the shared history. Whether this proposition is true remains to be seen, and most certainly invites further research.

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