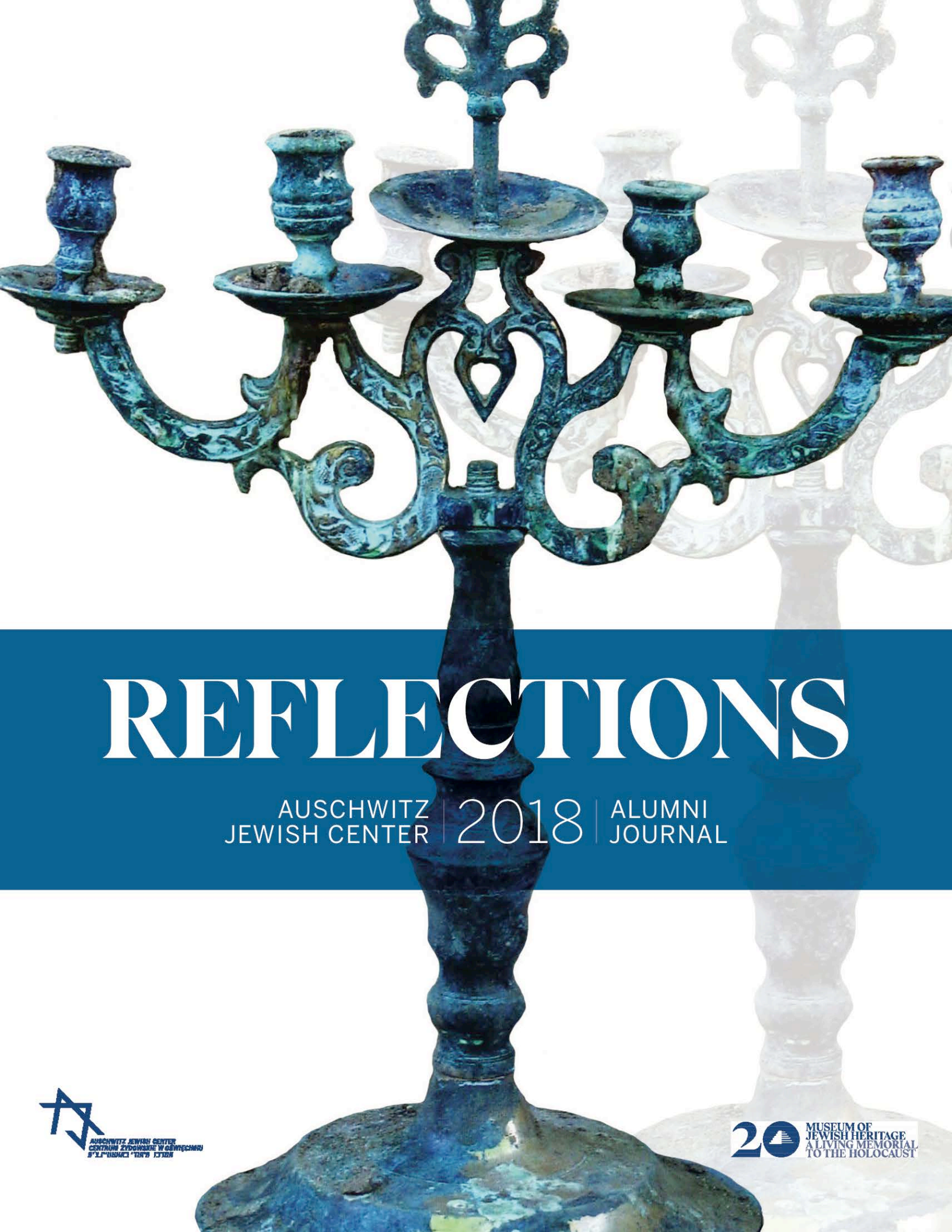

REFLECTIONS

AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER | 2018 | ALUMNI JOURNAL

AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER
CENTRUM ŻYDOWSKIE W OŚWIĘCIMIU

20 MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE
A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST

ABOUT THE AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER

Established in 2000, the **Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC)**, a proud member of the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust family, is a cultural and educational institution located in Oświęcim, Poland.

Photo by Andrzej Rudiak

The only Jewish presence in the vicinity of Auschwitz, the AJC is comprised of three buildings: the Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue; the adjoining Kornreich House, which once housed a Jewish family and today houses a Jewish Museum and educational programs; and the 100-year-old Kluger Family House, which belonged to the last Jewish resident of Oświęcim, Szymon Kluger, after WWII.

For more information, visit **ajcf.org**

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE – A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST

The Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is New York's contribution to the global responsibility to never forget. The Museum is committed to the crucial mission of educating diverse visitors about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust.

Photo by John Halpern

The Museum protects the historical record and promotes understanding of Jewish heritage. It mobilizes memory to teach the dangers of intolerance and challenges visitors—including 60,000 schoolchildren a year—to let the painful lessons of the past guide them to envision a world worthy of their futures.

For more information, visit **mjhnyc.org**

Cover:
Menorah excavated at the site of the former Great Synagogue in Oświęcim in 2004.
Auschwitz Jewish Center Collection

ABOUT *REFLECTIONS*

Reflections is an annual academic journal of selected pieces by Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC) program alumni. Its aim is to capture the perspectives, experiences, and interests of that year's participants. The AJC Newsletter, published three times per year, provides snapshots of the Center's work; ***Reflections*** is an in-depth supplement published at the end of each year. The pieces in this issue are authored by alumni of the **American Service Academies Program (ASAP)** and the **Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows Program**.

The **American Service Academies Program (ASAP)** is a two-week educational initiative for a select group of cadets and midshipmen from the U.S. Military, Naval Academy, Coast Guard, and Air Force academies. Throughout the in situ program, the group works to gain a better understanding of pre-war Jewish life and its subsequent devastation. Within this framework, students are challenged to understand what can happen in the absence of open and democratic governing institutions — when evil is given free rein, when fear overpowers ethics, and when democratic ideals are not defended.

The **Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows Program: A Bridge to History** is a three-week study trip for graduate students studying the Holocaust in a variety of fields. It is the goal of the fellowship that Fellows gain not only knowledge of the Holocaust sites they visit, but also an understanding of the legacy of the Holocaust in Poland, its effects on collective memory, and complexities surrounding such categories as victim, bystander, and perpetrator. After an orientation in New York City, the Fellows travel in Poland for three weeks, during which time they visit Kraków, Warsaw, Łódź, Treblinka, and Oświęcim (Auschwitz). The Fellows explore Poland's rich Jewish heritage and meet with local leaders to learn about pre-war Jewish life, life under the Nazi occupation and Communism, and the state of Jewish communities and memory in Poland today.

To learn more about AJC International Programs, visit **mjhnyc.org/ajc-international-programs/**

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What is Auschwitz: Memorial, Museum, or Misrepresented?

BY ROBERT BELLANTONI

It is a place that defies common sense. It is eerily beautiful, yet it is the site of mass murder and true evil. It is alive, and it is dead. This is Auschwitz.

This is Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp where 1.1 million people were brutally murdered. They came from all backgrounds, ages, and nationalities: just regular people. It is here that they suffered for years in the worst conditions possible. It is here where you will find the worst of humanity. You will see a small pond where human ash was carelessly dumped as the crematoria were overflowing, and you will walk by the grove where families heard screams from the gas chamber as they awaited their own deaths. But sometimes you can also find the best of humanity. You will likely hear the story of how a Polish sergeant was arbitrarily sentenced to death by starvation in a dark cell. Instead, a Catholic friar named Maximilian Kolbe voluntarily took his place because the sergeant had a family. Still, it is hard to take it all in.

This is Auschwitz, the tourist site where over 44 million people have come to see with their own eyes what happened here (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum). As you walk towards the camp, someone might remark, “Is it just me, or does this feel like an amusement park entrance?” Tour busses, ticket booths, bookstores, long lines of high-spirited teenagers, and beautiful weather. It might not feel – initially at least – like the site where so many were murdered and imprisoned. You could see a man, perhaps a local, casually riding his bike through Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Or you could spot someone walking bare-chested along the infamous railroad line.

This is Auschwitz, the museum and the memorial. Walking through the historic buildings, you will find many of them repurposed as exhibits dedicated to different victim groups. You will come across nearly two tons of human hair and thousands of pots, suitcases, dresses, and shoes. You might see a few hundred prosthetic legs and arms, too. You will feel uncomfortable walking through hallways with the mug shots of thousands of prisoners staring at you. You will certainly walk through the barracks, enter a gas chamber and point out the Zyklon B vent, or stare down the train tracks. And how could you miss the notorious gate marked “Arbeit Macht Frei” (Work Will Make You Free) as soon as you walk in? Surely, everyone knows this sign, but you will sadly discover that forty-one percent of Americans do not even know what happened here (Astor, 2018). Finally, at the end of your visit, you will be exhausted from walking the 472 acres that the camps span (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum). And you will still wonder how this all happened.

Auschwitz is all of this and so much more.

This was my experience as part of the American Service Academies Program. After two weeks of intense study and discussion about the Holocaust and mass atrocities, we ventured to Auschwitz. There, at the symbolic center of the Holocaust itself, I experienced firsthand the mystifying reality of Auschwitz. It was most intriguing to witness how the staff and educators were forced to confront its many identities. Here, at one of the

most unique sites in the world, they are given the daunting task of ensuring millions of people understand the Holocaust while simultaneously protecting its history and respecting its victims. This is the dilemma of Holocaust education, and Auschwitz makes it a reality.

Reflecting upon our visit to Auschwitz I, several of those in the group were a little disappointed in what they saw. They did not expect the exhibits, the crowds, or the reconstruction of some buildings. Rather, they wanted to see Auschwitz as it "really was." I understood. It was strange going into a gas chamber or touring exhibits where people once lived and died. It felt wrong. Yet I also believe that such exhibits are necessary. Should not we be happy that so many people come to Auschwitz to learn? After all, most visitors seemed to be tourists visiting from Krakow for a day trip while we had two weeks of non-stop Holocaust education. I began to further comprehend the many traits of Auschwitz and understand the controversies that accompany them.

Consider the challenges facing the staff at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Should the two tons of human hair be preserved (Engelhart 2015)? Which buildings should be reconstructed? Which should be allowed to decay? Which victim groups should be represented in exhibits? Indeed, it is this effort to educate the masses, preserve history, and pay proper respect that complicates the identity of Auschwitz. We do not want this hallowed ground to become a Holocaust theme park, as the architectural and Holocaust historian Robert Jan van Pelt suggested (Engelhart 2015). But to what extent can a nearly eighty-year-old relic remain truly genuine?

Some, like Robert Jan van Pelt, argue that the best way to honor the victims is to completely close Auschwitz II-Birkenau after the last survivor passes. Van Pelt proposes that "at that future date, may the slowly crumbling debris of decay suggest the final erasure of memory" (BBC 2009). He contends that it is better to let the site deteriorate naturally than artificially reconstruct it, especially when eighty to ninety percent of the original buildings are destroyed or in ruins (Curry 2010). But how could we seal off Birkenau when one of the powerful messages of the Holocaust is "Never Forget"? While I do not agree with his thinking, there is still a valuable message to take away. We cannot replicate what happened at these killing centers. One Auschwitz survivor told us, "I'm not sure why you're going there. You won't see much anymore besides grass." She was telling us, I believe, that this *is not* Auschwitz anymore. Sure, it may be the same physical location, but for us to even consider comparing the present Auschwitz to the past is foolish. We can never begin to understand the victims' experiences, and, as van Pelt argues, we must stop trying to replicate them.

Prior to the 70th anniversary of the camp's liberation, Piotr Cywiński, director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, eloquently expressed the importance of preserving Auschwitz. When asked "Why is the immensity of Birkenau so significant?" he responded:

> Because it is authentic. Even if most wooden barracks no longer exist, even if SS officers blew up gas chambers, even if grass has reappeared where it had grown before the war, the presence of the Shoah is still evident…this is much more than any exhibition in the world or the most elaborate memorial. Provided, of course, that one has previous knowledge of history (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum).

Cywiński's statement summarizes the duality of Auschwitz. Despite the physical changes in its landscape, Auschwitz is still the center of the Holocaust. It is the most enduring evidence of what happens when humanity sits idly by. Yes, Auschwitz is a museum, a memorial, and a symbol. But at its very heart, it is the mass murder

of over a million innocent individuals that makes Auschwitz what it is. That is why this concentration camp is so special, and that is why its preservation is of utmost importance.

We always chant “never forget” and “never stop asking why.” Yet seldom does the average person truly consider how we must balance education and commemoration when discussing the Holocaust. Auschwitz makes this dichotomy a reality because it is a place that defies common sense. Where else in the world do people flock by the millions to see one of the most shocking examples of human cruelty? So, although you might come across a group of giggling teenagers or a casual biker, you will undoubtedly walk away astonished that humanity was capable of such a crime. And when you finally catch that last glimpse of the camp on your tour bus back to civilization, you will marvel at the strength of anybody who survived and pray that it never happens again. This is Auschwitz, for me at least.

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Addressing Failures of Empathy in Responses to Genocide

BY SEQUOIA CHUN

During my visit to the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, I was particularly struck by a gallery in the core exhibition on some of the 76,000 French Jews deported to Nazi camps in the East between 1942 and 1944 (Yad Vashem). There were too many portraits on the walls for me to spend time with each one, but I stayed as long as possible at that exhibit, examining photographs of those people in their normal and dignified lives. Each person had a name, an address, a family, and a story that will never be completely told or understood. This part of the museum had an enduring effect on me. In the study of such a vast and incomprehensible evil as the Holocaust, I was able to get a glimpse of the lives of individual people who lived at that time. My natural response to the exhibit added to a question raised in my previous studies: what roles do individual connection and empathy have in genocide education and prevention?

During the 20th century, hundreds of millions of people were displaced, persecuted and murdered, mostly by their own governments. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 and entered into force in 1951. The Convention was followed by the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court, in July 2002. One hundred and thirty-nine countries, not including the United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, and Indonesia, have so far ratified these agreements (United Nations). Despite these public international commitments, the international community has failed to prevent genocides in the years since 1945. Millions of people have been murdered in genocides in Cambodia, Darfur, and Rwanda, and in major democides in China and the USSR.

Paul Slovic is a psychologist at the University of Oregon who studies how people and societies react to mass suffering and death. He believes that one fundamental problem in preventing genocide is that statistics about mass atrocities or death fail to spark emotion in others, and thus fail to motivate action. He calls this phenomenon “psychophysical numbing,” meaning that people are unable to connect on an emotional level with the suffering of large numbers of other people.

Slovic believes that humans have two fundamentally different ways of understanding the world, which guide both our actions and decision-making. One system is rapid, intuitive, automatic, and experiential. It is what most might call human “snap judgment” or “gut feeling,” and is immediately self-evident based on our biological and cultural biases. The second system is analytical and deliberative. It is based upon reason, logic, conscious decision-making, and rational analysis of abstract concepts like statistics. Multiple psychological studies indicate that the strong “gut feelings” created by our first system of thought are necessary to generate emotion, which is usually the main factor in our motivation to act on behalf of others (Schwarz 12).

One major reason that mass atrocity is often met by indifference or lack of action in the international community is the human tendency to ignore the plights of individuals in a perceived outgroup. Affect and “snap judgments” of good and bad evolved to help humans survive by protecting individuals and their communities

from present, visible, and immediate dangers. It is believed that humans have spent 96 percent of their 500,000-year evolutionary history living in small hunter-gather communities of 30-100 people before the development of agriculture allowed civilizations to take shape. Robin Dunbar, an anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist, did research in the 1990s that posited "Dunbar's Number" as the maximum number of people with whom it is possible for a human to have stable relationships. That number is around 150, but it can increase to around 250 depending upon how a given society is structured (Dunbar 4). This is why traditional communal societies, like Amish church communities, are never much larger than that: the bonds that knit the community together break down when it is no longer true that everyone knows everyone else.

While most Western civilizations today are not predicated upon strong personal relationships among all members of society, Dunbar's findings show how powerful and exclusive innate human tribalism is. For most of our evolutionary history, human societies have consisted of very small, insulated ingroups, and humans still gravitate towards communities and activities that create feelings of inclusion and familiarity. While this is a valuable impulse, it means that humans are often limited in our awareness of those not included in our ingroups. We are less inclined to empathize with the suffering of outgroup members, especially when our differences are compounded by physical distance, lack of a common language, and cultural and racial divides.

Despite advancements in access to information and education, and the global role the United States has accepted in the postwar world, our ingroup/outgroup mentality has still superseded the obvious need for intervention in recent mass atrocities. Many nations have failed to prevent the deaths of millions of people, most notably in Rwanda 24 years ago. The scope of this genocide would positively merit intervention if our policy decisions were based on a rational assessment of the value of such a large number of human lives. If we as a society believe that every human life has equal value, then the relationship between the value of saving lives versus the number of lives saved should be linear, but that is not how leaders or nations evaluate whether to intervene in an atrocity.

There is another psychological principle that could contribute to a reluctance to intervene. In the 19th century, a psychophysical principle, known as Weber's Law, was discovered that showed that our ability to detect changes in a physical stimulus rapidly decreases as the magnitude of the stimulus increases. Our perceptual systems seem to be designed to sensitize us to small changes in our environment at the expense of making us less able to detect large changes. Psychophysical numbing may result from our inability to appreciate losses of life as their numbers become larger.

Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel laureate and researcher in judgment and behavioral economics, incorporated this psychophysical principle of decreasing sensitivity into prospect theory and the value function (Kahneman 1). When applied to human lives, this function implies that the subjective value of saving a specific number of lives is greater for a small tragedy than for a larger one.

Several studies on life-saving interventions have documented psychophysical numbing or proportional reasoning. The proportion of lives saved carries more weight than the number of lives saved when people evaluate an intervention. When people are given the choice of saving a low percentage of many rather than a high percentage of a few, we experience a "collapse of compassion."

Images and personal stories hit us more powerfully than statistics. This is known as the "identifiable victim effect." Imagery – whether photos, sounds, smells, or testimony – conveys meaning viscerally, and can help us relate and make the suffering of others more real for us. It is easier for people to relate to, feel compassion for, and be willing to help one person, such as Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the face by the Taliban for going to school, than it is for us to understand that over 100,000 soldiers and tens of thousands of civilians have died as a result of the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

Left to our own devices and intuitive patterns of thought, humans generally favor individual victims and sensational stories that are closer to home and easier to imagine, rather than masses of suffering people to whom we feel little connection and on whose behalf we are unwilling to act. Newspapers and television media both reflect and reinforce this dynamic. In 2004, ABC allotted 18 minutes of total coverage to the ongoing genocide in Darfur, NBC allotted five minutes, and CBS allotted three minutes. All of these channels devoted far more time to the case of Natalie Holloway, an American girl missing in Aruba, and to Martha Stewart and Michael Jackson (Slovic 8). Basic psychological factors and media reinforcement make it very difficult to overcome our reluctance to intervene to stop genocide and mass atrocities.

One way to combat this tendency is to highlight the stories of individuals affected by mass atrocity. I found individual stories to be invaluable to my own education about the Holocaust in the American Service Academies Program. Survivors' testimonies in particular are unforgettable and an essential aspect of Holocaust education, and the survivors I met spoke to the human aspects of the historical events we studied. Listening to survivor testimony about human existence under utterly inhuman circumstances is central not only to factual education about the Holocaust, but also to developing an enduring empathic response in the listener that will hopefully become a call to action against future mass atrocities. People must understand intellectually and viscerally how genocide affects the lives of individual people and that, in the words of Holocaust survivor Abel Herzberg, "six million Jews were not murdered during the Holocaust; one Jew was murdered six million times" (Maximin).

However, in order to avoid genocide and mass atrocities in the future we must set up institutions that recognize and are insulated from the weakness of human moral intuition and the risks of compassion fatigue and psychic numbing. Multinational or regional treaties could be set up to create pre-authorized monitoring bodies and impose economic sanctions or the use of force when genocide or atrocities are imminent. These types of agreements will be very difficult to negotiate due to national sovereignty concerns, but the importance of such preventative measures cannot be overstated. Recognizing that these concerns may limit the prospect for proactive and pre-authorized intervention, perhaps an active, ongoing anti-genocide international body could be constructed to monitor and report on the condition of human rights worldwide. Such an organization could function in much the same fashion as environmental monitoring bodies.

International human rights organizations and news media should be educated to understand the importance of personal narratives of suffering and loss rather than statistics when documenting mass human rights violations. In trying to emphasize objective facts, human rights organizations risk losing the ability to connect with supporters on a human and actionable level. Paul Farmer, a medical anthropologist and doctor, has written eloquently about the power of images, narrative and first-person testimony to overcome our failure of imagination in considering the suffering of distant people (Prison Photography). However, there are caveats

about the use of emotionally focused media in crises. Repetition and excessive information can eventually numb the moral imagination just as much as ignorance can.

Advances in the social sciences have allowed human beings to learn more about themselves, their fallacies and unconscious biases. This knowledge invites a responsibility to recognize the limitations inherent in our decision-making when we use solely our intuitive moral judgment. While education, awareness, and empathy are powerful motivators and can act as calls to action, all humans are vulnerable to indifference and lack of compassion towards members of an outgroup. In genocides and mass atrocities, there are too many lives at stake for intervention to depend upon domestic media and public opinion. Ultimately, the strongest prevention against future genocide will be national and international policies rooted in a rational respect for the value of individual human lives.

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When Resistance Becomes Duty

BY ELAINE WEAVER

Six feet, three inches. He stands at attention—head erect, eyes in the boat, chin in, shoulders back, chest out, stomach in. His pursed lips curl downward into a scowl as his piercing eyes fixate on an object somewhere over the horizon. Perched on top of his head is his cover, constructed of glistening black vinyl at the brim and dark gray canvas all around. On his left breast pocket, he flaunts his collection of ribbons and medals. He looks like a military man, a soldier. But the glaring red band around his left shoulder, stamped with a swastika, makes it known that he is not a soldier—he is a Nazi officer.

He is a nameless man, a mere fragment of my imagination, and no individual in particular. Yet, in a paradoxical sense, he could be anyone. He could have been the traitorous neighbor of a Jewish family residing in the streets of Warsaw. He could have been the husband of a German wife who spent her weekends volunteering at the local church. Or, perhaps, he could have been an average man, barely getting by and supporting his family from paycheck to paycheck. To the untrained eye, he exudes confidence, patriotism, and pride. But to those who know better, his poise is disturbingly reminiscent of a sense of entitlement and Aryan superiority—the very foundation of Nazi ideology.

Standing on the trodden dirt road with a group of cadets and midshipmen at the Auschwitz concentration camp, I could envision this nameless man. He is the man that Paweł, our tour guide, has described for us—a person proud to wear his uniform. A person like me. As we say our goodbyes to Paweł and walk toward the shuttle, I force myself to consider the truth of Paweł's words. The thought of having any similarities to a stone-cold murderer haunt and nag at me. Every morning I take a hard look at the mirror and think about how lucky I am to be a cadet at the Coast Guard Academy, even if I am half-asleep and squinting at 6 a.m. I am proud to wear my uniform and even prouder to be a part of a humanitarian service that affords me the opportunity to freely give back to the community that has given me so much. But my stomach churns at the thought that this nameless Nazi officer took just as much pride, if not more, in his service. This sobering realization prompted me to reflect upon the power of nationalism and its ability to woo a soldier, an officer, or even a civilian into committing acts of terror and violence, just as it did in the Holocaust.

The Holocaust, however, was not just a result of nationalism. It was the culmination of a series of immoral and unethical decisions made by military and political leaders, which were amplified by millions of Nazi members and functionaries as they trickled down to the masses. From 1919 to 1933, the German military oath under the Weimar Republic stated that soldiers would "protect the German nation and its lawful establishment … and … obey the President and … superiors" (The German Military and Hitler). However, as the Nazi Party gained popularity and won the public's trust, the 1934 military oath was revised, now obligating soldiers to "render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Führer [Leader] of the German nation and people" (The German Military and Hitler). With their allegiance shifted from the "German nation and its lawful establishment" to Hitler, German soldiers were no longer required to distinguish between lawful and unlawful orders, and were instead charged with responsibility to carry out every wish and command of their *Führer* (The German Military

and Hitler). Ultimately, this change in fidelity made it acceptable for soldiers to follow unlawful orders given by the immoral individual in power.

Further degradation of ethics in the German military was evident in the "Guidelines for the Behavior of the Troops in Russia," a message given to German soldiers on June 4, 1941, which stated that the struggle against Bolshevism "requires ruthless and energetic action against … guerillas, saboteurs, and Jews, and the total elimination of all active or passive resistance" (Planning the Invasion of the Soviet Union). The language of the Guidelines starkly contrasted that of the Ten Commandments of Conduct of the German Soldier at War, which stated that "cruelty and pointless destruction is dishonorable…no opponent who surrenders may be killed [which] includes even the guerilla fighter…Wounded opponents are to be treated humanely" (The German Military and Hitler). The new orders to annihilate, exterminate, and obliterate all guerillas, saboteurs, Jews, and resistors effectively nullified German soldiers' codes of conduct. Although there were few leaders who ranked highly enough to alter legislation, it only took those select few to sentence millions of innocent civilians to their deaths, such as the fifteen Nazi officers who were among those who sanctioned the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 (The Wannsee Conference).

So what is a society to do when it is no longer governed with morals and ethics? Thomas Jefferson said that "when injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty" (Thomas Jefferson's Monticello). Although German soldiers and Nazi officers were given orders to commit mass atrocities, obedience to superiors neither excuses nor justifies their actions. Regardless of age, status, or position, each individual had the moral responsibility to resist unlawful orders and injustice and to treat others decently, humanely, and justly. As a cadet at the United States Coast Guard Academy, I have taken an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States" and to ensure that each individual may freely enjoy his or her rights (Enlistment Oath: Who May Administer). This oath not only binds me to follow my superiors' orders, but also charges me with ethical obligation to resist injustice. As a future Coast Guard officer, I must follow all lawful orders, but must also be responsible for my own actions, as given by the Code of Conduct for members of the United States Armed Forces (Code of Conduct). This means that I must have the moral courage to speak up to superiors, peers, and subordinates, knowing that it is also one of my duties to defend justice.

George Santayana, an American philosopher, once said that "those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." With the Holocaust as a solemn warning in our history, military members, political leaders, and everyday civilians must learn ethical leadership and decision-making. Learning about such tragic events and their causes has inspired me to be more cognizant of my decisions and their impact on others. Now, as tensions in the Middle East and all around the word heighten, it is more critical than ever to promote moral responsibility in the men and women serving in the United States Armed Forces. This moral responsibility, however, is not innate to all; it trickles down from morally responsible leaders—leaders who have been educated and made aware of history, so that past ethical misconducts are never repeated (Sawicki).

David Frey, professor of history at the United States Military Academy at West Point and director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at West Point, summarizes what I have learned through the American Service Academies Program well, stating that ethical leadership and moral responsibility start *now*, even as a cadet. The only way to be prepared for difficult moral decisions to come is by practicing accountability and responsibility in everyday situations (Frey). Although it may be difficult to hold peers and

friends accountable for their actions, no moral decision is ever made without inner conflict. Only by practicing accountability each day can we be prepared to make the right decisions when it counts.

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Hate Speech or Team Spirit: The Intent and Effects of Antisemitic Graffiti

BY MARK ALEXANDER

When I traveled to Poland for the first time in summer 2018 as a participant of the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows Program, I encountered many antisemitic emblems and slogans painted on public walls, fences, and bus stops. Several local residents tried to explain to me that the graffiti wars raging across their cities' walls did not spring from any hateful beliefs held by the vandals, but rather they were simply innocuous slogans and symbols reflecting the intense rivalries among various Polish soccer clubs. I began to wonder about the intent behind the use of these hate symbols. I found it difficult to imagine that antisemitic words and symbols could become completely separated from their hateful origins. Was it possible that hate speech and symbols of white supremacy could actually be used harmlessly?

On my first day in Krakow, I was struck by the amount of graffiti that seemed to be engaging in an argument across the walls of the city. In many places, several layers of graffiti revealed how vandals had created a kind of a dialogue by responding to one another's spray-painted messages. The first pieces of graffiti on a wall had often been crossed out or painted over, and an ongoing battle seemed to be waging for control of some of the city's urban canvases. For example, on a brick wall where one vandal had spray-painted a communist logo, another had come along and effaced the original graffiti with a symbol commonly used by white supremacists and neo-Nazis. The so-called Odin's cross, which is a simple circle with a cross drawn through it like the crosshairs of a gunsight, had also been painted on a nearby bus stop. Another vandal had responded here by writing "ANTIFA" (an abbreviation for "anti-fascist") and painting a gallows around the white supremacist symbol to make it appear as if the logo itself was being hanged. Elsewhere, I saw that a spray-painted Star of David had been effaced by painting a gallows around it, just as the antifascist vandal had done with the Odin's cross at the bus stop. As I walked through Krakow, I also observed several Stars of David painted near the phrase "JUDE GANG WITA" (this translates roughly to "THE JEW GANG WELCOMES YOU"). In other spots, crossed-out Stars of David had been painted near the letters "AJ," whose meaning I did not understand.

I was startled at the amount of seemingly antisemitic graffiti I encountered on that first day. Speaking with local residents about the graffiti, I was surprised to learn that my Polish acquaintances believed that the spray-painted dialogues I had seen actually had nothing to do with antisemitism. I discovered that much of the graffiti I had observed were the typical slogans and symbols of Krakow's rival soccer clubs, Cracovia and Wisła. This rivalry goes back more than one hundred years, when the two clubs first established themselves in Krakow. Cracovia became known as "Jude Gang" for historically having welcomed Jewish players onto its team. Consequently, Wisła began to use the slogan "*Anty Jude*" ("Anti-Jew," frequently abbreviated as "AJ") in response to their rivals proudly identifying as the team that had welcomed Jewish members (D.B. 2015). This phenomenon and my Polish friends' dismissal of the potentially racist nature of this graffiti fascinated me. I could not understand how explicitly antisemitic words and symbols might become divested of all of their hateful connotations and applied to different purposes without still retaining or transmitting their originally offensive meanings. In the days after I learned about the soccer rivalry at the root of the graffiti, I noticed much more while walking

through Kazimierz, Krakow's historically Jewish district. The graffiti was heavier here than in the other parts of the city I had seen, and the Cracovia and Wisła slogans seemed to be everywhere. I began asking myself if my Polish friends might have been right: perhaps these seemingly hateful symbols might all just be related to a sports rivalry after all.

Several pieces of vandalism, however, seemed to have nothing to do with sports and instead appeared overtly hateful, and yet locals still informed me that this reflected team rivalries and not antisemitic beliefs. On one busy street corner, for example, the German phrase "NAZI RAUS!" (which roughly translates to "NAZIS GET OUT!") had been crossed out with thick black spray paint and a white power emblem had been painted next to it. Other graffiti seemed so hateful that it made me question whether the sports rivalry could really suffice to explain the use of the antisemitic rhetoric I was seeing. Although someone had tried using heavy paint to obscure it, a thick, black swastika and the stenciled English words "THE ONLY GOOD JEW IS A DEAD ONE" were still visible on one corner. This message was inescapably antisemitic, of course, but other graffiti was less clear and more confusing. For instance, I was looking up at a crossed-out Star of David and the word "WISŁA" on a wall when I realized that the graffiti faced a historic synagogue. Although this piece of vandalism clearly belonged to the universe of the city's soccer rivalries, I wondered if the site had not been selected deliberately. Did the vandals realize that the antisemitic symbol that they spray-painted gazed directly at a synagogue? Did they intend for Jewish men, women, and children to see this as they came to worship, or was the wall chosen accidentally? If the site had been chosen indiscriminately, did that somehow change the effect that the antisemitic symbol would have on those viewing it? I found myself rooted to the spot for a few moments as I wondered how much the underlying intent actually mattered if passersby were still offended or traumatized by the messages in the graffiti.

Days later, I encountered more troubling graffiti painted along the road as we drove through the Galician countryside near Kielce. Who, I wondered, were the intended viewers of this graffiti, which read "KORONA" (literally, "CROWN") with the "O"s made into Odin's crosses? I knew that the latter were white supremacist symbols, but at first I was not sure what "KORONA" meant. Was this another soccer team? More of this graffiti covered bus stops and walls, some appearing with and some without the Odin's crosses. I quickly learned that Korona Kielce is, in fact, another popular local soccer club, as I had suspected. I saw more "KORONA" graffiti without the Odin's crosses, and I again began to wonder if I had been reading too much into the racist connotations of the symbol as my Polish friends suggested. Maybe the graffiti was simply the enthusiastic work of local team boosters unfamiliar with the connotations of the popular white supremacist symbol. On the road from Chmielnik to Tarnów, however, I saw "WHITE CLUB KORONA" spray-painted with Odin's crosses in place of the "O"s on several walls. Suddenly, the graffiti had become at once more explicit and exclusive, overtly proclaiming the club as a whites-only space. As with the explicitly antisemitic graffiti in Krakow, these words were printed in English. I wondered again who the intended audience was for such graffiti. Were foreign tourists like myself meant to read and understand this? I began asking myself if it mattered who the intended target originally was if I was the one reading it now.

The intended target of hateful speech certainly does matter, however, to the Polish court. As I researched the history of these Polish soccer clubs' fierce (and racially charged) rivalries, I discovered that a case involving hateful language at a soccer match several years ago revealed how the law viewed such things. In 2014, a Polish municipal prosecutor had ruled that fans' antisemitic chant was not intended as hate speech because it was not

specifically directed at Jews (Masters 2014). The chant of “Move on Jews! Your home is at Auschwitz! Send you to the gas (chamber)!” was directed at the opposing Polish team and their fans, and so the court decided that this abhorrent language was not hate speech, but rather it was simply competitive rhetoric.

I struggled to understand this decision, and I remember puzzling about it as I looked at a pair of Odin’s crosses spray-painted on a wall in Oświęcim. On a building around the corner from the entrance to the Auschwitz main camp, vandals had written the bright blue words “UNIA HOOLIGANS!” (“HOOLIGANS UNION!”) with the white supremacist symbols in the place of the “O”s, again conflating the worlds of sports and white supremacy. Someone else had since partially obscured the hate symbols with white paint, but they remained clearly visible. What was the motivation of these “hooligans,” and who did they hope would see their message? What did the vandals hope to accomplish by painting hate symbols in this particular location?

Photograph courtesy of Mark Alexander, July 2018, Stefana Jaracza, Oświęcim, Poland. The spray-painted phrase “UNIA HOOLIGANS!” (“Hooligans Union!”) appears on a building facing the grounds of the Auschwitz main camp in Oświęcim. The Odin’s cross symbols in the word “HOOLIGANS” have been partially obscured by white paint, but they remain clearly visible. An older, faded Odin’s cross can still be seen just to the left of the phrase, revealing that vandals have been defacing this wall with these commonly used white supremacist symbols for some time.

It may be that the underlying intent behind violent antisemitic chants or white supremacist vandalism is not fundamentally hateful and is, in fact, all about soccer. This would still not mean, however, that such things cause no harm. We may never be able fully to appreciate the intent behind others’ actions, but our ignorance of their underlying motivation clearly does not prevent others’ words and deeds from having their effects on us. One can certainly injure another without meaning to do so, and the absence of intent does not mean that the injury has not occurred. Perhaps the Polish court was correct, and it is possible for hateful speech to be used without hateful intent. I remain skeptical that taunts about Auschwitz have nothing to do with antisemitism, however, just as I remain skeptical that hateful speech can ever be used without producing harmful consequences.

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Staging Literature: Using Words to Draw the Traumatic Past

BY JOSHUA DAWSON

A shimmering July sun falls upon the white stone walls of the Saint Maximilian Kolbe Center in Harmęże, Poland. We have departed our bus to follow a guide down carefully constructed steps into the basement, a space protected by a small wall of sandbags from Polish squalls and swelling ground water. It is only retroactively, having come through what survivor and artist Marian Kołodziej calls his Labyrinth, that the meaning and intentionality of the entrance's spider-webbed glass becomes clear. Our guide was careful to explain that while glass typically offers both clarity and transparency, a piece of broken glass offers only complexity, and a multiplication of images. I can think of no more effective image to mark the entrance to Kołodziej's Labyrinth.

The geography of Kołodziej's early life was important. Although part of Poland in 1921 when he was born, Raszków had only three years earlier been part of the Prussian Empire, a status it had endured since the second partition of Poland in 1793. Recognizing, even in very general terms, the geopolitical position of Poland is essential in coming to a clearer understanding of the atmosphere that ushered in the events of the Holocaust that would so profoundly shape Kołodziej's life. The conflicts of the two world wars played a pivotal role in the formation of Poland as it appears today, as well as the way in which modern Poland understands and represents its past. Prior to and during the First World War, Poland was divided amongst three powerful empires: Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. Following the war, the Allies reunified Poland and, as a result of both treaty negotiations and several conflicts with its neighbours, Poland found its national borders expanded, including a key corridor to the Baltic Sea. The period of the Second Republic was short-lived, however, and with the dual Nazi-German and Soviet-Russian invasion of 1939 Poland was subject to two simultaneous and brutal occupations. By 1941, Operation Barbarossa would pit the two former allies against one another, and left Poland to become part of what historian Timothy D. Snyder has described as the "bloodlands," caught between Hitler and Stalin. After the war, Poland fell on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain and was subject to Soviet influences until 1989. The thawing of the Cold War subsequently made clear the extent to which history had been suppressed in Poland and much of the Eastern Bloc, and it is unsurprising that this same postwar period is nearly contemporaneous with Kołodziej's own silence about his personal history.

What we know of Kołodziej's story only begins to emerge in 1993 after he suffered a stroke. As part of his rehabilitation, Kołodziej's doctors recommended drawing, and the first of his Harmęże drawings began to appear. American military forces liberated Kołodziej on May 6, 1945 at Ebensee, and his silence extended for nearly fifty years afterwards. Shortly after the war, Kołodziej enrolled in the faculty of painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow and began a long career working as a set designer for the theatre. Despite his outward silence on the subject of camp life, Kołodziej's mind remained inextricably linked to his past and to Auschwitz in particular. Kołodziej wrote in the 2009 exhibition catalogue of this preoccupation with Auschwitz by explaining that the experimental nature of his postwar "theatrical works can be treated as a protest against what [he] experienced [in Auschwitz]" (*The Labyrinths* 15). Thus a continuity exists from Kołodziej's experiences in Auschwitz through his postwar career, to the construction of the exhibition at Harmęże.

Kołodziej's statement that he "built Auschwitz, because [he] got there in the first transport" suggests even more clearly the connection between these three periods of his life (*The Labyrinths* 15). Having been forced to participate in the construction of not only his own prison, but also the space in which the Nazis murdered over one million people between 1940-1945, Kołodziej's relationship to construction and space was understandably both complex and traumatic. However, where the construction of Auschwitz in Kołodziej's youth was forced labor, his postwar works demonstrate an approach to space that affirms his agency as his writing shows:

> I have usually tried to be faithful to the text and stage directions, I used to disintegrate the space of the stage. I even often think that it was not only disintegration and opening of the physical space which was walled-in there in the camp. I have always wanted one interior to show another interior, or one inner man to show another inner man, for that matter (*The Labyrinths* 15).

Consequently, Kołodziej explicitly opposes his postwar work in the theatre to his time in Auschwitz, and makes clear his work's protest: during the war, he was forced to build and to wall-in, whereas after the war he tasked himself with disintegration and the opening up of space. However, as divergent as these two relations to space are, the experience of Kołodziej's exhibition at Harmęże represents a space of their convergence.

One cannot escape feeling walled-in while descending the stairs into the space that journalist Laura Piper describes as being "built to look like a freight train." Referring to the exhibition as his own personal Auschwitz, Kołodziej curated this impression intentionally. In understanding the exhibition as a continuity of the previous two periods of Kołodziej's life a question arises: why reproduce Auschwitz, and to what end is this personal camp shared with visitors?

Kołodziej's own reflections might be thought to offer some clarity, but in many ways they only exacerbate the tensions already present. For instance, in an interview with Paweł Sawicki, Kołodziej insisted that he did "not do art" because art "always goes in the direction of aestheticism" while his own drawings were both "quite brutal and quite cruel." At the same time, however, Kołodziej, also in the exhibition catalogue, maintains that his drawings "have specific references" and that his work "talk[s] to the history of art." Kołodziej goes on to write "I talk to Dürer, I talk to Memling. I take their ways of expressing suffering, pain, despair from them - and put them into 20th century experience. I very much want my drawings to be understood today" (*The Labyrinths* 16). Kołodziej then elaborates on the function of these specific references from the history of art: "I have tried to seek understanding with the audience by the help of mutually known, common signs" (*The Labyrinths* 15). Thus, for Kołodziej, art is a common language by which to communicate his own experiences to visitors in Harmęże. But Kołodziej offers not only explanations, but has instructions for viewers as well, "be patient, wait patiently for everything that is written in these drawings. They are my 'drawn words' that I am sending you. One needs to read them" (*The Labyrinths* 17). Having gathered the insight that Kołodziej's work is composed not only of specific references to a visual arts genealogy of despair but is also engaged in a written account that one must patiently read, a new lens with which to view his exhibition becomes available.

Indeed, after a moment's reflection upon the style and context of Kołodziej's exhibition it is nearly impossible for one's mind not to recall Dante's *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy). Not only has Dante's work been hugely important in the realm of literature, informing the works of T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, James Joyce, and

Jorge Luis Borges, but it was also a wellspring of responses in the realm of the visual arts, inspiring Auguste Rodin, Sandro Botticelli and Gustave Doré to transform Dante's poetry into images. Perhaps most important was Dante's influence on the formation of medieval conceptions of hell, and the spatial organization of Kołodziej's exhibition demonstrates the lasting impact of this aspect of Dante's poem.

Just as the visitor at Harmęże enters Kołodziej's exhibition by descending into the monastery basement, so too does Virgil guide Dante into the depths of hell in *The Inferno*. Kołodziej himself wrote, "I draw only hell. There is no heaven" (*The Labyrinths* 17). Kołodziej's comment also demonstrates a distinct difference between Dante's trilogy and his own work. Where, by the third part of the *Commedia*, *Paradiso* (Paradise), Dante has left the underworld and Virgil in exchange for heaven and his beloved Beatrice, Kołodziej's Labyrinth presents no such escape.

Kołodziej is not alone in drawing upon Dante in order to represent the Holocaust as Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This Is a Man*) famously cites the medieval poet as well. Levi explicitly engages with Dante's *Inferno* at the conclusion of the first chapter of *If This Is a Man* as he and thirty others find themselves loaded onto a dark truck with a German soldier, about to enter Auschwitz. The soldier, rather than declaring "woe unto you, wicked souls!" (*Guai a voi, anime prave!*) simply asks the incoming prisoners if they have any money or watches since such goods will no longer be of any use to them (Levi 82). Levi contrasts Charon, the ferryman of the river Styx, with the German soldier, by quoting Charon's lines to the damned as they cross Styx into hell (Canto III:84). Charon's statement is a moral one; the soldier's a material one. This difference highlights one of Levi's most important insights about the camps, what he called "the grey zone," for the suspension of even the possibility of moral judgments.

This scene also marks the end of Levi's first chapter, "The Journey," and the transition into the second "On the Bottom." The transition between these chapters also delineates the beginning of the second stage of Levi's text, wherein he dispenses with the present-tense and chronological narrative of the first chapter. From this point until the final chapter, "The Story of Ten Days," Levi relies upon the present tense and he arranged his reflections thematically, rather than chronologically. Comparative literature scholar Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi in "Representing Auschwitz" has read *If This Is a Man* as involved in a "relativist" approach to Holocaust representation, which seeks to put the Holocaust into dialogue with other historical events. Recognizing the link between Dante's literary hell and Levi's account of life 'on the bottom' is an essential component of her interpretative framework (DeKoven Ezrahi 122).[1] Similar to Dante's *Commedia*, Levi's *If This Is a Man* offers an account of ascension in "The Story of Ten Days" wherein chronological narration resumes and Levi is able to describe the story of his final days in Auschwitz culminating with his liberation.

Yet, despite the structural or narrative similarities between these two literary works, the nature of their downward and upward movements is quite different as the difference between Charon and the soldier suggests. Dante's *Divina Commedia* is an allegorical work representing moral knowledge in the context of medieval Christian Europe, and the descent into hell occurs in the service of coming to a better, clearer understanding of sin and morality in paradise by the end of the trilogy. For Levi, the movement of *If This Is a Man* offers no clean division. Rather, what the text as a whole demonstrates is the traumatic time of the camps which is not

[1] DeKoven Ezrahi contrasts the relativist approach with the "absolutist" work of writers such as Paul Celan, or Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, both of which insist upon the radical uniqueness of the Holocaust in the course of human history.

experienced chronologically, but rather, as Elie Wiesel so eloquently wrote, turns one's life "into one long night" (Wiesel 32).[2] Understanding Dante's and Levi's shared approach to the representation of experiences of despair, the question thus becomes how are we to interpret the space of Kołodziej's exhibition at Harmęże which is similar to the two others, and yet clearly lacks the third and final movement of ascension.

The Labyrinth is a space that reminds the viewer of Dante's hell and is built to resemble Auschwitz. The space is unmistakably subterranean, the walls made mostly of stone and reinforced with timeworn lumber. The lighting of the exhibition diminishes, but does not entirely remove a sense of claustrophobia. The very air of the Labyrinth is both cool and heavy—the scent of must and mildew endowing the space with a sense of age beyond its twenty years.[3] Walking through such a space, visitors are confronted with images drawn from Kołodziej's memory, his imagination, and his dialogue with figures of despair in the history of art and literature. However, in arriving at the end of the exhibition, one does not ascend out of the basement as Dante ascends with Beatrice or Levi ascended out of the time of the camps into the final ten days. Rather the exit of the Labyrinth is on the level with the exhibition. Kołodziej never left his hell.

It is not accidental that Kołodziej designed the space of his exhibition in this way, and while upon exiting the exhibition one finds a Japanese garden, it is also true that you must make the decision to leave the exhibition before entering the beauty of this meditative space. This separation reflects Kołodziej's belief that his exhibition is not art, but rather it is brutal and cruel. Art, like the garden, is beautiful and provides the space and time to think, to reflect, or to meditate. While inside of the Labyrinth one is not afforded the luxury of reflection, but is confronted with the immediacy and excess of Kołodziej's past. The experience of Kołodziej's Labyrinth is one that visitors must bear upon their shoulders after descending those stairs, and points to the immense pain and sorrow that Kołodziej himself bore through fifty years of silence. In not offering a staircase upwards and out of the Labyrinth, Kołodziej withholds Ariadne's thread and demonstrates that this maze is not one that permits a victorious escape; the story of his past is not an experience to be gone-through. The message of Kołodziej's Labyrinth is that the experience of the camp is a lasting experience, one that remains and is retained inside.

How, then, does one live with the memory of Auschwitz rather than trying to move on or to forget? Ultimately, the memory that Kołodziej's Labyrinth represents is much like the broken glass that greets visitors as they descend the stairs into it; both are cracked irreparably. At the same time, however, these pieces of broken glass can be used, as fragments of a former whole, in order to produce something new, something from which we might still hope to listen, to read, to learn, and ultimately to remember.

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[2] The shift in tenses and narrative arrangement are meant to demonstrate that the very experience of time in the camp is different from everyday time. Moreover, the structure of Levi's text suggests the ease with which one might slip out of the comfort of everyday life into life at the bottom.

[3] Cheryl Chaffin, a literary scholar, in a footnote to her article "Photographic Plates of Memory" provides a rough genealogy of Kołodziej's work starting with exhibitions in 1995 at the Holy Trinity Church in Gdańsk, Poland, and 1996 in Essen, Germany, before the permanent installation of his works in 1998 in Harmęże.

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Wartime Scars – Comparing the Presence of War and Genocide in Bosnia and Poland

BY KATJA GROSSE-SOMMER

On my bus ride from Belgrade to Sarajevo, a man got on at the first stop over the Bosnian border wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the text "Srebrenica 1995 – never forget." The omnipresence of the war in this country and its visibility in everyday life would follow me for the two weeks I participated in a summer school at the University of Sarajevo. What made an impression on me was how the memory of the war was everywhere, or maybe, more precisely, how I felt the war was always present. Particularly due to the close temporal proximity to the three weeks spent in Poland as part of the 2018 Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows Program, I will use this short and non-exhaustive essay to present some of my reflections on the presence of war and mass violence I noticed in Poland and Bosnia. In particular, I will focus on the commemoration of war, its presentation in museums, and the importance of personal encounters in narrating trauma. This essay will focus on the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, as well as the commemoration in the cities of Sarajevo and Mostar.

This personal opinion essay does not wish to draw historical parallels between significantly different events, nor does it aim to compare suffering or make evaluative statements. Arguments against the possibility of comparing genocides, I feel, are in fact only conducive to historical ignorance by attributing untouchable status to particular events. In doing so, they place them "outside of history," as Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer has argued in his work on the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust. Furthermore, this essay does not explore the causes or historical development of either the Holocaust or the Bosnian War,[1] but instead explores my personal reflection on my stay in both countries. The background of this essay is also a time where I find myself reflecting on the borders of European geographical and social identity. Along this line, I have long puzzled over the following event.

At the beginning of my master's program in Jewish Studies, I heard that one of our professors, in his early forties, had been speaking about how he grew up in a peaceful Europe. His forgetting (or willing exclusion) of the Yugoslav Wars showed, to me, a shocking ignorance in someone who considers himself a highly educated academic. It also raised the question of what instances of mass violence have shaped Europe, its values and its identity. The Holocaust, it has been argued, can be seen as a shared traumatic event that significantly defined modern European societies (Diner 36), asking the question of how a modern, "civilized" European culture could drive large-scale destruction and murder (Baumann). The war in Bosnia, on the other hand, is seen by

[1] For readers who may be unfamiliar with the conflict, a short summary: the Bosnian War (1992-1995) was one of the conflicts triggered by the breakup of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Following a declaration of independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina in a referendum supported mainly by the population majority (44 percent) of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), the Bosnian Orthodox Serbs (32 percent) mobilized with support of the Serbian government and the Yugoslav People's Army. Their aim was to claim territory in which they subsequently carried out ethnic cleansing, targeted mass sexual violence, and established concentration camps. The mobilized Bosnian Catholic Croats (17 percent) at times fought both against and in alliance with the Bosniak forces. After attacks by Serb forces and the inability of UN soldiers to protect "safe enclaves" such as Srebrenica, where 8,000 Bosniak men were massacred, NATO forces intervened and the conflict was eventually formally ended with the Dayton Agreement of December 1995. The almost four-year long siege of Bosnia's capital Sarajevo ended only in February 1996.

individuals such as the aforementioned professor as something foreign and removed from Europe. Responding to clichés of Balkan identity as something "other" to European culture (Žižek), this essay is therefore also written from a position of frustration as to why this region is so often seen as external to Europe, when of course Bosnian culture is firmly oriented towards the European (Sontag 90).

A rather marginal focus on the history of violence in South-Eastern Europe, particularly of scholars in my own field of Holocaust studies, and notably also within in my own personal trajectory of interest, leads me to the following exploration of the continued presence of instances of mass violence in both Poland and Bosnia. I will aim to present them as two expressions of different European traumas.

Remembering the War

A significant difference between commemorating war and genocide in Poland and Bosnia can be found in the population that remains in post-conflict spaces. In Poland, the AJC Fellows encountered the narrative of a victimized local population in many places. This can be traced through memorial plaques and different museum exhibits as well as political developments. In focusing on Polish suffering under Nazi German occupation, they de-emphasize the collaboration of a considerable part of the gentile Polish population in the Nazi German persecution of Jewish Poles and in the expropriation of their property. Virtually all the Jewish communities in Poland have been erased. While there seems to be a vibrant Jewish presence in districts such as Kazimierz in Krakow, I was struck by the Havdalah ceremony held onstage in during the annual Jewish Culture Festival: only a small minority of the audience was participating through song, presumably because they were unfamiliar with the ceremony's rituals. It may be that the "preservation" of heritage, when carried out by those less familiar with Judaism and its traditions, risks replicating only cultural tropes. Although organizations such as the Jewish Cultural Center or Chabad actively work to strengthen Jewish life, serving primarily a Jewish audience, it seems that the majority of those involved in preserving Jewish culture in Krakow, as well as its target audience, are not Jewish (see also the work of Ruth Ellen Gruber). This of course by no means implies that their input is any less significant or unjustified, but merely points to the minority of Jewish cultural actors in Poland, particularly noticeable in the field of Jewish heritage.

Memorialization efforts that take place in locations such as Oświęcim, in which the synagogue has been rebuilt into a museum dedicated to commemorating and educating about Jewish life in the area, are led mostly by non-Jews. The now-absent Jewish life is presented to the local town community in which few local inhabitants, if any at all, will be able to remember the area's Jewish population. The question that can be asked here is to what extent the target audience is international. In the case of the Auschwitz Jewish Center in Oświęcim, although the museum is involved in local educational projects, a large number of its visitors stem from international (heritage) tourism. Such an (unintentional) orientation may run the risk of antagonism between locals and visitors, who come to the town solely as its adjacency to the former concentration camp of Auschwitz. I remember an Israeli lecturer of mine relaying her trip to Poland, frustrated, after having visited only the sites of mass atrocity there, with her resulting view of the country as a "cemetery," rather than viewing the country for all that it was and is beyond its role in World War II.

Many of Poland's commemoration battles stem from the fact that the local population, understandably, gives precedence to remember and memorialize their own suffering, rather than that of others, seen as external to

majority society. In a country in which today only a miniscule Jewish population resides, one can sense the problems that arise when faced with commemorating World War II and the Holocaust. How can one acknowledge, to a fair extent, the manifold grievances suffered by various population groups, where the roles of victim and perpetrator may have been more fluid than would facilitate a clear historical categorization? In particular, what conflicts can arise when the majority population feels that their own suffering is overshadowed by commemorating an absent population?

Notably different is wartime commemoration in Bosnia, where victims of war, due to population distribution along ethnic lines, remember exclusively their own suffering. Ethnic lines still divide population as well as territory: when they constitute the population majority in a given geographical area, Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs can present their own narrative of the war in a relatively uncontested manner. The Dayton Agreement divided the country into the two legal entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Republika Srpska, with Bosniaks constituting the majority population in the former and Bosnian Serbs in the latter. Unsurprisingly, war narratives differ significantly in these territories, in which the population distribution of Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs has changed significantly due to ethnic cleansing and (forced) migration. In 1991, the capital Sarajevo's population was comprised of 50 percent Bosniak and 25 percent Bosnian Serbs. Today, around 80 percent of the population is Bosniak (Statistika BA). The Bosniak majority, after the city's three-year siege, today has the agency and narrative monopoly to emphasize their victimization at the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. This dominant commemoration is visible even to the outside visitor. For example, all the hostels I stayed at displayed advertisements of an exhibition of the Srebrenica massacre. Inevitably, this reminded me of Krakow, where advertisements for tours to Auschwitz were omnipresent and obviously similarly part of the touristic canon.

A significant difference between the two places was, however, that visible marks of violence and atrocity can more easily be avoided in Poland than in Bosnia. Particularly for foreign visitors, who are linguistically separated from memories of war and occupation on plaques displayed throughout the city, it is much easier in Poland to avoid spaces that commemorate suffering. Obviously, this argument is not exhaustive: as has been stated previously, Krakow's tourism industry is significantly influenced by its proximity to Auschwitz. Of course, Warsaw's architecture is notably marked by destruction and reconstruction. However, as is the case in Krakow and its remaining ghetto infrastructure, a visitor must possess more knowledge to be able to recognize what impact the war had in shaping cityscapes: an unaware visitor may not realize that Warsaw's Old Town is completely reconstructed. In Sarajevo, on the other hand, it is impossible to walk through the city and not be confronted with the war, visible in the damage on the building facades facing south, where mortar fire has left pockmarks that have, in many instances, not been restored.

Remembrance in Museums

In locations that were significantly affected by war and mass atrocity, the memorialization and, particularly, presentation of these events in more official spaces such as museums is certainly significantly different in their form, contextualization and interpretation, for international visitors as well as for locals.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, international visitors are presented with Bosniak narratives of victimization in the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide in Sarajevo, opened in 2016, and in

the Museum of War and Genocide Victims in Mostar. These museums share the same concept and presentation, aiming to tell the story of genocide victims to an international audience, evident from the English-language texts accompanying the displays. Both museums' locations are cities of touristic importance, which were also significantly influenced by the war and have come to represent the war. (Mostar's Stari Most bridge, Bosnia's most recognizable landmark, was destroyed in November 1993 by Croatian military forces and later rebuilt. Due also to extensive media coverage during its siege, Sarajevo became an emblem of civilian suffering during the Bosnian War.)

These museums, as stated on their respective entrance signs, were created by victims of the war. This precludes any kind of objectivity in the museum: these exhibits are not meant to present nuanced points of view on the Bosnian War. They present exclusively the suffering of Bosniaks at the hands of Bosnian Serbs and Croats. Bosniaks are presented as the sole victim group, and neither the wartime victimization of other groups, nor crimes committed by Bosniak forces, are mentioned.

The museum's narration is based on objects, for the most part personal effects such as clothing or trinkets, donated by survivors or by victims' families. These are accompanied by text explaining the victim's personal story through the objects, which link individual stories to a larger war narrative. These objects are accompanied by posters, photographs, and other illustrative objects, for example models of concentration camps. Both museums also present recreations of prison cells, in which life-sized dummies in tattered clothing with painted bloodstains illustrate internment and torture. The museum is visibly low-budget, with poorly legible texts printed on thin, plasticized paper.

Interesting also when comparing these two Bosnian museums with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum are the significant differences in captioning and accompanying text in the former. Presented only in English, and therefore testifying to the Bosnian museums' international target audience, the objects displayed, for the most part, do not mention their historical provenance. Only rarely can text be found that stated who has donated the object, and even rarer are specific names. Instead, the text remains vague, for example stating only that an object was "preserved and donated to the museum by [the victim's] daughter and sister."

This is, of course, strikingly different to objects displayed at Auschwitz. Although the exhibited artifacts, for the most part, consist of objects taken from victims, such as the piles of suitcases, prostheses or kitchenware, they are presented not as items that speak for the individual victim, but rather in their accumulated mass. Thus, the aim of presenting them is to communicate the sheer extent of genocide. In such a presentation, at least for the visitor, the issue of precise captioning and provenance does not arise. (Exceptions in the museum at Auschwitz are the displays of victims' photographs, which foreground individual stories by contextualizing them with names and biographical information, to the extent that these can be found.)

It is interesting to compare the museums in Bosnia and those the AJC Fellows visited in Poland regarding their usage of photography. The AJC Fellows Program was heavily infused by discussions on museum displays of photography, particularly regarding their educational function and best-practice exhibition standards. Particularly after visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, our group of Fellows concluded that the museum had a relatively outdated standard of using photography. Particularly agitating was a photo of a starved, naked woman. Taken shortly after January 1945, her image was blown up to a size larger-than-life

and not ot be overlooked in the museum exhibition display. The unavoidable display of such photographs is contrary to the practices of institutions such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where graphic photographs are accessible only behind a number of warnings and barriers. Such photos cannot be stumbled upon and instead need to be actively sought out by the visitor.

The Museum of War and Genocide Victims as well as the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide do not follow this policy. Both museums display large photos showing executions, torture, and exhumed human remains. Particularly shocking and therefore memorable for me personally was the center image of a photo collage in the basement of the Museum of War and Genocide Victims. Showing the exhumed remains of a woman killed in her eighth month of pregnancy, clearly visible within the remains of her decomposed body were her fetus, as well as her pubic hair. This photo in particular should provoke a discussion not only about the acceptability of displaying images of victims without consent, but also on the emotional power in photographic narration, as well as the sexualization of victims of violence (for further exploration of this topic, see the work of Barbie Zelizer on Holocaust imagery).

Photography, however, plays a significant role in remembering the Holocaust as well as the war in Bosnia. Interesting here are issues of color and its role in enabling identification with photography's subjects. Photographs of World War II and the Holocaust are available to us, for the most part, in black-and-white, which, arguably, contributes to a sense of historical distance. Projects such as that of the artist Marina Amaral, titled "Faces of Auschwitz,", which originally monochrome prisoner registration images in the possession of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum are digitally colorized, aim to "act as both a memorial to [victims'] passing and a warning to the world at a time when the memory of the Holocaust becomes increasingly abstract and remote." Such projects, which, arguably, make these photographic images more real to our present, are surrounded by issues of "authenticity" and the aesthetization of suffering. However, such alienating historical distance is not present when viewing photographs of the Bosnian War. What we see in images from the mid-1990s are people that led lives we recognize as similar to our own, dressed in fashions that we recognize, if not from our lifetime, then certainly from images of our parents or the popular culture of two decades ago.

Personal Encounters

This recognition of a life that is not my own, but certainly could have been that of mine or that of my parents, is what I reacted to most. Evoking strong emotions were encounters with the people I met in Bosnia. I befriended a twenty-year old whose parents lived through the siege of Sarajevo. When I asked to interview his mother, who, he told me, had worked in the city's Ashkenazi synagogue during the war, he said that she was too traumatized to speak about it with a stranger. One of my classmates in the summer school I attended, a Bosnian woman raised in Germany, whose father had served in the military, became extremely emotional during our excursion to the Republika Sprska. She could barely stand to look at the inhabitants, saying that it made her question their whereabouts twenty years ago. Our Bosnian language teacher's father, she told us, was killed in the war and she had fled, along with her mother and sister, as a refugee to Germany.[2] Our professor, a man in his forties who led our excursion to Republika Srpska's capital, Banja Luka, told us how, having grown up there, he was forced to leave at age twenty with his family, fleeing to Germany. A visit to what had once been

[2] Interesting also that the summer school included a crash course in "Bosnian" language, rather than "Serbo-Croatian," "Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian," "Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian," or "Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian."

his home city, he said, was always difficult. In Banja Luka, we visited a sports club, where we received an introduction to one of the region's traditional boating activity. Giving us a quick rundown on the history of the club, a member mentioned how the organization's membership changed after the war, euphemistically describing as "migration" what was in fact the forced expulsion of the area's Bosniak population, accompanied by ethnic cleansing.

I think that for our AJC Fellows Program cohort, encounters with survivors of the Holocaust constituted some of the most confronting moments of our trip. The four women who shared their stories in New York and in Krakow, as well as their sheer physical presence, made clear that real people experienced the Holocaust. This brought the otherwise theoretical history closer and made everything more real for those of us who are temporally far removed from these historical events, and/or have no familial connection binding us to them.

The presence of survivors who could share their personal story was, to me, the most significant difference between viewing the impact of the Holocaust in Poland and the war in Bosnia. Most people one meets in Bosnia either lived through the war, or have immediate family who did. Ethnic tensions are far from being resolved, and the accompanying identification and resentment play a significant role today. In commemorating the war in Bosnia, one will not get involved in discussions on whether photographs can or need to be colorized in order to bring the abhorrence of individual suffering closer to our understanding of reality. The conflict in Bosnia was, from its initiation, always close to what we, living in the modern period in the United States or Europe, understand and recognize as reality, transmitted in real time by a variety of media. What remains then is my shock when I see a photo of snipers shooting into a crowd of people dressed as my parents did twenty years ago. Identification at places such as Auschwitz I find more difficult, because I cannot imagine the tremendously different lives these people lived, historically further removed from what I understand as my reality.[3] Of course, in the end I believe we are always confronted by an inability to understand suffering that is not one's own, whether or not one can see parallels in the lives of others. A comparison of suffering is never useful, acceptable nor desirable, and it is not my intention to draw one here.

I wonder if the Holocaust and the events of World War II are any less present for inhabitants of Poland than the war is for those in Bosnia. War has certainly significantly marked all the Polish landscapes we visited as part of the AJC Fellows Program and considerably influences the self-understanding of the local population. Of course, our program meant to focus our attention on places and spaces where violence was present, at times also in the marked absence of its memorialization.

However, the most significant difference in Bosnia and Poland, I believe, can be found regarding the average population. While World War II is obviously a major trauma and strongly defining for Polish national identity, the historical event itself is much further removed. It is represented through embodied narrative rather than personal experience, which is the case in Bosnia. This is not to argue that Poland has worked through its trauma of the Holocaust and World War II; it is quite the contrary. But political and social presence is certainly a different story in Bosnia, where ethnic division between antagonistic groups is still present in the political makeup of the country, and where a majority of the population can personally remember the conflict.

[3] Significantly, race also influences our ability to identify with victims of genocide. The Bosnian War, as bell hooks points out, constitutes a particular, anomalous shock to America (and I would add Europe) because it affects white, rather than colored, bodies (hooks 45).

I wonder if these two museums in Bosnia and their use of objects and photography, certainly not in line with what is today considered an acceptable museum standard, similarly speak to the proximity of the conflict and the continued rift in ethnicity pervasive in the country. These museums are not meant to present a narrative of objectivity and factual presentation of the conflict. Instead, they stand as both individual and collective memorials to a group of victims. Auschwitz, I believe, wishes to do the same. However, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum also has a strongly emphasized educational (and representative) function. This function goes far beyond anything expected of the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide and the Museum of War and Genocide Victims. As the former is an internationally connected institution that serves the goal of wide-ranging Holocaust education both locally and in an international context and has an according budget, it is necessarily more regulated and subject to international pressure regarding museological standards and academic practice.

Maybe all that is left for us to do is to work to counter, as much as possible, the political instrumentalization of narratives. Coming to both countries as an outsider, I am grateful that the AJC Fellows Program taught its participants to be cautious in their judgment and to respect narratives that are not our own, while at the same time being able to place them in critical context. In examining Bosnia, I believe this means respecting spaces such as the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide and the Museum of War and Genocide Victims, but similarly listening to stories of people living in the Republika Srpska and their wartime (as well as ongoing) suffering and grievances. It means giving space to, respecting and accepting the narrative that Polish people suffered under Nazi German occupation, and at the same time critically pointing out problematic texts in museums and commemorative plaques that refer to victims as “Poles” without mentioning that they were killed for their Jewishness, or similarly failing to mention that Jewish victims were Polish citizens also.

In the end, what remained with me also was the realization that what one looks for in landscapes, in people, or in history, one will most probably be able to find. I wonder if another observer coming to both countries with questions other than my own, at a different point in time and with a diverging view on who should be included in the European community, would have a significantly different take on the matter.

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Did You Notice the Butterflies?: Behind the Headphones, Muted Memorializing, and Curated Soundscapes at Treblinka

BY KATHRYN HUETHER

From my Journal: July 7, 2018

The van pulled into the parking lot and I looked up from my book. The lot felt similar to the campsites I went to as a child in Montana, or where we would park before venturing out onto a trailhead; both things that I cherish in my life for providing me with serenity and joy. Stepping out of the van, I smelled the scent of evergreens, I heard wind rustling the leaves and birds chirping, and I saw butterflies. Beautiful and vibrant butterflies, everywhere.

Yet, these affective experiences that I affiliate with my childhood, with happiness and peace, scents that provide me great ease and comfort, and the butterflies, oh the butterflies, were in sharp juxtaposition to the why of my day. Why was I in this forest clearing?

I was there to visit the Treblinka memorial site where hundreds of thousands of lives were lost, murdered during the Holocaust. This site was not a pleasant forest meadow from my upbringing, nonetheless the forest soundscape, the fresh scents, and the butterflies, almost indicated otherwise.

The irony was so cruel I felt physically sick. The view of the forest, the smell of the forest, the sound of the forest, were all lying to me. Here, at this site, in this forest, I should not be granted serenity and joy.

On July 7, 2018, I, along with the other nine Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows and our guide Maciek, downloaded the mobile phone application (app), "AudioTrip," in preparation for our visit to the extermination site Treblinka. "AudioTrip" is an app that is described as a "community [that] improves your experience of discovering new places, guides you along [a] designated route, [and] tells great stories about points you visit."[1] In sum, AudioTrip provides a personal tour guide experience from your phone. The app provided each of us with both a highly shared, yet individual experience. On the one hand, we all heard identical versions (save one fellow who expertly maneuvered back and forth between English and Polish) of the audio guide, yet on the other hand, what we experienced was separate and private as the tour was received from behind the enclosed auditory space of our headphones. The app directed us through the site of mass murder, prompted (if you were using cellular data) by GPS to move on to the next segment, each introduced by an eerie, almost ghostly musical accompaniment before transitioning to the spoken narrative for that specific point.

[1] "Home," *AudioTrip*, accessed on July 30, 2018, http://www.audiotrip.org/.

I had skimmed through the audio guide the night before, taken aback by the musical additions that I presumed aimed to complement the historical narrative and survivor testimonies. Before each point of the audio guide, a short musical segment was heard that could be described in musical terms as made up of minor seconds and chromaticism, all in the minor mode, or, in non-musical terms, as spooky, the sort of music that you would expect of a horror film. It was disconcerting and sent shivers down my back, simultaneously sounding kitschy and out of place. Additional musical elements were interspersed amongst the survivor testimonies and historical narratives: a sonic icon of a solo violin at one point (typical of Jewish memorial and mourning),[2] clashing piano chords at another, and the grinding and screeching of a train when we were standing over the site where the trains once arrived at Treblinka. The headphones covering our ears in tandem with the curated audio guide removed us from the present reality of the site, instead attempting to transplant and provide us with a reality of the past. The musical addendums, although at points kitschy, and even described in an interview with one Fellow as "being inadequate," attempted to influence the site visitor *affectively*. That is, the audio guide sought not just to provide a historical overview of Treblinka, but to have the visitor experience sonically the specter of Treblinka's infamous past.

Nonetheless, behind the headphones, the existing sound marks—the sounds that stand out in a particular environment—of the forest today were dulled, if not completely diminished: the chirping of the birds blocked out, the buzz of the insects muted, the soft breeze of the rustling leaves silenced. Part of our Fellowship group opted completely for the use of the audio guide, while some returned to it at certain points, and others engaged in non-use by entirely ignoring it. Thus, even from within our small group of ten Fellows and one guide, there were at least three varying sonic experiences of the memorial site, leading me to the following query: How *is* Treblinka "supposed" to sound? Or perhaps more importantly, how *should* Treblinka sound?

Dedicating my attention to these questions, this essay addresses the varying sonic experiences that are allocated by the use, "misuse," and non-use of the Treblinka audio guide. To clarify, I employ "mis-use" to refer to the group of Fellows who moved back and forth between listening to the audio guide and to the soundscape of the memorial site, those who went "half and half" so to speak. "Mis-use," therefore, indicates not a malfunction on either the user or technological end, but that the audio guide was employed in a way that it was not originally intended or planned for. Overall, I aim to suggest that the usage of the audio guide onsite at the Treblinka memorial actually severs a visitor's interaction with the site itself, instead figuratively relocating them to the historical specter manifested via the audio guide app.

This essay's aim is to elucidate the different facets of experience at Treblinka, with specific focus on the influence of the audioguide and the natural soundscape. I supplement my argument with own experience at Treblinka, which I then couple with interviews I conducted with the 2018 AJC Fellows cohort and Professor Agnieska Haska, one of the app's curators. In turn, I frame my inquiry within the field of Music and Sound Studies in order to effectively address the relationship between sound and space and its subsequent affect. Overall, I assert that the usage of the audioguide at Treblinka and its sonic addition to the natural temporal site drastically alters and in turn shapes the reception of Treblinka as a place of Holocaust memory. In sum, this

[2] A sonic icon refers to the process over time when particular sounds become *iconic* for particular locations, events, or cultures that are very specific and easily identified and associated with the thing they signify. For more, see *Keywords in Sound*. A sonic icon is comparable, but certainly not identical, to a *leitmotif*. See David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, editors, *Keywords in Sound* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

short essay does not mean to polemicize the audio guide, but rather to highlight the impact of sounds on our experience at Treblinka and, more broadly, to demonstrate how sound influences our reactions more than we are initially aware.

Comments from the 2018 Fellows

"I found the technology perhaps a very isolating experience."

"It [the audio guide] *detracts from the emotionally and spiritually reflective experience that many people desire or need on such a visit."*

"Did you notice the butterflies?"

In October 1943, the Commons Chamber, an essential architectural space for British parliamentary democracy, was destroyed during a Blitz bombing. Following the destruction, Winston Churchill stated: "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us."[3] What Churchill was referencing is easily perceived when pointed out: the building had been built in a rectangular pattern that easily suited Britain's two-party system. A shift to a horse-shoe design as proposed, could in turn, cause a shift in parliamentary procedures.

I employ this metaphor not to suggest that the usage of the audio guide at Treblinka's memorial site is in any way connected to the architectural planning of Britain's Commons Chamber, but rather to demonstrate *how* a space can influence human action. We adapt to a space, just as it adapts to us. Have you ever considered how human beings *sense* and *perceive* a space via auditory means? For instance, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari understand social space *as* sonic space, stating that "space is the register in which sound can happen and sound can have meaning…space is not a static thing. It is a constant formation, dissolution and reformation."[4] In turn, in their seminal text, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?*, scholars Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter term auditory perception of a space as the process of creating *aural architecture*, or "a real, complicated environment, such as an urban street, a concert hall, or a dense jungle [that] is the composite of numerous surfaces, objects and geometries."[5] Buildings, plants, animals, roads, and even people, are just a few of the contributors to *aural architecture*.

To further clarify how we perceive a space via auditory means, imagine that you are going on a run on a forest trail. You do this run often, but always with your headphones covering your ears. On this particular day, you have forgotten your headphones, yet you still venture out onto the trail. You notice things you were never aware of before: a gentle brook bubbling at the trailhead, a woodpecker pecking at the halfway mark, and the pleasant hum of insects in the forest meadow where you always end. This time as you listen to the chirping crickets and buzzing bees, you notice these beautiful, large butterflies that you had never seen before.

[3] Winston Churchill, "House of Commons Rebuilding," October 28, 1943, Hansard, United Kingdom Parliament, Commons, House of Commons Rebuilding, Speaking: The Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill), HC Deb 28, volume 393, cc403-73, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1943/oct/28/house-of-commons-rebuilding Accessed on August 16, 2018.
[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 311.
[5] Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5.

The difference between your run with headphones versus your run without is that when you wear your headphones, you effectively mute the aural architecture of the forest, replacing it instead with the sound recording that emits from your headphones. Described by Sound Studies scholar Holger Schulze, this process is referred to as *spatial layering*:

> A layering and refocusing of sound sources. One layer is very present as it is almost directly projected onto our eardrum through technology, while the other is acoustically rather distant but bodily very present through our acoustic horizon and orientation on spatial reflections. This intriguing layering of recorded and life sounds elicits a form of *re-spacing* via the auditory.[6]

Spatial Layering is useful for understanding the varying experiences that are a result of the use, "mis-use," and non-use of the AudioTrip app at Treblinka. The life sounds of the memorial site—i.e. the chirping of the birds, the hum of the insects, the wind rustling the leaves—are overlaid, and even in some cases supplanted, by the recorded sounds and narration of the audio guide. The memorial's temporal forest space is replaced by the curated audio guide, which cites a historical specter of the Holocaust. Thus, the memorial site of Treblinka in 2018 as experienced by my AJC cohort is exchanged for a sonic ghost of the Treblinka during the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the exchange is not without its similarities. Although the space has changed drastically in regard to its architecture—the buildings and gas chambers were destroyed in the fall of 1943—the forest and its soundscape (presumably) have largely remained the same. There have been objects added to the site. First, to mark the locations of specific buildings and the railroad tracks. And second, as a memorial to the approximately 900,000 victims.

There are moments throughout the audio guide where a recorded forest soundscape is even included, highlighting certain soundmarks that signify elements of the forest, thus spatially layering a recorded forest soundscape over the lived forest soundscape. Perhaps the audio guide should encourage the visitor, here, to remove their headphones and absorb that natural soundscape.

Treblinka Memorial Forest Entrance[7]

Treblinka Memorial Train Tracks

[6] Holger Schulze, "The Corporeality of Listening: Experiencing Soundscapes on Audio Guides," in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage,* ed. by Karin Bijsterveld (Germany: Transcript-Verlag, 2013), 197.
[7] All photos taken by author on July 7, 2018.

From my Journal: July 7, 2018

As I ventured into the memorial site with my headphones over my ears and the audio guide turned on, I immediately became annoyed. The forest soundscape that I had heard when I got out of the van was subsumed by the kitschy soundtrack and dramatic BBC-like narration. I tried to listen to the audio guide throughout, but there were moments where I was so put off by it that I eventually decided to silence it altogether. I would listen to it later—after all, I am a sound studies "scholar."

Despite the added sound effects and kitschy musical segments, the audio guide provided context where it otherwise would have been lacking. In an interview with one of the designers of the audio guide, Professor Agnieszka Haska stated that the audio guide was designed in part, to counter the "poor infrastructure of the site" and to provide information to site visitors who did not travel with a tour guide.[8]

> The audio guide was created last year [2017]; the history starts with the idea by Memory of Treblinka Foundation. The Foundation wanted to create some kind of guide for tourists coming to Treblinka. Usually, visitors are coming there with organized tours and tour guides, but in recent years, one can observe that the percentage of individual tourists is rising … the infrastructure [at Treblinka] is quite poor. Apart from the museum building there are no maps, leaflets, or any other materials to buy … due to heritage law regulations it is impossible to put information stands at the site … So, the main goal was to provide visitors with some basic information about Treblinka memorial site. First, the Foundation was thinking about creating a booklet in Polish and English … printing booklets is not so cheap, if you want more than 200 copies [and] you can visit the Treblinka memorial site even when the museum is closed—so an audio guide on your phone is more useful than a booklet.[9]

The audio guide provides information for fifteen points: site map; the cornerstone; the symbolic gate; camp well; tracks branch-off; the map of the camp; loading platform; store houses; memorial stones; monument; infirmary; grate; edge of the camp; clearing; memory. Each point provides a combination of general background information, coupled with survivor testimonies and site-specific history. The twelfth point, the grate, is the longest.

"The Grate"

[8] Professor Agnieszka Haska, in an interview with the author, August 28, 2018, via email.
[9] Ibid.

The grate itself "symbolizes the grate on which corpses were burned," yet this point differs from the others as after two minutes of historical context, the remaining twelve minutes consist of a man and woman's voices taking turns as a seemingly never ending list of names is voiced.

During this moment, I sat near the memorial stones, seeking reflection. I had one earphone in to take in the list of names, the other was out so that I could hear the forest soundscape as well.

From my Journal: July 7, 2018

I preferred the temporal forest soundscape to the prosthetic one of the audio guide. The temporality moved me, the prosthetic left me feeling empty. There were points when my past association with the woods clashed so harshly with what was around me and the memory of the site that I was brought to tears, beyond anxious. I walked through the whole site, ending my visit in the clearing. Butterflies were here, too, and the aspens and pines moving with the breeze.

Reception of the audio guide was mixed amongst the AJC cohort. There was a general consensus that we respected the reading of names, agreeing that it did contribute to the reflective experience that the majority of us sought at the memorial site. Nonetheless, finding value in the audio guide overall was not the norm. One Fellow stated that while she used the audio guide most of the time, she did not follow it for her entire visit (engaging in the "mis-use" experience) saying that "there were certain moments in which I sought reflection and reflection only, and the audio guide did not deliver."[10]

Reaction to the added sound effects and musical segments was met with the most displeasure. One Fellow commented that "I did not appreciate them in the slightest. I don't need or want sound effects when I engage with sites of mass atrocity; I am not seeking theatrics or entertainment. I am seeking a reflective space. The audio guide's sound effects felt, in many respects, invasive." Another stated that "I found the music annoying, predisposing visitors to a specific mood (sadness, pity) … no music would have been preferable."[11] I myself was very vexed by the sound effects.

In turn, the usage of the audio guide has a few complications beyond the morally questionable use of music and sound. For instance, while the audio guide can be downloaded by anyone, many visitors do not know about it until they get to the site itself, which would not be a problem if that visitor has access to cellular data or Wi-Fi. However, many of the visitors are international that are not using a data plan (which was the case for the majority of our AJC cohort). Therefore, they would not be able to download it even if they wanted to. Professor Haska acknowledged this implication, stating that the audio guide's designers even thought about setting up a Wi-Fi hotspot, yet this poses many technical and financial difficulties, in turn stating that there was not a large PR campaign regarding the audio guide, so it is unknown how known it is.

[10] Sophie Lombardo, in an interview with the author, August 29, 2018 via email.
[11] Ibid.; Macarena Tejada-López, in an interview with the author, August 18, 2018 via email.

When I asked the group what they thought an ideal scenario would be, to have the audio guide or to not, or some variation of the two, responses were mixed. It was obvious that having an experience of Treblinka with only the audio guide and to have your headphones on the entire time would take away from a reflective process, while not using the headphones at all removes context—something many site visitors do not have. Perhaps the ideal experience is the one of "mis-use," because the audio guide is then used when sought out, while also leaving room for the natural forest soundscape.

From my Journal: July 7, 2018

When I had finished in the clearing, I realized I needed to return the way I came. I turned around and began venturing back through the memorial site to the van, and I could not get out of the site fast enough. Bees were buzzing close to my head; a grasshopper landed on my brow, which led me to aggressively smack my own face; the sun was beating down on me and my water tasted tinny; I could not get out fast enough. My anxiety began to increase in tandem with my brisk pace, I needed to be out, beyond the gate.

As I turned the corner, getting closer to the exit, I saw my friend Frankee slowly walking up ahead. I quickly caught up to her, said a brief hello, and moved past. I needed to get out, and I think she understood. Once I passed the gate that stood symbolically for the death camp's entrance, I stopped, and let out a huge sigh of relief. I was out. I paused briefly and continued back. As I turned the corner yet again, I heard, before I saw, Maciek, Katy, and an older man walking in front of me. The man was speaking Polish with a cheery, upbeat inflection. As I caught up to them, I slowed my pace to walk adjacent them. I listened to the man's story. He was a Holocaust survivor who was born in 1936, and this was the first time he had returned to Poland in 70 years. He was leaving tomorrow. And here he was, sharing his story.

In closing, I found that the audio guide took away from the site. Recall the runner's differing experiences with and without their headphones. If I had solely remained behind my headphones for the duration of my site visit, my experience would have been drastically different, practically muted. Most significantly, I would have missed meeting the Holocaust survivor that I described above in my journal entry. Conceivably, I would have left completely irritated by the kitschy music, not focusing on the site at all. Maybe I would have left thinking I just heard another historical documentary, one of the many I have listened to over both my studies and life. And quite possibly, I would have missed the butterflies.

From my Journal: July 7, 2018

After I left the site, I went quickly to the little museum. There was a guest book at the entrance, and Katja was flipping the pages. I wanted to come back to look for myself. I quickly went through the museum, feeling drastically underwhelmed by its presentation, returning to the book. As I was flipping through the pages, Katja left, and Frankee joined me. I was trying to take in as many pages as I could, inevitably missing something meaningful.

I paused when Frankee caught my attention, directing me to a little sketch that someone had made in the book. It was a butterfly and I almost missed it. Someone else had also noticed the butterflies, and I'm sure they were not listening to the audio guide.

"Butterfly Sketch"

In closing, I want to ask you, did you notice the butterflies?

Because I did.

And they gave me hope.

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The Edges of Memory: On Traces and Loss

BY SOPHIE LOMBARDO

Tucked into a dense forest some 70 miles northeast of Warsaw, a ring of 17,000 symbolic tombstones fade into one another, one indiscernible from the next. Countless butterflies flit from rock to rock, their orange and yellow wings bright and beautiful against the jagged edges of the concrete *matzevot* (tombstones). Yahrzeit candles, rocks, and slips of paper have been placed at only a handful. A mixture of fresh pine and silence fills the air. This is the memorial to the victims of Treblinka.

Between July 1942 and November 1943, the Nazis murdered an estimated 900,000 Jews at Treblinka. Today, little evidence remains to indicate those 900,000 people were ever here at all. Except for a marker for Janusz Korczak, the memorial offers neither the names nor the faces of the murdered. None of the camp's original structures remain—not the SS men's zoo, or the infirmary that was not an infirmary, or the ten gas chambers constructed solely for the purpose of destroying an entire people. In an attempt to erase their crimes, the Nazis plowed the camp over before it fell under Soviet control. Only the *matzevot*, and a large obelisk standing in the place of the victim's ashes—critically, not their bodies, but their ashes—mark this place as an atrocity site. Just as the author Katja Petrowskaja wrote of Babi Yar, at Treblinka "there was nothing more to show—only to tell" (Petrowskaja 170). The resultant absence is palpable and viscerally disturbing.

As I walk through the memorial at Treblinka, I cannot help but acknowledge that this is how a successful genocide looks and feels. Here, the Nazis attempted not simply the murder but "the demolition of a man" (Levi 26). Not even the dead were spared from a continual process of violence and destruction. Of the 900,000 victims, fewer than 24,000 have been identified in the memorial's Book of Names. Without the construction of this symbolic cemetery in the 1960s, the Nazis' efforts "to disguise the killings … to obliterate the destruction," would have proven even more successful than we are otherwise forced to accept (Walke 119). Regardless, "the dead exist only in memory" at Treblinka; "there are no paper records; and as a rule, there are no individual gravestones" (Walke 119). But what memory do we have if the vast majority of the witnesses, and anyone who knew them, perished?

* * *

The same day we went to Treblinka, the AJC Fellows met with Helena Czernek and Aleksander Prugar, co-founders of Mi Polin, the first active Judaica company in Poland since World War II. For the past several years, Czernek and Prugar have been scouring Poland's former Jewish communities for *mezuzah* traces (that is, the markings on doorframes left behind by the cases for prayer scrolls). Their intention, "to transform a story of family loss into one of survival and revival of Jewish tradition" (Hodes). While telling us about the process by which they locate and preserve *mezuzah* traces, Czernek and Prugar drew our attention to a displaced doorpost in the corner of their office, brown and wooden and worn around the edges. They said that this doorpost was special--that fate led them to it. It was sitting in a trash heap when they found it, one day away from its removal to a landfill. After a difficult morning, the story was a small, much-appreciated comfort. And its message was clear: against all odds, Judaism persists.

What could not escape my attention, however, was that at least in the case of these traces, Judaism's persistence remained anonymous. How else could one engage with a literal hole in a doorframe? In that space, something once existed; now, nothing did. I had no names, faces, stories. Much like a footprint in sand, the trace confirmed absence as much as it did presence. How was the story of this *mezuzah* trace any different from Treblinka's symbolic *matzevot*?

The answer came when Czernek and Prugar offered an additional comment: this doorpost came from the entrance to a butcher shop in the small town of Sokołow Podlaski. It belonged to the Elster family.

As my colleagues shuffled out the door, I asked for clarification: "Did you say this doorframe belonged to Aaron Elster's family?"

"Yes," they said. "Why?"

"I knew Aaron Elster," I explained. Well, I knew Aaron insofar as any scholar "knows" a Holocaust survivor. But from my time as an intern at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, I remembered all too well the day Aaron walked into our offices asking someone to explain a message he had received from Poland.

"They say they found my *mezuzah*? How?" Four years later, I could hear his voice still.

Aaron passed away in April 2018, just before Yom HaShoah. Hidden by a Polish couple for several years during the war, he was one of 29 survivors from his town (his older sister Irene, who also hid with this couple, was another). The rest of Sokołow Podlaski's 6,000 Jews were murdered—many, he recalled, shot and buried in his family's backyard. The others, including his younger sister Sara, were deported to Treblinka.

As I ran my hand over the carved-out space where the *mezuzah* once was, the connection between the doorframe and the killing site drew itself. The people who passed through this door ultimately died at Treblinka. And I found myself asking how you could possibly make something from nothing. What was this trace but another hole created by the Shoah?

Then I wondered how many times Aaron and the rest of his family walked through this doorframe. I began to imagine a butcher shop bustling with activity. And just that detail imbued this doorframe with a meaning I struggle to articulate. It felt personal. Somehow, this hole—this nothing—felt like something.

* * *

In her moving family history *Maybe Esther*, Katja Petrowskaja writes that her mother's "memories of what came before … existed for the sole reason of future visiting, because the war shed light in both directions; what came before no longer existed, and memory became the only proof of the past" (Petrowskaja 69). It is telling that what so visibly moved Aaron Elster was not the deportation, but a moment that came before: "I remember one time," he noted, when "[my father] had to have a tooth pulled…"

> He didn't go to shop that day, and I remember he came home and took a bottle of liquor and started drinking it. And I would help him. And then he made—silly thing—he made a bunch of fried eggs. We

both ate them, and that's a day I had with him which I, I cherished for a long time" (Elster, USC Shoah Foundation).

Following the war, Aaron's father existed only in memory. Even the facts of his death remained undetermined. "My dad, I don't know," Aaron said. "I think he wound up in Treblinka." (Elster, USC Shoah Foundation).

Traces thus capture a complex duality that characterizes much of our engagement with Polish Jewish history. By itself, the doorframe represented nothing more than a silhouette, a shadowy outline of a destroyed past. Memory sharpened the image and provided specificity where once we had only anonymity. Given the Nazis' desire to deprive Jews of everything and everyone they loved, to reduce them "to suffering and needs," perhaps this is the most important thing traces can provide (Levi 27). We will never be able to fully identify the stories linked to these remnants because most of their owners cannot tell us about them. Yet they encourage us to reach out to the past; they give us something to hold. Where the historical record offers scant information, memory can occasionally fill in the gaps. The Elsters' displaced doorframe told seemingly paradoxical stories. On the one hand, it conveyed an emptiness that continues to hang over many of Poland's formerly Jewish communities; on the other, it provided a picture of life before.

The butcher shop figures prominently in Aaron's testimony of his prewar experiences; he recalled going in and out of the shop "all the time" to help his parents with their work (Elster, USC Shoah Foundation). He also explained that the family shop at 4 Rogowska Street served a primarily non-Jewish clientele, a fact that provoked the ire of some Jewish and Gentile neighbors alike. Indeed, around the time that the war broke out, Aaron remembered that Poles started slapping stickers that said "Pig" on their customers' backs, a public shaming intended to encourage boycotts. It is likely, however, that the Elsters' relationships with Sokołow Podlaski's non-Jewish population are what allowed Aaron and Irene to survive the war.

When linked with memory—even a memory professed to have begun after the war started—the *mezuzah* trace could provide an image of what existed before. Yet even Aaron's experience was delimited by his own experiences and memories. That he could never "find conclusive information" about much of his family's fate haunted him throughout his life. His memoir's title, *I Still See Her Haunting Eyes*, gestured toward the doubly traumatic "coexistence of knowing and not-knowing, of the presence and absence resulting from destruction" (Walke 119). He never found out what happened to his six-year-old sister Sara. He could only imagine "she died among strangers," with "nobody there to tell her that they loved her." This fact imparted a "pain that … will never go away." (Elster, USC Shoah Foundation). Other survivors have echoed this sentiment, recalling that "what happened to the others … we could establish neither then nor later: the night swallowed them up, purely and simply" (Levi 20). For Ruth Kluger, seeking out the details of her father's death felt akin to "running through my house in the dark, bumping into things." "How *did* he die then?" she writes. "I know so little about who he was, and now I don't even know this final, inalterable fact" (Kluger 40). Even memory only takes us so far, reminding us that traces present incomplete renderings of the past.

In its utter thoroughness, the Shoah inflicted multiple dimensions of suffering upon the Jewish people. In many instances, it eliminated even the possibility of memory. The reality is that the "vast majority of those who experience a genocide—whether it be the Holocaust, Rwanda, or Cambodia—die. That is the point of genocide" (Shneer, 246). Their voices are silenced, and we are left with a void. In that respect, Treblinka's symbolic

matzevot and Poland's *mezuzah* traces bear striking resemblances. But in a place where life and not death was the primary experience—in the town of Sokołow Podlaski, for example—perhaps we can find something more.

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The Polish National Exhibition of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Memory Politics

BY THERESA MCMACKIN

Introduction

Memory politics has proven to be a consistent outcome of genocide and mass atrocities. Poland is no exception, having found itself in the center of a contentious debate over memory and revisionist history. The Polish government's proposal of a "Holocaust law" in January 2018, which would have made it illegal to accuse the "Polish nation" of wrongdoing during the war, was met with condemnation from scholars and politicians alike. The European Union, the United States, and Israel were among those who strongly condemned the law as an attack on free speech and an attempt by the nationalist government "to whitewash one of the bloodiest chapters in Poland's history" (Santora). The Polish government amended the legislation in June 2018, making the use of the phrase a civil offense rather than a criminal one.

This most recent example of memory politics sheds light on the public debate over contentious history, but it does little to address the politics at play in Poland's museums and exhibitions. This article will focus on a particular exhibit: "The Struggle and Martyrdom of the Polish Nation 1939-1945" at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial in Oświęcim. The exhibit, opened to the public in 1985, contains language and terminology reflected presently in Polish memory discourses. This article will outline the exhibit and the media presented within it to bring focus to an overlooked example within the most symbolic memorial in modern history.

An Overview of National Representations Within Auschwitz I

Plans for country-specific exhibits were part of the initial organizational plan for the Museum. The plans, proposed in early 1947, outlined that the three parts the museum would consist of: "a general section showing the story of prisoners in the camp, an international section devoted to the wartime situations of the countries whose citizens were deported to Auschwitz, and a third section presenting the other German concentration camps." The barracks unused by the museum were "to be placed under the protection of the countries whose citizens died in Auschwitz, or to be used to display information about other Nazi camps" (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum).

National exhibitions began opening within thirteen years of the museum's dedication. The first national exhibits, dedicated to citizens of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, opened to the public in 1960; the Belgian and Danish national exhibitions were unveiled in 1965 and 1968, respectively. The German Democratic Republic (DDR)[1] opened their sponsored exhibit, *The Anti-Fascist Movement in Germany, 1933-1945* in 1970. The Hungarian national exhibition opened in 1970 as well, followed by the Bulgarian exhibition in 1977, and the

[1] Commonly referred to as East Germany.

Austrian exhibition in 1978. The national exhibitions of Hungary,[2] Holland, and Italy opened in 1980; the Soviet Union followed them in 1985.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, countries in the former Communist Bloc began opening their national exhibitions. The first of these, *Prisoners from the Czech Lands in Auschwitz* and *The Tragedy of the Slovakian Jews*, were opened in 2002.

Despite the museum's original intention to reserve exhibitions for countries to represent their citizens, an exhibition on the Roma-Sinti, *The Destruction of the European Roma*, was opened in 2001. It is the only exhibition that is not sponsored by a recognized state entity.[3]

The national exhibitions have been renovated or retracted during the museum's history. The original Hungarian exhibit, opened in 1970, was replaced by a new exhibition entitled *The Citizen Betrayed: A Remembrance of Holocaust Victims from Hungary*; this exhibition opened in 2004. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the East German exhibition closed and no exhibition has been planned by unified Germany to replace it.

The Struggle and Martyrdom of the Polish Nation 1939-1945

The Polish national exhibition, located in Block 15 of Auschwitz I, was opened in 1985. The exhibition takes up the whole of Block 15, with minor renovations done in order to manage the flow of the presentation.

Throughout the exhibition, there are instances of language that can be interpreted as unsubstantiated or favoring the concept of collective suffering. The concept of collective suffering is seen in the initial panels describing the invasion by Nazi forces, labeled as "Hitler's Forces Brought Havoc and Death." The section highlights six photographs of military personnel captured by the Nazis, including two photographs of mass burial plots. The caption above reads: "As early as the September campaign the Wehrmacht and the SS were already committing many atrocities against prisoners of war. This is the beginning of the terror which soon enveloped the nation and affected all of its citizens."

As the exhibition continues, a number of the images presented in the displays contain emotional and interpretive language. The previously mentioned section includes a degree of interpretive language; three large photographs taken by the Einsatzgruppen during their campaigns in Ukraine following Operation Barbarossa, provide no citations or credits.[4] All three photographs include captions at the bottom right-hand corner and read: "Mass executions, such as this in Ukraine, were carried out also on the territory of occupied Poland." According to the digital archives of Yad Vashem, two of the three photographs were added to Yad Vashem's collections in 1986 and 1995, respectively. Based on this information, the images were likely added to the Polish exhibition after its initial opening. Emotional language is seen in the caption of a photograph where a group of children are

[2] The Hungarian National Exhibition was renovated three times over the course of the museum's history, twice under Communism and a third time in 2004. The exhibition opened in 2004 is the one that is currently on display for visitors.
[3] *The Destruction of the European Roma* exhibition was created by the Documentation and Cultural Centre with the help of the Association of Romani in Poland and other Roma organizations. The exhibit is located in Block 13, within the section containing national exhibitions.
[4] Source information and citations for two photos mentioned can be found in the bibliography. The third photo could not be identified and located for proper citation.

gathered in front of a Nazi guard post in an unspecified location in Warsaw. The caption, without provided context, reads: “Their parents did not return from interrogation. Warsaw.”

Photo by Theresa McMackin, Auschwitz I Polish Exhibition, 14 July 2018

The exhibition does include information on the Jewish experience during the occupation, though the section where much of the information presented is under the heading: “Terror, executions, expulsion, deportations to concentration camps and forced labor affected all sectors of the Polish nation.” The section summarizes the concentration of Jews into ghettos and the mass deportations beginning in 1942; a plaque in the section also informs the visitor how, despite the risk of death, 75,000 Jews were saved in Poland with “the overwhelming majority of them (were) rescued by ethnic Poles.” This figure is concerning for a number of reasons; neither the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum nor Yad Vashem have a figure similar to this one referenced in regards to the Holocaust in Poland. Also, the known statistics concerning rescuers in Poland do not match realistically with those given by the exhibit.[5]

The exhibition includes information on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, but the information provided can appear to be conflicting. One caption, which includes many grammatical and spelling errors corrected with a pencil, describes how a “handful of fighters” took part in the Ghetto Uprising; further into the exhibition, a large printed panel gives the historically accurate number range of six hundred to one thousand fighters. Although information published by the United States Holocaust Museum estimates that 17,000 Jews fought with the Polish Home Army during the Warsaw Uprising, none of this is noted in the panels displayed (USHMM).

The final room of the exhibition focuses on the history of Auschwitz from the Polish perspective. Throughout the presentation, a great deal of language suggesting collective suffering is used. One of the first panels states how “there is no other place on the earth where more Jews, Poles, (and) Gypsies perished as a result of criminal method,” while another uses the term “Jewish nation” to describe the millions of Jews deported from occupied territories. The latter panel also makes clear distinctions between ethnic Poles and other prisoners deported from across Europe, using the term “representatives” to describe non-Jewish prisoners.

[5] Using the figure provided by the Polish exhibition, the Righteous honored by Yad Vashem from Poland would have had to rescue ten Jews per person.

The most distinctive feature of the exhibit comes before one exits the block. From the staircase used to enter the room, the entire left-hand wall is lined with photographs of Auschwitz prisoners. In front of the photographs, wire mannequins dressed in striped prisoner uniforms arranged in hunched marching positions. The uniforms, which include women's dresses, do not display prisoner numbers or the color-coordinated triangles used to identify prisoners. No Star of David patches are present in the display.

Photo by Theresa McMackin, Auschwitz I Polish Exhibition, 14 July 2018

The lack of triangles on the uniforms gives the visitor no indication as to the identity of the prisoners being represented; therefore, the lack of a Yellow Star and/or a triangle with a "P"[6] stitched into its center misleads visitors as to the identity of the prisoners being represented with the mannequins and striped uniforms.

Conclusion

Poland's history during the German occupation is a debate that has challenged its identity since the end of the war. Recent historical studies, most notably Jan Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, and *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz* have brought into question the self-perceived images of Poles as rescuers, resisters, and martyrs. Successful grassroots initiatives, the most notable being the Jan Karski Association in Kielce, have made strides in achieving an environment for reflection and reconciliation in communities faced with this troubled history. The special circumstances of Poland's relationship to Auschwitz raise the question of representation and where a line should or should not be drawn between distinctions of ethnic Poles and Polish Jews.

In 2016, the Auschwitz Museum announced that a new exhibition on Polish victims was being planned and that it would replace the exhibition mentioned in this article. The opportunity to redesign the Polish exhibition comes at a time when Poland's history, and the institutions that represent that memory, have found themselves in the crosshairs of historical fact and nationalist revisionism. The new exhibition will surely contain more recent scholarship and more contextual information, but whose benefit it will serve can only be determined by those overseeing the exhibition's script. Auschwitz, which has always stood as a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, may become a battleground between history and national memory that would prove consequential

[6] In the concentration camp system, non-Jewish prisoners were designated by color-coded triangles with letters or words stitched onto the triangle. The triangle stitched with a "P" designated Polish prisoners.

for generations. To quote historian Timothy Snyder in his commentary on the government's closure of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk: "in some measure at least, how the rising generations of Poles see themselves, democracy, and Europe will depend on whether they can have ready access to their country's complicated experience in World War II" (Snyder 5).

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Preserving Cemeteries as Sites of Jewish Memory: The Role of JewishGen and the Auschwitz Jewish Center

BY YAEL FRIEDMAN

Over the summer, while pulling weeds in the Oświęcim cemetery, I paused, not only to pay my respects to the dead, but to learn more about the individuals, the ones of whom I know family stories and their contributions to the town of Oświęcim.

These were individuals buried in accordance with Jewish law and custom. All Jews buried in a Jewish cemetery are cleansed of all impurities according to Jewish rituals, watched over from death until burial, and interred within three days of death. Traditionally, relatives mourn the dead for up to one year, including shivah (the initial phase of seven days of mourning), followed by thirty days of grieving, and often through the unveiling of the gravestone which takes place within one year of death. Jewish cemeteries are typically cared for and preserved by the local Jewish community.

During the Holocaust these practices were difficult, if not impossible, to observe. Moreover, after the Holocaust, some survivors returned to find cemeteries completely destroyed. Other cemeteries were filled with broken gravestones from which they later created memorials, and some remained relatively intact or could be rebuilt through placing gravestones in the space. Despite assistance from local communities and international Jewish organizations to clean up cemeteries, most Jews could not conduct burial practices for the murdered Jews of their families and communities because the location of their family members' physical remains was unknown to them. This prompts the question: how do visitors, and Jews in particular, mourn and remember those killed during the Holocaust in post-Holocaust Europe today? Furthermore, what can cemeteries, specifically, tell us about the Jewish communities in what would become Nazi-occupied territories—and what testimony do they leave in the wake of Nazi occupation? In this essay I will explore some of these themes and two organizations that conduct work in cemeteries in an effort to preserve Jewish memory.

New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust (the "Museum"), tells the history of the Jewish experience before, during, and after the Holocaust. The Museum shares these stories through objects, photographs, documents, and testimonies. For example, a small comb made by Ruth Mermelstein in Auschwitz-Birkenau at age 16 urges the viewer to ask questions about humanity and survival in the most notorious Nazi camp. In a place where prisoners were given a number and forced to wear the same clothing as all other inmates in an effort to dehumanize them—where, moreover, their hair was forcibly shaved—a comb made of stolen metal suggests not only resilience and resistance, perhaps even defiance, but also a longing for female identity.

In focusing on lived experiences, it is necessary to exhibit the more challenging aspects of Holocaust history. While the Museum has made the curatorial decision to display only a small number of images of mass executions, murder, cemeteries and related sites, two other members of the Museum family, JewishGen, a Jewish Genealogy online platform, and the Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC) in Oświęcim, Poland, work very

closely with these types of sites. In honoring and remembering the lives of Jews, they focus their work on preserving Jewish heritage in former Nazi-occupied countries through the remnants of Jewish life in those spaces.

Before discussing how cemeteries are useful resources by which to study Jewish heritage, it is necessary to determine what constitutes a cemetery. Commonly, cemeteries are recognized as contained spaces that have been consecrated as land in which to bury the dead. They have gravestones and there is intentionality in the use of that space. But how do we define the spaces of concentration camps and death camps where millions of Jews were killed by gassing, starvation, torture, and through other means? Colloquially, especially in many Jewish heritage tours of Eastern Europe, those are referred to as cemeteries as well. In the former camp of Birkenau, there are sites of six gas chambers, two of which were in homes taken by the Nazis from local residents prior to building the four large gas chambers. There are sites where ashes of those murdered in gas chambers and cremated in the crematoria were scattered into ponds. There are sites where piles of gassed Jews were burned in the name of "efficiency."

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum erected pillars at several of these sites to commemorate those murdered. Are these gravestones or memorials—or both? Historian James E. Young analyzes the memorial at Treblinka where "perhaps the most magnificent of all Holocaust memorials, seventeen thousand granite shards are set in concrete to resembles great, craggy graveyard" (186). Memorials built to resemble cemeteries in general, and in particular those at killing sites highlight the collective memory construction at play. This would suggest that the pillars erected in Birkenau also serve as memorials, rather than gravestones. Furthermore, the Hebrew term for cemetery, *beit kvarot*, translates to "house of graves," further clarifying what constitutes a cemetery in Judaism. For this piece, I will use the traditional Jewish understanding of a cemetery.

JewishGen

Cemeteries provide a rich source for genealogists and those looking for relatives. This is evidenced by projects undertaken by JewishGen (JewishGen.org), a proud member of the Museum family. JewishGen is the largest digital repository for Jewish family history information in the world – comprised of a growing collection of more than 30 million records. In addition to translating *yizkor* books (memorial books written by survivors of towns and villages about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust) and connecting individuals seeking information about relatives, JewishGen maintains a database, JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR), that includes "names and other identifying information from Jewish cemeteries and burial records worldwide, from the earliest records to the present" (JewishGen). The value of JOWBR is that it preserves the memory of the people buried, even if something were to happen to the actual *matzevah,* gravestone. This is important since there has been a sharp increase in the number of reports of acts of vandalism and desecration around the world in recent years.

By collecting—and making accessible—the information on JewishGen, they are trying to create virtual cemeteries that are permanently housed for researchers and family members to access information on Jewish burials and memorialized for future generations. This important work is done almost entirely by volunteers who go to cemeteries, take pictures, transcribe the information, and then send it to JewishGen to be indexed in the database. For example, volunteers are currently clearing brush and photographing a cemetery in Briceni

(Brichani), which was part of Khotin district of Bessarabia Gubernia of Russian Empire and is now part of the Republic of Moldova. By making this information available widely, there is a public record of thriving Jewish communities prior to the Holocaust.

Clearing brush around a gravestone in a forest in Briceni.
Photo donated by Joyce Field

Auschwitz Jewish Center

Since 2000, the AJC has maintained the second Oświęcim Jewish cemetery, in which the last burial took place that same year with the death of the last remaining Jew in the town, Szymon Kluger. The first Jewish cemetery was established when Oświęcim nobleman Jan Piotraszewski donated a plot of land to the town's Jewish residents for the purpose of building a synagogue and a cemetery in 1588, leading to the formation of an organized, stable, Jewish community in Oświęcim. However, this cemetery was closed after Austrian regulations were imposed in December 1783, and the second one was opened soon thereafter in 1784. In July 1941, "the cemetery was closed by the German authorities, and its contents were almost entirely destroyed. *Matzevot* were used as construction material" and "some of them likewise ended up at the bottom of the River Soła, as was recalled by Jews from Oświęcim who saw them in the immediate aftermath of the war" (Szyndler 14). Residents of Oświęcim and the surrounding area continue to find Jewish tombstones on private properties.

In the first years after the war, the cemetery was partly restored at the urging of a handful of Jews from Oświęcim who had survived the Holocaust and returned to their hometown. There was minimal care of the cemetery between the 1960s, when the last of Oświęcim's Jews left the town (though some Jews returned in the decades after), and the mid-80s, when Asher Scharf, who lived in the United States and whose ancestors were buried in the Oświęcim cemetery, initiated an extensive restoration.

Tombstone of Abraham Aba, the oldest recovered *matzevah* at the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim. Auschwitz Jewish Center Collection

Care of cemeteries was, and traditionally continues to be, the responsibility of the Jewish community, but since the town is devoid of Jews, as is the case in many other areas in former Nazi-occupied territories, the AJC has taken on the responsibility in Oświęcim. Despite regular maintenance work, the cemetery has suffered some acts of desecration, even as recently as in 2003 when a dozen or so gravestones were overturned or damaged. Today, several groups help clean up the space within the framework of the AJC's educational projects. The majority of post-Holocaust cemeteries in areas under Nazi occupation during World War II and the Holocaust require a more nuanced analysis than those in non-war-torn spaces. In the AJC's new cemetery guidebook, published in 2018, explanations are offered of the space, the gravestones, and the people buried in the cemetery.[1]

Timothy Corbett, the Museum's inaugural Prins Fellow and a historian focusing on Vienna's Jewish cemetery, analyzes the historical value of cemeteries. On the Museum's podcast series Stories Survive, he discussed how studying cemeteries, particularly gravestones, reveals "people's conceptions of life, the values by which they lived their lives, the way they conceived of their place in the world and their place within their communities." They are not only traditionally sites of remembrance and commemoration, but they offer a unique history of communities from the perspective of the communities themselves. As noted in the guidebook, one can learn about the rabbis and the important families from the community, and can even identify the Jewish families who created tombstones based on their carved insignia or initials.

Yet, there is another layer of the story to tell here. After the Holocaust, in an effort to reestablish the cemetery in Oświęcim, nearly complete gravestones were re-erected and broken ones were used as part of new cemetery walls as well as a lapidarium, a monument made of fragmented tombstones. It should be noted that it was not always possible to match gravestones with burial plots. This means that where a gravestone stands, it is not confirmed that the remains of that person are in that exact location. Additionally, gravestones that could not be re-erected signify the desecration that took place in this space, one that is uniquely linked to the Holocaust. It is

[1] The guidebook is sold at Café Bergson at the AJC in Oświęcim. For more information and to purchase the guidebook, please email the AJC at info@ajcf.pl.

not possible for someone to walk through the cemetery and see broken tombstones that were made into a memorial without acknowledging the destruction that took place during the Holocaust. As Young noted in his research about memorials in Poland, the "fragments of shattered Jewish tombstones . . . represent a newly collected Jewish memory, retrieved piece by jagged piece in a form that emblematizes both the destruction and the impossibility of recovery" (185). Even so, the preserved cemetery could now still serve its purpose to pay respects to the dead and offer visitors a glimpse into the Jewish community of Oświęcim.

It was with these purposes that I visited the Oświęcim cemetery this summer with the American Service Academies Program (ASAP) to clean up the cemetery. The ASAP is a 16-day AJC program for U.S. military students who learn about Jewish heritage, the Holocaust, and post-Holocaust mass atrocities through the framework of military ethics and ethical leadership. Annually, the cohort of cadets and midshipmen contribute to the preservation of Jewish memory in Oświęcim by clearing brush, weeding, removing branches, and tidying up walkways. Through this active participation, they help the AJC in its effort to preserve and honor the memory of Oświęcim's Jewish community.

Midshipmen clearing pathways.
Photo by Yael Friedman

Cadet sweeping the lapidarium.
Photo by Yael Friedman

Cemeteries continue to evoke feelings of loss, absence, and nostalgia. But, taking a note from Corbett's approach, cemeteries that trace back generations, or even centuries, can reveal so much more than loss and death. We honor the dead, but also the lives that individuals lived and the Jewish communities they formed. As Corbett stated in the Museum podcast about his research on what Jewish cemeteries can reveal about Austrian-Jewish life and culture across time, "Spaces are precisely worth preserving because these are works of art, they are social documents, they are historical archives, and not least of all . . . these are some of the last remaining memorials of a community that was largely destroyed in the Holocaust and such there is a political responsibility." Given the unsettling trend in Europe of rewriting national Holocaust narratives as well as the increasing number of incidents of vandalism in cemeteries, it is ever more important to document the sites of cemeteries and those who were buried in these spaces.

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