

Chapter 6

Responding to Invasion: Toppling Monuments, Building Monuments

MONUMENTS DEFIANT

In addition to becoming decontextualized symbols of resistance in the form of memes and online photographs, monuments and especially war memorials both inside and outside the occupied areas served Ukrainians locally as canvases for anti-occupation messages.

This kind of use had already begun following the initial Russian invasion in 2014. One example is the gilded eagle on top of the Monument of Glory in central Poltava, a 10 meter tall cast iron column installed in 1811 to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Peter I's victory over the Swedish army. Since 2014, the eagle has been adorned with the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag and the red-and-black flag of the UPA. This use has been controversial, and the flags have repeatedly disappeared, only to be replaced by the city administration.¹

Following the 2022 invasion, anti-occupation messages soon appeared across the occupied territories. The slogan “Putler is a dickhead 19/03/2022” was written on the Danube Fleet monument in Kherson on the day indicated (see figure 6.1). In Beryslav, Kherson region, on May 9, someone painted graffiti reading “Putin is a dickhead,” “Putin, drop dead,” and a Ukrainian flag on the local tank monument.² On July 22, the pedestal of another nearby monument, a memorial at a communal cemetery on the outskirts of Beryslav, Kherson region, was painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag.³

¹ “Prapory z monumentu Slavy u Poltavi znovu znykly,” *Kolo.News: Novyny Poltavy*, April 24, 2021, <https://kolo.news/category/situatsiyi/25934>.

² <https://t.me/suspilnekherson/11583>, May 9, 2022.

³ “149 den' viiny: khronika podii v Khersons'kii oblasti,” *Suspil'ne. Novyny*, July 22, 2022, <https://suspilne.media/263162-149-den-vijni-hronika-podij-v-hersonskij-oblasti>.

Figure 6.1. Danube Fleet monument in Kherson with graffiti “Putler is a dickhead.” Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, March 2022.



Flags—both painted and cloth—were among the main symbols of defiance. The tank monument at the entrance to Kherson’s Park of Glory can serve as an example. A Ukrainian flag was installed on it on February 24, the first day of the invasion. On March 13, during one of the largest anti-occupation demonstrations in the city, someone put up several such flags on the tank, including a large one on which demonstrators signed their names. The flags were only taken down by the occupation administration at the end of March, as was the Ukrainian flag attached with adhesive tape to the polymer kneeling soldier statue of one of Kherson’s Soviet-Afghan War monuments.⁴

Veritable flag wars ensued in a number of locations. The occupiers and local residents repeatedly put up their own flags and took down each other’s. Thus, in Hola Prystan’, Kherson region, a Russian flag was hoisted on April 24 on the flagpole of the Walk of Glory, a composite memorial to different local heroes, only to be taken down again by unknown locals the next day. Two days later the flag was put up again and an eternal flame lit at the memorial.⁵ A large Victory Banner hoisted on a flagpole in Kherson’s Park of Glory was likewise taken down twice.⁶ Conversely, at the Border Guards monument in Kherson, Ukrainian flags were put up several times and taken down by the Russians each time.⁷ (At the same monument,

⁴ Mykola Homanyuk’s fieldwork.

⁵ <https://t.me/hueviyherson/17552>, April 25, 2022; “Pamiatnik voiam-zemliakam v Goloi Pristani,” *Shukach*, September 22, 2015, <https://www.shukach.com/ru/node/47112>; https://t.me/herson_today/314, April 27, 2022.

⁶ Mykola Homanyuk’s observations on site; Iryna Parshyna, “V Khersone okkupanty usilenno okhraniaiut vyveshennyi imi v tsentre goroda krasnyi flag,” *Tsentr zhurnalists’kykh rozsliduvan’*, April 25, 2022, <https://nikcenter.org/ru/2022/04/newsitem-68210>.

⁷ Mykola Homanyuk’s observations on site.

a yellow ribbon, symbolizing nonviolent resistance against the Russian occupation, was attached to the machine gun of the soldier statue sometime in May, only to be replaced with a St. George's Ribbon (see next chapter) by the Russian side on May 28 for Border Guards' Day.⁸) In June, a man was filmed taking down a Victory Banner hoisted on a flagpole in Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region.⁹ In Mariupol', Donetsk region, several Russian flags disappeared from flagpoles in the city's central Freedom Square in October 2022.¹⁰

On May 9—Victory Day—Ukrainian flags were used in some places in the Kherson region as a sign of resistance against Russian forces appropriating Great Patriotic War memorials and the associated commemorative rituals. In Novotroits'ke, locals organized a ceremony with Ukrainian flags at the local war memorial. Participants brandished Ukrainian flags, laid wreaths, and played the Ukrainian anthem. The head of the village council gave a speech and an Orthodox priest conducted a memorial service—all under the eyes of several armed Russian soldiers.¹¹ In Chaplynka, a similar ceremony with Ukrainian flags appears to have led to the dismissal of the Russian military governor for not having intervened.¹² In the village of Askaniia-Nova, local residents conducted a Victory Day ceremony and deliberately sang songs in both Russian and Ukrainian to counter the claim that they are oppressed Russians.¹³

On the one hand, acts of local resistance involving war memorials sometimes existed only in the Russian imagination. Thus, on May 22, a Russian Telegram channel proclaimed that “vandals” had “defiled” a Great Patriotic War memorial in Skadovs'k, Kherson region, and had “attempted to extinguish the eternal flame.”¹⁴ In fact, according to a local

8 “Kherson rozpochav aktsiiu nenasylnyts'koho sprotyvu rosiis'kii okupatsii ‘Zhovta strichka,’” *Most*, April 26, 2022, https://most.ks.ua/news/url/herson_rozpochav_aktsiju_nenasilnitskogo_sprotivu_rosijskij_okupatsiji_zhovta_strichka; Mykola Homanyuk's observations on site.

9 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8566, June 19, 2022.

10 “Okupanty navit ne pomityly: u Mariupoli z flahshtokiv znykly prapory RF,” *RBK-Ukraina*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/stylar/okupanti-navit-pomitili-mariupoli-flag-shtokiv-1666249811.html>.

11 Polina Mirer, “300-metrove ‘smuhaste prostyradlo’: 9 travnia v tymchasovo okupovanykh mistakh,” *Suspil'ne: Novyny*, September 5, 2022, <https://suspilne.media/237573-300-metrove-smugaste-prostiradlo-9-travna-v-timcasovo-okupovanih-ukrainskih-mistah>; oral communication by a local correspondent.

12 Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

13 Student essay about Askaniia-Nova.

14 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/2202, May 24, 2022.

resident, no vandalism had occurred, and the flame had been blown out by strong winds.¹⁵

On the other hand, conflicts over monuments could also turn very real and violent. The most prominent example occurred when, on March 21, anti-occupation demonstrators in Kherson tried to clean the memorial to ATO soldiers on Freedom Square, which Russians had covered with graffiti such as “Murderers of Donbas children.” In response, Russian soldiers dispersed the demonstration by shooting in the air and using tear gas and concussion grenades, leaving several people injured.¹⁶

In the unoccupied parts of Ukraine, another way of using war memorials to express defiance was to deliberately refrain from repairing monuments damaged by Russian shelling. In the run-up to Victory Day, Kharkiv’s Mayor Ihor Terekhov announced that the Memorial of Glory had been checked for mines and that municipal workers had “gotten our Memorial ready for May 9” by planting fresh flowers and tending to the communal graves, but the traces of Russian damage had been deliberately left in place “as symbols of our struggle with present-day Nazism.” He also advised Kharkiv residents to refrain from visiting the memorial on May 9: “Our enemy is insidious and cynical, and we can expect particular cruelty and ferocious shelling, especially on this day, which is sacred to all of us.” Kharkivites, he declared, would bring flowers to the memorial “on the day of our Victory,” commemorating the dead of both the Second World War and the war against Russia.¹⁷

MONUMENTS AND ANTI-WAR PROTEST IN RUSSIA

Inside Russia, some antiwar resistance also targeted monuments. Most direct antiwar action in Russia came in the form of arson or other attacks on military recruitment offices and occasionally (though far less actively

¹⁵ Mykola Homanyuk’s interview with a resident of Skadovsk.

¹⁶ “Okupanty napaly na myrnyi mitynh u Khersoni, ie poraneni ta zatrymani,” *Kavun.City*, March 21, 2022, <https://kavun.city/articles/200129/okupanti-napali-na-mirnij-miting-u-hersoni-ye-poraneni>; “Rossiiskie voiska so strel’boi razognali demonstratsiiu v Khersoni. Est’ ranenye,” *BBC News Russkaia sluzhba*, March 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60820472>.

¹⁷ “Terekhov: povrezhdeniia ot rossiiskikh ‘gradov’ dolzhny ostat’sia na Memoriale slavy kak simvol nashei bor’by s sovremennym natsizmom,” *Interfax-Ukraina*, May 5, 2022, <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/829957.html>.

than in Belarus) on railroad tracks. Yet, in at least one case, damage was done to one of the new structures erected to celebrate Russia's war of conquest: in June 2022, in Cheboksary, Chuvashia, two young men damaged an installation in the form of an orange-and-black letter Z. They were eventually sentenced to eight months of nighttime house arrest.¹⁸

At the same time, ordinary Russians also used Ukrainian-themed memorials to the Great Patriotic War and other monuments to express opposition to the Russian invasion, or at least empathy with the victims. Next to the Kremlin wall in Moscow, a series of granite steles installed from 1975 onward honors the USSR's "hero cities" in the Great Patriotic War;¹⁹ since the beginning of the Russian attack in 2014, Russian officials, the Ukrainian embassy, and regular visitors had used it to express their attitude toward the ongoing war by either laying flowers there on commemorative dates or omitting to do so.²⁰ Following the 2022 invasion, taking flowers to the Kyiv and Odesa steles—as well as a mosaic at the *Kievskaiia* metro station—once again became a cautious act of expressing anti-war feelings.²¹ In April 2022, an activist was detained for standing in front of the Kyiv stele with a copy of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.²² Other war memorials likewise became sites of contestation. In Kamensk-Ural'skii, Sverdlovsk region, officials had had a Z symbol painted on an armored vehicle that serves as a memorial to soldiers who died in Afghanistan and Chechnya. In July 2022, someone added three letters to spell the word "AZOV," the name of a regiment that Russian propaganda associates with Ukrainian radical nationalism.²³

18 "Povredivshim installatsiiu v vide bukvy Z zhiteliu Cheboksar zapretili poseshchat' magaziny razlivnogo piva," *Mediazona*, January 2, 2023, <https://zona.media/news/2023/01/02/cheb-z>; Sudebnyi uchastok No. 2 Leninskogo raiona g. Cheboksary, "Delo No. 1-12/2022," November 18, 2022, http://len2.chv.msudrf.ru/modules.php?name=sud_delo&op=cs&case_id=108033804&delo_id=1540006.

19 On the Hero Cities, see Ivo Mijnsen, *Russia's Hero Cities. From Postwar Ruins to the Soviet Heroarchy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2021).

20 "Est' tsvety u stely goroda-geroia Kiev!," *Gordonua.com*, May 4, 2016, <https://gordonua.com/news/worldnews/posolstvo-ukrainy-v-rf-ukrasilo-zhelto-sinimi-cvetami-stelu-kieva-u-sten-kremlya-i-vystavilo-tam-karaul-131082.html>.

21 <https://t.me/sotaproject/35820Ay>, February 27, 2022; Andrei Pivovarov (@brewerov), "Moskvichi nesut tsvety na stantsiiu metro Kievskaiia," Twitter, March 8, 2022, 12:04pm, <https://twitter.com/brewerov/status/1501151867144966149>.

22 <https://t.me/sotaproject/38570>, April 10, 2022.

23 Mikhail Furmanov, "Sverdlovchanin oskvernil voennyi pamiatnik, ostaviv nadpis' Azov," *Ura.ru*, July 12, 2022, <https://ura.news/news/1052569289>.

In January 2023, after a Russian missile destroyed part of a residential building in Dnipro, killing over 40 people, people brought flowers, toys, candles, and photographs to several Ukrainian-themed memorials across Russia, such as statues to the poets Lesia Ukraïnka and Taras Shevchenko.²⁴ Other monuments used for such purposes included memorials to the victims of Stalinist repressions.²⁵ In Kerch' in occupied Crimea in May 2023, residents commemorated the 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars by bringing blue-and-yellow (and other) flowers to a deportation memorial.²⁶

ICONOCLASM ABROAD AND IN FREE UKRAINE

Another way of responding to Russia's full-scale invasion was iconoclastic. Monuments seen as Russian or Soviet were toppled both inside and outside Ukraine.²⁷

In Poland, where a centralized removal campaign that started in 2017 had already gotten rid of most such memorials, some of the few left standing disappeared from public space following the February 2022 attack.²⁸ In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the authorities dismantled or removed a large number of war memorials—which, as elsewhere, had been less sys-

24 "V Moskve poiavilsia stikhiinyi memorial zhertvam udara v Dnepre," *Radio Svoboda*, January 17, 2023, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-moskve-poyavilsya-stihiynny-memorial-zhertvam-udara-v-dnepre/32226655.html>; "Stikhiinye memorialy v Rossii v pamiat' o zhertvakh udara po Dnepru: kak eto vygliadit," *BBC News Russian Service*, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-64333356>. For overviews of such actions, see Aleksandra Arkhipova, "Empatiia kak protest," *Kholod*, February 2, 2023, https://holod.media/2023/02/02/flower-protest;***** [pseudonym], *Ufashistov malo kraski* (Gor'kii [fictitious place]: Freedom Letters, 2023), 252.

25 For an example in Tver', see "V Tveri sud schël diskreditatsiei armii vozlozhenie tsvetov k pamiatniku," *TIA*, February 10, 2023, <https://tvernews.ru/news/295648/>.

26 "V Kerchi nesut tsvety k memorialu pamiati zhertv deportatsii krymskotatarskogo naroda," *Krym.Realii*, May 18, 2023, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-krym-kerch-tsvety-memorial-pamyati-zhertv-deportatsii-krymskotatarskogo-naroda/32417367.html>.

27 For more on this, see "War on Monuments: Documenting the Debates over Russian and Soviet Heritage in Eastern and Central Europe," ed. Kristina Jõekalda, special issue, *Kunsttexte*, no. 1 (2024). An overview is provided in Mischa Gabowitsch, "Mimetic De-Commemoration: The Fate of Soviet War Memorials in Eastern Europe in 2022–2023," *Kunsttexte*, no. 1 (2024).

28 "Poland Begins to Dismantle Soviet-Era Monument," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-08-24/poland-begins-to-dismantle-soviet-era-monument>; "Demontaż pomników Armii Czerwonej. Leśkiewicz: usuwane są obiekty o charakterze propagandowym," *Polskie Radio 24*, October 29, 2022, <https://polskieradio24.pl/130/5925/artykul/3062104,demontaz-pomnikow-armii-czerwonej-leskiewicz-usuwane-sa-obiekty-o-charakterze-propagandowym>.

tematically affected by earlier decommunization campaigns than other kinds of monuments—following public debate of varying degrees of openness.²⁹ In Bulgaria, the Russian aggression tipped the scales of a long-running debate in favor of a decision to move the 1954 Monument to the Soviet Army from central Sofia to an open-air Museum of Socialist Art.³⁰ In Czechia, a bronze statue of a Soviet soldier was removed from a war memorial in Příbyslav in March 2022; the mayor claimed that this decision was temporary and served at least in part to protect the statue.³¹

In all of these countries, the Russian aggression emboldened those who had already associated all or most Soviet statuary, including war memorials, with Russian imperial oppression, and convinced many others that such monuments were untenable. More nuanced voices urging the consideration of preservationist and other aspects were drowned out. There was some limited resistance to removal. The Bulgarian decision immediately sparked protests.³² In Narva, Estonia, a small gathering took place to prevent a rumored unannounced removal of the local tank memorial;

29 On pre-2022 iconoclasm against Soviet war memorials and its limits, see Gabowitsch, “What Has Happened to Soviet War Memorials.” On acts of removal in 2022 in the Baltic countries, see, for example: Mark Dunkley, “Monumental Decisions: The Impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Soviet War Memorials,” *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 227–35; Amos Chapple, “Estonia’s Contentious Soviet Monuments,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 15, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/estonia-soviet-monuments-removal/31989524.html>; “Removed Narva War Monuments Become State Property,” *ERR News*, August 23, 2022, <https://news.err.ee/1608692881/removed-narva-war-monuments-become-state-property>; “Up to 300 Soviet Monuments Set for Removal in Latvia,” *LSM*, June 30, 2022, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/culture/history/up-to-300-soviet-monuments-set-for-removal-in-latvia.a463529/>; “Lithuania’s Kaunas to Remove Soviet Memorials, Vilnius Won’t Follow Suit for Now,” *LRT*, November 4, 2022, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1670208/lithuania-s-kaunas-to-remove-soviet-memorials-vilnius-won-t-follow-suit-for-now>; “Soviet Statues from Antakalnis Cemetery in Vilnius to Be Moved to a Park,” *LRT*, March 29, 2023, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1950033/soviet-statues-from-antakalnis-cemetery-in-vilnius-to-be-moved-to-a-park>.

30 “Sofia’s City Council Approves Plan To Move Contentious Soviet Red Army Monument,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, March 9, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-sofia-red-army-mnument-moved/32310767.html>. On past conflicts around the monument, see Daniela Koleva, “Pamiatnik sovetckoi armii v Sofii: pervichnoe i povtornoie ispolzovanie,” in *Pamiatnik i prazdnik: Etnografija Dnia Pobedy*, ed. Mikhail Gabovich [Mischa Gabowitsch], trans. Aleksandr Beliaev (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020), 294–309.

31 Tereza Pešoutová, “Piskovcový rudoarmějce z náměstí v Příbyslavi musí pryč. Chtějí ho ochránit před možným poškozením,” *Český rozhlas: Vysočina*, March 9, 2022, <https://vy-socina.rozhlas.cz/piskovcovy-rudoarmejec-z-namesti-v-pribyslavi-musi-pryc-chteji-ho-ochranit-pred-8698272>.

32 “Protests, Human Chain after Soviet Monument in Bulgaria Slated for Removal,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, March 10, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/sofia-soviet-monument-protest-bulgaria/32311884.html>.

in Latvia, there were a few reported cases of construction workers refusing to engage in acts of demolition.³³ Controversy sometimes centered on whether decisions on monument removal should be taken by local or central governments and whether to remove monuments from public view altogether or transfer them to museum spaces.³⁴

However, the geography of this new wave of iconoclasm was circumscribed. No acts of removal of memorials to Red Army soldiers were reported from Moldova or from NATO member states Norway, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Italy, France, and the United States, even though individual politicians in some of those countries publicly advocated removing some monuments or parts thereof.³⁵ In Hungary, Russian officials even unveiled several renovated or rebuilt monuments to Red Army soldiers after February 2022; a few days after one of them was opened in the village of Csákberény, anti-war activists wrapped a memorial in black foil and attached the flags of Hungary, Ukraine (with the Hungarian-designed coat of arms of Carpathian Ukraine), and the EU to it in an act of protest.³⁶

The new iconoclasm responded to Russia's increasingly active attempts to claim a monopoly over the right way to honor the memory of victory over Nazi Germany and sought to deprive would-be supporters of the Russian invasion of symbolically charged meeting places. In a number of other countries, Soviet war memorials were used as canvases for messages against the invasion. Thus, in Berlin's Treptower Park, at the largest such memorial outside the former Soviet Union, anti-Russian graffiti was

33 ERR, "Vozle sovetskogo pamiatnika-tanki v Narve sobralos' bolee 100 chelovek," *ERR*, March 8, 2022, <https://rus.err.ee/1608674926/vozle-sovetskogo-pamiatnika-tanki-v-narve-sobralos-bolee-100-chelovek>; Dinija Jemeljanova, "Padomju pieminekļu demontāža reģionos rit lēnām," *LSM*, August 25, 2022, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/padomju-piemineklu-demontaza-regionos-rit-lenam.a470942/>.

34 "Koalitsiia v Narve priniala reshenie o perenose tanki-pamiatnika," *ERR*, August 8, 2022, <https://rus.err.ee/1608678874/koalitsija-v-narve-prinjala-reshenie-o-perenose-tanki-pamiatnika>.

35 For examples, see Stephanie Höppner, "Sowjetische Denkmäler: Kann das weg?," *Deutsche Welle*, August 17, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/sowjetische-denkm%C3%A4ler-kann-das-weg/a-62837005>; "Hungarian Jobbik Party Calls for Dismantling of Soviet Monument in Budapest," *TVP World*, October 17, 2022, <https://tvpworld.com/63993035/hungarian-jobbik-party-calls-for-dismantling-of-soviet-monument-in-budapest>.

36 "V Vengrii otkryli vosstanovlennyy pamiatnik sovetskim voynam," *RIA Novosti*, June 19, 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230619/pamyatnik-1879254286.html>; László Szily, "Úgy érezzük, hogy mára Oroszország saját felségterületének tekinti Magyarországot, ezért reagáltunk mi," *444*, June 26, 2023, <https://444.hu/2023/06/26/ugy-erezzuk-hogy-mara-oroszország-saját-felseterületének-tekinti-magyarországot-ezert-reagaltunk-mi>.

sprayed on the pedestal of the main statue. At the Tiergarten war memorial, also in Berlin, activists covered a tank with a Ukrainian flag and, on a separate occasion, hoisted a banner that read “Putin is Hitler.”³⁷ In Vienna, the wall behind the 1945 Soviet war memorial on Schwarzenbergplatz was painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag. In Czechia and Slovakia, a number of Soviet war memorials were painted blue-and-yellow or blood-red or covered with anti-invasion graffiti.³⁸ Whereas the Berlin graffiti were swiftly removed by city authorities, the flag in Vienna stayed in place since the wall does not form part of the memorial and was reportedly painted on the orders of its owner, the former Czech foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg.³⁹ In Brno, Czechia, a city spokesperson was quoted as saying: “We do not see any reason why we should quickly remove such expressions of solidarity with Ukraine.”⁴⁰

These Red Army memorials had been erected at the very end of the Second World War or in the immediate postwar decades, deliberately entangling commemoration and geopolitics. In the Putin era, additional monuments to Russian and Soviet military heroes from different ages have appeared in places ranging from China through Israel to South-Eastern Europe and the United States. Installed by both Russian and local actors, they usually serve as tokens of affinity with Russia and the Soviet or Russian imperial past.⁴¹ Such monuments also became targets of symbolic interventions in the aftermath of the February 2022 invasion. In March 2022, for example, two such incidents occurred in Greece: in Athens, someone painted the word “Azov” (presumably referring to the eponymous Ukrainian regiment) on a memorial for Soviet soldiers who joined

37 Presseservice_RN (@PresseserviceRN), “(1/3) In #Berlin wurde das Sowjetische Ehrenmal im Treptower Park geschändet. Mehrere Teile des Ensembles wurde mit Farbe und Parolen beschmiert. Hintergrund scheint der Krieg in der Ukraine, insbesondere mutmaßliche Kriegsverbrechen in Bucha zu sein. #Bo704, Twitter, April 7, 2022, 12:06pm, <https://twitter.com/PresseserviceRN/status/1512008808222048257>; “Berlin: Weltkriegspanzer am Sowjetischen Ehrenmal mit Ukrainefahnen verhüllt,” *Der Spiegel*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/berlin-weltkriegspanzer-am-sowjetischen-ehrenmal-mit-ukraine-fahnen-verhuellt-a-bebf8d6a-36c2-49f3-b5a1-147b21b968fd>.

38 Aneta Zachová, Krassen Nikolov, and Michal Hudec, “Soviet War Memorials Take a Hit across Central and Eastern Europe,” www.euractiv.com, March 14, 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/soviet-war-memorials-take-a-hit-across-central-and-eastern-europe/>.

39 “Mauer am Wiener Schwarzenbergplatz mit ukrainischen Farben bemalt,” *Vienna Online*, January 3, 2022, <https://www.vienna.at/mauer-am-wiener-schwarzenbergplatz-mit-ukrainischen-farben-bemalt/7310916>.

40 Zachová, Nikolov, and Hudec, “Soviet War Memorials Take a Hit.”

41 Gabowitsch, “What Has Happened to Soviet War Memorials,” 202–3.

the Greek partisans in the Second World War.⁴² In a separate case, someone threw paint at a recent statue of eighteenth-century Russian admiral Fedor Ushakov on the island of Corfu.⁴³

Inside Ukraine, beyond the territories occupied by Russia, there was also a new wave of monument removal and attacks on monuments.⁴⁴ Its main targets were statues associated with Russian imperial control over Ukraine. This included first and foremost Soviet-era statues celebrating the “friendship and unity” between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine. In Pereiaslav, Kyiv region, for example, the local authorities decided to remove a centrally located monument to the 300th anniversary of the “reunification” of Ukraine and Russia, a late Stalinist project completed in 1954. The monument’s base had previously been covered with the names of Ukrainian cities ravaged by the Russian invaders.⁴⁵ In Kyiv, a 1981 monument to two workers symbolizing Ukrainian-Russian friendship was removed from under the Arch of Friendship Between the Peoples.⁴⁶ The Three Sisters monument in Sen’kivka near the Ukrainian-Russian-Belarusian tripoint, built in 1975, was likewise slated for dismantling by a May 12, 2022, decision of the Chernihiv regional government.⁴⁷

Monuments to individuals associated with Russian dominance were also targeted. One prominent example was an equestrian statue of the Russian general Aleksandr Suvorov, who had famously led the capture of the Ottoman fortress in Izmail in Bessarabia, conquering it for Catherine II.

42 “Zhiteli Afin proveli stikhiinyi miting u pamiatnika sovetским voynam,” *RIA Novosti*, March 20, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220320/miting-1779145907.html>.

43 “Vandaly oskvernili pamiatnik admiralu Ushakovu v Gretsii,” *RIA Novosti*, March 26, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220326/pamyatnik-1780239271.html>.

44 This topic would warrant another book, and we cannot do it full justice here. For further discussion, in addition to the issue of *Kunsttexte* cited above, see Mischa Gabowitsch, “Monuments in Times of War. Ukraine’s Monumentscape since February 2022,” *Eurozine*, April 6, 2023, <https://www.eurozine.com/monuments-in-times-of-war>, as well as the video recording of a panel titled “Decoloniality in Ukraine: Is there still a place for a ‘Soviet soldier’ in historic [sic] memory?” organized by Tatiana Kochubinska at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden on December 1, 2022: <https://www.skd.museum/programm/decoloniality-in-ukraine>.

45 “U Pereiaslavi znesly monument do 300-richchia ‘voziednannia’ z Rosiieiu,” *5 kanal*, July 7, 2022, <https://www.5.ua/regiony/u-pereiaslavi-znesly-monument-do-300-richchia-voziednannia-z-rosiieiu-281890.html>.

46 t.me/vitaliy_klitschko/1378, April 26, 2022. On earlier discussions surrounding the monument, see Olha Martyniuk, “Was bedeutet die ‘Entrussifizierung’ ukrainischer Städte?,” *ostBLOG Spezial: Russlands Krieg gegen die Ukraine* (blog), June 5, 2022, <https://ukraine2022.ios-regensburg.de/namenoi>.

47 Roman Petrenko, “Monument ‘Try sestry’ na kordoni Ukrainy, RF ta Bilorusi likviduiut’,” *Ukrains’ka pravda*, May 12, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/05/12/7345740/>.

Cast from melted Turkish cannons, the monument was initially installed on Russian initiative in the Romanian town of Dumbrăveni in a location where Suvorov had greeted his soldiers after a victorious battle. In 1916, it was transported to Odesa. In 1945, the Soviet authorities installed it in Izmaïl to mark the one-year anniversary of their reconquest of Izmaïl and Bessarabia from Romania. Attacks on the monument began in May 2022. After someone threw red paint on the statue in late May, the authorities swiftly had it cleaned, yet in October the municipal council voted to have the statue transported to a museum; it was removed on December 1.⁴⁸ In Odesa, the municipal council similarly decided to have the local Suvorov statue (a 2012 copy of the one in Izmaïl) as well as a 1900 monument to the Founders of Odesa, including Catherine II, removed from their central locations.⁴⁹ The decisions had overwhelming support from council members, even though they were not entirely uncontroversial. On the one hand, Suvorov and Catherine undoubtedly symbolized Russian imperial rule over the Ukrainian lands. On the other hand, Odesa's very existence and Izmaïl's inclusion in Ukraine were inextricably linked with the Russian imperial past. In this way, the situation echoed the dilemma that had earlier accompanied the removal of Soviet war memorials from those regions in western Poland that had been transferred from Germany as a result of the Second World War.⁵⁰ Yet unlike the Polish case, where the decision to remove those monuments had been enforced from Warsaw, in Ukraine removal was decided locally.

A related wave of monument removal and defacement targeted monuments to Aleksandr Pushkin, memorialized ubiquitously during the Soviet period as a Russian national poet.⁵¹ Not only was Pushkin targeted as the centerpiece of a cult transporting Russian cultural imperi-

⁴⁸ <https://t.me/stranaua/78093>, December 1, 2022.

⁴⁹ On the decision procedure and removal process see the following posts in the official Telegram channel of the Odesa authorities, see <https://t.me/odesacityofficial/10947>, September 18, 2022; <https://t.me/odesacityofficial/11385>, October 3, 2022; <https://t.me/odesacityofficial/12378>, November 8, 2022; <https://t.me/odesacityofficial/13800>, December 28, 2022.

⁵⁰ Nancy Waldmann, "Koniec przeobrażeń? Dekomunizacja przestrzeni publicznej w Polsce na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych w latach 2016–2017—wybrane przykłady," *Rocznik Ziemi Zachodnich* 2 (2018): 714–66.

⁵¹ For an overview, see Polina Horlach, "'Pushkinopad' prodovzhuetsia: u Kyievi demontuiut shche odyn pam'iatnyk Pushkinu," *Suspil'ne. Novyny*, January 6, 2023, <https://suspilne.media/494317-puskinopad-prodovzuetsa-mer-kieva-vitalij-klicko-pidtrimav-peticiu-pro-demontaz-pamatnika-rosijskomu-poetu>. On pre-2022 Ukrainian debates about a perceived Pushkinfall, see Sophie Charlotte Pinkham, "Pushkin for President: Russian Lit-

alism; many Ukrainians also faulted the poet for using his own writings to promote ideas of Russia's cultural superiority and its right to rule over others. The well-known writer Serhii Zhadan, one of the most prominent voices of this kind, made a series of selfie photos in front of Pushkin statues, most of which would disappear soon thereafter.⁵²

Here, too, iconoclasm was not unproblematic—in November 2022, a majority of those polled on the question in Kharkiv said they would have preferred the local Pushkin monument to stay, either unaltered (44 percent) or with an additional panel providing context (10 percent).⁵³ (Attacks on Pushkin monuments as symbols of Russification have been a recurrent feature in the history of Ukrainian nationalism; thus, in October 1904, a group called “Defense of Ukraine” unsuccessfully attempted to blow up the recently installed Pushkin bust in Kharkiv.⁵⁴)

These acts of iconoclasm echoed cases from other places and times where attacks on public statues erected under a previous imperial regime did not occur immediately upon independence, but rather responded to challenges to a country's new-found sovereignty. Thus, in Poznań, in newly independent Poland, during the night of April 3/4, 1919, local residents toppled monuments installed under Prussian rule. Happening almost five months after Poland formally recovered its independence, the iconoclastic spree came in response to discussions at the Paris Peace Conference questioning Poland's claim to Gdańsk and Eastern Pomerania.⁵⁵ The same year, a Fokker biplane was mounted on the pedestal of a toppled statue of German emperor Wilhelm I in Strasbourg, a city recently recovered from Germany by France, just as demolished Tsarist statues were simultaneously being replaced with new makeshift monuments in Soviet Russia—the same as started happening in Ukraine in 2014.⁵⁶

erary Cults in the Transition from Communism.” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2019), 279–81, <https://dx.doi.org/10.7916/d8-tp8v-sa82>.

52 “Zhadan i sobaky: shcho trapliaieŭsia z pamiatnykamy Pushkinu pislia selfi pys'mennyka,” *Vogue*, November 17, 2022, <https://vogue.ua/article/culture/knigi/zhadan-i-sobaki-shcho-traplyayetsya-z-pam-yatnikami-pushkinu-pislya-selfi-pismennika-50537.html>.

53 Homanyuk and Danylenko, “Symvolichnyi prostir mista.”

54 Fedir Turchenko, “‘Kharkivs'kyi proekt’ Mykoly Mikhnovs'koho,” *Naukovi pratsi istorichnoho fakultetu Zaporiz'koho derzhavnoho universytetu* XV (2002): 23–25. We thank Serge Lunin for this reference.

55 Praczyk, “Émotions en action,” 117.

56 Regarding Strasbourg, see Praczyk, 117. It should be noted that in the case of Strasbourg, a statue of the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was left intact. See Praczyk, 124.

In Ukraine in 2022, military monuments were also affected—less systematically and often in several stages, though pressure for removal increased over time.⁵⁷

The first stage was often to throw paint at a monument. An exhibition of works by Ukrainian graphic artist Oleksandr Kom'iakhov, which opened on Independence Square in Kyiv in November 2021 to celebrate the eight anniversary of the Revolution of Dignity, included a comic strip about a couple on a motorcycle shooting a paint gun at the Kyiv statue of Soviet World War II-era general Nikolai Vatutin (the monument was later removed by official decision).⁵⁸ Following the Russian invasion, such paint attacks became common occurrences, usually targeting statues of individual military leaders or heroes, such as the Izmaïl statue of Aleksandr Suvorov mentioned above. As late as June 2023, several busts of Twice Heroes of the Soviet Union in Kyiv's Park of Partisan Glory had their faces painted red by unknown protesters, who also painted slurs such as "chek-ist" and "occupier" on the pedestals.⁵⁹ Both the Vatutin monument and the busts were built under Stalin in the early postwar years.⁶⁰ A 1982 stele celebrating Kyiv's status as a "Hero City" lost its Order of Lenin.⁶¹ In Uman', Cherkasy region, a similar bust of locally born war hero Ivan Cherniakhov's'kyi simply saw the medal on its pedestal draped in black—another first-stage way of dealing with unwanted Soviet symbolism.⁶² Another possible first step was to paint the number of the decommunization law from 2015 (317 VIII) on a monument's pedestal, as happened, for example, to several monuments in Poltava.⁶³

57 A useful journalistic overview showing the situation as of the early summer of 2022 is Anastasiia Holubieva, "Viina i pam'iatnyky: v Ukraini znosiat' Pushkina, a na okupovanykh terytoriiakh povertaiut' Lenina," *BBC News Ukraïna*, June 24, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-61921265>.

58 Photo by Mykola Homanyuk. For more on the exhibition, see "Na maidani Nezalezhnosti u Kyievi prezentuvaly vulychnu vystavku 'Maľovana istoriia Maidanu,'" *Natsionalnyi memorialnyi kompleks Heroïv Nebesnoi Sotni—Muzei Revoliutsii Hidnosti*, November 22, 2021, <https://maidanmuseum.org/uk/node/1745>.

59 "Chekisty i palachi: v Kieve razrisovali biusty sovetskikh partizan," *Apostrof Kyïv*, June 29, 2023, <https://apostrophe.ua/news/kyiv/2023-06-29/chekisty-i-palachi-v-kieve-raz-risovali-byusty-i-sovetskih-partizan-foto/299901>.

60 On the construction of the Vatutin monument, see Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin's Citizens: Everyday Politics in the Wake of Total War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), 60–63.

61 Mykola Homanyuk's photo.

62 Mykola Homanyuk's photo.

63 Mykola Homanyuk's photo.

The second stage was partial removal, which targeted not only such monuments to individuals but also generic war memorials and was often followed somewhat later by complete removal. One example is the Victory Monument in Chernivtsi, unveiled in 1946 by Leonid Brezhnev, then the chief political officer of the Transcarpathian Military District.⁶⁴ In August 2022, the bronze statue of a Red Army soldier that was part of the memorial was removed at the behest of the local authorities, leaving the main obelisk intact.⁶⁵ Less than a month later, the obelisk was gone too.⁶⁶

In Transcarpathian Mukachevo, the local authorities removed a tank monument installed in 1969 as part of a wave of new war monuments installed in Western Ukraine following the suppression of the Prague Spring. In doing so, they stressed that the tank was not involved in the Second World War, and commentators mentioned that its barrel had been aimed at the center of the town.⁶⁷

Yet war memorials also disappeared from public space in places where they had previously been seen as being closely tied to a local identity. In Dnipro, in early January 2023, a wave of iconoclasm saw the removal, among other statues, of a monument to Soviet war heroes Efim Pushkin and Aleksandr Matrosov.⁶⁸ Pushkin was a general who had defended Dnipro (then Dnipropetrovs'k) against the Germans in 1941 and was later killed in action near Mykolaïv. Matrosov was among the most revered martyrs of the Soviet war cult, the most famous of the many Soviet soldiers reported to have blocked a German machine gun with their bodies. According to his official biography, he was born in Dnipro. So was the

64 Central State Film, Photo, and Sound Archive of Ukraine (TsDKFFA), newsreel no. 284 (1946).

65 Alla Podliesna, "U Chernivtsiakh prybraly pam'iatnyk nevidomomu soldatu na Sobornii ploshchi," *Suspil'ne: Novyny*, August 12, 2022, <https://suspilne.media/270300-u-cernivcah-pribrali-pamatnik-nevidomomu-soldatu-na-sobornij-plosi/>.

66 "U Chernivtsiakh demontuiuf reshtky monumentu Peremohy," *Molodyi bukovynets'*, September 7, 2022, <https://molbuk.ua/index.php?newsid=266799>.

67 "U Mukachevi demontuvaly pam'iatnyk radians'komu tanku," Mukachivs'k amis'karada, April 11, 2022, <https://mukachevo-rada.gov.ua/news/u-mukachevi-demontuvali-pamyatnik-radyanskomu-tanku>; Iryna Balachuk, "U Mukachevi demontuvaly radians'kyi tank," *Ukrains'ka pravda*, April 11, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/04/11/7338747/>; "V ukrainskom Mukacheve demontirovali pamiatnik sovet'skomu tanku," *RIA Novosti*, April 11, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220411/ukraina-1782890909.html>.

68 "V Dnepre snesli pamiatnik Aleksandru Matrosovu raboty Vucheticha," *Radio Svoboda*, January 4, 2023, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-dnepre-snesli-pamyatnik-aleksandru-matrosovu-raboty-vucheticha/32207478.html>.

author of the statue and the most famous and controversial creator of Soviet war memorials, Evgenii Vuchetich.

In Ukraine, as in other countries, the events of February 2022 precipitated decisions that had long been in the making. Thus, in April 2022, the city government of Drohobych, L'viv region, organized a "clean Thursday." Under the guise of "de-Russification" and "getting rid of evil communist spirits" (*komunistychnoi nechysti*), they dismantled most of the local eternal flame memorial, following a consultation procedure that had started well before the large-scale invasion.⁶⁹

Whereas in these cases removal was sanctioned and organized by the local authorities and thus bore the stamp of democratic legitimacy, there were also instances of conflict and unsanctioned destruction. In May 2022, an unidentified group of Ukrainian soldiers used a truck to topple a statue of medieval grand prince Aleksandr Nevskii in Kharkiv.⁷⁰ A figure central to Russian war memory for centuries and revered as a saint by the Orthodox Church, Nevskii had no connection with Kharkiv, founded hundreds of years after his death, although the statue was installed in 2004 ostensibly to mark the city's 350th anniversary. While the removal was unsanctioned, a representative of Ukraine's Institute of National Memory later justified it.⁷¹

In Mykolaïv, on October 19, 2022, a monument to police staff who died in the line of duty, including in the Great Patriotic War, was erected in the city center in 1977 thanks to donations from police officers. As part of the post-Euromaidan decommunization wave, by 2016, some local activists as well as the Institute of National Memory were campaigning to have it removed, referring to its local nickname as a "monument to Chekists" and the Civil War-era *budenovka* hat on the statue that they argued symbolized Communist terror against Ukrainians. After years of inconclu-

69 "Derusyfikatsiia v dii: u Chystyi chetver Drohobych pozbuvsia komunistychnoi nechysti," Drohobych's'ka Mis'ka Rada, April 21, 2022, <https://drohobych-rada.gov.ua/дерусифікація-в-дії-у-чистий-четвер-др/>.

70 Olena Cherneta, "U Kharkovi znesly pam'iatnyk Oleksandru Nevs'komu," *Vgorode*, May 19, 2022, <https://kh.vgorode.ua/ukr/news/sobytyia/a1206836-u-kharkovi-znesli-pam-jatnik-oleksandru-nevskomu-video>.

71 "Simvol 'sily russkogo oruzhiia': v UINP prokomentirovali snos pamiatnika Aleksandru Nevskomu v Khar'kove," *New Voice Khar'kov*, May 19, 2022, <https://nv.ua/kharkiv/po-chemu-snesli-pamyatnik-aleksandru-nevskomu-novosti-harkova-50243476.html>. On the role of Alexander Nevskii in Russian memory politics through the ages, see Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, *Aleksandr Nevskij: Heiliger, Fürst, Nationalheld: eine Erinnerungsfigur im russischen kulturellen Gedächtnis (1263–2000)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004).

sive debates, on October 13, 2022, a group of activists for the center-right *Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy* party arrived with a crane truck to remove the monument. They were hindered by a group of retired policemen who, while stressing their Ukrainian patriotism, argued that the statue was a grass-roots monument that honored Ukrainians who died serving their city and was important for commemorative ceremonies. Six days later, unknown attackers blew up the monument.⁷² (The mayor's office later promised to replace it with a new monument after the end of the war.⁷³) Soon thereafter, another Mykolaïv monument was similarly blown up: a Motherland statue that was part of a Second World War memorial.⁷⁴

In Mykolaïv, destruction happened under the cover of night. Elsewhere, iconoclasts made sure to document the act of demolition, such as the Odesite activist Dem'ian Hanul, who had himself filmed destroying the relief on a monument to Grigorii Kotovskii, a Civil War-era military commander active in Moldova and Ukraine who became the object of a post-humous cult in the Soviet era.⁷⁵

Preservationists found themselves in a difficult position. The *De Ne De* association of artists and curators had long campaigned for a more nuanced approach to Soviet statuary, distinguishing between Russian or generic Soviet monuments on the one hand and Ukrainian Soviet heritage on the other, in an attempt to reappropriate the Soviet heritage from the Russian Federation. Unlike monument defenders who sought to downplay the Sovietness of monuments, *De Ne De* argued that Soviet-era monuments needed to be preserved precisely because they were Soviet in order to teach how propaganda works. "Decommunization," they argued, "is easy to start

72 "U Mykolaievi khochut' znesty pam'iatnyk 'militsioneru' na Sadovii: zakhyshchaty monument pryshly veterany MVS," *Novyny N*, October 13, 2022, <https://novosti-n.org/ua/news/U-Mykolayevi-hochut-znesty-pam-yatnyk-miliczioneru-na-Sadovij-zahysh-haty-monument-pryshly-veterany-MVS-253033>; "Z'ivaylysia foto ta video pidirvano-ho pam'iatnyka 'zahyblym militsioneram,'" *Novyny N*, October 20, 2022, <https://novosti-n.org/ua/news/Z-yavlylysia-foto-ta-video-pidirvanogo-pam-yatnyka-zagyblym-miliczion-eram--253546>.

73 Iuliia Tkach, "Posle voyny v Nikolaeve ustanoviat novyi pamiatnik pogibshim pravookhraniteliam,—Lukov," *Nikvesti*, October 31, 2022, <https://nikvesti.com/ru/news/public/259100>.

74 "U Mykolaievi pidirvaly pam'iatnyk 'Skorbotna maty,'" 0512—Sait mista Mykolaieva, November 3, 2022, <https://www.0512.com.ua/news/3490285/u-mikolaievi-pidirvali-pamiatnik-skorbotna-mati-foto>.

75 Dem'ian Hanul, "Dekomunizatsiia vid mene," Facebook, April 18, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/GanulDemian/posts/pfbido22uSzPtJMF2A7JatS1PV3CjmL3ss5ZsrK4sCwMtikPgwevJok7W4bJSOQEsG36UV2l>.

but impossible to finish.” Given the Russian carnage, however, they found it impossible to keep protesting against the removal of Soviet monuments.⁷⁶

Other critics noted that the money and efforts spent on decommunizing public space should rather go to defending the country: rather than wasting 28 million hryvnia on removing the Soviet coat of arms from the Motherland statue in Kyiv, some of them wrote, decommunizers should spend that money on defending the country.⁷⁷ Against this, Anton Drobovych, the head of Ukraine’s Institute of National Remembrance, argued that symbolic decommunization was itself a contribution to national defense. He argued that changing the symbol on the Motherland figure’s shield would be a reasonable middle course between unconditional reverence for all built heritage *qua* heritage and the radical drive to destroy everything, and that it was a way to appropriate a symbol of Ukraine’s losses in the Second World War. “European culture,” he claimed, “features hundreds of examples of prominent monuments of the past being altered, reshaped, adapted, and reconstructed, for that is a sign that a community is mature to the point where it takes control over its own symbolic space and feels able to change and define it.”⁷⁸

Drobovych was thus advocating to subject the country’s most recognizable war memorial to the very kind of appropriation that, as we have described, had been happening for years in rural Ukraine. This type of appropriation has so far saved most rural memorials from the post-2022 wave of iconoclasm. Indeed, the vast majority of cases in which war memorials were removed, with or without an official decision, were in cities. For the reasons outlined in chapter 2, rural memorials have become much more domesticated, preventing them from being reinterpreted as foreign objects. Few of the memorials located in most of Ukraine’s almost 30,000 villages disappeared.⁷⁹ Even in regions of Western Ukraine where iconoclasm was particularly radical in the larger cities, the increasingly

76 The quote and the other observations in this paragraph are from Zhenya Molyar’s presentation at the *Documenting Ukraine* workshop at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna on February 8, 2023.

77 See, for example: Anna Kudeliuk, “‘Tiuninh na krovi’: chomu Ukraïna ryzykue prohrawy u viini proty okupantiv,” *Znai.UA*, July 16, 2023, <https://znai.ua/society/462011-tyuning-na-krovi-chomu-ukrajina-rizikuye-prograti-u-viyni-proti-okupantiv>.

78 Anton Drobovych, “Symvoly voiuut’ i peremahaiut’,” *Ukrains’ka pravda*, July 20, 2023, <https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2023/07/20/255490/>.

79 For the source of this number, see “Kilkist’ administratyvno-terytorialnykh odynts’ za rehionamy Ukraïny na 1 sichnia 2016 roku,” *Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky Ukraïny*, 2016, https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2016/ds/ator/ator2016_u.htm.

frequent calls to remove war memorials in rural areas often met with resistance from local residents.⁸⁰ The Second World War memorial in the village of Lysychovo in Transcarpathia provides a striking example. In April 2023, an out-of-town activist wrote to the village council, demanding to have the monument removed. The council's response to the activist states that it is a memorial honoring

warriors from our village who died or went missing in action in the period from 1941 to 1945 rather than a "monument to Soviet soldiers".... By dismantling a monument to warriors from our village, we would devalue not only their role in combating fascism but their very lives.

The question of dismantling the monument was put for discussion before the residents of our village, and they unanimously took the view that participants in the war of 1941–45 are on a par with soldiers who died during the full-scale Russian invasion [since] February 24, 2022, protecting the freedom and independence of our Fatherland.⁸¹

Similar acts of resistance to removal have been recorded in Galician regions, reputed to be particularly fervent in getting rid of war memorials from the Soviet period.⁸²

NEW AND RENEWED MEMORIALS

Conversely, the war has also led to the creation of new memorials. In free Ukraine, new makeshift memorials began to spring up for soldiers and civilians killed by the Russian onslaught. Walls or banners displaying names and/or portraits of the fallen appeared in different cities. Cemeteries were bursting at the seams due to the large number of

⁸⁰ For cases where rural war memorials were removed or altered, see the Facebook page of the *Dekomunizatsiia. Ukraïna* group, which campaigns for such removal: www.facebook.com/UADecolonization.

⁸¹ <https://t.me/stranaua/101383>, April 22, 2023.

⁸² For examples, see Pershyi Zakhidnyi, "Hromada na Lvivshchyni proty znesennia radians'koho pam'iatnyka," Youtube video, 3:49, June 22, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPJWm37IKog>; "Na Prikarpat'e zhiteli dvukh sel otkazalis' snosit' pamiatniki sovetskim soldatam," *Strana.UA*, December 1, 2023, <https://ctrana.media/news/451864-vivano-frankovskoj-oblasti-v-dvukh-selakh-otkazalis-snosit-pamjatniki-sovetskim-soldatam.html>.

new graves that needed to be dug for both soldiers and civilians killed in the war.⁸³ Ukrainian flags were often used at cemeteries to mark soldiers' burial places, turning old and new cemeteries across Ukraine into seas of blue and yellow, with occasional sprinkles of other countries' flags for foreign volunteers. This was in contrast to the occupied territories, where at least in some cases the Russians reportedly prevented people from burying Ukrainian (or even Russian) soldiers in cemeteries and the bodies had to be interred in private gardens instead.⁸⁴

As the Ukrainian army retook territories from Russia, memorials started to arise to honor those killed in the Russian onslaught. As early as April 2022, Volodymyr Zelens'kyi announced that the destroyed bridge linking Irpin' and Kyiv would be turned into a memorial for civilians killed in the city.⁸⁵ Six months later, a Kyiv architectural firm proposed a project that would involve preserving the destroyed bridge next to a new reconstructed one, sparking debate on whether memorializing trauma for all to see in their daily commute was appropriate.⁸⁶ In the meantime, a number of grassroots memorials had sprung up around the bridge. One of them involved a canvas on which anyone could write the names of those killed; another included objects that had belonged to adults and children who died in Russian shelling while trying to flee Irpin'.⁸⁷ An initiative by artists from Ukraine and the US involved painting sunflowers on war ruins around Irpin', such as a graveyard of burnt-out cars at the entrance

83 Jan Heidtmann, "Zu viele tote Helden," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ukraine-lwiw-gefallene-russland-1.5573385>.

84 See this report about Trostianet's, Sumy region, which was occupied for about a month at the very beginning of the large-scale invasion, by the regional governor: "Kakoe ot-noshenie k russkim? Nikakoe. Eto izgoi na tysiachu let': Sumskaia oblast' Ukrainy uzhe pochti mesiats oboroniaetsia ot rossiiskoi armii—khotia nakhoditsia priamo na granite. Ee glava Dmitrii Zhivitskii rasskazal 'Meduze,' kak ei eto udaetsia," *Meduza*, March 22, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/03/22/kakoe-otnoshenie-k-russkim-nikakoe-eto-izgoi-na-tysyachu-let>.

85 "Zelens'kyi anonsuvav memorialnyi kompleks na zhadku pro mist v Irpeni i perezhytu 'bezhlyzdu navalu' rosiian," *Ukrains'ka pravda*, April 17, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/04/17/7340167/>.

86 Karyna Bondarenko, "Na zruinovanomu mostu cherez Irpin' planuiut zbuduvaty memorial: proiekt otrymav bahato krytyky," *TSN*, October 7, 2022, <https://kyiv.tsn.ua/na-zruynovanomu-mostu-cherez-irpin-planuyut-zbuduvaty-memorial-proiekt-otrimav-bagato-kritiki-foto-2174806.html>.

87 "Boialas', chto povsiudu budet dukh smerti. Dumala, zhit' zdes' ne smogu. No smogla': Reportazh 'Meduzy' iz Buchi—o tom, chto seichas proiskhodit v gorode, gde rossiiskie soldaty ubivali, nasilovali i pytali zhitelei," *Meduza*, October 27, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/10/27/boialas'-chto-povsyudu-budet-duh-smerti-dumala-zhit'-zdes-ne-smogu-no-smogla>.

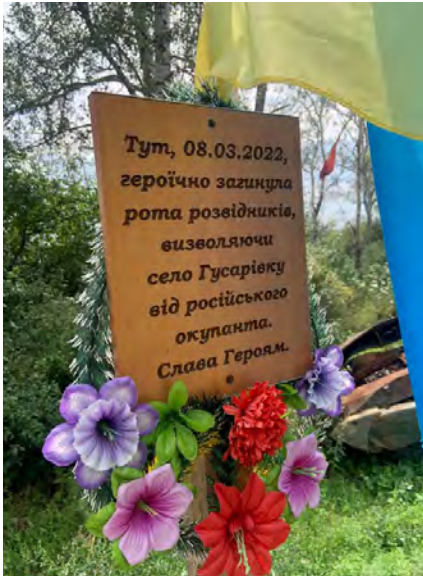


Figure 6.2. Memorial to fallen soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with the inscription "Members of a reconnaissance company died here on March 8, 2022, while liberating Husarivka from the Russian occupiers. Glory to the Heroes!" Village of Husarivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.



Figure 6.3. Monument to the Territorial Defense. Irpin', Kyiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, January 2023.

to the city. The initiative aimed to raise money for reconstruction by selling non-fungible tokens (NFTs).⁸⁸

After deoccupation, Ukrainians sometimes simply removed the traces of Russian monumental propaganda. Thus, the Glory of Ukraine memorial in Kherson, which turned into a pro-Russian Second World War memorial under the occupation, was painted a neutral gray.⁸⁹ More often, however, they used existing memorials, both in the liberated territories and elsewhere in Ukraine, to celebrate liberation and mourn their losses. In Kyiv, the steles celebrating the World War II Hero Cities were transformed: steles dedicated to cities in Russia were rededicated to Ukrainian cities under assault since 2022. A poster informed visitors, for example, that President Zelens'kyi had declared Kherson a Hero City of Ukraine in March 2022. To

⁸⁸ Theo Farrant, "Artists Paint Sunflowers on Destroyed Vehicles in War-Torn Irpin," *Euronews*, August 18, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2022/08/18/flowers-for-hope-artists-paint-sunflowers-on-destroyed-vehicles-in-war-torn-irpin>. Also see <https://www.instagram.com/flowersforhopeart>.

⁸⁹ Our sources here and in the rest of this section are Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork and photos.

these posters, in turn, ordinary people sometimes attached portraits of individual fallen soldiers.

In Ivankiv, Kyiv region, a black-and-red sports fan scarf with the words “Glory to Ukraine” was attached to an armored vehicle installed as part of a memorial to the Soviet war in Afghanistan. In Chornobaïvka, Kherson region, a wreath made of ribbons and artificial flowers was woven around the head of a grieving mother statue at a Great Patriotic War memorial, and the acronym for “Ukrainian Armed Forces” was sprayed on the memorial’s main statue, an abstract flag composition. In Kherson, a Soviet emblem on a supply truck installed on a pedestal in 2013 as a World War II memorial was painted over with the colors of the Ukrainian flag.

Other memorials in liberated places were also subjected to this kind of spontaneous decommunization. In Oleksandrivka, Voznesens’kyi district, Mykolaïv region, a large, formerly red banner in the hands of a soldier statue was painted grey.

In some places, improvised standalone memorials marked the spots of Russian attacks. At the Babyn Iar Holocaust memorial site in Kyiv, a new plaque informed visitors that “On March 1, 2022, six persons—five adults and one child—died from a missile attack on Babyn Iar” (see figure 6.4). In Kherson, the sites of the stolen monuments to Admiral Ushakov and General Suvorov were also turned into Ukrainian war



Figure 6.4. Memorial at the explosion site in Babyn Iar in Kyiv. The inscription reads “On March 1, 2022, six persons—five adults and one child—died from a missile attack on Babyn Iar.” Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, April 2023.

Figure 6.5. Graffiti of the silhouette of Valerii Zaluzhnyi, commander-in-chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces, drawn on the pedestal of the stolen monument to Admiral Fedor Ushakov. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.

memorials. Someone drew the silhouette of Ukrainian commander-in-chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi on one side of Ushakov's pedestal and stenciled the words "Death to the Russians [*smert' rusni*]" on another side (see figure 6.5). Stenciled writing praising the Ukrainian Armed Forces and announcing the return of Crimea were applied to the pedestal of the Suvorov statue, which now supported a Ukrainian flag.

In turn, the makeshift memorials that had sprung up during the occupation were turned more permanent. Thus, in Kherson, the simple crosses that had marked the site of resistance by Territorial Defense forces on March 1 in the Lilac Grove (see figure 6.6) were supplemented with other memorabilia such as decorative cloths and wreaths, and a more permanent granite memorial was erected at the site (see figures 6.7, 6.8). In December 2022, former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko announced that he would fund a competition to turn the site into a memorial of Ukraine's unbreakable fighting spirit to be known across the world.⁹⁰

In keeping with the post-Soviet culture of hybrid war memorials, the names of those killed in 2022–23 were added to memorials dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, the Anti-Terror Operation, and other military conflicts.

Another type of new war memorial, following a Soviet precedent that was especially popular at the very end of the Second World War and in the first post-war years, were exhibitions of trophy military equipment.



⁹⁰ "Poroshenko oholosyv konkurs na proiekt pam'iatnykam heroiam Buzkovoho haiu u Khersoni," *LB.ua*, December 31, 2022, https://lb.ua/society/2022/12/31/541038_poroshenko_ogolosiv_konkurs_proiekt.html.



Figure 6.6. Memorial to fallen members of the Territorial Defense with the inscription "This memorial sign marks the site where fighters of the 124th Brigade of the Territorial Defense of Ukraine's Armed Forces fell while defending Kherson from the Russian invaders in February-March 2022. From fellow members of the 124th Brigade and the Themis volunteer unit." Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, May 2022. Lilac Grove, Kherson.

Figures 6.7. Memorial to fallen members of the Territorial Defense forces. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, April 2023. Lilac Grove, Kherson.



Figure 6.8. Memorial to fallen members of the Territorial Defense forces. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, April 2023. Lilac Grove, Kherson.

At the Konev Heights memorial in Solonytsivka near Kharkiv, captured Russian vehicles and missiles were added to the German tanks on display in memory of the Second World War.⁹¹



Yet standalone memorials to the ongoing war also started appearing soon after liberation. At first, these too were improvised: for example, a board with a message supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces written in blue and yellow chalk. Yet more permanent memorials did not take long to appear. In Oleksandrivka, Snihurivs'kyi district, Mykolaïv region, this took the form of white steles symbolizing a flame that enclosed the silhouette of a soldier in full body armor; this was flanked by portraits of the fallen and Ukrainian flags.

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