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Unlocking New Histories of Human Rights in State Socialist Europe: The Role of the COURAGE Collections

Introduction: Human Rights Activism in Eastern Europe

The collections featured in the COURAGE online archive offer a resource for exploring the history of human rights activism in socialist East Central Europe from a range of innovative perspectives. This chapter draws on a range of collections which offer insights into diverse forms of human rights activism in socialist Europe, including Romani civil rights activism in Czechoslovakia, feminism in Yugoslavia, environmental mobilization in Hungary, and human rights campaigns in Soviet Ukraine. These case studies promise to shed new light on histories of human rights activism, which have typically focused on a few well-known examples, such as Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, the Workers' Defence Committee in Poland, or the Moscow Helsinki Committee. The activities of these citizens' associations are essential not only for a more nuanced understanding of campaigns for human rights within Eastern Europe under socialism, but also for a richer grasp of the history of human rights more broadly. The turn towards human rights by opponents of repressive regimes in the Soviet bloc (and Latin America) was one of the factors that contributed to the "breakthrough" of human rights in international politics in the 1970s. Thus, human rights activism in Eastern Europe was crucial, according to Samuel Moyn and Jan Eckel, in shaping this decade as a turning point in the global history of human rights activism.¹

In the 1970s, East European dissidents could make their voices heard internationally as a result of the shifting diplomacy of détente. The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was signed by thirty-five states in Helsinki in 1975, created an East-West forum for the monitoring of human rights in the Soviet bloc.² According to Sarah Snyder, the principles agreed on at Helsinki helped build a transnational network which connected dissidents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to advo-

1 Eckel and Moyn, *The Breakthrough*.

2 Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*.

cacy groups or government officials in Western Europe and North America.³ This network internationalized dissidents' criticisms of human rights violations and carved out a space for human rights advocacy in the multilateral diplomacy of the CSCE. But another reason for the success of the human rights movement was a general loss of faith in other utopian political languages, above all, the language of revolutionary socialism. In the wake of the upheavals of 1968, Soviet and East European dissidents became an object of fascination for Western intellectuals, for example on the French Left.⁴ Thus, the story of human rights activism in Eastern Europe became entwined with the figure of the "dissident" as a moral witness to the crimes of communism.

The case studies featured in this chapter demonstrate that struggles for human rights involved a far wider range of social actors than was acknowledged by the earlier focus on intellectual, and often male, dissident elites. They also contribute to scholarship that challenges the established "Helsinki narrative" as the dominant mode of explaining the history of human rights in East Central Europe since the 1970s. The collections which inspired these case studies include the archives of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, Czech Republic; the papers of prominent feminist intellectuals at the Library of the Women's Centre in Belgrade, Serbia; the documents of the Hungarian Danube Circle Association and other collections related to the Danube movement's campaign against the so-called "Dunasaur," a massive dam between Hungary and Czechoslovakia; and the Kharkiv Human Rights Group's (KHPG) Virtual Museum of the Dissident Movement in Ukraine. Each of these collections provides important insights into the politics and lived experiences of human rights activism under state socialism, and they connect these histories in different ways to continuing struggles for human rights in post-socialist Europe today.

Tracing the History of Human Rights through Archives

The accessibility of archives has been a significant factor in shaping research on the history and memory of human rights activism in the former Soviet bloc. During and immediately after the socialist era, accounts of human rights activism in Eastern Europe were typically written by dissidents themselves or by émigré scholars and activists who had settled in Western Europe or the United States. The transnational networks that enabled mobilization around human rights claims also functioned as conduits of knowledge about these campaigns in local contexts. For example, the archives of Radio Free Europe, held by the Open Society Archives in Budapest, are a rich resource for the study of the production and circulation of knowledge about human rights

3 Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*.

4 Horváth, "'The Solzhenitysn Effect'," 879–907.

within and beyond the borders of socialist regimes. Collections of samizdat (self-published texts produced by oppositional and nonconformist groups) and tamizdat (texts that were smuggled to the West and published there) have been studied by historians interested in alternative forms of communication and networks that enabled an exchange of ideas about human rights (and other subjects) across the East-West divide.⁵ Historians of the “Helsinki effect” have drawn on diplomatic archives and the publications of dissident groups in Eastern Europe, although their focus is typically the international history of human rights activism rather than the domestic politics and everyday experiences of the dissidents themselves.⁶ More recently, the archives of communist regimes and re-readings of contemporary theoretical texts have yielded insights into the ways in which government officials, legal scholars, and political theorists developed conceptions of human rights that harmonized with Marxist theory.⁷

Drawing on a diverse range of archival collections, the case studies featured in this chapter, although very different, demonstrate some common themes. First, as mentioned above, they complicate or challenge our conventional understandings of the figure of the “dissident” and force us to ask how gender, ethnicity, and nationality shaped activists’ understandings of human and civil rights and their own positions as subjects within wider processes of cultural dissent. For example, the history of Romani activism challenges us to find space within the familiar narratives of Czech dissent (which has often tended to focus on canonical figures such as Václav Havel) for individuals such as Miroslav Holomek, the first president of the Czech Union of Gypsies-Roma (1969–1973), who was in many ways a loyal citizen and party member, but who simultaneously challenged official policy by calling for expanded cultural rights for Czechoslovak Roma. As we see in the case of the Kharkiv Human Rights Group’s (KHPG) Virtual Museum of the Dissident Movement in Ukraine, there was a tension between the subjectivity of activists, many of whom explicitly refused to identify with the “political” nature of dissent, and the categories of analysis imposed on them by scholars and curators.

The act of decentring the “dissident” as moral witness connects the case studies in this chapter to the wider social and cultural contexts of social mobilization in late socialism. As Benjamin Nathans has remarked, there has been a tendency to write the history of Soviet dissent in isolation from the social and cultural context in which it developed.⁸ Recent work on late Soviet society, however, has increasingly called into question the “binary categories” of “oppression and resistance [...], official culture and counterculture, totalitarian language and counter-language, public self and private self, truth and

5 Kind-Kovács and Labov, *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond*.

6 Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*; Snyder, *Human Rights Activism*.

7 Richardson-Little and Ned, “Dictatorship and Dissent,” 49–67.

8 Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason,” 632.

lie.”⁹ Indeed, many of the movements under discussion in this chapter did not view themselves in these terms: their relationship with the communist regime or wider society was far more complex and ambiguous. The need to overcome these binary categories is particularly evident in the case of the Danube Circle Movement in Hungary. Social movements such as the Danube Circle attracted mass support precisely because they did not present their actions as “political.” Nor can the case of environmental activism or, indeed, feminism be categorised unproblematically as a “human rights” movement. These movements were also influenced by forms of cultural dissent stemming from revisionist Marxism and the wider student movements after the upheavals of 1956 and 1968.¹⁰

Third, these case studies are implicitly or explicitly transnational. Histories of human rights activism have typically either been written from the perspective of international history or have remained caught in the national frame of the historiography on resistance and opposition to communist regimes in particular countries. But the case of the Danube Circle Movement, for example, demonstrates that not only were problems such as environmental pollution inherently of a cross-border nature, but citizens’ social mobilization around questions such as the hydroelectric dam between Gabčíkovo and Nagymaros (on the Slovak and Hungarian banks of the Danube respectively) can also only be understood in a transnational frame. From a different perspective, the history of feminist thought in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s was also produced through a constant circulation of ideas, texts, and people across borders, whether the internal borders of the various republics or the borders between feminists in Yugoslavia and the women’s liberation movements of the West or women’s movements in postcolonial countries.

At the same time, these collections also illuminate the continuing importance of nationalism and the nation in the history and politics of human rights activism in socialist Eastern Europe. In East Central Europe, dissidents’ embrace of human rights was also tied to a desire for national self-determination and a reclaiming of the national past from the communist regime.¹¹ After 1989, the exclusionary potential inherent in campaigns for liberation through collective national rights was felt in full force by members of national or ethnic minority groups (above all, Roma) and women. Feminists in socialist Yugoslavia who had mobilized around the question of sexual violence in the 1980s were forced to confront the consequences of nationalist war in the 1990s. In the case of one prominent activist, Lóránd notes, anti-war activism led to a recognition that her “partisan past brought her closer to feminism in the context of the nationalist war, despite the contradictions between the women in the party organisation and the new feminists before the war.” In the territories

⁹ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 5.

¹⁰ Gildea, et al, *Europe’s 1968*.

¹¹ Kopeček, “Human Rights Facing a National Past.”

of the former Soviet Union the legacies of the socialist-era “national question” have been particularly violent. As Kulick shows, Soviet authorities suppressed Ukrainian dissidents’ expressions of resistance “by couching the struggle in national terms,” thereby misrepresenting the Ukrainian human rights movement, “which was and remains a force for reforming these polities through appeals to legality, rights enshrined in the law, and a recognition of the basic dignity of each and every Soviet citizen.” This reflects the argument of Benjamin Nathans, who notes that Soviet dissent was diametrically opposed to the well-known strategies of twentieth-century civil disobedience campaigns in places such as Birmingham, Alabama or Bombay. Rather than publicly defying certain laws, Soviet dissidents invented a form of radical *civil obedience*: “engaging in or insisting on practices formally protected by Soviet law – such as freedom of assembly or transparency of judicial proceedings – but frequently subject to the wrath of the regime.”¹²

Finally, all of these collections have been the subject of conflicts about the writing of history in post-socialist Eastern Europe. In the 1970s, as we have seen, the Soviet dissident emerged as a symbolic focus for Western intellectuals eager to discover a moral witness to the crimes of communism. But the more complex histories that speak through collections such as those featured in this chapter, were written in the context of the 1990s, when debates about recent history and particularly the period between 1945 and 1989 were overshadowed on the one hand by campaigns for retroactive justice (such as property restitution, legal rehabilitation, financial compensation, prosecution of war criminals and agents of the political police), lustration, generational conflicts, and political fighting and, on the other hand, by national and international efforts (for example by the European Commission) to create days of commemoration and celebration, monuments, museums, hagiographies, and textbooks.¹³

The Museum of Romani Culture, Brno, Czech Republic

The Museum of Romani Culture, which is located in the Moravian city of Brno, is one of the most important institutions documenting the history of Romani culture and politics in post-war Europe.¹⁴ Established after the collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, the museum was the result of many years of campaigning by Roma activists during the socialist era. Its archives, which include the personal papers of leading figures in Romani political and ethnic movements, are important for understanding the history of state policy and social mobilization for Roma rights in socialist Czechoslova-

12 Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason,” 630.

13 Antohi, “Narratives Unbound,” xv–xvi.

14 Accessed September 28, 2018. <http://www.rommuz.cz/>

kia and the post-socialist Czech and Slovak republics.¹⁵ The museum also holds valuable collections relating to Romani visual and material culture in East Central Europe. Furthermore, museum staff have conducted numerous interviews with Roma survivors of genocide and persecution during World War II, and it has taken a leading role in initiatives to commemorate the victims of the Roma Holocaust. The materials archived in the museum demonstrate that Romani struggles for citizenship rights in post-war Eastern Europe are central to the broader history of civil rights activism during and after state socialism.¹⁶

The Museum was established in 1992 by activists linked to the first collective organization for Roma in socialist Czechoslovakia: The Unions of Gypsy-Roma (1969–1973). Romani activists, especially in Slovakia and south-eastern Moravia, had been petitioning the Czechoslovak government and Communist Party for permission to establish cultural and social organisations for Roma since the late 1940s. The Unions of Gypsies-Roma were finally established after Czech and Slovak Roma activists took advantage of the opportunities for political mobilization that opened up during the Prague Spring of 1968. As high-ranking officials were thrashing out the details of the Action Program to reform and democratize communist rule in Czechoslovakia, a Slovak Roma activist named Anton Facuna began to lobby the Slovak authorities for permission to establish a Romani cultural association. Facuna was sharply critical of bureaucratic efforts to assimilate Roma in 1960s Czechoslovakia, which had included a “resettlement” programme intended to disperse Roma from the poorer regions of Slovakia across the country. In his petition to the authorities, Facuna described this scheme as a violation of Romani citizens’ rights to freedom of movement. Facuna and other activists hoped that Roma might be recognized as a national minority in the new federal constitution, which aimed to assuage Slovak complaints about the centralization of power in Prague. National minority status would have given Roma the right to claim state support for the Romani language and culture. But their efforts failed, and Roma were not included in the nationalities law that granted—admittedly limited—cultural rights to Hungarians, Ruthenians, Poles, and Germans. Instead, the government allowed Roma to set up Unions of Gypsies-Roma to support social integration of the country’s diverse Romani population. The Unions undertook numerous activities, including efforts to improve housing, welfare, and education, to combat discrimination, promote Romani cultural identity, and to raise awareness of the racial persecution of Czech and Slovak Roma during World War II.¹⁷

15 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Museum of Romani Culture Collections”, by Anna Vrtálková, 2018. Accessed: October 10, 2018.

16 Donert, *The Rights of the Roma*.

17 Donert, *Rights of the Roma*; Sokolová, *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity*; Pavelčíková, *Romové v českých zemích*; Jurová, *Vývoj romskej problematiky*.

Important insights into the history of Romani political mobilization are provided by the personal papers of Miroslav Holomek, president of the Czech Union of Gypsies-Roma (Svaz Cikánů-Romů) from 1969 until 1973. Holomek was born into a family of Moravian Roma which had been integrated into local society for centuries. Many of Miroslav Holomek's relatives were killed during the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia during the World War II. Together with another Moravian Romani family, the Daniels, members of the Holomek family played an important role in setting up the Czech Union of Gypsies-Roma after the Prague Spring and, later, in founding the Museum of Romani Culture. The Czech and Slovak Unions of Gypsies-Roma were mass organizations set up under the National Front. When read alongside the archives of the Roma Union stored at the Moravian Provincial Archive and party and government reports at the National Archives of the Czech Republic in Prague, the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava, regional archives in cities such as Košice, and the reports of the State Security, the Holomek papers offer fascinating insights into the politics and everyday experiences of one of the first organizations for Roma in post-war Europe.

The museum also holds the papers of a number of individuals who did not identify as ethnically Roma but supported Romani activists in their claims for equal rights. These materials include the papers of a leading demographer, Dr. Vladimír Srb, who joined forces with leaders of the Roma Unions to lobby the government for Romani cultural rights. Moreover, the museum received the papers of the leading scholar of Romani language and culture in socialist Czechoslovakia: Milena Hübschmannová. As a student of Indian languages at Charles University in Prague in the late 1940s, Hübschmannová was struck by the similarities between Romani and Hindi. Unable for political reasons to pursue her dream of travelling to India, she threw herself into the study of Romani, building up an extensive network of contacts with Roma from Slovakia and Moravia and large numbers of Slovak Roma migrants to the Czech Lands after the war. When these papers are catalogued, they will be an invaluable resource for researchers.

Equally significant is the collection of private papers donated by Miroslav Dědič, a schoolteacher who established a boarding school for Roma children (the School of Peace) in the early 1950s. Influenced by the Soviet pedagogue Anton Szemjonovics Makarenko, Dědič wanted his school to serve as a place where Roma children would learn to become model socialist citizens. The collection includes diaries written by Dědič and documents relating to the history of the school, for instance correspondence with government agencies and state-run radio and newspapers and letters to Romani activists, journalists, film-makers and writers who were engaged in various projects to support the integration of Roma into socialist society. Many of these projects were highly assimilationist, reflecting the contemporary belief that assimilation, implemented if necessary with coercion, was the best path

to full citizenship for people described paternalistically in official terminology as “citizens of gypsy origin.”¹⁸

The founders of the Czech Union of Gypsies-Roma were already seeking to establish a museum of Romani culture in the early 1970s. Preserved in the museum’s collection is the card catalogue listing objects collected by the Roma Unions during this period, including artefacts made by Roma blacksmiths sourced by the historian Bartoloměj Daniel. These objects were displayed in an exhibition of Roma crafts and were intended to lay the foundations for a Romani museum, but after the liquidation of the Unions they were deposited for over twenty years at the Institute for Ethnography of the Moravian Provincial Museum until they were returned to the Museum of Romani Culture in 1992.¹⁹ In addition, the museum has assembled a number of collections pertaining to Romani material, visual, and audio culture. These materials include collections of textiles and clothing, jewellery, caravans and domestic interiors, posters and postcards, creative works of art, video documentaries, audio recordings, photographs, and traditional crafts and trades. It was also in this period that historians working in Czechoslovakia began to conduct archival research on the persecution of Roma during World War II. The historian Ctibor Nečas began his research during this period, but he was only able to publish a small number of articles in rather obscure academic journals. Not until the 1990s was Nečas able to publish the results of his research as a major monograph. In addition to functioning as a repository, the Museum has also conducted numerous interviews with Czech and Slovak Roma survivors of persecution and genocide during the World War II.

The Czech and Slovak Roma Unions were forced to close down in 1973 at the tail-end of the purges that the communist leadership introduced in the name of “normalization” after the Prague Spring was crushed. But the networks that connected activists such as Miroslav Holomek were maintained throughout the ensuing decades of socialist rule. Romani activists from Czechoslovakia participated in the first World Romani Congress in London in 1971, and a Slovak Romani émigré, Ján Cibula, became head of the International Romani Union. Charter 77 sought to publicise the plight of Czechoslovak Roma in the language of human rights in the late 1970s, but the story of Miroslav Holomek and the Roma Unions reminds us that Romani citizens in socialist regimes were not simply victims. Rather, Roma were agents and advocates for their own rights under socialism.

The transformation of Romani activism after 1989 can also be explored in the Museum’s collections, for example the papers of poet and activist Vladimír Oláh, or documents relating to the Roma Civic Initiative (Romská občanská iniciativa, ROI). In recent years, the Museum of Romani Culture has played a

18 Spurný, *Nejsou jako my*.

19 Accessed January 31, 2018. <http://www.rommuz.cz/odborna-verejnost/oddeleni/fond-sebe-dokumentace/>

leading role in campaigns to commemorate the victims of the Roma Holocaust in the Nazi Protectorate. After years of campaigns by Romani advocacy groups, the Czech government has finally agreed to purchase a pig farm that was built on the site of a former concentration camp for “gypsies” in Lety. The Museum has been entrusted with the task of creating and maintaining the memorial at the site. More than 1,300 people were interned in this camp after 1940. An estimated 327 Roma died in Lety, and a further 500 were deported to Auschwitz, most of whom did not return. Nearly all the 6,500 Roma and Sinti living in pre-war Czechoslovakia were killed during the war. The history of the Roma Holocaust in wartime Czechoslovakia has been one of the most controversial questions surrounding Romani history since 1989, and one in which the Museum has played an important role. The story of the Museum of Romani Culture has been entwined with struggles among Romani activists to come to terms with the legacies of genocide from the earliest post-war years. No longer a non-governmental organization, but a public institution operating under the Ministry of Culture, the Museum of Romani Culture continues to play an important role in documenting and producing historical accounts of the Romani experience (including struggles for civil and human rights) during and after the socialist era.

The Neda Božinović and Žarana Papić Collections at the Library of the Women’s Studies Centre in Belgrade

The library of the *Centar za ženske studije*, the Women’s Studies Centre in Belgrade, holds important collections of two feminist intellectuals who defined the feminist movement in Yugoslavia and, later, Serbia for decades. The Women’s Studies Centre was itself a product of the post-World War II history of the feminist movement in Yugoslavia and Serbia. The library is part of the Women’s Library Network throughout Serbia. It holds the personal archives and book collections of two prominent feminist intellectuals, Neda Božinović (1917–2001) and Žarana Papić (1949–2002), whose activism links the story of the library to the history of human rights and civil rights. The library also holds materials relating to the history of the archive itself, and the process of establishing the archive was central to the activism of Yugoslav feminists. While the historical relationship between feminism and human rights movements is far from unproblematic, the history of feminist activism targeting violence against women from the 1970s and against the war in the 1990s connects the story of feminism in Yugoslavia to human rights in important ways.

The Women’s Studies Centre was founded by members of the feminist group *Žena i društvo* (Woman and society).²⁰ The women who became the founders of the group started to meet, talk, and publish feminist texts in the

20 Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*.

early 1970s, creating the most organized feminist critical group in East Central Europe after World War II. The group, or rather groups, worked in the three biggest cities of Yugoslavia: Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Zagreb. They started as small discussion circles of women and some men, mostly still students, at the universities and in student cultural centres, and their activities became more formalized over time. The individual stakes and life trajectories, the different intellectual approaches, the inherent differences within the local scenes intellectually and in the actual infrastructures make this a loose network, connected, however, by the shared fascination with a feminist critique of socialism in Yugoslavia. Their early discussions were mostly academic, as they were reading texts freshly appearing in the “West” as a result of the revived feminist movement (the “second wave”) together with Marxism, the Praxis philosophers, and other Marxist revisionist schools. “Western” theories served as inspiration for a local version of feminism, thinking about the Yugoslav self-managing society, and the realities of women in Yugoslavia. However, some publications were focused very much on critical theory, such as the interpretations of the *écriture féminine* in French post-structuralist theories.

Writings on art and literary theory were produced in tandem with art works and literature with feminist aspects: some pieces adopted an explicitly feminist position, while others were fascinated by the same issues as the feminist theorists and social sciences around them. 1978 was an important turning point after the early small group discussions and publications: the *Studentski kulturni centar* (SKC) [Students’ Cultural Centre] in Belgrade hosted the first international feminist conference in Yugoslavia. The documentation of this event, together with the exhibitions, podium discussions, open lectures, and film screening related to the *Žena i društvo* group are available in the archives of the SKC.²¹ The early phase focused on the philosophical and social roots of women’s oppression from a social science and humanities perspective, largely relying on the official state socialist discourse about women’s emancipation, but rethinking the ideas and concepts that constituted the official language and ideology in order to point out the shortcomings or even failures of the regime in the emancipation of women.

Feminist texts also appeared in newspapers and women’s magazines, especially in the 1980s. This decade brought along the “activist turn” of the group: from around 1985, radical feminism was no longer simply theoretical but rather became the way in which the group organized itself.²² This was the time when the lesbian movement became an important ally and source of inspiration for Yugoslav feminists and when new energies were gained from the women-only groups. The major concepts of the time were sexuality and

21 Accessed: 25 August 2018: <https://www.arhivaskc.org.rs/> See also: Bonfiglioli, “Back to Belgrade, 1978,” and Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge*.

22 I explain the main motivations and the most important actors and ideas behind this turn in Chapter 5 in Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge*.

violence, and a further crucial theme was women's health. The widespread and shared interest in these themes arose from the recognition, discussed in the writings of Lepa Mladenović, Sofija Trivunac, Lina Vušković, Vera Litričin, and Vesna Mimica, among others, that both are symptoms and sources of other forms of inequality. The new Yugoslav feminists gained more and more access to the international feminist movement, as well as to human rights movements. The first SOS helpline for women and children victims of domestic violence was created in 1988 in Zagreb as *SOS telefon za žene i djecu žrtve nasilja* [SOS telephone for women and children victims of violence], although feminists in Belgrade had been planning such a helpline before this. In 1989, a helpline was set up in Ljubljana and in Belgrade in 1990. The institutional preparations of the SOS helpline are well-documented in the case of Belgrade, and the materials are part of the collection of the ŽINDOK Centar, now in the holdings of the Library of the Women's Studies Centre in Belgrade. Here, one can see the long list of state institutions, including the organs of city government, the police, hospitals, and social services, contacted by the feminists from the *Žena i društvo* group for information about women who had been raped.

The break-up of Yugoslavia, the war, and the emergence of semi-authoritarian regimes following the democratic elections created different challenges for feminists.²³ While there was diversification among and even serious clashes between feminists, an important strand of feminist anti-war activism grew out of the *Žena i društvo* group of the 1970s.²⁴ The post-1991 anti-nationalist, anti-war feminist agenda largely relied on the agenda from the late 1980s, using its concepts and building itself from its forms of organisation. The 1990s in Serbia saw the creation of the Women in Black, i.e. *Žene u crnom* group (mostly organising anti-war activism) and the Autonomous Women's Centre, i.e. *Autonomni ženski centar* (for victims of violence) and AŽIN, the Association for Women's Initiative, which is an NGO working with rural women, "promoting women's cooperatives and small businesses, assisting the self-organisation and networking of women throughout Serbia."²⁵

As the feminist activist scene grew more diverse in the 1990s, the first women's studies courses and study programs were created. The feminist academics in the Yugoslav groups, such as Rada Iveković and Lydia Sklevický in Zagreb, Žarana Papić and Anđelka Milić in Belgrade, Silva Mežnarić, Vlasta Jalušić, and Tanja Rener in Ljubljana, and Nada Ler-Sofronić in Sarajevo were teaching feminist theory in their classes before 1990, and the Inter-university Centre in Dubrovnik offered feminist summer schools as early as 1987. There

23 On conditions during the period of war, see Žarkov, *The Body of War*; Helms, *Innocence and Victimhood*; Lóránd, "Feminist Criticism of the 'New Democracies'."

24 Miškovska-Kajevska, *Feminist Activism at War*. On the challenges feminists faced see Mladjenovic [Mladenović] and Hughes, "Feminist Resistance to War and Violence in Serbia."

25 Miškovska-Kajevska, *Feminist Activism at War*, 53.

were two crucial steps towards the foundation of the present-day Women's Studies Centre, which holds feminist archival documents today. One was a course introduced into the curriculum of the University of Belgrade with the title "Women and Society," while the other was the creation of an NGO with the name *Centar za ženske studije*, Centre for Women's Studies, which offered access to women outside the university to the study of feminist theory and social science.²⁶

The two most important collections documenting the history of the feminist movement in Serbia and Yugoslavia since the 1970s are the legacy of Neda Božinović (1917–2001) and Žarana Papić (1949–2002). They document the work of two women from different generations whose paths met and merged in the feminist anti-war movement of the 1990s. Papić was one of the initiators of the *Žena i društvo* group in the 1970s, a sociologist who went to great efforts to understand the stakes of second wave feminism in the "West," translate its relevance to the Yugoslav reality, and organize women to articulate a feminist critique of the state-controlled women's emancipation agenda. In the volume *The Anthropology of Women*, which she put together with Lydia Sklevický, a historian from Zagreb, they introduced the category of gender as a useful analytical concept for the social sciences.²⁷ After her early death, her collection of books and notes were donated to the Library of the Women's Studies Centre, which she helped create and where she taught until the end of her life.

Whereas Papić started her career in the 1970s, Neda Božinović was already active in the pre-World War II women's and student movement, and she joined the partisan army during the war. She held several high official positions in socialist Yugoslavia, including that of judge of the federal Supreme Court. After more than a decade of retirement, she became active again when the war broke out: she was one of the founders of the Women in Black anti-war group, and she wrote a book about the history of women's movements in Serbia. She realized that her partisan past brought her closer to feminism in the context of the nationalist war, despite the contradictions between the women in the party organization and the new feminists before the war. She authored an important overview of the women's question and the women's and feminist movements, and complementing this work, collected and catalogued masses of documents from the history of the feminist group in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.²⁸ The collection was in the care of ŽINDOK, the *Ženski informaciono-dokumentacioni trening centar*, i.e. Centre for women's information, documentation and training, a small Belgrade-based women's rights NGO, until the opening of the Library of the Women's Studies Centre.

26 Blagojević, "Feminist Knowledge and the Women's Movement in Serbia," 191–92.

27 Papić and Sklevický, *Antropologija žene. Zbornik*.

28 Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku*.

The holdings of the collection include the documentation of the *Akciona Anketa*, i.e. action research, which the feminist group in Belgrade initiated during the process of the creation of the SOS helpline. The aim of the *Akciona anketa* was to gain knowledge about women's experiences. The polls in three subsequent years (1986–1988) were organized around three topics, closely related to each other: women's dissatisfaction with men (1986), solidarity among women (1987), and women's health and violence against women (VaW; 1988). The venues of the polling were the following central spaces in Belgrade: the Terazije (1986), Kalenić pijaca (Kalenić market, 1987), and the main railway station and Knez Mihajlova street, Belgrade's main street (1988). The answers were valuable material for further organizing, even if the sample was not representative of all of Yugoslav society, considering that it was women in the centre of Belgrade who answered the questions. Doing the surveys was one of the first steps to initiate discussions with ordinary women on the streets about their views on their situation in Yugoslav society. The results of this small-scale research project provided feedback for the group about what women in Yugoslavia wanted and what their realities and problems were. The themes and questions resonated with the ideas and practices of the worldwide feminist struggle against VaW. Also, from the outset these questionnaires had the underlying aim of building a wider women's movement, both by the act of asking women about these experiences and thus raising their awareness of their situation and by publicizing the results of the surveys. The questionnaires also were intended to assess women's willingness to organize and, moreover, women's willingness to organize for the betterment of their own position. The Library of the Women's Studies Centre in Belgrade now has the original questionnaires and analyses, including those that were not published anywhere.

The Danube Movement, the “Dunasaur” and the Role of Environmental Movements in Late Communism

Environmental movements played a distinct role in the authoritarian regimes in the former Soviet bloc. Rapid industrialization and the race for production in the countries of the Eastern bloc had obvious environmental consequences: widespread use of agricultural chemicals, deforestation, nuclear waste (the disaster of Chernobyl being the most emblematic of all issues), and water pollution. Since the environment was seen as a “soft” issue, environmental activism offered citizens a chance to participate in politics without being directly involved in oppositional activities. With the softening of almost all the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, however, environmental movements channelled collective dissatisfaction, and through effective mobilizations, they contributed significantly to the collapse of the regimes. Notable environmental movements included protests in the early 1980s in Ruse, Bulgaria

against chlorine pollution from chemical plants on both the Bulgarian and the Romanian side of the Danube River (documented by the collection *Ecological Protests against the Chlorine Pollution in Ruse* in the COURAGE Registry²⁹); ecological movement groups in Poland (as mentioned in the *Fuck '89* collection); the Brontosaurus movement in Czechoslovakia; the Ecoglasnost rally that directly preceded the resignation of Todor Zhivkov in Bulgaria, and the rallies against the Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania.

This case study focuses on the ‘melting pot’ Danube movement in Hungary, which mobilized against the building of a dam (known as the “Dunasauro,” the monster on the river) between Nagymaros in Hungary and Gabčíkovo on the (then) Czechoslovak side of the Danube River. The movement is of particular significance not only because it played a major role in bringing down the regime at the end of the 1980s, but also because it left its imprint on the later evolution of all of civil society in Hungary. The Danube movement collection *Documents of the Danube Circle Association* can be found among the COURAGE project’s collections of cultural resistance, and for a good reason. The Danube Circle was at the heart of this initiative. However, the Danube movement extended far beyond this group, which was in any case institutionalized only after 1989 and thus did not have an “official” regular membership. The collection consists of professional documents, analyses of the construction project, as well as press materials, documents of the association, and documentary films which were in the private possession of one of the members and which have been given to the Budapest City Archives, where they are being digitalized, a process which in principle will come to a close in 2018, at which point they will be made open to the public and available for research.

1. *The Plant – the Idea and a Chronology*

The plan to build a hydroelectric plant on the Danube River goes back to the 1950s, but according to some sources the initial ideas go back as far as the 1910s.³⁰ After years of delay, it became a reality in the 1970s. In 1977, an agreement was signed by János Kádár of the People’s Republic of Hungary and Gustáv Husák on behalf of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to start construction work. The goals of the project were to gain electric power supply, enable navigation, and have a reasonable flood controls on the river. Construction was delayed several times for financial reasons linked to the impending debt crisis facing both countries. In the early 1980s, as the environmental and economic costs of the project become more and more apparent, voices against building the dam became more and more strident. A committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences condemned the project, and discus-

29 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Ecological Protests against the Chlorine Pollution in Ruse”, by Anelia Kasabova Dr. 2017. Accessed: October 5, 2018.

30 Manning, “Patterns of Environmental Movements in Eastern Europe.”

sions about it came to the surface, with probably the most influential among them being those of János Vargha (in 1981 and in 1984).³¹

In 1984, the Danube Circle was formed as an organization aiming explicitly to raise public awareness about the environmental and economic disaster that this construction would entail and to push for legislation to stop the entire project. Since the moment of its foundation, the authorities persecuted the organization and its members; public gatherings were disrupted by the police and flyers and leaflets were banned.³² Nevertheless, the movement had a significant influence on the Hungarian public. People managed to distribute materials illegally, and the organization's newsletter was published, also illegally.³³ Radio Free Europe broadcast reports about its activities, and its members held lectures at universities.³⁴ A documentary about Dunasaur was shown to the public several times, and it became well-known before the authorities decided to ban it.³⁵ The movement, moreover, gained international recognition when it was awarded the Right Livelihood Award in 1985. The movement organized illegal demonstrations, and eventually the largest demonstrations since the revolution of 1956 took place in September 1988 with 30,000 participants, forcing the government to start negotiations about the dam. This was also a possibility for the Danube Circle to put pressure on the government and demand changes which proved to be comprehensive.

A shift finally occurred when the reform communist branch took over and Miklós Németh became prime minister. Németh dissociated himself from the official standpoint represented by the old leadership of Károly Grósz and announced Hungary's withdrawal from the project in May 1989. He had no doubt realized the significance of the Danube question. In February 1989, 140,000 signatures were collected demanding that the state stop the project.³⁶ The Hungarian government started negotiations and finally pulled out of the agreement in 1992. The issue was far from closed, but it was now reframed. Instead of an internal conflict between an oppositional

31 Szabó, "Zöld mozgalmak és polgári kezdeményezések Magyarországon"; Haraszti, "The Beginnings of Civil Society."

32 Fleischer, "Jaws on the Danube."

33 The name itself, the Danube Circle (Duna Kör) first appeared on the first newsletter of the movement in 1984. Fleischer, "Jaws on the Danube."

34 Szirmai, "Protection of the environment and the position of green movements in Hungary."

35 The film was directed by Ádám Csillag and shot for five years (1984–1988) at the BBS – Balázs Béla Stúdió, which also figures in the Registry as *Balázs Béla Stúdió Research Archive*. The BBS "was meant to function as a training ground, where filmmakers who had completed their formal instruction could make short films that were not produced to be screened. Precisely this latter criterion, which was a kind of cautionary measure, granted special freedom to the Studio, since the films were not subjected to censorship until after they had already been made." COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Béla Balázs Studio Research Archive", by Balázs Beöthy, 2017. Accessed: October 08, 2018, doi: 10.24389/2099 The film can be watched here: <https://vimeo.com/15330203>

36 Fleischer, "Jaws on the Danube."

movement and an authoritarian system, it became a foreign policy issue between Hungary and Slovakia.³⁷ Even though the history of the Danube movement is undoubtedly an essential part of the history of resistance against the communist regime in Hungary, it also played a significant role later on in shaping institutional politics.

2. Layers of the Protest Movement – Why was it Important?

The Danube movement is significant in a variety of ways. First, it enabled active opposition to the regime, as environmental activists could remain in the shadows of the grey zone for a while. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, several clubs and circles, “quasi-movements” were allowed, such as the Hungarian Ornithological Society as early as 1974 or the Youth Environmental Council of the Communist Youth Organisation in 1984. They were founded partly as a sign of the softening of the regime, but also, as Szirmai points out, “none of these were initiatives of civil society but, on the contrary, were the official and formal responses to ecological demands of the society at the time.”³⁸ These organizations demonstrate the prevalence of a widespread popular demand for environmental issues, but they were not openly engaged in criticism of the entire system. As Gille points out, the environment was also essential as a symbolic issue, since environmental catastrophes reflected the communist state’s relationship to its own citizens and its inability or unwillingness to provide protection.³⁹ Meanwhile, the official narrative of the state represented environmental disasters as occurring only within capitalist systems.⁴⁰

Hungarian citizens identified with the Danube question in multiple ways, since it involved emotional, traditional, anti-systemic, and even nationalistic-patriotic values. The “melting pot” capacity of the movement mentioned in the introduction refers to the fact that the Danube movement was far from unified, as underlined by Haraszti, who regards the movement as an “archetype of democratic pluralism,” where conflicting rival groups had to cooperate.⁴¹ These groups included the “Blues,” who were openly against the regime, the “Greens,” who emphasized environmental problems, and “Friends of the Danube,” who were pushing for a compromise. By the end of the 1980s, the movement moved toward a more general criticism of the regime, and it came to include leaders from the oppositional parties, which later entered the Hungarian parliament after the first free elections in 1990, namely: the conservative MDF, the liberal SZDSZ, and the (then) liberal FIDESZ.

37 Szabó, “External Help and the Transformation of Civil Activism in Hungary.”

38 Szirmai, “Protection of the environment and the position of green movements in Hungary,” 49.

39 Gille, “Is there a Global Postsocialist Condition?”

40 Manning, “Patterns of Environmental Movements in Eastern Europe.”

41 Haraszti, “The Beginnings of Civil Society,” 80.

A less obvious element in the resistance was nationalism/patriotism, which is peculiar, as this motive did not become dominant in the analytical frames of the Danube movement. As diverse and colourful as it was, the urban/rural divide within the Hungarian opposition seems to have made it difficult to situate nationalistic voices within a (predominantly) urban movement. Nevertheless, voicing support for purportedly national interests played an important role in the communist regime, and the alleged “internationalism” of the “brotherly nations” was among the central values, while addressing national issues was a taboo. This becomes obvious on the basis of a ground-breaking article by János Vargha (under the pseudonym Péter Kien)⁴², founder and leading figure of the Danube Circle, in the samizdat journal *Beszélő*. Vargha not only writes about the environmental and economic consequences of the dam project but also develops an argument about the potential threat of Hungary losing territory to Czechoslovakia, and about Czechoslovak national interests as contrary to Hungarian ones. This narrative was certainly present among the Hungarian dissident community, but it was almost never a theme in the primarily liberal atmosphere of the democratic opposition.

3. The Birth of a Movement and the Importance of the Danube Movement after the Democratic Changes

The influence of the Danube movement in the fall of the regime is almost self-evident in the literature of civil society and social movements today.⁴³ A further impact of the Danube movement is found in the academic discipline of the study of social movements. With his first analyses of the Danube movement as a new social movement, Máté Szabó and other social movement scholars sought to connect the new Hungarian social movement scene to West European traditions. Academic scholarship in this vein sought to contribute to the central project of the new democratic government by putting Hungarian movements on the map of the (Western-dominated) scholarship on social movements. On the one hand, this was an essential contribution to the existing literature on environmental movements, and it also offered a new analytical perspective on the relationship between green movements and the institutional system.⁴⁴ On the other hand, this perspective contributed to the West-

42 Vargha, “A nagy szlovák csatorna.”

43 Börzel and Buzogán, “Environmental organisations and the Europeanisation of public policy in Central and Eastern Europe”; Láng-Pickvance, Manning and Pickvance, *Environmental and Housing Movements*; Manning, “Patterns of Environmental Movements in Eastern Europe”; Szabó, “Zöld mozgalmak és polgári kezdeményezések Magyarországon”; Szabó, “External Help”; Kerényi and Szabó, “Transnational Influences on Patterns of Mobilization within Environmental Movements in Hungary.”

44 Szabó, “External Help”; Szabó, “Zöld mozgalmak és polgári kezdeményezések Magyarországon”; Láng-Pickvance, Manning and Pickvance, *Environmental and Housing Movements*.

ern bias in the study of social movements.⁴⁵ It played a significant role in internalizing the metaphor of “catching up,” which has been present implicitly or explicitly in most analyses of the movements in the region, and it articulated expectations of the green movement based on the success story of the German Greens, for instance.⁴⁶ The influence of the Danube movement, moreover, did not stop at the democratic changes around 1989. Even though scholarly interest in the Danube Circle focuses primarily on the late 1980s and early 1990s, the organization played an important role in the demonstrations against the Socialist government in 1998. According to the polls, these demonstrations changed voters’ preferences and contributed to the fall of the Socialist government. In spite of or, rather, together with these complex, sometimes contradictory phenomena and processes, the history of democratic changes in Hungary can hardly be discussed without discussion of the role of the Danube movement.

History, Memory, and the Legacy of the Ukrainian Dissident Movement

This case study focuses on the Kharkiv Human Rights Group’s (KHPG) Virtual Museum of the Dissident Movement in Ukraine. This online archive aims to preserve and publicize the heritage of dissent, as it is based on the notion that knowledge is a crucial tool in the fight for social and political reform in the present. As an NGO and successor to Helsinki-inspired organizations, KHPG approaches the memorialization of dissidence from the perspective of long-standing practitioners of human rights work. The organization’s virtual online museum was founded in 2003, at the end of President Leonid Kuchma’s second term and on the eve of a highly contested and fraudulent presidential election in 2004.⁴⁷ The political climate in Ukraine at that time was fraught. The sitting president flirted with authoritarianism while fending off domestic and international scandal.⁴⁸ His alleged involvement in the disappearance and death of journalist Georgiy Gongadze precipitated the largest public protest since independence, called the “Ukraine without Kuchma” movement in 2000–2001.⁴⁹ During this dark time for Ukraine, human rights practitioners, like KHPG, prioritized making public the stories of individuals who fought injustice in Soviet times in order to inspire their compatriots,

45 Gagyí, “Social Movement Studies for East Central Europe?”

46 Szabó, “External Help.”

47 Myagkov, et al. “Fraud or Fairytales.”

48 Bondarenko, *Leonid Kuchma*; Way “Kuchma’s Failed Authoritarianism,” 131–45; Koshiw, “Be-headed”; Clines, “Evolution in Europe.”

49 Hrabovsky, “The First and Second Murders of Heorhiy Gongadze”; Svistovych, “To everybody!”

some of whom were jailed for participating in the 2000–2001 protests.⁵⁰ In an introductory essay to a book published by KHPG in 2003 about Soviet-era dissidents, Boris Zakharov argues that because Ukrainians remained unaware of the struggle over human rights in the Soviet period, they tolerated similar infractions after independence.⁵¹

KHPG's online Virtual Museum to the Ukrainian Dissident Movement is a repository for documentation about dissent in 1956–1987, including memoirs, biographies, letters of protest, and other primary sources.⁵² Most of these materials are related to efforts of human rights activists to reform Soviet socialism from Khrushchev's Thaw in the mid-1950s through the Gorbachev reforms of the mid-1980s. However, the site's periodization extends beyond those established temporal parameters to include nationalist struggles against the Soviets following the annexation of western Ukraine (and also western Belarus, the Baltics States, and adjacent territories), as per the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, signed clandestinely by the Nazis and the Soviets in 1939. Recognizing the multifaceted and intergenerational nature of the struggle over human rights, the Virtual Museum also provides memoirs, documents, and other materials about religious communities resisting Soviet rule, the democratic political opposition, activists focusing on economic and social reforms, and representatives of what is broadly referred to as the Ukrainian national movement. The lattermost category includes information about members of nationalist organizations in the annexed territories of Galicia and Volyn and cultural institutions anchored in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and the rest of Ukraine.

The Virtual Museum has materials in both Ukrainian and English, though the Ukrainian language site is far more developed. It includes almost 400 biographies of notable dissidents as well as descriptions of approximately 30 organizations involved in the dissident movement—including those affiliated with religious denominations, the democratic opposition, and organizations devoted to fighting for better social and economic rights. Organizations underpinning the Ukrainian national movement, such as the Club for Creative Youth in Kyiv, the Ukrainian Youth Association in Galicia, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, the Ukrainian National Front, and many others, are also catalogued under a separate heading.

The site includes a glossary of almost 200 terms associated with human rights in the Soviet Union and terms specific to the dissident movement in Ukraine. This feature is particularly useful for students and researchers who require more context, and the most important entries have also been translated into English. The glossary has mini essays about articles in the criminal codex that the Soviet authorities used to prosecute dissidents, like “anti-Sovi-

50 “Sprava aktyvistiv ‘Ukraina Bez Kuchmy’ 8 bereznia 2001 roku.”

51 Zakharov, *Narys istorii dissidentskogo rukhu v Ukraini 1956–1987*, 6–9.

52 Virtual Museum of the Dissident Movement in Ukraine. Accessed November 17, 2017. <http://museum.khpg.org/>.

et agitation and propaganda,” as well as prison slang, like the term “kartser,” which was a punishment cell (*shtrafnoi izolyator*, called *shizo* or *kartser* for short).⁵³ This section also has longer essays about important primary documents, such as the “Letter from Creative Youth in Dnipropetrovsk,” written by loyal Soviet citizens and committed Marxists who were critical of the suppression of Ukrainian language instruction and publications in the 1960s and 1970s and described this suppression as anti-Leninist in orientation.⁵⁴ We see in this text that resistance and opposition were not necessarily by-products of antipathy, but were at times part of a desire to reform the system from within.

There are also references to particularly important turning points and investigations, which precipitated massive crackdowns, or “pogroms” as they are sometimes referred to on the website, against nationally conscious Ukrainian dissidents and human rights activists. The “Dobosh Case (or Affair)” figures prominently, as it involved the arrest and interrogation of Yaroslav Dobosh, a young Belgian national of Ukrainian origin, who implicated many Ukrainian dissidents in a vast web of so-called anti-Soviet activity. He had travelled through Prague, where he met a Lemko woman from Slovakia who apparently gave him the contact information for a number of dissidents in Kyiv and Lviv, including Ivan Svitlychny.⁵⁵ He met with many of them and was caught later with a copy of the “Dictionary of Ukrainian Rhymes” written by political prisoner Sviatoslav Karavansky. Dobosh’s confession, whether made by a naïve and eager twenty-five-year old émigré activist or an active KGB agent, provided the pretext for a wave of arrests of prominent Ukrainian dissidents in 1972–1973.⁵⁶ According to literary scholar Mykhailyna Khomivna Kotsiubynska, the State Security Services took full advantage of the moment. They pressed both Kotsiubynska and Zenovia Franko, close relatives of two canonized Ukrainian literary figures, to rescind publicly their support for those arrested. Franko was immediately detained and interrogated and eventually relented under sustained pressure, publishing a recantation in *Radianska Pravda*, while Kotsiubynska managed to figure out the KGB’s strategy and resisted.⁵⁷

It bears mentioning that the Virtual Museum has 204 interviews with dissidents in Ukrainian (64 of which have been translated into English). Many of them were conducted by Vasyl Ovsienko, a member of KHPG and former

53 Rasma, “The Organization of Power in Soviet Labor Camps”; Ovsienko, “Kartser.”

54 “Lyst Tvorchoyi Molodi Dnipropetrovska,”; Zhuk, “Culture Wars,” 77–78.

55 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Ivan Svitlychny,” by Orysia Maria Kulick, 2017. Accessed: October 5, 2018.

56 “Dobosh Case”; “Karavansky, Sviatoslav Josyfovych”; “Arrests of the Ukrainian intelligentsia 1972–1973”; Zakharov, *Narys istorii*, 97–98.

57 Bogumiła, Hnatiuk, and Kharchuk, *Bunt pokolinnia*, 26; “Y moyemu zhytti bulo tak bahato dobra”; COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska,” by Orysia Maria Kulick. Accessed June 25, 2018; COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Vasyl Stus Collection,” by Orysia Maria Kulick. Accessed June 25, 2018.

Soviet political prisoner who also served time in Mordovia and later in Perm-36, a strict regime hard labour camp located near the settlement of Kuchino.⁵⁸ Taken together, these interviews reveal a great deal about the dissident movement, including the day to day pressures and surveillance techniques used by the KGB, alliances between Jews and Ukrainians in the hard labour camps, and the perspectives of prisoners of other nationalities (Armenian and Lithuanian) on the common struggle being waged together with Ukrainian political prisoners.⁵⁹

In some cases, the insights are startling and raise an entirely new set of questions. In strict regime camps, human rights activists intermingled with the “25-ers,” or members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and national resistance forces from the Baltic States and other countries in the western borderlands, who were arrested and given 25-year sentences in the immediate post-war years. Not all were amnestied in the 1950s and, as a result, they met men like psychiatrist Dr. Semyon Gluzman from Kyiv, who came to the defence of General Petro Grigorenko, a fierce human rights activist and defender of Crimean Tatars. Gluzman argued in his diagnosis in 1971 that attempts by Soviet authorities to declare Grigorenko mentally unfit were an egregious misuse of psychiatry.⁶⁰ Shortly thereafter, Gluzman himself was arrested and sent to the labour camps in Perm, where he met Ukrainian and Baltic nationalists. He emerged from this exile sympathetic to the “25-ers,” who ultimately entrusted him with their legacy, sending him countless letters about their experience, which are now preserved in archives at the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen.⁶¹

The Virtual Museum also contains an interview with Armenian Paruyr Hayrikyan, who shared his story and his impressions of poet Vasyl Stus and the journalist Viacheslav Chornovil, both of whom he met in the Siberian camps. Hayrikyan was one of the most active leaders of the democratic movement in the Soviet Union, becoming the head of the National United Party (NUP) after its leaders were all arrested in 1968. The organization’s main goals were independence for Armenia and Russia and confronting the consequences of the Armenian genocide. Because of his outspokenness about self-determination and Armenian independence and leadership of an organization pursuing those ends, Hayrikyan was arrested twice, serving two terms in Perm-36. In an interview with several members of KHPG in 1999, he recalled that, at first, he was somewhat disappointed by Stus, believing that a real fighter was in the camps, but learning that his perspective was not political. Neither Chornovil nor Stus behaved as though they were prisoners in a concentration camp. They lived for

58 “Ovsienko, Vasyl Vasylyovych.”

59 Stetsyshyn, “‘Zhuchky’, agenty KGB I dissident”; Ovsienko, “Zustrich z Ar’ye Vudkoyu”; “Interview Balisa Hayauskasa Vakhtangu Kipiani U Vilniusi, 1995 h.”

60 “Countrymen remember General Grigorenko”; “Grigorenko, Petro Hryhorovych”; “Gluzman, Semyon Fyshelyovych.”

61 This information was shared with me in a conversation with Gluzman in Kyiv in June 2017.

the sake of literature, art, and Ukrainian history. Hayrikyan said that Stus' Ukrainian comrades deliberately shielded him from the banal language of Soviet protest, at times insisting that he not sign petitions so that his poetry could speak for itself.⁶² Stus' poetry remains underappreciated to this day, having been overshadowed by the story of his multiple arrests, incarceration, and sadistic treatment by the Soviet regime. His poetry was "intrinsically European, modernist, intellectual," and fiercely individualist, written by a deeply sensitive and principled person.⁶³ The only time Hayrikyan cried in the camps was when Stus' poetry was read aloud to him. The Stus he describes is someone who maintained his humanity, never resorting to violence even when attacked by other prisoners. When his manuscripts were confiscated, Hayrikyan helped organize a hunger strike demanding that Stus' papers be returned to him.⁶⁴ According to literary scholar Alessandro Achilli, it was "the *private* rebellion of Stus's conscience," rather than the *political* implications of his words and deeds, that constituted the greater threat to the "homogenizing fury of Soviet ideology."⁶⁵ That the camp administrators returned the nearly 100 manuscripts taken from Stus indicates that they were trying to prevent Stus' private principled rebellion from spreading to other inmates.

As powerful a force as Stus was in unofficial circles and among Soviet internal exiles comingling in hard labour camps and in émigré communities, he was not that well known in his own country until the late 1980s, when the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* lifted the veil over the suppressed recent past. In an interview with Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska, Yevhen Zakharov, director of KHPG, said the first time he heard of Stus was in 1988, when he managed to get his hands on a volume published outside the Soviet Union. Zakharov was floored by how much Stus' poetry pushed past what was imaginable in Soviet Ukraine. When asked whether she was a dissident, Kotsiubynska answered, as most do, that she never considered herself one, as she viewed dissidents as politically minded people.⁶⁶ This Virtual Online museum thus also allows researchers to think deeply about categories and frames of analysis that have in many ways been imposed on people involved in the Soviet human rights movement.

KHPG's efforts to honour this legacy dovetail with its own mission to fight for the primacy of the rule of law in Ukraine today. As the successor to the Kharkiv branch of "Memorial," founded in 1988, KHPG has tracked human rights violations in Ukraine since 1992, as well as the positive and negative effects of electoral and constitutional reforms, the consequences of lustration, and transparency in the political process more generally. Its members

62 Ovsienko, "Paruyr Hayrikyan: interview about Vasyl STUS and about himself."

63 Achilli, "Vasyl' Stus and Death," 10–12.

64 Ovsienko, "Paruyr Hayrikyan: interview about Vasyl STUS and about himself."

65 Achilli, "Vasyl' Stus and Death," 10–12.

66 "Kotsiyubynska, Mykhailyna Khomivna."

have participated regularly in public demonstrations and protests against malfeasance and corruption in government. They were also involved in the EuroMaidan rebellion of 2013–2014, as were the dissidents themselves.⁶⁷

One of the consequences of recent events—EuroMaidan, the annexation of Crimea, the ongoing war in the Donbass, and deteriorating relations between Ukraine and Russia—has been a mass rejection of a commonly shared Soviet past. Therefore, archives and collections representing the human rights movement and preserving its legacy are ever more crucial, as they highlight cooperation among like-minded individuals across borders. For instance, microbiologist Nina Strokata-Karavanska met Larissa Bogoraz and other Moscow-based human rights activists while visiting her husband in prison. Shortly thereafter (in 1968), the *Chronicle for Current Events* began publishing, and Strokata-Karavanska reported regularly for them on the state of human rights in Ukraine.⁶⁸ Even so, it remains clear from materials in the Virtual Museum (and other collections at the Sixtiers Museum in Kyiv and the Prison on Lon-skogo St in Lviv) that the Soviet nationalities policy left its mark on the Ukrainian dissident movement, giving this human-rights-based resistance the character of a struggle for national liberation.⁶⁹

A failure to deal with the long-standing consequences of contradictory policies and approaches to the national question has led to gross oversimplifications about what happened in the Brezhnev era with these human rights activists. The materials available at the Virtual Online Museum to the Ukrainian Dissident Movement reveal that they resisted the homogenizing fury of Soviet communism in culture and politics by trying to carve out and defend autonomous spheres of thought and action. Because of Soviet discomfort with the nation as a category, the authorities suppressed forms of resistance by couching the struggle in national terms, which as the cases above show, misrepresents the human rights movement, which was and remains a force for reforming these polities through appeals to legality, rights enshrined in the law, and recognition of the basic dignity of each and every Soviet citizen.

Conclusion: The Use and Misuse of Archives

All the case studies featured in this chapter have been the subject of conflicts over the writing of history in the post-socialist era. At the heart of many of these conflicts is the question of the “totalitarian” nature of communist re-

67 Sverstiuk “Uroky z Maidanu.” The Sixtiers Museum in Kyiv has a photo display in the foyer with photos of Soviet-era human rights activists gathered in front of a large banner with a photo of Vasyl Stus, who died under mysterious circumstances in Kuchino in 1985, and the slogan “I am with you.”

68 Much of the *Chronicle of Current Events* is available online here: <https://chronicleofcurrentevents.net/> Accessed: October 17, 2018.; See also, Strokata, *Ukrainian Women in the Soviet Union*.

69 Zakharov, “History of Dissent in Ukraine.”

gimes and the degree to which state violence under socialist rule was comparable to the mass violence and genocidal policies of the Third Reich. The history of the Roma exemplifies the complexities of these debates, particularly in light of endemic structural and societal discrimination against Roma across Eastern Europe today, ranging from segregation in “special schools” for children with learning difficulties, coercive sterilisation of Romani women, the removal of children into institutional care, ghettoised housing, racial violence, and social and economic exclusion. Histories of Romani civil rights activism under socialism have been overshadowed by fierce debates about the Romani Holocaust and particularly the role of local authorities in implementing anti-Gypsy regulations during the Nazi Occupation.⁷⁰ The Museum of Romani Culture has played an active role in these debates, conducting oral history interviews with Romani genocide survivors, organising events to commemorate the victims, and seeking to expand public awareness about the experiences of victims and survivors. In the Czech Republic, the deeply contested history of the concentration camps for “Gypsies” established at Lety and Hodonín became a focal point for these debates. After years of campaigning by Romani activists, the Czech government finally agreed in 2017 to purchase a pig farm that was built on the site of the Lety camp in the 1970s. The Museum has been given the task of overseeing the memorial that will be built at Lety to commemorate the Roma and Sinti who lost their lives in the camp.

From a different perspective, the history of women’s experiences under socialism has also triggered impassioned debates among scholars based in the region as well as in Western Europe and the United States. Here the emphasis has been on the extent to which socialist rule emancipated women and the degree to which mass organisations for women under communist regimes can be defined as “feminist.”⁷¹ These debates can be seen as both part of a longer tradition of socialist feminism dating back to the nineteenth century and as a response to the rapidly growing levels of social and economic inequality in post-socialist states, the effects of which are often felt more acutely by women. Many women experienced the collapse of socialism after 1989 as a loss of the social and economic rights guaranteed by the communist regime. But the struggles to interpret the meaning of socialist-era women’s organising is also part of wider debates about the legacies of socialism for civil society in the region today.

Efforts to recover the history of socialist-era activism in order to understand civil society today are also evident in the ambivalent legacies of the Hungarian Danube Circle Movement and its successors. Initial attempts to write the Danube Circle into the history of Western environmental movements did manage to put such movements on the map for Western scholars, but at the same time they reinforced the perception that social movements in

70 Nečas, *Českoslovenští Romové*.

71 De Haan, *Ten Years After*.

the East were simply “catching up” with practices “pioneered” in the West. Moreover, the activities of the Danube Circle continued through the 1990s. Meanwhile, the case of the KHPG virtual online museum, founded in 2003 just before a highly contested presidential election in Ukraine, demonstrates the clear and urgent connections between human rights struggles today and the legacy of dissent. The museum was established in a fraught political climate. Amidst the largest public protests in Ukraine since independence in 2000–2001, human rights practitioners focused on publicising the stories of human rights activists from the Soviet era. This effort was driven by the desire to commemorate the past and bring attention to human rights violations in the present. The EuroMaidan rebellion of 2014, the annexation of Crimea, the ongoing war in the Donbass, and deteriorating relations between Ukraine and Russia all demonstrate the importance of initiatives such as the Virtual Online Museum in the documentation of the history of human rights activism across borders in the recent past, and these initiatives may also serve as a source of inspiration for the immediate future.

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