

Vernacular memory and implicated communities

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Published 23 November 2021

Abstract

Abandoned sites of trauma in Poland appear to be forgotten, but their removal from social and cultural circles is only superficial. Frequently, these sites are inscribed into the local culture of memory and members of the local Polish communities can usually locate them and share stories about them. However, as they are not commemorated, there is an ambivalent aura around them. In 2017 two foundations (Zapomniane Foundation, The Matzevah Foundation) carried out an intervention into the landscape of Poland by marking thirty burial sites of Jewish victims of the Holocaust with simple wooden markers. The effects of that intervention shed light on the vernacular local memory of the Holocaust and the folk-traditional roots of the practices and behaviors related to these sites.

Key Words

heritage, Holocaust, memory, non-sites of memory

It is difficult to estimate how many unmarked sites of the deposition of the remains of Jewish Holocaust victims are located in Poland, especially in its southern and eastern parts, where the so-called “Holocaust by bullets” took place (Desbois 2009). In recent years, researchers have drawn attention to the fact that both the structure of this phenomenon and its remains in the landscape and local memory cultures differ from the image of the Holocaust as identified with ghettos, deportations and death camps.¹ The Holocaust by bullets often took place in plain view of bystanders or was, at least, not completely hidden from view, as it unfolded directly in people’s places of residence, or in their close vicinity; most often the remains were buried at the same location too, frequently by locals.

This article is an attempt to analyze a commemorative project carried out in 2017 by two organizations: the

Zapomniane (Forgotten) Foundation – a Jewish foundation established by members of the Rabbinic Commission for Jewish cemeteries in Poland (RCC) and The Matzevah Foundation – an American foundation devoted to the preservation of Jewish heritage in Poland. The aim of the project was to intervene in the landscape of Lublin region and Lesser Poland by placing symbolic wooden markers in the form of a matzevot in places of unmarked burial sites of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Although such sites appear to be abandoned and forgotten (they are not commemorated or marked, often neglected, littered, forsaken), it seems that their removal from social and cultural circles is only superficial. Although members of the local communities (homogeneously Polish) are not always able to locate them precisely, those sites are frequently inscribed into the local culture of memory, albeit

¹ The executions carried out by Germans often took place in towns or in the nearby forests; Jews were gathered and transported to the killing site, while locals would observe the entire event, sometimes helping or getting otherwise involved in it. This involvement took various forms, from the so-called “Blue Police” (in German-occupied Poland, it was the pre-war police force mobilized by the order of the General Governor Hans Frank to serve German authorities), to individual Polish citizens assisting the killers, to executions organized and carried out by the locals themselves. Apart from that, there were also individual murders and denunciations of Jews in hiding. See, inter alia, Engelking, Grabowski (eds) 2018, Grabowski 2011, Engelking 2011, Grabowski 2020, Tryczyk 2015.

not in an obvious manner. Within the research team of the project *Uncommemorated Genocide Sites*, we refer to them as *non-sites of memory* (Sendyka 2015, 16. 2016a). A non-site of memory can be seen as the reverse of a *lieu de mémoire* in the understanding proposed by Pierre Nora (1984). The term was coined by Claude Lanzmann and conceptualized by Roma Sendyka. According to her, non-sites of memory are defined as dispersed locations of various genocides, ethnic cleansings, and other similarly motivated acts of violence.

The basic indicator is lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of delimitation (any official designation of the scope of the territory in question). Non-sites of memory also have in common the past or continued presence of human remains (bodies of deceased persons) that has not been neutralized by funerary rites. These sites do not, meanwhile, share physical characteristics: they may be extensive or centered, urban or rural, though they are often characterized by some variety of physical blending of the organic order (human remains, plants, animals) and to the inorganic order (ruins, new construction). The victims who should be commemorated on such sites typically have a collective identity (usually ethnic) distinct from the society currently living in the area, whose self-conception is threatened by the occurrence of the non-site of memory. Such localities are transformed, manipulated, neglected, or contested in some other way (often devastated or littered), the resultant forsaking of memorialization leading to ethnically problematic revitalization that draws criticism (Sendyka 2016, 14).

Their paradoxical status is important from the point of view of the subject of this article – these are places that are remembered, but not commemorated; conventional memory practices are not devoted to them, and yet often there are stories about them and related rules of behavior. Unmarked graves undoubtedly belong to this group of sites. At the same time, from the point of view of Jewish law, their status is different from places of violence or, for instance, from abandoned sites of worship. Because there are human remains deposited in them, they require special protection – like cemeteries. According to Jewish religious law it is forbidden to violate the burial site. As the Jerusalem Talmud states: “It is forbidden to move the dead and their bones from the place where they rest” (Jerusalem Talmud, Moed Katan 2:4). Locating and marking them is therefore important not only as a gesture of commemoration, but also as a way of informing people that there are human remains in this place and that it should not be disturbed. According to the guidelines of the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries, the remains should not be moved or tampered with, which excludes exhumation. As exhumation is only allowed in Judaism in exceptional cases (including the threat from natural fac-

tors, e.g. a flooding river, however, the key is to be able to carry out careful and thorough exhumation, which is impossible if the remains are not in the form of a complete skeleton, see: Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 363: 1), from the point of view of *halakha*, protection of remains from any possible interference is ever more important. Therefore, investigation of such sites using non-invasive archaeological methods is preferred, and great importance is attached to the most precise and accurate delimitation of grave boundaries (Sturdy-Colls 2015, Karczewski et al. 2016). In this sense, the marking of graves of the Jewish victims of extermination is not only an act of instantiation of the memory of Jewish communities and their tragic deaths, but it is also an attempt to protect their burial sites, doing justice to the provisions of Jewish law.

Case study: marking uncommemorated burial sites

The need for this kind of act was the starting point for the project that is analyzed in this article. In 2017, I accompanied the members of both foundations in their work in the course of the project, making observations and conducting interviews. Taking into account the estimates of the possible number of sites with this status in Poland – according to the RCC around a thousand – and being aware of the costs and amount of work potentially involved in the preparation of permanent commemoration, the Zapomniane Foundation and The Matzevah Foundation decided to look for a formula that would make it possible to mark such sites on a wider scale, an intermediate solution, not excluding or replacing commemoration, but rather facilitating it (Zapomniane 2017).

Looking for a form and shape of a marker to be located at the sites of thus far unmarked graves, the team tried to ensure that the interference it would cause in the landscape was modest. Marking was primarily intended to have an informative function – to provide information about a given place and legitimize it in the eyes of those who know its character – as most of the locals know *about* it even if they do not know *of* it. Jonathan Webber points out the precision and certainty with which representatives of local communities are able to indicate the location of a Jewish cemetery, although at present there is only an empty, overgrown area (Weber 2015). In this sense, the marker itself constitutes something *less than* a conventional monument. As the authors describe it, there are two main reasons behind the decision to choose such form of a marker, one of which can be described as pragmatic, the other – as social (Zapomniane 2017). If a marker is an indirect form that does not replace commemoration, and, at the same time, it serves to disseminate knowledge about such places, its form should allow for its relatively easy placement in space. Secondly, a marker placed overnight in a given place cannot, and should not, replace a process leading to a decision to establish some form of permanent

commemoration at that place. Its modesty was designed to avoid a strong visual interference with the landscape that could arouse resistance or opposition from the local community; I shall come back to the possible reasons for such opposition below. However, such a marker has the ability to play a facilitating role precisely as an act of modest interference – it can facilitate future commemoration of the site by “bringing out” local knowledge, focusing local initiatives and locally conducted research as well as encouraging commemoration practices. The thirty markers which were placed by the Matzevah and Zapomniane Foundations in autumn 2017 in thirty selected places in the Lublin and the Lesser Poland Voivodships, had a form referring to a wooden matzevot, found before the war in Jewish cemeteries in eastern Poland.² The markers were made of larch wood, most resistant to water and weather conditions from among the locally occurring trees. Because the addressees of this action were mainly today’s inhabitants of these places, the inscriptions were prepared in Polish. The same text has been placed on all the markers: “Here rest Jews of blessed memory murdered during the Holocaust”, with the Star of David and a tantzava (Hebrew letters TNCBN – an abbreviation from the sentence: “May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life”). The choice of material was dictated by the aforementioned assumption of modest interference in the landscape – a wooden marker made of a material most often found in marked places or in their close vicinity fits into, and sometimes even merges with, the landscape. The project was also thought of as a research experiment – the aim was not only to mark uncommemorated graves, but also to look at the consequences of this kind of gesture, both for the landscape, as well as for the local infrastructure and memory culture, and the life of the local community. In the following part of the article, I discuss my observations made less than a year after the markers had been placed.

Wooden markers in the form of matzevot were placed in places previously examined by the Zapomniane Foun-

dation in close cooperation with the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries (RCC). Since the traditional tools of archaeology are excluded due to the obligations of Jewish religious law (*halakha*) in such locations, the RCC and the Foundation used the tools and methods of non-invasive archaeology, including archival research, testimonies, analysis of satellite photography and archival aerial photos, topographical analysis with the use of LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and geophysical tools (like georadar) that facilitate the identification of anomalies located under the surface of the soil. In autumn 2017, thirty previously studied sites of the deposition of human remains of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were marked (until August 2020, both foundations had marked 50 sites in total). The sites were located in different surroundings, forests, fields and towns. Among them, there were 12 sites located in built-up/inhabited areas (of which 2 are on the grounds of former cemeteries, which today are rather undeveloped space), 5 are located on the grounds of marked or fenced Jewish cemeteries and 13 are located deep in the woods. While some markers became immediately visible to the residents of a place, others may not have been noticed. Some of them constituted an additional element of the existing memory infrastructure concerning the Holocaust (e.g. an existing monument located far from the burial site itself³, or an existing commemoration of another Jewish burial site in a given locality⁴, a marked Jewish cemetery like in the case of Łaskarzew, Piaski, Brzesko, Tarnów, Stopnica, Szydłów.). Others were the first signs of this kind in the local landscape. Moreover, three of the above sites were associated with the former death camp in Sobibór, and one with the labor camp in Bliżyn. Due to the specificity of these places, the placement of markers was accompanied by members of local community only in some cases. Only in the case of three out of the 30 marked sites, various representatives of the local community and local activists, non-Jewish Poles, preserving the memory of the Jewish community in the area or region were present

2 The Jewish cemetery is in a village called Lenin in today’s Belarus: <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/l/1428-lenin/104-teksty-kultury/138391-drewniane-macewy-z-lenina> (accessed: 20.08.2019).

3 In Miechów, the Chodówki Forest. The Miechów area was researched by Karina Jarzyńska and Jakub Muchowski with support from Aleksandra Szczepan and Roma Sendyka. The town is located in Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodship, and has approximately 12,000 inhabitants. Its development started in the 12th century, when Duke Jaksa of the House of Griffins invited monks of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher. The abbey became a center of pilgrimage to the Chapel of the Tomb of Christ. Jewish settlement started here in the mid-19th century and before World War II, approximately 40% of the inhabitants were Jewish. During the war, Jews were re-settled to the ghetto, and murdered in death camps. In the area there is also a major killing site from 1941, i.e. Chodówki forest, with 600-700 victims buried in the field.

4 In Radechnica. Radechnica is a small village in Roztocze, a region in eastern Poland in Zamość County with approximately 920 inhabitants. In World War II, its small Jewish community was resettled to the ghetto in Szczepieszyn, while a few Jews in hiding were denounced and executed. A strong underground movement was connected with the local Bernardine abbey where local partisans often took shelter. After the war, a mental hospital was opened in the buildings constructed next to the abbey. Over the last decade, the church in the abbey has become a mausoleum for the so-called cursed soldiers of the right-wing anticommunist underground formations (the exhumed bodies found in the area by archeological missions of the National Remembrance Institute are gradually being moved here). The site was researched within the project by Maria Kobielska, Roma Sendyka, and Aleksandra Szczepan with the support of Aleksandra Janus, Jacek Małczyński, Karina Jarzyńska, Tomasz Majkowski and Katarzyna Suszkiewicz.

during placing of the marker (in Karmanowice, Rogalów and Brzesko).

During subsequent visits conducted in spring 2018 to the twelve selected sites, I noted that none of the markers in the sites had been removed. This is not surprising in places far from inhabited areas. Perhaps nobody, or only a few people, have had the opportunity to see/encounter them. However, among the more visible places, there were those where a wooden marker could be an obstruction (e.g. it was very close to the road), as well as those where there seemed to be consent to littering and acts of vandalism (alcohol is consumed at one of the unfenced, unmarked cemeteries, garbage is thrown away, etc.). When analyzing the effects of this intervention, the first question that came to my mind was: what caused the markers to remain in place after nearly a year? Currently, I have adopted two main working hypotheses concerning the permanence of markers in places where their removal or destruction was, in my opinion, most likely. The first refers to the taboo associated with a burial site, the second to the relationship of the marker with other, unambiguously Catholic, “domesticated” common gestures in the surrounding space.

Hypothesis 1: taboo associated with burial sites

Places which were marked with wooden *matzevot* most often functioned – in a particular manner, typical for non-sites of memory – in the consciousness of the local community as burial sites. The way they are treated is typical for the perception of space – in any case never homogenous – by religious and traditional communities. In folk cultures, space is divided into specific zones, which are reflected in the principles of proxemics and specific sets of behaviors (Tomiccy 1975, Bystróż 1947, Bystróż 1980, 221-222). Furthermore, sites of deposition of human remains pose a mediational character: they are treated as places of communication with the deceased. This treatment may also apply to *foreign* necropolises and graves, despite the fact that they do not fit into the category of *familiarity* (Józefów-Czerwińska 2012, 132). Although places connected with culturally, ethnically and religiously separate groups do not play (unlike one’s *own* necropolises) a community-forming role, in the experience of space – in a culture with folk roots saturated with magical semantics – they can be perceived as dangerous. Analyzing cultural taboos concerning burial sites in Polish folk culture, Bożena Józefów-Czerwińska writes that “[t]heir recognition [...] was, on the one hand, to prevent unacceptable contact with them and undesirable proximity to the sacred, and, on the other hand, to mark their territorial distinctiveness in the world” (2012, 133). Czerwińska emphasizes that “[c]emeteries and graves, in the eyes of the traditional population, appear to be inviolable places, permanently embedded in the cultural landscape”

(2012, 133-134). The non-sites of memory, usually deprived of any conventional memory practices, as locations for the deposition of human remains trigger specific types of behavior, even if in a negative mode. I see the sources of this type of behavior in the folk-traditional roots of those communities in which – in the absence of other discursive and symbolic frames into which sites left behind by the Holocaust from bullets could be interpreted – local “vernacular memory” developed (Sendyka 2016b). As Roma Sendyka suggests, the discourse on memory is multilayered and vernacular memory can be understood as a layer that is “closest to the ground”, most narrowly located and often unheard (2016b, 252). According to Sendyka, vernacular memory favors half-measures, silent knowledge, makeshift gestures, when trying to express what is unknown or partly known, what is blocked and for what there is no official language (2016b, 264). In my interpretation, in local communities, practices characteristic of vernacular memory draw from a reservoir of available resources – whether it be traditional religious practices or rules specific to the folk culture – in response to the need to cope with a place that cannot be easily tamed. Zuzanna Bogumił and Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper observed a similar mechanism of using traditional religious practices in coping with the memory of a difficult past (Bogumił, Głowacka-Grajper 2019). Non-sites of memory, as a problematic legacy, rarely openly recognized or discussed as part of local history, are rather the subject of the non-symbolic, non-discursive practices of vernacular memory. To this day, burial places are most often taboo spaces, which can be reinforced not only by the strangeness of those who rest there, but also – in the case of non-sites of memory containing Jewish remains – by the lack of a ritual closure that would make them a grave in the proper sense. As Polish anthropologist Ludwik Stomma writes, “where there is a taboo, look for mediation, where there is mediation, look for taboo” (2000:97). Mediation phenomena are inherently associated with prohibitions and practices that seek to neutralize them. The lack of a funeral in folk culture meant that the deceased was in a state of permanent mediation – and therefore suspended in a state recognized as particularly dangerous, requiring neutralization, and finally tabooed. Polish ethnographer Adam Fischer described the practices of dealing with the dead body in Polish folk culture in the early 20th century, including the gestures performed towards the bodies of those who experienced sudden, “non-their-own” death (especially the murdered), which were common in various parts of Poland, like throwing branches, hay, sticks or stones at the sites where the remains were buried. Searching for an explanation, Fischer refers to other researchers, interpreting those practices as a substitute for a form of worship or actions aimed at preventing the dead from leaving the grave and reversing the negative effects of contact with a dead body. The peculiar status of non-sites of memory – first of all, as deposits of remains of “others”, secondly, lacking the ritual closure – is sometimes expressed in the vernacular ways of referring to them, for

example, in the phrase “kaddish-less graves”, used by Stanisław Zybała from Radecznica. It is also reflected in the related practices of omitting them, littering, avoiding.

It should be noted that in many cases the cultural taboo did not protect either the Jewish graves themselves, or the tombstones that marked them. There are historically known cases of deliberate violation of burial sites and human remains/ashes deposits in post-war Poland described by researchers (inter alia: Gross and Grudzińska-Gross 2016; Zaremba 2012), along with the practice of digging through graves and the use of matzevot from cemeteries as building material (the practice was documented by Łukasz Baksik in a photographic project “Matzevot of Everyday Use”, Baksik 2013). While the pre-war cases of the violation of Jewish graves and remains observed in 19th century Poland were usually related to superstition and folk magic⁵, an economic motivation was behind many of the wartime and postwar violations of the sites where ashes and remnants of Jewish remains had been deposited. In the case of the former, violation of the tomb does not so much mean the lifting of the taboo but confirms it – it is the taboo that guarantees magical effectiveness. In the latter, the breaking of the taboo might have been rooted in – and in a sense, prepared by – the pre-war and wartime construction of otherness and dehumanization of Jews. Zuzanna Dziuban draws attention to how that later made possible a whole range of practices concerning Jews both during their life and after death, including desecration and digging up Jewish burial sites (2015). Anti-Semitism and the involvement of local communities in the acts of killing (often motivated by the prospect of profit: either being rewarded or appropriation of the property or money of the victims), also played a significant role.

In contemporary Poland, the protective aspect of the taboo seems to be restored to some extent, even while there is a sense of public denial about Polish involvement and complicity in the Holocaust (which can be observed as a reoccurring outcry accompanying publications of books that bring up the subject, e.g. Gross 2000) and while the practices of desecrating the remains are not unequivocally condemned by those who participated in it, and their descendants (Reszka 2019). I see the presence of this taboo in the ambivalent “aura” of the non-sites of memory and the neutralizing practices still connected to them: omitting, avoiding, littering, and marginalization. As such, they are not forgotten, but are rather subjects of non-symbolic, non-discursive practices - developed locally, without references to globalized or national discourses of memory, drawing from the local context and practices.

Hypothesis 2: wooden markers – affinity of gestures

The second hypothesis is related to the possible relationship between a wooden matzevah and the gesture, common in Poland, of placing wooden crosses not only at burial sites, but also at places of death – as, for example, in the case of marking the places of road accidents. Crosses at roads and crossroads – irrespective of whether they are a place of worship, a sign of burial site, site of death or a gesture of penance – are a common element of the Polish (and European) landscape. In addition to crucifixes as chapels and crucifixes on graves or as markers of the place of death, also penitential crucifixes were widespread in Europe (Grainger 2010). According to this hypothesis, the affinity of both gestures – marking the burial site with a wooden matzevah and marking the grave or the place of death with a wooden cross – may make the first gesture seem domesticated by reference to the latter. This has been proven recently by an observation made by members of the Rabbinical Commission for cemeteries in Adampol (a village close to Sobibór), where the locals refer to the marker using a term “the Jewish cross”.

- *Why do you call it a cross?*
- *And how are we supposed to call it?*
- *But there is no cross there.*
- *But for us it is a cross. Just as if it were a Polish cross (...). For me it is the same. I know it has a different name, but I don't know that name. Anyone will tell you that there is a cross there.*
- *In Jewish tradition a gravestone is called a matzevah (...).*
- *And we call it a cross. But not our cross, the Jewish cross.*

The relationship between the wooden marker and a “way-side” cross and the taboos related to burial sites might offer an explanation for the fact that none of the 18 markers visited by representatives of both foundations have been destroyed or removed. However, in at least three other locations the marker served as a starting point for commemorative processes. Within a year, two of the marked sites have been transformed into permanent commemorations and one has become the subject of local remembrance practices. In these cases, a key role was played by local networks of activists and the involvement of immediate neighbors of these sites (or property owners). In the case

5 Such practices were discussed in journals and newspapers, described as an outrageous „durability of superstition” and folk magic, however rarely explaining the essence of it, see: *Drobiazgi*, „Wisła. Czasopismo poświęcone krajoznawstwu i ludoznawstwu” 1916, v. 20, p. 81: <https://polona.pl/item/9030429/42/>; *Skutki zabobonu*, „Górnoślążak. Pismo codzienne poświęcone sprawom ludu polskiego na Śląsku”, No. 161, Katowice 19.07.1906: <https://polona.pl/item/50466604/3/>; „Kurjer Warszawski”, No. 117, 17.05.1876: <https://polona.pl/item/19219872/0/>; *Rosół z trupa*, „Dziennik Warszawski” 12.11.1865. I am grateful to Łukasz Kozak for drawing my attention to the above-mentioned cases, especially the use of Jewish corpses or their fragments by Polish peasants to protect animals from diseases or to protect people from plague and evil forces.

of Karmanowice and Rogalów, two towns near Nałęczów, the very placement of a matzevot sparked the interest of people involved in the study of local history – representatives of the local community were present on the spot, including a person who indicated the burial site; a two-part radio report on the subject was also created (aired on the Polish Radio Lublin). In Brzesko, thanks to the involvement of a local activist of memory, a plaque with the names and surnames of the victims – Cyla and MundeK Strauber – was placed on a wooden matzevot. The marker has also become an integral part of the Brzesko march of memory. In both cases, it was the local actors who gathered knowledge about the victims and the circumstances of their death. Thanks to a local activist, a school friend of one of the victims took part in the ceremony accompanying the unveiling of the monument in Karmanowice. Thanks to another one, the circumstances of death of Cyla and MundeK Strauber are known, remembered and reported by a schoolmate of Cyla. In the case of all three sites, the marker, in a sense, helped to “bring out” local knowledge. The temporary nature of the intervention may contribute to focusing local initiatives and act as a catalyst for locally conducted research, activities and commemoration practices. It is a gesture which, since it is not a proper commemoration, does not relieve the local community of other obligations, nor does it impose ready-made forms and discourses. At the same time, it opens up room for action, leaving space for one’s own agency and offering the opportunity to take responsibility for the commemoration process to the extent that is possible locally.

Conclusions

Following the suggestion of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2016, 102) and Roma Sendyka (2019), I refer to non-sites of memory as a “legacy” rather than “heritage”, to avoid the association with what is monumental, celebrated or at least recognized as important, even if problematic (as is the case with the difficult heritage of the site of the former NSDAP congresses in Nuremberg described by Macdonald 2009). As Konrad Matyjaszek (2013) also points out, the use of the term “heritage” with reference to what had been Jewish property in Poland draws our attention to the nature of the process of acquisition of these goods. However, this legacy shares some of the characteristics of “difficult heritage” described by MacDonald – the risk of opening up social divisions and challenging a positive self-identification of a group directly related to it. Non-sites of memory – unwanted and ambivalent heritage – function in the local community with a taboo associated with them. As Roma Sendyka writes, “they are a source of a certain discomfort among the communities nearest them, for whom commemorating them is a greater threat for their collective identity than is neglecting to commemorate them” (2015, 16-17). Their commemoration is threatening to expose both the former local presence of “others” and bring up the problematic status of

property they left behind, as well as the circumstances of their death. It seems that this prevents the local communities from making commemorative gestures and conducting commemorative practices, and results in deeming these places religiously and culturally alien, and therefore not subject to codes and systems of behavior belonging to the burial sites of members of one’s own community. Local memory activists who decide to make gestures aimed at commemoration on their own initiative are often confronted with the resistance of the rest of the community and fear of the consequences of violating the stability of the local memory culture.

Given the complex status of non-sites of memory, they appear to be something that is inherited in a sense of being left behind by those who were here before us, but for at least two reasons are not perceived as part of *us*. First of all, *they* (both victims and perpetrators) were members of *other* groups (the Jews, the Germans / the Nazis). This allows one to create a strong division between *our* and *their* legacy, including the legacy of violence. Secondly, even if perpetrators were members of our own community, the community uses various mechanisms to protect its own positive self-image, so in consequence, this is never fully acknowledged. A discourse of “a few bad apples” can serve as an example of such mechanism. Moreover, Andrzej Leder (2014) uses a term “sleepwalking through revolution” to describe the whole process that took place in Poland between 1939 and 1956 – namely the Holocaust wiping out the Jewish community and the fall of the higher classes. He calls it a revolution – referring to bourgeois revolution – but a particular one, as it was made by Others, which has problematic consequences, such as for instance the lack of the very possibility to equate actions with responsibility for what happened. Non-sites of memory are a problematic legacy rather than a difficult heritage – they are rarely openly recognized, talked about or referred to within the local community. Also, those who might want to claim their ownership over this kind of legacy cannot be easily interpreted as “heritage community”. The term, proposed in the UNESCO Faro convention, offers an interesting approach: contrary to the traditional definition of a community of (certain) heritage as formed by blood ties, ethnicity or place of residence, it introduces the understanding of such group as a community of will. However, Erica Lehrer points to the problematic use of the term proposed in the Faro Convention with regard to the legacy of the Holocaust. Recognizing the flexibility of the definition as its positive aspect, Lehrer (2020) also acknowledges the limits of the focus on “will” and “choice” as conditions for becoming part of heritage community. Instead, thinking about the intersections of Polish and Jewish history, Erica Lehrer proposes the term *community of implication*, more appropriate to describe those involved in a given history and entangled in it, regardless of their will and choice. Lehrer refers to Michael Rothberg (2019), who introduces a new concept of historical subjectivity – “implicated subjects” – to overcome the limits of Raul Hilberg’s triad (perpetrators, victims, bystanders).



Figure 1. Aleksander Schwarz, photograph of the commemorated site in Karmanowice (Poland), previously marked by a wooden marker, 2018. Available courtesy of the author.



Figure 2. Steven D. Reece, documentation of the project by The Zapomniane Foundation and the Matzevah Foundation, 2017. Available courtesy of the author.



Figure 3. Steven D. Reece, documentation of the project by The Zapomniane Foundation and the Matzevah Foundation, 2017. Available courtesy of the author.

Consequences of the intervention seem to prove that such gestures can become a tool to open up local knowledge, because the marker itself seems to belong to the same type of practices that vernacular memory favors: it is performative, it is temporary, it is modest, unspectacular. It also seems to fit into the complex memory cultures of communities of implication. Being *less* than a monument, they leave room for different actors to take action and create the discourse around them. Being vernacular, they facilitate the sharing of local vernacular knowledge. Being temporary, they create space for various stakeholders to negotiate the future of the site. At the same time, this symbolic gesture changes the status of the site, which seems to make it possible to change related practices. Practices of folk-traditional origin neutralizing the ambivalence of non-sites of memory can be replaced by a different system of behaviors, without imposing a national or international memory discourse, thereby letting the community of those who recognize themselves as actors take action.

Acknowledgements

The articles presented in this issue were prepared within the scope of the project: *Uncommemorated Genocide Sites and Their Impact on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland* (Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the National Programme for the Development of Humanities, 2016-2020, registration no 2aH 15 0121 83) developed in the Research Center for Memory Cultures, Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University. Principal investigator: Roma Sendyka, team members: Katarzyna Grzybowska, Aleksandra Janus, Karina Jarzyńska, Maria Kobielska, Jacek Małczyński, Jakub Muchowski, Łukasz Posłuszny, Kinga Siewior, Mikołaj Smykowski, Katarzyna Suszkiewicz, Aleksandra Szczepan.

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