

Article

# Generational succession, culture and politics: the shaping of Euro-Atlantic sites of memory.

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## ABSTRACT

Memory studies have often looked to the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain as the principal mediators of collective memory for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Scholars have often assumed the primacy of political factors in memory work, with Cold War politics understood as shaping collective memory both west and east of the Iron Curtain. The present article proposes to problematize these assumptions. While not negating the role of politics, it suggests that the changing cultural priorities of each successive generation were of greater importance than current memory analyses permit. Using the former KL Plaszow (Kraków, Poland) as a case study, this essay draws attention to the common features of memory work shared across the Euro-Atlantic world. Establishing how each of the postwar generations engaged with memory work to suit their particular needs this article analysis the impact that generational sensibilities had on memory sites.

## KEY WORDS

Plaszow, Kraków, memory work, generational memory, Cold War

## Introduction

In 2012, a local paper published a photograph of the remains of KL Plaszow, a former labor and concentration camp located in Kraków, Poland (Kaczmarz, 2012). It depicted a windswept, overgrown meadow with rubble dramatically piling up in the foreground. Focusing on neglect and desolation it was used to illustrate an article complaining about the state of the former KL (Maciejowski, 2012). The photograph may have been taken in 2012 but this section of the camp has looked more or less the same since the end of the war.

In 1984, while working on a small memorial located some fifty meters from where the photograph would be taken, members of the Kraków's Civic Committee for Protection of Monuments of Struggle and Martyrdom (KKOPWM, 1984: 2), a state sponsored memory actor, noted that with the successful erection of the planned tombstone '[t]he process of commemoration of new places of struggle and martyrdom should in principle be finished.' In their view, the camp was properly maintained; all the major killing sites were marked with relevant monuments.

Despite few changes in the material conditions of the site between 1984 and 2012, contemporary reactions to the former camp varied dramatically. Why? The most obvious answer would be because of the political situation. Scholars assume that under Communism, the omnipotent state shaped collective memory and prevented Poles from commemorating sites connected to the Holocaust. The fall of Communism is seen as a turning point, a moment in which proper commemoration of the war and proper maintenance of the sites of memory became possible (Irwin-Zarecka, 1989; Orla-Bukowska, 2006; Lebow, 2006; Korzeniewski, 2010; Szpociński, 2006, Nijakowski 2008). A parallel argument is often made for the entire Euro-Atlantic world. The end of the Cold War is understood as a moment that gave 'freedom to express views that were long regarded as dead or, at best, marginal (in the east and west)' (Stone, 2013: 174, see also Carrier 2005, Levy and Sznajder 2006). This narrative, in its local and global versions, subsumes the changes in memory work to the rhythm of political developments. The present article seeks to problematize those explanations. It does not negate the importance of political circumstances but suggests that broader social and cultural changes should be examined to understand fully the dynamics of memory work in Poland and in the rest of Euro-Atlantic world. It ties the changing approaches to sites of memory with generational change. It suggests that new styles of memory work and new memorials express generational needs, not only political priorities.

The site of former KL Plaszow provides a productive lens for study of the generational memory work because of the history of the camp, the history of its memorialization, and its precarious status among Polish memory sites. On the one hand Plaszow cannot be compared to the most prominent sites like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, or Treblinka. On the other it is located in Kraków, a city often deemed the cultural capital of Poland (Kubicki, 2010; Niedźweidź, 2009) and a place where, through both the Communist and post-Communist periods, commemorations of the Holocaust and the Jewish past were at the forefront of memory work (Gryta 2017). As such, Plaszow never got its own museum (Auschwitz and Majdanek did) but was always subject to efforts at memorialization by some of the most influential memory activists in the country.

The precarious status of Plaszow is reflected by the limited scholarship on the site. It was only in 2009 that a comprehensive history of the camp was published (Kotarba 2009). Rare memoirs were released earlier (Graf 1989), but there are only few scholarly articles concerned with commemoration of the site. Some of them are informed by art history (Szymański 2015), others by human geography (Charlesworth 2004, Charlesworth and Addis 2002, Drozdowski 2012), some by history of memory (Gryta 2013b). With the exception of Szymański's and Gryta's texts, these articles are based on observations. If occasionally inaccurate (e.g. Charlesworth excludes half of the site and one of the memorials from his analysis), they nevertheless offer alternative perspectives. Moreover, they confirm that as early as in the 1990s there was a widespread understanding that the maintenance of Plaszow was inadequate.

The present article utilises the existing scholarship (primary Szymański 2015 and Gryta 2013b) and looks back to primary sources such as projects and documents produced by Kraków's memory activists. These documents allow for an in-depth analysis and for drawing of comparisons between Kraków and numerous other sites both in Poland and across Europe. This article starts off by offering an interpretation of memory work in Plaszow and its place in Polish memory, and progresses to discern the more universal aspects of those commemorations. It highlights the features of Plaszow that were common to other memory sites across Poland and Europe, interpreting those commonalities as expressions of generational needs and priorities.

The present paper analyses three different phases of memorialization of Plaszow, including two plans that were never realized. It first looks at the 1964 monument that marked one of the killing sites, the Hollow; connects it to the two small scale memorials erected in the 1940s and 1950s contextualizes them against the history of Polish Socialism and, interprets them as answers to the needs of the war generation. This generation survived the conflict and remembered only too vividly its cruelty and its victims. It used monuments to pay respect to their fallen and to mark the key sites connected to the war past; it used memorials as mnemonic devices. The monuments were not designed to provide overarching narratives but rather to trigger, guide, and shape memories carried by the members of the public.

The second project analyzed in this article was devised in 1995 and represented a new approach to Plaszow. The land of the KL was sacralized and the site was presented as a hallowed space requiring complex protection. This change in thinking was partially connected to the fall of the Iron Curtain. Moreover, the new project answered to the needs of the second generation, the generation of people who were born in the first postwar decades and whose parents remembered the conflict. It was an expression of nostalgia, of yearning for the meaningful past of their parents' generation – hence the need to sacralize the sites connected to their parents' past. However, unlike their parents who used memorials to mourn the fallen and express a nationalistic agenda, the representatives of the second generation focused on human rights abuses and tried to ground their contemporary identities in history by relating them to the examples from the past.

The third project, expressing the needs of the third generation, that is the generation whose grandparents remembered the conflict, was designed in 2004 and like the 1995 project was never realized. It was conceived at a time when Poles started to develop a non-heroic narrative about the war past which partially informed the design. This project

broke with the attempts at sacralization of the land and focused on evoking an emotional response from visitors. The material remnants of war atrocities, previously deemed sacred, become secondary; the experience of the visitor in the 'here and now' became the principal purpose of memorials. Instead of sacralizing the suffering of the historic community the immediate role of new monuments was to evoke an emotional response from the visitors in order to shape their identities and politics.

## Generations

This study defines generations as an extension of a cohort (Mannheim 1970: 381). A cohort is a 'naturally occurring phenomenon,' that is an objectively existing collection of individuals defined with relation to easily measurable variable, e.g. the time of birth (Edmund and Turner, 2002: 15). A generation comes to existence on the basis of a cohort, it is a 'cohort plus'. It possesses 'a collective consciousness that permits that generation to intervene significantly in social change' (Edmund and Turner, 2002: ix). Generations are shaped by shared circumstances (e.g. significant historical events) and shared resources. In short, 'a generation becomes a significant social force if its members share a common habitus' (Edmund and Turner, 2002: 15). Cultural production of each generation shares similar characteristics and approaches similar problems in a similar manner. It is important however, to remember that the overlap between an age-defined cohort and a generation is never complete. In fact, in case of elite members of the generation, it can be secondary (Bourdieu 1988:147). The most influential members of a generation often recruit from a different cohort. David Wyatt (1993: 3) states that '[g]enerations are given impetus and voices by the work of salient elders [highlight- JG]'. Thus, this research accepts that every generation had its particular needs in relation to memory work and that those needs were fulfilled by activists and artists whose cohort was, on occasion, different from the base cohort of the generation to whose memory work they contributed.

## History of Plaszow camp

Plaszow's history is similar to that of tens of thousands of sites across Nazi occupied Europe. The camp was first created in 1942 and to erect it the Nazis demolished two prewar Jewish cemeteries and used the *macevot* (tombstones) to pave camps roads. The inmates of the camp were mostly Polish, of both Jewish and Polish ethnicity, although in 1944 Hungarian Jews en route to Auschwitz were imprisoned there as well. Plaszow existed simultaneously as a labor camp and an execution site servicing Kraków. Contemporary research estimates the number of casualties at around 8,000, vast numbers of whom were never inmates. Instead, they were brought from the city to be executed in the camp. Plaszow had two primary executions sites referred to by the prisoners with gallows humor as Dick Hill [hereafter: the Hill] and Cunt Hollow [hereafter: the Hollow] (Kotarba, 2009). The camp was closed in 1945 and most of its structures were demolished. Importantly, even before the camp was created, the Jewish cemeteries were used as an execution site. In the first execution after the Nazis took over the city, thirteen Poles were killed there in October 1939. This execution was not related to the existence

of the camp but it was nevertheless a part of the broader history of the site (Kotarba, 2003: 20).

## Monuments-as-mnemonic-devices and war generation's remembrance

The first three monuments erected in Plaszow reflect particularly well the concerns inherent in the memory work of the first generation. That is to say it reflects the concerns of people who survived the war as adults or adolescents, and therefore had meaningful memories of the conflict. A cross was erected first, between late 1946 and early 1949, on the Hill, commemorating 'the killing of Poles on this hill' (Gryta, 2013b: 167). Next, at some point in the late 1940s or possibly in early 1950s, a small boulder with inscriptions in Polish and Hebrew was erected on the Hollow. It reminded visitors about the 'several dozen thousand Jews brought from Poland and Hungary' (Gryta, 2013b: 168). Both memorials were created by local communities to mourn their fallen and the state was not involved. In fact, as Gryta (2013b: 168-169) demonstrates, they were erected 'under the radar' to avoid the State's intervention as both stood at odds with the Stalinist politics of memory. Interpreting these politics, Annamaria Orla-Bukowska notes that 'the totalitarian regime – in the interests of redirecting identity towards Communism – limited the pool of historical <<truths>>' acceptable for commemoration (Orla Bukowska 2006: 186). Christian or Jewish suffering was not included in this 'pool of truth.' The new vision was exemplified in Auschwitz, which became a shrine of an internationalist fight against imperialism led by the Soviet brothers. Plaszow, along with others sites such as former death camps in Chelmno and Treblinka, was forgotten (Gryta 2013a: 79). Consequently, the cross and the boulder narrated all the most important aspects of Plaszow's history, both its Jewish and Polish past. It was however, the 1964 monument that defined Plaszow and gave it all the features characteristic of the war generation's memory work.

The new monument was part of nation-wide commemorative campaign. First, after the end of Stalinism (in Poland in 1956) the internationalist undertones were expunged from the official memorial narrative. Later, in the 1960s, the Polish government decided to create a new overarching narrative and enshrine it in numerous monuments erected across the country. This new vision of the past was decidedly anti-German, played on nationalist sentiments, and was underscored by strong imagery of martyrdom (KKOPWM and Gryta 2013b).

Erected on the Hollow as part of this campaign, the 1964, large-scale, monument was created '[i]n honor of the martyrs murdered by the Hitlerite perpetrators of genocide in 1943–45'. The nine-meter-tall concrete structure, with the inscription on the reverse, depicted five figures, their heads bent under an invisible burden, with a fissure where their hearts should be (Szymański, 2015). Both the language, ('martyrs', 'genocide/ludobójstwo' a term that in Polish does not evoke Jewish suffering but rather mass murder of ethnic Poles) and the form (male figures 'slashed with a series of bullets from a machine gun' (Szymański 2015)) encode the Communist government's new narrative, focusing on the mass suffering of ethnic Poles as a cohesive group and not depicted as individuals. Witold Cęckiewicz, author of the memorial, placed it on the southern part of the Hollow, which itself was on the southern fringes of the camp. This

way, the monument was easily accessible and there was no need to wander through the overgrown site. In fact, given that only the immediate surroundings of the sculpture were landscaped, it was hard for visitors to access the rest of the camp, with the exception of the nearby Hill (Gryta, 2013b: 174).

The choice of the Hollow and the spatially limited form of the memorial was a consequence of interplay of complicated postwar social, cultural, and political factors. In the 1960s, Plaszow was still on the outskirts of Kraków. Nearby housing estates that today stretch far to the south of Plaszow would only start to grow. Locating the 1964 monument on the boundary of the site, next to a thoroughfare leading out of the city, was practical as it made it easily accessible.

However, and most importantly especially from the point of view of local population, the location of the monument addressed, or rather redressed, the mishandling of the most pressing postwar problem: the need to properly bury the bodies. In a sardonic letter to the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (SFFD) in June 1958, a grieving father wrote: ‘The ashes [of my son – insertion by the author] can be picked from the crematorium in Plaszow. The only reason that they are not currently being profaned by dogs is because, luckily, the ditch where they were thrown was recently flooded’ (Dokumentacja: 170). The letter arrived at the height of the relatively liberal post-Stalinist Thaw and resonated well with members of the combatant organization.

For members of the war generation taking care of the graves and killing sites was an act of very personal mourning and often also a duty dictated by their religious (Christian and Jewish) upbringing (Winter, 1998: 33-44). However, because of the particular conditions of Polish Stalinism, early acts of mourning were redefined as political and were blocked. Marcin Napiórkowski (2016) notes that the Communist government tended to properly bury only the bodies of the members of Communist People’s Guard. Other bodies, of civilians or members of the anti-Communist forces, were either buried in mass, often unmarked graves or not at all. This way their number would not diminish the number of graves of the People’s Guard, the insinuation used to legitimize the Communist government. From the 1956 Thaw onward, Kraków’s SFFD made considerable efforts to address this problem by clearing, marking, and maintaining the sites of killings and mass burial in Plaszow and across Kraków. Importantly, all of those projects focused on the immediate area of graves and killing sites: none advocated for memorials covering large areas (Dokumentacja).

The need to mourn the fallen and mark their graves only partially explains the shape of the war generation memorials. Two other factors were at play. Firstly, the issue of scale and space had to be addressed. Secondly, monuments played a part in identity politics of the first generation. Kraków, Warsaw, Poland and Europe were marked by countless sites of war atrocities. The case of Warsaw is the most telling. Having witnessed two urban uprisings it was then levelled by the Nazis in an act of retaliation. Any effort to mark all the atrocities that took place there would require the whole city, or more precisely its ruins, to be turned into a memorial. Although extreme, the case of Warsaw is nevertheless informative. Members of the first generation had to find a way of navigating the huge number of potential memory sites.

The solution came in the form of limiting the size of sites of memory. Commenting on postwar practice in the 1990s, a veteran of war generation memory work, explained that ‘we do not list [as protected heritage – insertion by the author] let’s say 200 ha of the

former camp, but some 20-30 hectares' (KKOPWM). If marking whole camps or battlefields was impossible, then only the most salient parts of those sites would be protected. Across Europe there were only very few exceptions to this rule. Auschwitz and Majdanek Museums, created in 1947, encompassed nearly the whole wartime sites (Huener, 2003: 62). Most of the site of Dachau was always recognized as important and the French Oradour-sur-Glane, the 'martyred village,' was probably the only memorial created in the first postwar years to cover the entirety of the destroyed site (Marcuse 2010: 196; Koshar 2000: 177). Yet these spaces were the exceptions that proved the rule. Oradour was seen as an 'archetype', as a 'symbol of France wounded by the German occupation' and thus it stood for other sites that were not commemorated in a similar manner (Oradour). In fact, perceived strength and importance of those few, unique sites depended on the fact that the majority of the sites across the continent were limited in size. Plaszow offers a good example of the '20 ha approach' as all the early monuments were localized in the area of the Hill and the Hollow, the killing sites. In Neuengamme, in Hamburg: 'the camp buildings had been torn down or reused as part of a model correction facility' and in 1953 a 'column was dedicated on a site outside of the former prisoners' camp, where the ashes of victims had been strewn' (Marcuse 2010: 197). Similarly, Bełżec, Treblinka, Sobibór and Chełmno were also initially abandoned and then, in the 1960s, commemorated with monuments marking only selected parts of those former camps (Gryta 2013a: 84).

Marking selected and limited areas was not only dictated by practical considerations. The first postwar memorials served as triggers for memories that the war generation visitors already possessed and at the same time helped to ground their identities. From Plaszow to Treblinka, from Bełżec to Treptower Park, from Guernsey to Jerusalem, the first generation memorials were designed as mnemonic devices evoking pre-existing narratives (Gryta 2013a: 77-87; Koshar 2000: 191-192; Carr 2014: 97; Ankersmit 2001: 184). Commenting on the Hall of Remembrance in Jerusalem, one of the most typical first generation memorials, Frank Ankersmit (2001: 184) compared it to 'a lens' that 'concentrates our feelings, associations, and knowledge' of the past and therefore is particularly suitable for the 'generation that is still fairly close' to the events. One caveat has to be added to this otherwise comprehensive analysis. Even though members of the war generation may have believed otherwise, the narratives evoked by their memorials were not an objective history nor were they accurate reflections of the past. Rankean notions of an empirically objective history dominated public discourses of the past in the 1940s and 1950s (Burke, 1991: 3-5; Szpak, 2012: 34-35). Monuments were understood to resurrect the past 'as it was' (Gladsky, 1985: 150). However, as Jay Winter and Emanuel Sivan (1999: 11) remind us, the act of remembering was always collectively constructed. Meanings and narrative clichés were always shaped socially. Therefore, monuments did not evoke 'historically accurate' narratives but rather they brought back those narratives most widespread in society. This was, however, not an interpretation that fitted into the modernistic world view of the war generation. Monuments-as-mnemonic-devices were popular with the first generation exactly because they did not challenge the tenets of modernistic history and modernistic faith in objectivity. Rather they pretended to attest to a fixed, objective past and thus supported the stable and unmoving identities of the members of the war generation.

If the early monuments did not evoke objective history then what kind of narrative did they offer and what kind of identity did they support? The 1964 Plaszow monument, Auschwitz, Treptower Park all operated in universal quantifiers. Created at the time of postwar reconstruction and the restitution of nation-states across the Europe, these memorials focused on nations and offered a vision of the past stripped of any nuance (Judt, 1992: 90). Koshar (2000: 178) notes that in case of the Oradour, the village-symbol that stood for the fate of the French during the war, there was no reference to ‘the messier details’ of history such as collaboration and passivity. If minorities, whether ethnic or religious, were mentioned it was in unofficial and small side projects erected, often illegally, on the fringes of state-sponsored memorials.

The earliest monuments in Plaszow thus exemplified a wider trend in war generation memory work. Monuments-as-mnemonic-devices dotted the landscape but marked only the spaces of executions or mass graves, banishing larger sites to oblivion. By marking the sites of death and burial they allowed visitors to mourn the fallen. Moreover, these aspired to attest to objective history, to help recollect ‘what really happened’ and at the same time, to perpetuate narratives that uphold national divisions and rigid identities.

## Postmodern challenge to memory work

Members of the first generation could use their memorials to confirm and ground their relatively stable identities because the war had seemingly little impact on the social structures they existed in. Their lives were affected, often destroyed, but the relevance of the groups structuring everyday life (family, church, local community) seemed to have survived the conflict (Judt 2005). Social change, which affected second and third generation and thus impacted their memory work, came later.

The postwar period in the Euro-Atlantic world was a time of stability bereft of conflict, when compared to the 1930s and the 1940s. Periodic outbursts of terrorist attacks in Europe and United States notwithstanding, postwar generations were spared global conflict that mobilized society in a manner comparable to the war. Moreover, with the exception of the Balkan wars, all of the postwar conflicts played outside of Europe or North America (Judt 2005). The prolonged period of peace spurred an unparalleled period of economic growth and stability that affected Euro-Atlantic societies in two meaningful ways.

The peace and prosperity that followed WWII secured its position as the principal point of reference for memory and identity work. WWI set the tone of national remembrance in the 1920s and 1930s but was ultimately overshadowed by WWII. The image of that conflict evolved and Holocaust memory moved into the limelight (Diner 2003: 39), yet nothing diminished the importance of WWII consciousness of Europeans and Northern Americans. In American memory, Vietnam looms large but, as attested by prolonged debates and memorial conflicts such as that surrounding the 1995 Enola Gay exhibition, WWII retained its hold on collective memory even there (Lebow 2006; Doss 2008; Crane 1997: 58-59). In consequence, both second and third generations, commemorated and constructed their identities in relation to a war that they did not experience.

Secondly, peace, stability and economic growth sped up the processes of globalization. The rise of new forms of accessible and fast travel, new forms of communication and the full urbanization of Euro-Atlantic societies severed the already weak links with locality



and local group (Beck, 2000: 79). The rise of new international entities in turn led to what Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002: 88) call the ‘cracking’ of ‘the container of the nation state’. Taken together, all those changes translated into a profound instability of social identities. Traditional points of reference (locality, family, group, even nation state) started to lose relevance, and new proved to be elusive. This new, profoundly unobvious reality, required a new type of memory work, that would, to use Sara Jones’ (2012: 195) phrase, address the ‘ontological uncertainty of the postmodern world’. There is, therefore, a critical difference between the memory work of the war generation, which used its own memories to ground existing identities, and the two generations that followed them. Second and third generations both worked on mediated memories to address the instability of their collective identities. Their memorials had to *create* narrative not simply *remind* them.

## Sacralization of sites of memory – second generation at work

The re-making of Plaszow as a second generation memory site started in the early 1980s and continued through to the early 2000s. During that time the site was redefined, sacralized, new projects were written, and new memorials were erected. However, the development that affected the site the most, was the building of a housing estate. Attesting to the lingering utilitarian approach to the sites of past atrocities, the creation of the estate was an echo of the memory work of the first generation. It demonstrated that that approaches to memory work evolve slowly.

Importantly, the fall of Communism had little impact on Plaszow, despite being traditionally recognized as a threshold for memory work. Liberated from state censorship, new activists could affect memory work with more ease than before, yet few actual changes were seen in the memoryscape. The thrust of activities went towards remembering Communist crimes and forgetting Communist heroes (Nijakowski 2008: 123-125, compare Gryta 2017). Little was done to redesign the memory of the Polish-German part of the war. Equally, the commemorative practices, debates, and controversies that started in the 1980s in the Euro-Atlantic world continued into the 1990s (Arnold 2011: 223, Carrier 2005: 23-24).

1989 had little impact on Plaszow. Surprisingly, this is also true of ‘Schindler’s List’. Initially it seemed, that the success of the film, partially set in the camp and filmed nearby, would give new momentum to memory work. In fact, Charlesworth (2004: 291) commented on ‘the power of Spielberg’s moral vision’ and noted that the film impacted the site ‘forever’. If Spielberg’s influence can be easily traced in Kraków, the municipality decided to create a museum in Schindler’s Factory partially inspired by the film (Marszałek and Bednarek 2011: 7), then the changes in Plaszow turned out to be limited. None of the projects from 1990s and 2000s were realized and the preservationists responsible for the site soon ceased to quote the film as having any influences over it (Płaszów. Obóz do 2008).

Rather, the first sign of the new style in memory work came in 1984 in the form of a small tombstone commemorating thirteen Poles murdered in Plaszow area in September 1939. The new monument was located neither in the Hollow nor at the Hill, the sites marked by the war generation, but on the northern fringes of the camp site in the area of

the leveled Jewish cemeteries. Thus, both the borders and the meaning of the site were expanded. Younger activists, unlike representatives of the war generation, aimed at commemorating all aspects of the site's past, even though they did not fully understand the potential of Plaszow and the number of stories attached to it. 'The process of commemoration of new places of struggle and martyrdom should in principle be finished' the KCCPMSM (184: 2) reported when planning the 1984 memorial. In fact, the effect of their project was the opposite. It did not finish the process of memorialization, rather it reminded how much there was to be done. It brought pre-camp executions into a focus and drew attention to the desecrated Jewish cemeteries. Moreover, it reminded local authorities that the whole 80 ha of an overgrown meadow, and not just the Hill and the Hollow, used to be a camp. Gradually, some city officials started to see Plaszow as a problem, as a topic that had to be addressed in its entirety.

The first solution to the Plaszow problem, developed in the 1980s, came in the form of a project called 'Contemplation Park' and was a cross between the ideas of the first and second generations. On the one hand, the western parts of the site, including the Hill, the Hollow, the 1984 tombstone, and the remnants of the Jewish cemeteries would be merged with the already existing nature reserve lying to the west of the KL. The Park '[w]ould have a dual role: it would be a place of exposition of the camp and the cemeteries, and recreational space so needed in that district' (Płaszów. Obóz do 2008). The idea to expose historic remnants for contemplation was clearly tied to the sensibilities of the second generation. By contrast, the eastern part of the camp where the administration barracks and some of the warehouses were located, would be turned into a housing estate, an idea that represented the more utilitarian approach of the war generation. The park was never created but the estate was built and populated in the early 1990s (Płaszów. Obóz do 2008).

The idea to create the Contemplation Park never came to fruition, however, it attested to the fact that some memory activists started to recognize the site as an important space with great memorial potential. This thinking was refined and expressed fully in the 1995 'Study in history and conservation of the former concentration camp Płaszów' (Żółciak, 1995). The 'site is a hallowed space and therefore all the authentic traces of the camp are particularly important' wrote its author, Jarosław Żółciak (1995: 91). Local architect, councilor, and an influential memory activist, Żółciak had a special interest in Kraków's past and through the 1990s and 2000s managed to position himself as one of the most influential experts on the topic (Płaszów. Obóz do 2008; Płaszów. Obóz od 2009; Grupa Projektowa Proxima). The 'Study' was one of the first documents in which he spelled out his understanding of and vision for the camp. He thoroughly criticized the approach of his predecessors who allowed the site to be neglected, subdivided, and partially built over, and who focused only on selected few spots (Żółciak, 1995: 55-56). In his view the roughly 40 hectares that still remain of the original site was hallowed and therefore deserved protection and maintenance. He advocated fencing the area off and creating an open-air memorial with a small museum located in the so-called Grey House, one of the few original camp structures (Żółciak, 1995: 93). All the existing camp remnants, mostly barely visible ruins of barracks, earthworks, and traces of roads, were defined as proofs of the past, and endowed with quasi-sacred status. The only intervention inside of the camp that Żółciak allowed would come in the form of simple gardening (Żółciak, 1995: 98). Interestingly, he also called for a construction of a set of structures; watchtowers,

and gates as well as the erection of a monument. All of those constructions were to be placed not in their original locations but around the Grey House, in a theme park of sorts (Żółciak, 1995: 93).

The contradiction between an attempt at preservation of 'all the authentic traces of the camp' and the creation of an inauthentic theme park is only superficial. In fact, the first caused the latter. In his 'Study', Żółciak (1995: 56) explains that 'the area of the former Plaszow camp has mainly content-driven value connected to the actions that took place here; the material value of objects is incommensurate to their meaning as authentic relics of the drama'. Thus, he admitted that there were barely any actual remnants left. In his eyes, the status of the site was connected to the history it witnessed. The camp was not important because of the value of the artefacts but because the land itself was a proof of wartime atrocities. The creation of, essentially, a set of decorations *on the fringes* of the camp was therefore a way of commemorating its history *and* keeping the site intact. Even though the newly erected structures would be profoundly inauthentic they would fulfill their educational purpose. The narrative presented in the museum and the 'theme park' would be authenticated by the hallowed site adjacent to it. The land of the former KL was envisaged as an artefact that pointed to the stories of suffering and persecution and thus proved the narratives outlined in the museum and the theme park (Jones, 2014: 41-42). The need to redefine barely visible debris, on a neglected site, as a hallowed space of memory was a direct outcome of the situation in which the members of the second generation conducted their memory work. They had no direct connection to the events of the past and a profound need to ground their identities in this past. Treating the sites of suffering of *their parents* with sacral reverence was thus an expression of a very particular strand of nostalgia that is 'an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world' (Boym 2001: xiv). It is the yearning for variously defined Golden Ages: for safe homes, for the land and time of adolescence (Boym, 2001: xv) and for the 'Good and Right' (Wilson, 2005:82). Nostalgia expressed via the sites of atrocities was a feeling of a similar kind. It was not some perverse yearning for the past atrocities but for the time when life made sense and when identities were defined, set in stone. For times when it was possible to differentiate friends from foes. It was a nostalgia for the 'Simple and Meaningful' if not necessarily for the 'Good and Right'. Through their nostalgic projects members of the second generation wanted to stabilize their identities and to ground them in the past. That it had to be their parents' past, and the war past in particular, there was no doubt. Wilson (2005: 89-93) notes that yearning for the time of adolescence of one's parents as a feature of postwar American culture. Similarly, Kaja Kaźmierska (2016: 121) observes the importance of the war for the generation born between 1945 and 1955 analyzing their oral testimonies: 'All the interviewees spontaneously start their autobiographical narratives from the war experiences of their parents and the influence of the war on the interviewee's own biography and the biography of their family'. For members of the second generation the war was a beginning of a new era and 1939 was the year zero of their reality. It is then hardly surprising that the war was commemorated with a new type of piety. Places such as Plaszow were not just any sites of memory equivalent to medieval battlefields. They were the sites of the suffering of their parents' generation, the sites where the lives of the (then unborn) children were defined. Hence the nostalgic need to sacralize Plaszow and to reimagine the site as hallowed. Plaszow, and numerous other

sites across Poland and Europe, confirmed the story that was already a part of autobiographical narratives. In turn, it was only proper to conserve the site and maintain it in an unchanged shape as a lasting connection to the past.

The process of sacralization was visible not only in Kraków. Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006) provides the example of the so-called War of the Crosses that played out in Auschwitz in the late 1980s and 1990s. It was a contest over the meaning of the camp between various Jewish and Polish groups and activists. They all interpreted the site differently, some as solely a Polish memorial, some as a Jewish one, while some tried to reconcile both histories. The only thing they had in common was the conviction that the whole site of the former camp, including the spaces that were not part of the museum, were hallowed and had to be protected (Zubrzycki 2006). Similarly, Ulrich Baer analyzing a photograph of an empty landscape in Ohrdurf camp taken in 1995, sees it as the photographer's attempt 'to see the unfathomable void first encountered by his father' (Baer 2000: 48). Baer explains that a need to reconnect with the story narrated by a soldier-father prompted an artist-son to capture, and elevate to a rank of a memorial, the emptiness of the camp sites.

Rudy Koshar observed a similar process in Germany. Commenting on a fashion for local archaeological digs he noted that '[t]he paradigmatic expression of the German memory landscape was now [in the 1970s and 1980s – insertion by the author] a topography of traces' (Koshar, 2000: 228). Second generation West Germans started to uncover the remnants of the Nazi past both in Berlin and in the provinces. Professional or semi-professional digs took place all over the country and the rediscovery of forgotten sites of the Nazi past was supported by numerous grass-roots organizations. The new fashion attested to the existence of the second generation's nostalgia for their parents' past, even if the past was not necessarily always glorious (Koshar, 2000: 227).

Koshar (2000: 227) notes that the 'dig where you stand' mania allowed previously marginalized groups to lay their claims to collective memory. Sites connected to the suffering of groups that experienced discrimination because of their political beliefs or sexual orientation were now discovered (Koshar, 2000: 228). This way, identity politics of the second generation was validated by the past. War relics attested to the historicity of contemporary identities (Koshar, 2000: 228).

Interest in the archaeological digs not only allowed the second root to ground its multiple identities in the history, it also marked a rupture with the first generation. The common denominator between all the new groups and topics remembered since the 1970s, was the focus on the breaches of human rights regardless of national affiliation. The first generation operated in universal quantifiers. It subsumed all the victims and persecutors into simple categories, most often nations. Activists recruited from the second generation expanded and nuanced those lists. Jews, Sinti, Roma and homosexuals started to be recognized in places that previously only commemorated 'martyrs'. Even more importantly, the first steps were made to recognize not only the suffering received but also inflicted by ones' own nation, and here Western Germany paved the way (Koshar 2000: 219; 228). Indeed, Jay Winter (2013: 49) notes that from the 1970s we can observe the 'braiding' of memory and human rights. Amplifying the stories of diverse minority groups that were among the victims and among the perpetrators (not to mention the sometimes porous boundaries between those categories) made society focus on breaches

of human rights rather than on simple (and often vengeful) narratives about national suffering (Levy and Sznajder 2002).

## Individualistic desacralization and third generation emotions

While the approaches to memory work of the first and second postwar generations were distinct, it is also important to recognize that their evolution took time and some ideas were held in common by subsequent generations. The memory work of the third generation is a case in point. On the one hand, it continued to tie together memory with human rights. On the other, it broke, in a dramatic fashion with attempts to sacralize sites of memory. At the same time, some memorials retained the features of the second or even the first generation memory work. For example, the planned new exhibition in Auschwitz did not incorporate any of the ideas introduced by the third generation (Dzieje).

Interestingly, and pointing towards the entanglement of the memory work of WWII with attempts to commemorate other events, revolutionary ideas that became popular with the third generation were foreshadowed by the 1982 Vietnam Veterans Memorial. On the one hand, the Memorial is tied to the established traditions by listing all the American fallen, although it updated this tradition according to the needs of the second generation by incorporating women. On the other hand, Maya Lin broke away from the second generation norms. Her monument was located on the sacred ground adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, DC, but it seemingly did not add to the sacredness of this space. Rather it scarred the place by cutting into the hill on which it was built.

Encapsulating the priorities of the second generation, it reminded viewers that war, any war, is not a cause for glory but a source of suffering (Sturken 1991: 119).

Foreshadowing needs of the third generation, it did not express nostalgia for the past but it aimed to shock, scare and evoke an emotional response. Controversial at the time of unveiling it eventually became accepted part of the American memorial pantheon thus making Maya Lin a 'salient elder' of the third generation (Wyatt 1993: 3).

During the rise of the third generation Plaszow experienced numerous small changes but no major redevelopment. What is more, the memorials actually created (e.g. commemoration of Hungarian Jewish women and a recreated *matceva* of a female Jewish educator) were in line with the memory work of the second generation. They expanded the list of victims and brought back the rich and multifaceted past that the Nazis had sought to erase. They also brought to the fore female figures that enriched the picture even further. By commenting on the many breaches of human rights both memorials continued a trend that had been initiated by second generation activists. Moreover, the new interest in the Jewish suffering visible in those memorials attested to changes in Polish memory. In the early 2000s, after the controversy caused by Jan Gross' *Neighbors*, Poles started to commemorate their Jewish brethren and attempts to create multicultural memories became more widespread (Michlic 2007: 25). Consequently, from 2005 onward visitors to Plaszow, a site that still looked like an overgrown meadow, could learn about the suffering and death of both ethnic Poles and Jews of various nationalities both genders, as well as Nazi attempts to destroy a whole culture.

The recognition of different categories of victims may have overlapped with the approach of the second generation, but the form of memorials created by the third generation was drastically different. In Plaszow, it was expressed in a yet unrealized (as of early 2018) project for total redevelopment of the former KL. Selected in an international competition in 2007 and created by architectural firm Proxima, the new plan must have seemed iconoclastic for second generation memory activists (Grupa Projektowa Proxima; Płaszów. Obóz od 2009). The Proxima project, in its first version, advocated literally cutting through the sacred site of Plaszow. Its creators envisaged a footbridge spanning the site, going over and above the camps structures, ‘penetrating the camp like a probe that pierces all the spaces of human life’ (Grupa Projektowa Proxima). The authors justified their approach on the grounds that the building did not ‘physically exist anyway’ (Grupa Projektowa Proxima). The roll-call square was to be covered with gravel and stone plinths, and hollowed niches symbolizing the emptiness of death, were to be placed there. The plan also called for: a line of columns placed around the memorial to mark its border; for low concrete walls to mark the places where camp structures used to be placed; and for an illumination that would highlight the memorial’s features after sunset. A new museum, an underground building called simply Memorial, would be built outside of the south border of the camp grounds so as not to destroy the artefacts (Grupa Projektowa Proxima).

Unsurprisingly, the radical vision caused strong reactions with Żółciak and a number of employees of local and regional heritage protection services (Płaszów. Obóz do 2008). Some of their objections interfered deeply with the design and called into question the main idea for the monument. Proxima architects were accused of mistreatment of the relics of the camp and were forced to alter the route of the footbridge. In the updated version, it followed the presumed line of one of the original camp roads and did not cut through the camp structures (Grupa Projektowa Proxima). The decision to move the footbridge reveals the differences between the second and third generation activists. Żółciak and second generation preservationists conceptualized the camp as a hallowed space and all the remnants, which mostly included scattered stones, as sacred relics. For the authors of the 2007 project ‘[t]he emptiness of the space was not enough to recall the image of the camp’ (Grupa Projektowa Proxima). Their project therefore was ‘a new scenario for a stage which has to show truth, to move feelings, evoke right emotions, cause a reaction’ (Grupa Projektowa Proxima). They went even further calling the design ‘a keystone between contemplative space and the present day’ and noting that ‘a spiritual transformation requires time and space’ (Grupa Projektowa Proxima). The remnants themselves had no power, they were not evocative enough. The camp was only seen as a ‘stage’. Framed with new constructions it would allow visitors to feel the connection to the past. The footbridge cutting through the layers of history was a key element of this ‘keystone’ allowing visitors to step back in time. Walking around, in fact *through*, the camp, contemplating the fate of the murdered, would offer a ‘spiritual transformation’ for tourists.

A similar approach, often utilizing the same concepts can be found in numerous other memorials created for the third generation. The recent redevelopments of the Bełżec death camp in eastern Poland (2004) and in the Austrian Hartheim Castle, a Nazi euthanasia center (2003), to name but a few, share key similarities with the approach of Proxima designers. In Bełżec the central part of the memorial was cut in half by a path

delving deep into the land. In Hartheim a footbridge cutting through the gas chamber was built (Schloss Hartheim; Bełżec). Both memorials preserved the sites and used their aura to evoke emotions and affect visitors in an unprecedented manner. Creating the feeling of immersion in the past, collapsing the boundary between past and present, the third generation memorials allowed visitors to walk across space and time to obtain an experiential connection with the events commemorated. To use Alison Landsberg's (2004: 2) formulation, they have 'the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics' and to sensitize visitors to the breaches of human rights.

Both the second and third generations constructed their identity with recourse to history. The most important difference between them lay therefore not in the general direction of memory work but in their approach to sites of remembrance. Żółciak envisaged the camp as hallowed ground. The most important parts of his project were the relics. For members of the Proxima team the actual physical remnants were secondary. They were but a 'stage' upon which their 'scenario' would play out to 'show the truth [...] [and] evoke the right emotions' (Grupa Projektowa Proxima). If the second generation tended to sacralize the land then the third aimed at de-sacralization and individualization of experience. If the second generation needed to confirm their identities in the history, then the third yearned for something more, for a direct communion with the past.

## Conclusion

Krakow's Civic Committee for Protection of Monuments of Struggle and Martyrdom spoke prematurely when they asserted in 1984 that the commemoration of sites of suffering in Kraków was nearly over. In fact, their own actions would contribute to new waves of memorializations. They repeated the stance of the war generation without realizing that their own interest in new categories of victims and a more holistic approach to sites of suffering heralded a new type of memory work.

This new approach, which began in the 1970s and the 1980s, continued to be employed well beyond the collapse of the Iron Curtain: it was expressed again in 2012 by the author of an article calling for tidying up of the site of KL Plaszow. Both the newspaper article and the Committee assertion confirm that political circumstances matter but only to a point. They may influence the wording of inscriptions or choice of topics for commemorations. However, it is the very particular generational culture that dictates the forms of and approaches to sites of suffering.

The first generation, the generation of people who survived the conflict, operated in a reality in which family, local community and nation provided valid and seemingly stable identities. They created monuments-as-mnemonic-devices that were to trigger their memories about the past, confirm their identities, and most importantly, to mark graves and sites of suffering of their fallen. Faced with the sheer number of the camps, battlegrounds, and sites of skirmishes, the members of the first generation chose to focus their work on spatially limited but particularly salient areas, those of graves and sites of executions for example.

Trying to come to terms with the 'ontological uncertainty of the postmodern world' and to express their nostalgia for the Simple and Meaningful past of their parents the members of the second generation envisaged their sites of memory in a completely different manner. They redefined the sites of suffering as sacred spaces where every,

even the smallest remnant attested to the past. Since identification with traditional groups was becoming much more complicated, they also attempted to historicize their new identities and connect them to the war past. They expanded the lists of victims to include categories previously absent. In so doing they reoriented memory work away from attempts at glorification of ones' nation towards the need to stigmatize human suffering and breaches of human rights.

The process of braiding human rights with memory is still ongoing but it found new momentum in the memory work of third generation. The generation of people whose grandparents experienced the war have not expressed the same semi-sacred respect of their parents when approaching memory sites. Rather they have seen the sites as 'keystones' allowing for an emotional connection with the past. Their memorials offered a symbolic journey in time; they cut through the remnants of history to reach the essence of human suffering, and to allow members of the third generation to empathize. The experiential contact with the memories of breaches of human rights has the potential to shape identities not on the grounds of knowledge but rather through emotion.

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