MEMORY POLITICS AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

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THE POLITICS OF TRAUMA AND MEMORY ACTIVISM

Polish-Jewish Relations Today

Janine Holc

Memory Politics and Transitional Justice

Series editors

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The Politics of Trauma and Memory Activism

Polish–Jewish Relations Today

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For Anthony

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract "Memory activism" is public advocacy for change in how the past is recalled and represented, and it has taken many forms in Eastern Europe after 1989. Much of this activism has centered on the difficult issues surrounding the history of Jewish life and death in Poland; scholars have documented Poland's "Jewish spaces" and debates over memorialization of the Holocaust. This chapter frames these issues as problems of representation, ideology, and attachment to national identity, drawing on the work of Kaja Silverman. It critically assesses the "reconciliation paradigm," a frequent model for memory work; addresses the impact of Jan Gross's *Neighbors* on Jedwabne; and presents an approach to memory activism that attends to the assignation of the "traumatic" and the possibility of ideological rupture.

Keywords Memory activism · Poland · Reconciliation · Neighbors Identity · Jews

Every year, in late October, residents of the town of Płońsk, Poland, take a walk together. Since 2008 the townspeople, led by their mayor, walk silently along the same road that Jews from Płońsk were forced to march along in 1942 by the Nazi SS (Płoński Marsz 2008). This silent vigil ends at the train station where Nazi authorities forced the Jewish families who had been living and working in the Płońsk ghetto to board trains leaving for Auschwitz, where they planned to kill them. Once the group

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arrives at the station, their silence is broken with readings of eyewitness accounts. They add their own commitments to remember. A priest and a rabbi together offer a prayer.

The Płońsk ghetto was in the center of town, on both sides of the main street. At the time of the German occupation many of the non-Jewish Poles of Płońsk encountered the ghetto boundaries (usually houses with boarded-up windows and doors) and the German persecution of its residents in their everyday public activities. It is the recorded testimonies of these witnesses that are read aloud during the present-day "March of Silence." These are Czesława Stawiska's words, from a 2004 interview by a local archivist and read aloud in 2008:

"I was once a witness to something that I cannot forget to this day. It was when Germans caught Jews who were trying to flee out of the Płońsk ghetto. They would do public executions—they gathered every Jew from the ghetto to the plaza at Warsaw Street, more or less across from the furniture store, and ordered them to bang together tins, to show that they 'enjoyed' the event… that they would remember that those who ran away would meet the same fate. And they brought out this Jew and beat him to death. Right when the Germans had killed him, that is exactly when I was going to Mrs. Mossakowski's for milk. I saw him. It was a young boy. I heard what he cried out: Mommy! My mommy! For a long time I could not forget those cries, that pleading. Because I heard it. Miss, he wanted his mother. The mother" (Stawiska 2004).

This event at Płońsk captures the contours and layers of memory activism, the central focus of this book. Czesława Stawiska's words recall Jewish life and death through the material culture of the town, its streets, and buildings, as well as through the everyday routines of life. She presents her experience with the Nazi occupation as an interruption that is both physical, in that Warsaw Street bisects the ghetto, and psychological, in her confrontation with extreme SS terror tactics. The mayor and town residents, who in the 2000s incorporate Stawiska's memories into their own commemoration, do so through a public enactment at the sites of past persecution. They are memory activists, in that the location and form of the enactment allow for expressions of grief and the deliberate, scripted recall of a specific moment from the past. Their practice creates a historical narrative of Płońsk in which the Jewish past figures prominently.

Płońsk's "March of Silence" also raises some difficult questions about Polish–Jewish relations and memory. First, Stawiska's testimony is not detached ethnographic observation. She represents her own

traumatization as well as the event of Nazis killing a child to intimidate a captive community. The calling out, until death, for a mother who cannot respond seems to be more than she could take in. She begins at a distance, describing "Germans" and "Jews," but then she moves closer, stunned at the "young boy" who is no longer identified as a "Jew" but just a child who needs a mother, as she possibly was. Stawiska is herself traumatized by first witnessing, and then, identifying with the pain of the boy. What are we to make of this witness's trauma? What exactly does it represent, and what purpose does it serve for the present-day participants in commemoration? Second, and in parallel with the first, what are those participants grieving and acknowledging? Is it their own losses, the extremity of genocide as it occurred on their own streets, or the pain and loss borne by past Jewish neighbors? And third, what new meanings does the public march create for the participants and observers? Is it an act of reconciliation, and if so, reconciliation to what?

This book seeks to respond to these difficult questions through an analysis of a series of memory activist projects in post-1989 Poland. Memory activism, or the public advocacy for a change in how the past is remembered, became more frequent after the end of Communist Party government throughout Central and Southern Europe. In Poland, it was part of the proliferation of advocacy initiatives that filled the newly open space of civil society, a space that Padraic Kenney called "carnival" in his study of the late 1980's (2002). Like the March of Silence in Płońsk, memory activism engaged residents of local communities to participate in scripted enactments aimed at challenging taken-for-granted understandings of Polish history, and creating new meanings—often based on the historical truths that had long been obscured or neglected—that the activists hoped would lead to specific outcomes.

In the cases presented in this book—Brama Grodzka in Lublin, Pogranicze Sejny in Sejny, and the Center for Jewish Culture in Kraków—these historical truths centered on the relationship of Polish national identity to ethnic and religious "others," especially Jewish "others." Geography plays a powerful role here. Because of the location of these sites—Lublin, Sejny, Kraków—on territory that so many Jewish families lived in, that so many nation-minded Poles wanted to claim for a Polish state, that empires wanted to contain and Nazis wanted to wipe clean, today's eastern Poland has legacies of hierarchy, exclusion and mass violence running through its past. Moral and historical questions about the role of non-Jewish Poles in the Holocaust as well as in other

excisions and exclusions, such as of Ukrainians, Roma, and Belarusians, arose in the late 1980s and continue to be painful and unsettled.

At the core of much of the reflection, rhetoric and debate about these legacies of violence is the question, what does it mean to be Polish? Barbara Engelking, writing for a Polish audience, puts it this way: "The experience of the Holocaust seems to me to lay an obligation on us all. An obligation which is paid off individually, on the basis of recognizing that particular event in the history of mankind as part of our own heritage" (Engelking 2001 [1994], p. 330). Taking the lead from Engelking's contextualization of history as a summons to responsibility, one could restate the core issue as two steps: to what degree were non-Jewish Poles implicated in anti-Jewish violence, and in what way should Polish national identity accommodate or disavow such implication? These two steps structure the environment in which historians in Poland and elsewhere have pursued these questions, as they publish work documenting the "particular events" (step one) that constitute "our own heritage" (step two). Examples include Bożena Szaynok's *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach* (1992), which brought to the forefront the 1946 murder of Jews who had survived the war by civilian Poles; Jan Gross's *Neighbors* (2001 [2000]), which documented the round-up and mass killing of the Jewish members of a small town by their non-Jewish neighbors; Jan Grabowski's *Hunt for the Jews* (2013 [2011]), about the practices by Poles of seeking out Jews in hiding during the war to turn them over to the Nazis; and Barbara Engelking's *Such a Beautiful Sunny Day* (2016 [2011]), about the refusal of rural Poles to take in Jews fleeing violence. Each of these was published in Polish prior to publication in the United States; the Polish publication date is in brackets.

Each of these works also sparked controversy in Poland upon publication; Jan Gross's *Neighbors* provoked perhaps the most deeply probing response. Scholars had documented postwar pogroms before his book and indeed had published articles on the town of Jedwabne during the Nazi occupation. But Gross's determined pursuit of the numbers of the dead, his privileging of testimony, and his insistence on connecting historical findings to questions of moral obligation elevated *Neighbors* to what one might call a memory crisis event. There was no easy way to downplay the truth that civilian Poles—indeed, Catholic Poles—had taken advantage of their long-time neighbors' sudden disempowerment under German law, and had forced Jewish men, women, and children into a barn to be burned to death.

Many readers reacted to Gross's arguments with defensiveness and anger, in part because of their challenge to the preexisting understandings of Polish national identity. Deep disillusionment was also a common reaction. The prominent liberal and editor of *Res Publica Nowa*, Marcin Król, led off a special issue on history and memory with these observations: "For me, [Jedwabne means] an end of the possibility of Poles thinking about ourselves in a certain way, bound up with tradition… I have written about how this 'fatherland' [ojczyzna] is essential for us… No longer. That 'Polishness' and that 'fatherland' are no longer alive" (Król 2001: 6). In the same issue, Paweł Śpiewak worried about the attacks on Gross, which included challenges to his evidence: "This [criticism of Gross] is not about information, but rather about a mode of thinking about ethnicity," that is, Polishness (Król 2001: 8). For Śpiewak the uproar over *Neighbors* came from its threat to a specific view of Polish national identity.

The reality that people who were Polish behaved immorally, not as individuals, but as a community, and not only any community, but one defined in the Jedwabne case as almost all those in the town who were not Jewish, challenged the taken-for-granted notion of Polishness as essentially moral. In this default position, Polishness is essentially moral because of the Polish nation's ostensible historic powerlessness (ignoring periods of dominance over others). Expanding empires and states had taken away by force the territory of Poland, in the 1700s, the 1800s to 1919, and then again in 1939. International actors had dictated and shaped Poland's borders and place in Europe, in 1919 and then again in 1944. This history renders Poland, in terms of this commonly accepted identity, an innocent.

Moreover, *Neighbors* provoked such emotionally charged reactions in part because the individual's attachment to the innocence of Polishness is itself a matter of emotion rather than historical fact. Indeed, we can say for many communities across the globe, attachments to "homeland," patria, ethnic identity, or religion were and are highly charged. They are part of the "practice of nationalism," in Brubaker's terms (1996)—the process of creating and sustaining a unified concept of "Poland." In the case of Poland, this charge is organized such that "particular events" outside of its rationale cannot be integrated into it. Engelking labels this attachment a "martyrology" (2001); Joanna Tokarska-Bakir calls it an "obsession with innocence" (2001). These terms may not be precise enough. The psychic investment in one's community's innocence is, as

these terms suggest, outside of the realm of historic argument, but this is the case with any psychic investment. It may be enough to say that such an investment is a formidable obstacle to those who would like to create change, be they historians or memory activists.

The challenge for activists, who do not pursue these questions via research, was and is to develop strategies that can somehow work with the investment in a pre-existing attachment to a specific dominant identity to create room for an alternative. One risk is that their intended audience may reject or evade their efforts, either to preserve the long-standing identification or to continue on in complacence. Another is that a superficial version of acknowledging Poland's implication in past violence may arise, as a substitute for the more difficult alternative.

This book chooses to focus on three organizations, out of the many memory activist initiatives that dotted Poland's social landscape after 1989, for several reasons related directly to the discussion above. First, as will be outlined below and developed further in the chapters of this book, these organizations took up the unsettled and still painful issues of Polish identity in the wake of ethnic and religious violence more directly than other memory groups. While organizations such as the Auschwitz Jewish Center in Oświęcim focus on the Holocaust as an event in the past, the three under study here view ethnic hostility and fear as an ongoing challenge in the present day. Second, these organizations invested substantial time in dialogue across ethnic and religious difference, but moved beyond dialogue to create multilayered, participatory events that play out in public spaces. Their events created discomfort and aversion as much as they offer avenues for connection. This distinguishes them from those memory organizations such as Andrzej Folwarczny's Forum for Dialogue in Gliwice and Warsaw, or the Edith Stein House in Wrocław, both of which emphasize education and intercultural understanding pursued in small, intimate groups. Finally, it what may at first seem counterintuitive, the three case studies of memory activism did not pursue reconciliation, either between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles, or among different ethnic identities. Reconciliation, defined as "the coming together of things that once were united but have been torn asunder" (Daly and Sarkin 2007), hopes for an end to the alienated condition of estrangement, and is indeed a popular and pervasive activist movement in settings with conflictual histories. However, as developed below, reconciliation has significant flaws that limit its helpfulness in effecting the types of change these memory activists are committed to.

Brama Grodzka's work was a collection of projects aimed at changing how residents of Lublin remembered Lublin's Jewish past. Before World War II one-third of Lublin's residents were Jewish, and the city was a center for Jewish spiritual and communal life in eastern Poland. The Nazi occupiers established a Jewish ghetto, along with increasingly brutal anti-Jewish tactics and deportations, and in 1944 they killed those remaining and destroyed most of the buildings. Postwar Lublin residents and visitors see few traces of this Jewish past on the surface. Brama Grodzka developed strategies of public engagement with Lublin's streets and empty spaces, with the goal of bringing Jewish Lublin into the public consciousness.

Pogranicze Sejny has been located in the town of Sejny in rural northeastern Poland, at the border with Lithuania, since the 1990s. This borderland region was, in different historical periods, at the outer edge of the Russian Empire, in reach of the Prussian Empire, and in the midst of the Polish-Soviet battles of 1919 and 1920. A frontier to some, a battleground to others, it was also a refuge to those fleeing persecution, such as the Old Believers who challenged Russian Orthodoxy. The Nazi occupation was devastating for Sejny's Jews. It also resulted in the ethnic cleansing of other communities, including the postwar relocation of local Germans. Postwar tensions between Lithuania and Poland are reproduced on the local level in Sejny, where a significant percentage of the population identifies as Lithuanian. Since the late 1990s, Pogranicze Sejny (also called the Borderland Foundation) has sought to restore the recognition of this region's multicultural history by creating practices that bring different ethnicities together.

The Center for Jewish Culture in Kraków has worked with the significant architectural heritage of Kraków's Jewish quarter, called Kazimierz, also since the early 1990s. Unlike the other two cases above, however, the Center attempted to maintain its mission in the midst of a mid-1990s surge in heritage tourism, Holocaust tourism, and participation in the annual Festival of Jewish Culture. In grappling with the many expectations, motivations, and desires of these visitors, the Center moved from an organization specializing in historical preservation to one promoting a historically accurate understanding of not only Kraków's Jewish past but of relations between non-Jewish and Jewish residents.

In addition, each of the three—Brama Grodzka, Pogranicze Sejny, and the Center for Jewish Culture—worked with an explicit or implicit awareness of the obstacles posed by the attachment to an innocent Polish

identity. They did not confront this identity directly, but instead offered avenues by which individuals could open up or loosen this attachment. However, as this book will argue, in doing so they created a new set of meanings which were problematic in their own way.

What follows are focused, ethnographic treatments of specific instances of memory activist events in the post-1989 period. But the more significant argument that the book puts forward goes beyond ethnography. As is evident in the layered dimensions of the commemoration in Płońsk, memory work in the public sphere cannot avoid the difficulties that come along with representation itself. In enactments of public recall, someone selects the words and actions which are intended to capture the past. Often these words and actions are already representations of the past—they have already been selected at an earlier moment—as in the case of Czesława Stawiska's testimony. Stawiska represented her observation of extreme brutality to the interviewer in 2004, who archived it for use in a memory event in 2008. Her depiction of the suffering and death of others, intertwined with her own recall of how she felt at the time, was already a "memory event" at the time of the interview, later mobilized for the purpose of helping Płońsk residents commemorate the Holocaust as Nazis carried it out in on their own streets. Thus, the work of memory activism relies on assumptions, at times implicit, about which aspects of the past are valuable, and which aspects of the present should be challenged and questioned.

In the past decade, several scholarly studies of memory activism in Poland and Ukraine have been published. Prominent among these are Erica Lehrer's on-the-ground ethnography of Catholic–Jewish reconciliation initiatives (2013); Michael Meng's analysis of the physical landscapes of Holocaust memory in Poland (2011); and Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory (2010). I build on these works to extend their lines of inquiry into issues of representation. Drawing on first semiotics and then critical trauma theory, the approach taken here evaluates the strategies by which activists undermine preexisting understandings and create new narratives. In other words, while previous studies have asked, "what happens when activists act?" this study asks, "what established meanings do activists displace, and what new meanings do they mobilize?"

The semiotics concept of "rupture" offered by Kaja Silverman is useful in considering strategies of representation in the context of strong emotional attachments to specific versions of the past (Silverman 1983).

Silverman proceeds from the view that connected belief systems legitimizing a specific social order—that is, ideologies—only appear to be consistent and smooth on their surfaces. She argues that any dominant system of representation hides a diverse array of alternative representations. She writes, "As long as there is culture there will continue to be ideology. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that there is always a heterogeneity of conflicting ideologies concealed behind the dominant one… . it *is* possible to effect a rupture with one…" (Silverman 1983: 31). We need language to be who we are, but we are still able to loosen our dependence on *specific* linguistically structured belief systems.

Silverman's view is useful for those studying social relations in situations of a widespread contestation of meaning, such as the debate engendered by *Neighbors*. It helps flesh out views of national identity such as Brubaker's (1996) in which "nationalism" is a social and discursive practice. Because any view of national identity or a national history only *appears* to be stable and accepted by all, how tightly people hold onto it can be changed. The links among the concepts comprising the dominant view—the qualities that make it function as an ideology—can be challenged, broken, ruptured. However, this "rupture" does not involve pointing out a logical contradiction or providing new documentation, because the attachment people have to a specific version of the past is emotional rather than a matter of logic. It requires a "working through" of the elements of that emotional attachment, and of who we are inside of that ideology: "…it is only inside of [ideology] that we find our subjectivity and our social reality" (Silverman 1983: 31). We cannot step outside of our culture altogether.

Silverman draws from Freud, Gramsci, Foucault, and Lacan to create a theory of representation in which our psychic investment in certain stories—linked events—can be explained not through psychology, but through the way language and narrative work in our lives. For Silverman, "national identity" is a unity that may appear powerful, but is ultimately unstable and must be constantly reasserted. Of course, the idea that traditions and nationalisms are "invented" is now accepted as commonplace by scholars. But Silverman offers an explanation of how such inventions come to have a grip on individuals and communities, and how that grip is at times loosened. And this is precisely the issue faced by memory activists, whose work is to change what counts as a valuable past for a community.

An example of such a system of representation is the commitment to "reconciliation" on the part of activist groups functioning in post-conflict societies. It may be surprising to think of reconciliation as an ideology, especially since historians and social scientists use "ideology" to refer to specific historical efforts at political legitimation and social control. Ideology for critical theorists is any linked set of articulated equivalencies that structure the possibilities for the agency; in this definition, what an ideology excludes is as important as what it includes, although it may hide these exclusions. Historians especially may find this definition to be overly abstract. However, if we take a careful look at how reconciliation, for example, functions to structure choices in responding to conflict, this view of ideology may prove to be a helpful lens.

Reconciliation, as defined earlier, is the bringing together of what has been artificially or forcefully ripped apart. This term is common in interpersonal relations, but memory work is concerned with its use in public processes following ethnic, religious or other types of social conflict. (It also has a specific theological meaning, which is not included here.) Reconciliation has so many positive associations that it risks being uncritically embraced. Its value can be taken for granted in contexts of intense societal division; it has a respected status in processes of social or national healing after conflict. This continues to be the case even though the scholarly reconciliation literature has developed nuanced analyses of the conditions under which reconciliation is possible and productive (Thomson 2013; Gawerc 2012; Abu-Nimer 2001).

What is the significance of taking "reconciliation" as a goal for post-*Neighbors* Polish-Jewish relations? The memory activists in this book grappled, to a larger or smaller degree, with these questions. In so doing, they were able to move beyond a "reconciliation" approach to identify and then put into practice strategies that created the possibility of rupture with the attachment to a Poland of "innocence," and to bring to the forefront alternative structures of working with the past. Brama Grodzka, this book argues, went furthest in doing so, developing through a series of participatory practices and events a model of "rapprochement," an acceptance of the irreconcilability of innocence with Lublin's Jewish past. Pogranicze Sejny developed a multicultural approach to break through the persistent dualism of "Polish/Jewish" characterizing the post-*Neighbors* memory debates. And the Center for Jewish Culture sought to counter a flood of memory entrepreneurs in Kraków in the late 1990s and early 2000s by shifting from historical recuperation to an

ongoing critique of Polish anti-Semitism. Each, this book argues, positioned these activities as refusals of the reconciliation approach.

How does reconciliation work "ideologically," taking Silverman's term, to put forward a particular version of social relations and to obscure alternatives? Jennifer Harvey (2014) has developed an influential critique of reconciliation that brings to the forefront the exclusions that are hidden via its representation of post-conflict healing. Her context—of relations between African-American and white religious communities in the United States—is quite different from Central European memory politics, but her treatment of what she calls the "reconciliation paradigm" is helpful in clarifying Silverman's view of ideology, and in providing a critical perspective on this approach in any context.

Harvey argues that what she calls the "reconciliation paradigm" appears at first glance to call upon the two parties in a conflictual situation characterized by injustice to overcome their "separateness," communicate across their differences, acknowledge how the "other side" perceives the situation, and base a new acceptance of difference in perspective on this acknowledgement (2014: 19). The outcome would be an inclusive community in which "difference," be it difference of identity such as racial difference, or difference in the interpretation of past wrongs, is embraced as enriching. One reconciles with the "other side." One also reconciles oneself to a shared life in which community members may not have similar identities, histories, or perspectives—just similar commitments to improving a shared future.

Harvey's book is an extensive elaboration of the reconciliation paradigm. There are two elements to her elaboration that are most helpful for understanding memory activism in Poland. The first is the assumption of two "sides" of the story that approach each other on a more or less equal basis. There may have been inequality, injustice, and violence perpetrated by one side on the other, but reconciliation proceeds when conditions have been created to allow both sides full security and voice. The second is the power of the reconciliation paradigm to diagnose the roots of the conflict over Polish–Jewish relations generally and over *Neighbors* in particular as an issue of a lack of acknowledgement on the Polish side of the full Jewish experience in Poland, and to prescribe education, dialogue, understanding, and acceptance as a way forward. This diagnosis and prescription is powerful because, discursively, it promises a shared Poland—a full, rich history in which Jewish Poland is embraced as part of Polish national identity. It is also powerful because its ideological

structure presents itself as countering those voices who would like to sustain Poland's "innocence"—that is, those rejecting any claims of Polish responsibility for Jewish death—while functioning to create a pathway out of guilt back toward that same innocence. Once could say the reconciliation paradigm is an ideological management of threats to Polish national identity.

Harvey's most compelling points come in her comparison of the reconciliation paradigm to another alternative, a "repair and redress" paradigm, which she supports. She attacks reconciliation's assumption of two separate sides that need to approach each other to overcome the past, and that have the capacity to do so equally. This assumption ignores the elements of one side's history and identity that allowed that side to perpetrate injustice. It also requires two sides, each of which come to the table, so to speak, via a claimed identification. Harvey also points out that reconciliation requires closure. There is an end of the reconciliation process presumed inside the concept itself. This anticipated closure has a force that can sideline any frank discussion of past suffering.

To illustrate the reconciliation paradigm and Harvey's critique we can consider an essay by Feliks Tych, a prominent historian in Poland, who posed the question, "are there separate memories of the Shoah, Polish and Jewish?" (2000). As this question played out in the Poland of 2000, the separateness of memories implied a separateness of not only experience but of interpretation. The difficulties of Polish–Jewish relations could be attributed to the nature of perception itself. In the view Tych is critiquing, misperception is part of human nature. The main obstacle to reconciliation is simply misunderstanding. Tych argues that this argument is attractive because it removes any responsibility for actual practices of exclusion, marginalization, and violence that Poles initiated or contributed to. It also leaves "interpretation" standing unexamined as each side's dominant narrative.

Tych's alternative to "interpretation" is to turn to historical truth-telling. "One cannot dispense with the [historian's] obligation to investigate the truth and to disseminate that to one's readers" (2000: 55). This insistence on speaking and writing about the past, tapping into long "dormant" archives, would, in his view, add such nuance and precision to discussions of Polish–Jewish relations that exaggeration, stereotypes, and sweeping generalities would be diminished. A retreat into "misunderstanding" would be impossible. While in many ways this appeal to

history is inadequate as a memory strategy, it speaks to the difference between "fact" and the "understanding" of reconciliation approaches.

Alternatively, Harvey looks to material solutions rather than historical ones. She argues that participants in any process attempting to address injustice between groups should treat their desires for "any sort of mutuality" with skepticism (2013: 128), because the "legacies of harm" cannot be genuinely addressed through dialogue (128). It is only through finding ways to redress the harms committed that post-conflict work can be considered just. This is work that is exclusively done by "one side," that is, the party that benefitted from such harms.

Again, Harvey is addressing racial relations in the United States, which I am in no way arguing are comparable to relations between non-Jewish and Jewish Poles; nor is it helpful to compare the experience of wartime Poland to other episodes of ethnic violence in a systematic manner. Moreover, in the case of Poland, the notion that non-Jewish Poles had access to more power than Jews living in Poland is an extraordinarily difficult claim to advance in practice, and one that memory activists choose not to make. The Soviet and Nazi occupations, the prewar and postwar boundary interventions of international powers, the local experiences with ethnic violence at the hands of Ukrainians, Russians, and Germans at various points in history, all work to position people who spoke Polish and aligned themselves ethnically and nationally with Poland as deeply vulnerable to deprivation and violence across many historical periods. Indeed, it is this persistent exploitation by external forces that intertwines with national identity to make Polish innocence so convincing.

What is important about Harvey's critique of the reconciliation paradigm is its direct relevance for memory activist work. This work, especially in its European forms, frequently draws on models that rely on reconciliation assumptions. This occurs in part because donors, funders, and other audiences find these assumptions familiar and perhaps reassuring.

To clarify the argument so far, memory activists in Poland operated in an environment in which they had to grapple with two powerful narratives, each of which incorporates and reinforces a specific view of Polish national identity, and each of which induces emotionally charged attachments. The narrative of Polish innocence appears consistent and historically grounded on its face; similarly, the narrative of Polish–Jewish reconciliation is morally compelling, has its own sources of legitimacy, and is supported by material resources. The story this book tells is how

three activist groups approached these narratives, avoided their pitfalls, and developed strategies that allowed people in Poland to effect a rupture with what had ordered their senses of self and nation up to that point.

One additional conceptual element is important to this argument. Representations of past events of extreme brutality, violence, and death necessarily involve trauma. As the story presented at the Płońsk "March of Silence" opening this chapter demonstrated, how and when a traumatized voice finds its way into representations of the past, and what that trauma signifies, are complex questions. The memory activists analyzed in this book used evocations of trauma in their strategies in ways which were not unproblematic. Traumatizing images and words are methods by which audiences can be pulled in, forced to confront uncomfortable truths, and face the pain of others. Yet they have other aesthetic functions which at times create distance, such as debasement. The literature on Holocaust visual culture explores these problematics, arguing that there is an ethics to representing suffering to a mass audience (Zelizer 2001).

Trauma theory draws on the Freudian insight that we dissociate when confronted with an experience we cannot assimilate or take in. In light of the dissociative response, we cannot fully remember or explain what occurred. In applying trauma theory to collective instances of suffering such as the Holocaust, scholars have noted the challenges it poses to historical representation. It is obviously central to a large body of work in Holocaust studies. Dominick LaCapra brought trauma theory to historiography, in his *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001). For LaCapra, a historian may be "working through" trauma, for herself and for the readers. Thus, hearkening back to that girl sent for milk in Płońsk, her story suggests that "trauma" has occurred and continues to occur in multiple modes, borne by multiple bodies. It is carried by the boy being killed; by his possibly absent, possibly observing, mother; by the Jewish residents of the ghetto, banging their tins; by Czesława herself at the time of the boy's death; by Czesława, the narrator who loses her adult train of thought and resorts to "the mother, the mother;" by a journalist or historian documenting the events that feature Czesława's testimony; and finally by audiences, both of Czesława's testimony and of, perhaps, the opening paragraphs of this book.

In alignment with Silverman's emphasis on ideology outlined above, critical trauma theory has recently emerged to questions the processes by which an event is labeled "traumatic," and a body is labeled "traumatized" (Stevens 2011). It notes that in various social contexts, in various

historical periods, some groups are found to be deserving of the compassion that comes along with a story or image of trauma, while some are not, regardless of any "objective" assessment of the extent of suffering. To label an event "traumatic" is to add something to it—a claim of urgency, a moment of silence, a stance of aversion or compassion. To notice a "traumatized" register and point it out creates possibilities (what does Czesława's testimony tell us about Poles in Płońsk?) and limitations (should we avoid asking such questions out of respect?). In sum, critical trauma theory asks us to attend carefully to how trauma manifests itself in forms of representation and for what purposes (Casper and Wertheimer 2016).

In the cases I present here, each group used assumptions about bodily trauma, community trauma, and future healing to pursue its activism. For example, the group Pogranicze Sejny in the Poland–Lithuania border region explains its home community as one of "learned mutual suspicion," in which Polish and Lithuanian neighbors are estranged from one another. Their mutual alienation is rooted in decades-old discrimination and ethnicized violence. For the Pogranicze activists, this estrangement is a traumatic wound. The particular representation of estrangement as traumatic informs Pogranicze's activism, the historical narratives it promotes, and channels visions of the future in a specific direction.

This book is organized by devoting a chapter to each memory activist group, in which the local context (Lublin, Sejny, Kraków) is elaborated, the group's mission and activities are detailed, and the strategies of each analyzed according to the conceptual framework outlined above. Each case is documented using a mixed methods approach, with an emphasis on direct observation and on-site open-ended interviews with staff, participants, and nonparticipants. This on-site fieldwork was supplemented by the collection of brochures, posters, and other ephemera; group websites; contemporary press accounts; historical archival material and press reports; and secondary sources. Each chapter offers textured examples of the events and practices developed by each group in the period under study.

In addition to the three groups chosen as case studies, an additional chapter analyzes the state as a memory participant. The government of Poland is, of course, a democracy, and one cannot say it has always spoken with a single voice, especially on issues of memory. The chapter positions the Polish state as a context for the emergence of memory

activists in the early 1990s, and then as a contender in the memory field, first in its establishment of IPN, the official Institute for National Remembrance; then in its creation of Polin, the Museum of Polish Jewry; and finally in its role, since 2015, as an active shaper of official historical narratives. This chapter is placed after the three case studies. The conservative governing party elected in 2015 in Poland has indeed altered the landscape for memory activism and certainly for historical scholarship and museum work. But its influence on the activists in Lublin, Sejny, and Kraków should not be overstated. The Law and Justice Party is but one contender in a porous memory field.

What does this book contribute to the field of memory studies? The memory activist groups analyzed in this book do not view "memory" as a static, sutured experience easily available and clearly identified. They first challenge the dominant, existing story about Polishness and Polish history by creating practices that loosen the attachment to national identity. They offer an embodied experience for an audience or group of participants with performative elements, showing how conflicting pasts, or stories, can coexist in the same narrative space. This performative approach to the dynamics of public memory sets memory activism apart from initiatives that stress memorialization, commemoration or symbolic gestures. Indeed, these groups do not even use stylized, choreographed performance (such as theater or protests) as part of their repertoire.

Memory is for most a deeply personal dimension of the self. It can feel as if it has a mind of its own, coming and going according to a rhythm we often cannot control. At times we seek to capture remembered moments for our own purposes: to tell a story to loved ones, to persuade an adversary, to connect with strangers. In Western contexts, memory has come to be considered an element of the psyche or a capacity of the brain. Under these conditions, it makes sense to distinguish between privately held and publicly shared memory. In other cultural contexts, the memory may be viewed as arising out of a shared experience or something summoned by specific practices, relational rather than inhabiting a single body.

The elusive quality of memory has made it a fascinating subject for scholars, especially in the twenty-first century. Its malleability and potential to speak to us intimately have historically made it an easy tool for states and empires, who commemorate selected events from the past and promote selected versions of history to legitimate their authority. Cultural authorities outside of the state also pursue what might be called "memory politics," whether they be international powers such as

the Vatican, or local historical societies. Many actors attempt to define memory of a past event for once and for all, but it there seems to be a countervailing resistance to finality inherent in memory itself.

In the field of "memory studies," some theorists find that individual memories at times "congeal," in Paul Ricouer's language, into something shared, which exists tentatively at the level of consciousness (Ricouer 2006). For Ricouer, the historian works with and against this consciousness to represent aspects of it as narrative, bringing it into the field of articulated language—the field of the symbolic. Ricouer's approach emphasizes the work of historians as critical sifters of memory. We as individuals still retain our emotional investment in memory, but it also has a life outside of us.

Memory politics in Poland has long been a crowded field, in which mobilized groups frequently turn to public venues and mobilize symbolic enactments to effect change, but also to prevent an anticipated change from occurring. The three groups under study in this book hoped to create a break with the attachment to Polish innocence, without resorting to reconciliation. However, the groups presented here do not represent the full picture of all memory activism in Poland. A significant set of actors is not covered here: those who aim to fix in place more firmly the narrative of Polish innocence.

Memory activist actions in Poland aimed at consolidating this narrative include the unauthorized installation of a Christian cross in front of the presidential palace in 2010 to force a specific memorialization of the Polish officials who had died in the Smolensk plane crash (De Bruyn 2013) and the 1998 "war of the crosses," in which right-wing Catholic activists put up religious symbols at the Auschwitz Museum, also unauthorized (Zubrzycki 2006). In both instances, advocates used local material culture and local understandings of public space to revise a historical narrative that felt inadequate to them. In the instance of the presidential palace protest, for example, activists interpreted the plane crash, in which a number of political and military leaders were killed, as an attack on the state. In their view, the security and independence of the Polish state could only be made whole via a strong assertion of historically grounded religiosity. To prevent the improvised cross from being taken down, they occupied the public space on Warsaw's main thoroughfare, in front of its main governmental building. These activists used the material cross and the specific place it was located to tell a story of the unjust sacrifice of life, a sacrifice that they felt traumatized the Polish nation while at the

same time defining it (see Szeligowska 2014; Jędrysik 2016; Kaczyński 2010).

While labeled "crosses conflicts," I would argue that these memory events are better thought of as working to deepen the individual and social investment in a narrative of innocence, which the activists likely feel is under threat. Memory work is, in this light, never inherently emancipatory or progressive. The very openness of the memory field to any mobilized actor means that memory politics are difficult to control, a condition that this book hopes to make visible. It may not be the case that, as Aleida Assmann hopes, "the growing interest in memory has reinvigorated an engagement with history accompanied by feelings" (2016). One could say it has also triggered a new awareness of how to mobilize feelings to ward off history.

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CHAPTER 2

Memory Activism Challenging the Reconciliation Paradigm

Abstract This chapter analyzes the practices of the Brama Grodzka group in Lublin, Poland. Brama Grodzka uses its physical location in the gateway over the road connecting the historically Jewish Quarter to Lublin's Old City as the material expression of its mission: to change Lubliners' conscious awareness of what the city's Jewish past means for Polish national identity. Brama Grodzka created a series of performative strategies that allowed participants to interact with the erasure of Lublin's Jewish community, broaching the possibility of rupture with a normalized mono-ethnic present. In their work, Brama Grodzka staff positioned the city itself as carrying the trauma of the Nazi excision of Jewish life, and the Polish suppression of its memory.

Keywords Brama Grodzka · Lublin · Memory · Ethnic · Nazi · Jewish Performative

The Old Town of Lublin, renovated and revived after 1989, is a strikingly beautiful example of Central European public culture. Meandering stone-paved roads leads one through charming courtyards, squares and archways, framed by churches, castles, markets, and homes dating from the seventeenth century. One of these architectural elements, the Grodzka Gate, stands out for its role in Lublin's history: it is an archway over a road that one took to cross from the Jewish Quarter to Christian Lublin. The Jewish Quarter was not, however, part of Lublin's

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post-1989 restoration; until the 1990s, most traces of Jewish Lublin had vanished. Grodzka Gate remained, however, and the memory activist organization "Brama Grodzka—Teatr NN" installed itself in its rooms. In doing so, it began the process of developing a vision for bringing Lublin's Jewish past into its present consciousness.

The city of Lublin in eastern Poland is a prime candidate for Holocaust memory work. Lublin had been central to Jewish spiritual and social life since the 1500s, when the grand Maharszala Synagogue was built in the city center to accommodate almost 3000 people. While the number of Jewish residents of Lublin fluctuated over the centuries, the city remained a home to renowned yeshivas, rabbis, teachers and cultural leaders, and figured prominently in the Jewish literary imagination of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kubiszyn 2011; Radzik 1995). Nineteenth-century urbanization encouraged an increasing number of Jewish families to move to the city from the surrounding rural areas. By 1862, Lublin proper was 45% Jewish (Kopciowski 2011).

The nineteenth century also brought a dismantling of some of the barriers to Jewish social mobility, access to professions, and freedom of residence. By the early twentieth century, Lublin was home to both orthodoxy and reform Judaism. Many Jewish Lubliners who had grown up attending public schools and speaking Polish were comfortable creating urban, secular—or at least assimilated—lives (Kopciowski 2011). However, this Jewish role in mainstream public life was resisted by non-Jewish Poles, whose politicians increasingly adopted anti-Semitic positions and tied Polishness to Catholicism during the interwar period (Blobaum 2005; Porter 2000). As William Hagen has put it, Polish anti-Semitism was "concrete and brutally face-to-face" (1996: 360).

Lublin's interwar contradiction of Jewish and non-Jewish communities intermingling to a greater degree than in the past, on the one hand, and calls for a separation between the groups, on the other, was captured by the symbol of the Grodzka Gate. Although by the late nineteenth-century Jewish families were no longer required to live in the Jewish Quarter, this was where Jewish-owned businesses, educational and social institutions, and synagogues were mostly located, since that is where they had been originally founded. The road passing under the Gate was the only connecting avenue between the sectors. Both Christians and Jews—as well as the significant Orthodox and Uniate minorities—continually passed under the Gate's archway to buy, sell, work, and socialize.

Grodzka Gate marked both division and the porousness of that division at the same time (Panas 2007).

In 1939 and 1940, Nazi occupation policies hardened the preexisting division. Jews were immediately divested of property, banned from shopping in non-Jewish stores and assigned to forced labor (Pohl 1993). In 1941, Nazis demarcated the Jewish Quarter as the Jewish ghetto, requiring almost all of Lublin's Jews to relocate there. Jewish individuals and families rounded up from small towns and rural areas outside of Lublin were also forced into the Lublin ghetto. Himmler ordered SS officer Odilo Globocnik to develop the concentration camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Majdanek in the vicinity of Lublin, as well as oversee all of the Lublin District; from 1941 through the end of the war, Lublin's Jews faced recurring selections and deportations to these camps (Musial 1999). The Lublin ghetto also functioned at times as a transit camp, a way station for Jews from elsewhere in Poland on the way to the camps (Marszalek 1995).

The forced labor system in this location meant that Jewish individuals were often on the move, being marched from ghetto to workplace and back (Rezler-Wasielewska and Grudzińska 2008). Individuals periodically escaped into the countryside or small villages, and the food was frequently smuggled in. Lublin's non-Jewish residents witnessed a range of Nazi brutalities, including mass killings in nearby forests (Kopciowski 2008). On March 16, 1942, Globocnik ordered the ghetto "liquidated," meaning to forcibly assemble all residents, seize their property, shoot the sick and vulnerable, and load any Jewish person who was not actively employed in forced labor onto trains to Belzec. The SS established a smaller ghetto, called Ghetto B or Majdan-Tatarski, for forced laborers, which was liquidated in 1943. These "liquidations" required extensive coordination, so the SS recruited non-Jewish Lubliners as well as the Jewish leadership for help; even so, they were shockingly brutal, chaotic, and not at all secret (Scheffler n.d.).

The destruction of the material culture of Jewish life was central to Nazi aims in Lublin. At liquidation, the intimidation and violence against people were accompanied by fires, explosions and the physical dismantling of the main buildings comprising Jewish public life. Nazis burned down the world renowned Maharszala Synagogue—the oldest building in Poland—along with most other Jewish institutions and homes (Radzik 2007) on the night of March 16, 1942.

In the immediate postwar period, Lublin's municipal authorities did not rebuild the Jewish Quarter. The site of the Maharszala Synagogue was paved over for a highway. These decisions fit in with the general downgrading of marking or memorializing Lublin's Jewish history during the Communist Party era. A small number of Lublin Jews returned to face anti-Semitism and violence committed by non-Jewish (Polish) Lubliners (Michlic-Cohen 2000). By the 1960s, only twenty years after the Nazis destroyed the Maharszala, it was almost as if Lublin had never had a Jewish population.

The memory activist organization Brama Grodzka emerged in the 1990s when a new openness in Polish culture allowed activists to initiative innovative projects involving public history. However, the post-1989 political environment also allowed for the reconstruction of a historical narrative that reinvigorated many of the tropes of prewar nationalists. In this narrative, Polish independence and sovereignty were best supported by an ethnically Polish (defined as Polish speaking and non-Jewish, non-Ukrainian, non-Lithuanian) and religiously Catholic citizenry (Zubrzycki 2006). This nationalist narrative positioned itself in opposition to Communist era policies, which it claimed had been nothing but an extended Soviet occupation. Although the Polish Communist authorities had indeed relied on forms of nationalism for legitimacy, the post-1989 narrative refused to recognize this (Zaremba 2001; Fleming 2010).

The enthusiasm for the freedom to celebrate national pride in this way left little room for a reintegration of Poland's Jewish past. It denied any participation by Catholic Poles in the marginalization, victimization, and killing of Jews (Engelking 2011; Tokarska-Bakir 2011). But religiously infused nationalism was not the only narrative in these years, of course. As Zubrzycki (2006) demonstrates, a "civic vision of the nation" hoping to contest the institutionalization of the Catholic Church in political life also emerged. This narrative avoided ethnic identity categories. This included issues Polish–Jewish relations. In addition to these articulations of Polish identity was a withdrawal from public associational life by many people in Poland (Bernhard 1996). This was surprising to outside observers because of the widespread grassroots support for the Solidarity movement in 1980 and again in 1988–1989. In Irwin-Zarecka's terminology, the memory of Poland's Jewish past had been "neutralized" for these Lubliners (1989).

The memory activism of Brama Grodzka was, thus, not simply a recovery of Jewish artifacts or the placement of plaques on missing

buildings. Brama Grodzka hoped to address the newly formed attachments of Polish Lubliners to the post-1989 nationalist historical narrative, as well as those who had become uninterested in the public sphere. The organization wanted to open up the possibility for a new version of the past in which Jewish life could be integrated. In doing so, however, the organization developed assumptions about what comprised an accurate interpretation of Lublin's history; what outcomes constituted a successful renegotiation of Polish identity; and how best to represent the pain—that is, the trauma—of the past. Given the complex history of Jewish Lublin, this last question was particularly complex. Which aspect of historic Jewish suffering captures Lublin's losses? Is the answer to this the same as the answer to the question of honoring Jewish sacrifice and pain? Should the losses of Lublin's non-Jewish, Catholic population be acknowledged also, and if so, how to represent Christian anti-Semitism in Lublin's history? If many of the Jews killed in the ghetto and nearby camps were brought in from elsewhere, are those deaths part of Lublin's history?

As will be detailed below, Brama Grodzka eventually addressed these issues through what might be called the modes of rupture and mourning. Its goals were neither recovery of a lost past nor reconciliation between Poles and Jews. Brama Grodzka activists sought to intervene in the apparently seamless dominant narrative of who a Polish person living in Lublin is and how she has come to be. Their practices provoked, first, an acknowledgment that the identity of "Lubliner" in the postcommunist period relied on the denial of Lublin's Jewish past or at least apathy to it. This assumption differs from the stance that Lublin is "missing" a Jewish element to its history and that this element needs to be recovered so that it can stand side-by-side with Catholic Polishness in the Lublin story, or that Catholic Lubliners should undertake reconciliation with past patterns of dehumanization. Second, Brama Grodzka used a representation of past trauma that required present day audiences to "witness" the past in an embodied practice, and then create space for grieving their losses.

Brama Grodzka did not address a Jewish past or a Jewish voice directly. It constructed a Polish identity that incorporated a series of moves: Polishness is partly comprised of a shared past with Jews, who were then violently excised not only from Lublin as a space, but from that Polishness. Moreover, this excision has itself been suppressed; speaking of it was taboo. In the words of activist Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, "How can one think of the history of the city without thinking of the

history of Jews? Our history is partially a Jewish history. To deny it is a lie" (Pietrasiewicz 2002). A prewar multicultural, multi-religious political community–albeit one threaded with conflict and ethnic hatred—had been replaced by first Nazi occupation, then Soviet domination, and since 1989 a triumphalist democratic pluralism that is nevertheless mono-ethnic. While Jewish absence is also an element of their events, Brama Grodzka created—they would say "retrieved"—a fractured Lublin and made explicit the implications for Polishness as an identity, which they read as constituting a violent loss. For Pietrasiewicz, Lublin's Jewish past "has been taken from people's minds."

A challenge in using a concept of trauma in memory scholarship is that it often imprecisely distinguishes between direct experience of violence, recall of that violence, witnessing of that violence, and a person or social group facing an upheaval in self-understanding as a result of any of these. Critical trauma theory addresses this imprecision by calling attention to how the label, "traumatic," functions in social relations. Perhaps most helpful in interpreting the work of Brama Grodzka is Peggy Phelan's integration of critical trauma theory, identity, and performance (1993, 1997). Phelan argues that there is a quality of public performance that distinguishes it from other types of expression when it comes to identity. In her words, "something substantial can be made from the outline left after the body has disappeared" (1993: 3). What she means by this is that memory of a loss can be incorporated and marked in a theater performance because a performance disappears materially as soon as it is completed, while its meaning for us persists (1997). Performance itself enacts loss. As will be shown below, Brama Grodzka's memory activism was, in part, the creation of an outline of Jewish Lublin while resisting the temptation to fill it with an idealized reconciliatory impulse.

Brama Grodzka originated as an arm of the local government's arts programming office in 1990, a time when city governments in Poland were newly elected, open to new ideas, yet with few resources as the subsidies offered by the previous regime were abruptly cut off. It became first a theater, then expanded its activities beyond theater in 1998 (Pietrasiewicz 2002, 2008). It benefitted from increased tourism to the city, especially after the completion of the restoration of the Old Town. Publicity materials presented its programs as focused on a "restoration of Memory of the presently nonexistent Jewish Lublin." The capitalization of the word, "memory," (in Polish, *pamięć*) denoted the intention to privilege this concept, invest it with specific meaning, and set it

apart from other terms in the organization's materials. Brama Grodzka used a specific understanding of "Memory" which incorporated physical, embodied, performative practices; aspects of material urban culture specific to Lublin; and a commitment to creating a means by which non-Jewish citizens could enter and exit a remembering experience, that is, a pathway.

The restoration of the Grodzka Gate itself was the foundational event for the Brama Grodzka organization. The reassertion of the Gate's importance to Lublin (which had faded) was the first and most prominent action taken by the organization. The term "Brama Grodzka" means "The Grodzka Gate," the fourteenth-century archway over the main street connecting the former Jewish quarter with the rest of Lublin. Grodzka Gate is not simply an architectural feature but an extension of a supporting building that housed a small museum, staff offices, and performance space in 2000; next door was a café and theater. Prior to 1990, the archway building had been in a state of neglect and disrepair. The decision of the group to locate permanently in the Grodzka Gate was intentional and required the solicitation of resources to upgrade the facilities and restore the historical integrity of the building. As presented by Brama Grodzka in an early brochure (available from the author), the restoration became "an element of the revitalization and rescue of the materially degraded Old Town of Lublin."

The group used its location in the archway to materialize its identity as a space that, prior to 1939, was neither Jewish nor Christian and at the same time both Jewish and Christian. As discussed above, before the war, when a Lubliner passed under the archway she moved into the transitional zone between the two sections; the imperative to freeze into a single identity was suspended, albeit temporarily. This is not to say that one's identity was transcended or left behind. Instead, the period of passing through, marked by the architectural assertion of the archway, rendered what had passed for a taken-for-granted, naturalized division into something else: a Polishness *constructed* to be not Jewish, or a Jewishness constructed as non-Polish. Thus, the archway was not only a border between the two sections of the city; it enunciated the quality of having a border, inherent to identity itself.

The complex interplay of intimacy, interdependence, and suspicion between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles is well illustrated by Brama Grodzka's oral history project focused on non-Jewish Poles (Kubiszyn 2000). Told from a child's point of view, they incorporate wonder and

empathy. Speakers are Catholic Poles recalling the Jewish Quarter of Lublin of sixty-five years ago:

> In these little workshops you could buy and sell everything. Tailors would almost resew your shirt sleeve while it was still on your arm. Shoemakers could fix any shoe. To really fix your shoes you went to the shoemaker on Kalinowszczyzna Street. For him, no shoe existed that he could not repair. He patched, he resoled. If someone would not be able to leave his shoe, the shoemaker resoled it on the spot; if there was a hole in the shoe, he patched it. (Kubiszyn 2000)

> I cannot forget the sodas. There, aside from fruit, in the afternoons were the most common items; I remember *świętojanski* rolls, candies, ice cream, cakes, every single one with a different taste, like the Mikado or the Stefan with a sugar glaze. The cakes cost on average 10 groszy. Whenever we came back from a walk, we went to the soda shop; each of us could choose our own cake; the counter girl then wrapped them up and tied them with a string, and at the end tied up a kind of little peg, so that it would be easier to carry the package between your fingers. (Kubiszyn 2000)

The details regarding the reputation of the shoemaker, the cost of the sweets, and the ease of carrying the packages seem to be adult concerns filtered through what a child heard at home. The focus on some details and not others, such as the tastes of the cakes, seems directly apprehended by a child. The *świętojanski* rolls mark a Catholic holiday, and it is not clear if the adult speaker has misremembered or if the Jewish shop baked these breads. Both excerpts capture differentiation, in the sense of strangeness and excitement in entering the Jewish Quarter. Yet they simultaneously communicate a resistance to differentiation, in terms of a focus on the qualities of pride on one's work, humor, need, and pleasure—shared elements of humankind. Other excerpts include stereotypes of Jewish merchants coexisting in the same narrative with an identification with those merchants. The oral histories mirror the contradictions of the Gate itself: connection and separation coexisting in one space.

In this context, one of Brama Grodzka's first performative strategies was the "Streetlight Project," which took place on the anniversary of the 1942 liquidation of the Jewish ghetto. The destruction of not only the people, but the buildings of the Jewish Quarter (of which the ghetto was a smaller part) transformed Lublin from Catholic-Jewish to "purely" Catholic. Grodzka Gate led to an area of the city—never rebuilt

and paved over—that was devoid of any specific historical character, that is, empty. In 2000, it was comprised of a parking lot, a multilane highway, some small businesses and a restored (non-Jewish) castle with a vast, empty lawn. This decision by the city reflected the overall reluctance by the Polish government to address the issue of Poland's Jewish past, allotting scarce funds to Catholic and other non-Jewish projects. Yet gradually young people, in particular, began to realize that these "empty" places were somehow Jewish, according to Pietrasiewicz (Pietrasiewicz 2002).

Brama Grodzka chose not to pursue commemoration of either the Jewish Quarter or the Jewish ghetto, but instead developed a strategy to counter the post-1945 acceptance of Lublin as purely Catholic and unmarked by Jewish death. After negotiating with the Lublin utility company, they launched the "Streetlight Project," in which each of the streetlights in the former Jewish Quarter was turned off for one hour on the evening of the anniversary of the ghetto liquidation (March 16). The lights in the rest of Lublin remained on as usual. The purpose of the extinguished lights was publicized throughout the city the month prior to the event in local newspaper and radio media. City residents were invited to stand on Lublin's Old Town streets—on either side of the Grodzka Gate—with lit candles during the hour. The organization hoped to create an experience in which citizens were present with both the darkness and the light; one portion of Poland's past had been extinguished while another had been rebuilt and renewed.

In interviews with the Brama Grodzka staff, it became clear that the act of extinguishing the lights had layered meanings in reference to the historical memory of Jewish Lublin: a light extinguished is a stark visual reference to a life extinguished; the multiple "deaths" of all of the streetlights reenacted the liquidation of the ghetto; the subsequent palpable darkness in part of the city emphasized the significance of the loss for Christian Lublin as well as for Jews; the streetlights themselves are everyday elements of urban life, repurposed temporarily to signify light that is extinguished; and the history of the ghetto was reinscribed in the city itself not as an erasure, but as a plunge into darkness—a loss that people are invited to grieve. All city residents were treated as potential spectators and each could choose the extent of his or her individual participation, including participation that was private and undocumented.

A more ambitious event, "The Presence of Absence," manifested publicly the loss of Lublin's Jewish community. In 2001, Brama Grodzka

organized a community project in which city residents—mostly high school students—each mailed a letter to an individual who had lived in the Jewish Quarter, using the individuals' prewar addresses. Each participant listed his or her own return address on the envelope. Since the physical homes at the addresses listed had been destroyed during the Nazi occupation, the Lublin post office processed each letter as "undeliverable," its standard procedure when a residence cannot be located. Stamped or handwritten on each letter by the post office was the phrase "addressee no longer exists" or "addressee does not exist," usually over the original address. Thus, returned to each letter writer was a material artifact of both a presence and an absence. Layered over an original text acknowledging an individual's historical existence was another text authoritatively negating the continued relevance of that historical existence. Both realities co-existed; each could be physically observed through the letter gaps of the writing and stamping.

Taken together, the hundreds of letters comprise a twofold expression of the "presence of absence." First, each letter writer individualized and concretized a general and abstract historical phenomenon, the murder of Lublin's Jewish families, by addressing a distinct letter. A letter with an address is a familiar and conventional mode of connection that presumes not only a recipient, but a communication, an intention, a specific place. A letter arrives not only in the hands of a reader, but at the reader's home. The address on each letter repopulated the current area of the former Jewish Quarter with not only people but the physical places where people lived. When all of the letters were brought together (at a gathering), they invoked the notion of a community living a collective life in materialized buildings that had been a substantial part of Lublin.

At the same time, the post office stamp across the addressee's residence transformed each letter into a material expression of the present-day impulse to negate the Jewish community's historical presence in Lublin. Throughout the city, a number of buildings that played significant roles in Jewish life are marked with plaques, and most residents were aware that Jews had once lived in Lublin. However, cultural anti-Semitism, a sense of unease with the historical facts of the Polish role in the annihilation of the Jews, and the long-term taboo on discussing Jewish Lublin, limited the possibilities that a shared understanding of the actual depth of the Jewish presence could emerge. Taken collectively, the letters with post office stamps asserting the addressee's "non-existence" were a re-narration of this resistance to the acknowledgment of Jewish Lublin.

The final instance of memory activism to be detailed here was "One World—Two Temples." Staff researched Jewish families who had once lived in Lublin but escaped death, either by leaving Poland before 1942, hiding with Christians or passing as non-Jewish. The organization invited family members or their descendants to Lublin for a ceremony honoring Jewish Lublin. Also invited were family members and descendants of Christians who had harbored Jews during World War II. Other invitees included Catholic clergy, Jewish community activists, and regular residents of Lublin. Prior to the date, the event was publicized in radio and local newspaper outlets.

The program involved 1500 active participants and an uncounted number of spectators (Boniecki 2001; Jozefczuk and Praczyk 2000). On the evening of the ceremony, Brama Grodzka staff organized participants into two parallel corridors of people, facing each other, beginning at the former "site" of the main synagogue in the Jewish section (the railing of a highway). Participants formed a double line through the (unmarked) former Jewish section, under the Grodzka Gate archway and ended at one of the oldest Catholic churches in Lublin, which was undergoing the beginnings of restoration and whose foundations only were visible. Each alternating individual represented Jewish Lublin, either because he or she was Jewish or because his or her family had played a role in Lublin's Jewish history.

Each person read from a text he or she had prepared that expressed Lublin's personal significance to the reader. Readers alternated between those at the beginning of the line near the synagogue and those at the church, with readings gradually moving toward the midpoint. Microphones and speakers allowed the readings to be heard by participants and by residents of Lublin who were spectators. The first individual at the synagogue site held a container with soil from the site. The soil was passed from person to person as individuals read their texts. The second container of soil from the Catholic Church's restoration site was passed from the first individual at the Catholic Church. The soils were mixed together at the Grodzka Gate, the symbolic midway point between both places of worship; portions of the mixed soil were returned to the original sites in containers intended to grow vines.

"One World—Two Temples" illustrates the combination of scripted and unscripted elements in memory activism. The project was logistically ambitious and required coordination between invited participants, city officials, religious authorities, the media, and technicians. At the same

time, participants needed to come to their memory pathway voluntarily, and the readings were dictated only by the desires of each reader. Activists did not develop an articulated "lesson" that spectators should have come away with; spectators chose their own level of involvement, including joining the line if they wished. Residents of Lublin who may not have intended any level of participation could spontaneously and/or temporarily venture into the proceedings at various points (although not at all points—the scheduled speeches created more rigid roles of "speaker/listener").

The project sought to alter the experience of Lublin for visitors and residents. For one evening, individuals committed to recovering Lublin's Jewish identity occupied a large portion of the city's public space. In addition to honoring the importance of the newly renovated church, the event recreated and honored the space of a nonmaterialized synagogue. Both church and synagogue were equally weighted components of the logistics of the event, even though one of these was purely imagined. Participants behaved as if a synagogue was present, and in doing so, reinscribed that section of Lublin with its existence. The Grodzka Gate was also reinscribed as a site where variously identified individuals, with variously strong or loose attachments to those identities, could safely interact. This is not to say that it became a site of ambiguity or indeterminacy. Rather, the event reinforced Brama Grodzka's appropriation of the archway as a space that ruptures the image and lived reality of Lublin as purely Polish and purely Catholic. In "One World—Two Temples," the equivalence of Catholicism with Polishness is disrupted and Catholicism must make way for an acknowledgment of a Poland containing a constitutive Jewish self.

In each of the initiatives presented above, non-Jewish Lubliners were invited to take up positions as mourners, in Phelan's sense of marking a space of loss. Brama Grodzka carefully avoided engaging with any historical instances of Catholic, Polish victimization by the Nazi regime. Alternatively, it also avoided the temptation to organize its events around the life story of a single Jewish family, a process that many memory activists elsewhere engage in because it appears to create empathic identification with Jews (for a critique, see Trezise 2013). For Brama Grodzka, the only trauma that could possibly be approached ethically, by non-Jews, was the city's. Lubliners physically witnessed the absence of the Maharszala, stood in its vacated space, in its "outline," as Phelan would say. They held envelopes in their hands literally inscribed with precise

evidence of the annihilation of Jewish homes. They blinked in the dark, temporarily disoriented, when the streetlights momentarily reproduced the darkness of a vacated Jewish space.

The embodied, performative elements of Brama Grodzka's strategies demonstrate the creativity possible in the 2000–2002 period in post-communist Poland. However, these strategies—which were designed to contrast with solemn, silent, spatially fixed commemoration events—can break loose from their moorings and lose their sense of purpose. At the end of the "Two Temples" ceremony, participants and residents mixed together in a carnivalesque atmosphere; since the event took place on Lublin's city streets, there were no clear boundaries demarcating the participants from spectators, or indicating the spatial or temporal limits of the event. For some Jews I spoke with, the element of merriment marking the end of the event was inappropriate.

A carnivalesque engagement with a space marked by Jewish death may enable a response that is itself a refusal to engage with the brutal extremes, the more so since Judaism (like most religions) argues for a very specific set of behaviors on the ground of the dead. In other words, did Brama Grodzka produce the conditions for a dismissal of real mourning and real rapprochement, in exchange for a surface-level mourning that at least enacts a partial acknowledgment of pain? As Ruth Gruber (2002) has expertly observed, non-Jewish "virtual," vicarious encounters with Jewishness in Central Europe is a common experience. The reality may be that trauma does not always remain tied to its moorings; affect and emotion are unpredictable players in memory performance.

In the mid-2000s, Brama Grodzka increased its profile as a cultural actor in Poland. It drew more attention and funding. The local government supported programming that targeted teachers in the school system. In 2011, its director won a prestigious cultural prize ("Nagroda" 2011); in 2014, the organization won a European-wide competition for its activities in creating a "vibrant memorial city." As documented in its website and in media coverage (http://teatrnn.pl), Brama Grodzka expanded to become an established voice in Polish memory activism. Its growth speaks to its consistent commitment to intentional, carefully designed programs. But its institutionalization into Poland's cultural scene also speaks to the movement of Jewish memory issues into the cultural mainstream. In 2014, the central government unveiled Poland's Museum of the History of Polish Jews (after years of controversy and

budget shortfalls), centrally located in Warsaw and generously funded—an acknowledgment of the emergence of the Jewish experience as a crucial dimension of Polish history.

The case of Brama Grodzka suggests that since, as Peggy Phelan writes, "Performance's only life is in the present," performative strategies for memory work generate a different kinds of mourning: the creation of new identities that address loss not only as a wound, but as an invitation (1993: 146). In contrast to memorialization, historical recovery or dialogue, Brama Grodzka detached Polishness from its definition by narratives that placed a mono-ethnic and monocultural Polish essence at the center. This rupture created space for a new, more capacious understanding of "Polishness" represented as capable of including a history of "other," non-idealized, intertwined experiences. It also created a pathway into engagement with history and public life for those who had no real attachment to any historical narrative.

Neither a resolution nor reconciliation, this Polishness included experiences of hostility as well as interdependence, compassion, and familiarity. Kaja Silverman (1983) offers us the concept of "rapprochement" to describe the acceptance of a tension that can never be resolved. In rapprochement, any goal of reconciliation is suspended. The uneasy coexistence of good and evil, compassion and indifference, is what we must live with.

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CHAPTER 3

Memory Activism in a Historic Borderland

Abstract This chapter analyzes the practices of the Pogranicze Sejny (or "Borderlands Foundation") group in Sejny, Poland. Pogranicze Sejny works with Sejny's location on the Polish–Lithuanian border to support its activism in developing avenues for multi-cultural dialogue. Prior to World War II Sejny and the surrounding region was home to a substantial Jewish population, as well as a number of ethnic and religious minorities. After the war, ethnic hostility between Lithuanians and Poles persisted, as well as the marginalization of Sejny's small numbers of Roma, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians. Pogranicze created structures that allowed members of these groups to approach each other as equals. The chapter identifies the strengths and limitations of Pogranicze's work, with a focus on traumatization and identification.

Keywords Pogranicze · Sejny · Suwałki · Dialogue · Borderland Multicultural Lithuania

Is the story of a community's members the same as the story of its history? This may seem like an odd question, because of course, a history of a community should be a history of all its members. We know, however, that histories are outcomes of strategic choices about who and what should be represented in the dominant narrative of a people. That these choices illuminate selective aspects of the past and obscure others is no surprise to memory activists, who work to influence these choices into the

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directions they desire. The implications of these choices can be particularly profound in regions of social and cultural multiplicity—characterized not simply by a majority and an excluded "other," but multiple, layered identifications. In a region of complex religious, ethnic, and linguistic difference, the group whose story is represented as the "truest" representation of the region is likely the group with the most access to power.

This chapter critically analyses memory activism in a setting of multiplicity, through the work of the highly regarded Pogranicze Sejny (also called "The Borderland Foundation"). Pogranicze Sejny's mission is to develop practices of dialogue and communication among groups that carry legacies of hostility toward one another. Located just inside Poland's northeastern border with Lithuania, close to Belarus and Russia/Kaliningrad, Pogranicze uses its location in the multi-ethnic town of Sejny (population 6000) as part of its own identity. For the Pogranicze activists, Sejny is a microcosm of larger issues of diversity, intolerance, and the legacy of historical violence—issues also facing, in Pogranicze's view, Poland, Central Europe and the globe. Thus, the particular representation of this town's struggles with an ethnic, linguistic and religious difference is central to Pogranicze's memory activism. This chapter elaborates on the assumptions and implications of their strategies.

How did Pogranicze Sejny diagnose the problems of historical memory in post-1989 Sejny? The answer is intertwined with the organization's interpretation of Sejny's history. For those familiar with Poland's regions as well as for those who are not, the northeastern corner of Poland is indeed considered remote today. However, prior to World War II Sejny was a well-traveled way station situated perfectly between Russia, Poland, and East Prussia, with trade routes reaching from Ukraine and Turkey. Its proximity to multiple borders—often able to be traversed by foot—mean that not only could people benefit from trade, they could easily seek refuge from a hostile empire or state. In this way, Sejny—midway between Warsaw, Vilnius, and Minsk—became dynamically multi-ethnic (Kozłowski 2011). Sejny and the larger region of which it is a part, Suwałki (also the name of a small city nearby), was in past centuries populated by communities speaking Polish, Lithuanian, Armenian, Ruthenian, Russian, Lemko, German, and Yiddish. Overlaid across this linguistic diversity were religious institutions supporting congregations of Catholics, Jews, Lutherans, Evangelicals, Uniates, Muslims, Karaites, and Russian Orthodox. In addition, the Suwałki region included offshoots of the faiths above, such as

Old Believers, a group who broke from the Orthodox Church and who found refuge in border regions.

In the view of Pogranicze Sejny, this history was a rich assemblage of difference. The difficulty, for Pogranicze, was that in the 1980 and 1990s Sejny residents did not acknowledge the difference in this way. Postcommunist Sejny was comprised of an uneasy coexistence of Polish speakers who were the majority (70%) and Lithuanian speakers (30%), with very small groups of Ukrainian, Russian (secular, Orthodox, and Old Believer), Armenians, and Roma. The destruction of Sejny Jews was unmarked. The large synagogue dominating the main street was empty and in disrepair. A small community of Old Believers lived in isolation. The Lithuanian community resented the underfunding of Lithuanian schools by the Sejny town government. The Poles resented the Lithuanians' ties to the Lithuanian state, just a few miles away. The "Sejny Uprising," a violent conflict between Poles and Lithuanians over control of the town in 1919, dominated memory for both ethnicities, even overshadowing World War II. German speakers had emigrated/fled at the end of the war. The Communist Party period had required a repression of the 1919 conflict and of ethnic vocabularies generally. Finally, the very proximity of other states—especially Lithuania—seemed to heighten the defensiveness and nationalism of the Polish-speaking majority.

In the eyes of Pogranicze Sejny, the town exemplified a community dominated by isolation, hostility, skepticism, and an inability to tap into the rich possibilities of its past and present cultural wealth. People used linguistic and religious difference to retreat from interaction. More importantly, the twin traps of hostility toward the neighboring "other" and the diminishment of the "other's" history were problems for all of Central Europe. In the words of the group's founder, Krzysztof Czyżewski, "when we dispose of old objects…. when we belittle the old men who have survived the hecatomb, when we erase memory of the past, we actually have a hand in the annihilation of the whole civilization… (1998: 17)." With this observation, which was part of a parable of a traveler in Central Europe, Czyżewski meant to link the dismissal of local, marginalized experiences with the harm done to all humanity.

Pogranicze Sejny's vision could be seen in its impact on Sejny's public everyday life. A visitor to the town in the 2000s is immediately struck by both the natural beauty of its rustic setting and its silence. The Suwałki Region is perched between a series of lowlands and lakes to the east, the

Białowieża Forest to the south, and the Baltic Sea to the north. There is a little industry. Sejny's residents generate income through tourism, trade, and small-scale farming. The skies are frequently a stunning blue; many homes have tall poles occupied by stork nests; roosters near and far crow throughout the mornings. On one of the two main streets, a building stands out for its colorful murals and posters announcing upcoming events. The main doors open; a man and a woman begin to bring folding chairs into the side courtyard, visible from the street. A handful of people, old and young, arrive and arrange themselves into a small circle. They talk, listen, and share who they are.

Pogranicze Sejny developed a repertoire of these types of events: always public, always with an air of informality and spontaneity, always aimed at connecting individuals to each other, face-to-face. In this way, arts programming became memory activism, because Sejny residents had almost never interacted across linguistic or religious difference, outside of municipal or business transactions. Pogranicze devised its programming to intentionally alter long-standing cultures of distrust by implicitly or explicitly requiring the participation of "different" ethnicities, and by keeping an engaged physicality at the center of the activity. Pogranicze's youth orchestra was an early example of its activism. Young people who identified as Polish played alongside those identifying as Lithuanian, including Lithuanian Catholics, Protestants, and teenager from an Old Believer family. The repertoire included folk pieces from many of Sejny's historic communities. In this way, participants expressed themselves not just in the presence of "others," but with and through others.

The youth orchestra, along with a men's choir similarly structured, captured Pogranicze's strategy of asking Sejny residents to break with their long-established attachment to ethnicity as a defense. Yet ethnicity was not discarded. Indeed, identification with an ethnicity, language or religion was the condition for participation. What Pogranicze hoped to rupture was the nature of the attachment—difference as a retreat. Czyżewski used the metaphors of bridge-building and crossing into foreign territory to describe Pogranicze's work:

> We wanted to build an inter-personal and inter-cultural "connective tissue" at Pogranicze—a [place that is a] specific location of painful borderlands full of broken bridges, traumatic memories and inveterate conflicts, different national mythologies and myths of freedom that were painful to our neighbors. (2014)

By "myths" that were "painful to our neighbors," Czyżewski means Polish narratives of past conflict with Lithuanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, and Roma.

As is suggested above, embedded within Pogranicze's activism is the assignment of trauma to the absence of interaction with the "other." In this view, for human development to take place one must loosen the tie to the ethnically exclusive historical narrative that keeps Central Europeans segregated. The wounds carried by, for example, Lithuanians regarding Poles or Poles regarding Lithuanians are the product of an over-investment in a historical story that is long past. Czyżewski shares with Polish writer Joanna Tokarska-Bakir the question of whether it is possible to construct an "unwounded" Polish national identity, and he answers unequivocally, yes. For Czyżewski, remaining distrustful and separated simply sustains the attachment to Polish innocence, and the anxiety about the future that comes with it.

Pogranicze's "Kroniki Sejneńskie" project illustrates the processes by which the organization attempted to rewrite Sejny's history by creating new "connective tissue" among the residents. "Kroniki Sejneńskie" began as a one-time children's program in which participants undertook an oral history of the town by interviewing their own grandparents' memories of daily life in Sejny and interactions with "other" religions and ethnicities. As a follow-up activity, the children developed a colorful, informal map of prewar Sejny, pulling information from their interviews and illustrating the map by hand on a large white piece of cloth. The artists drew the prewar wooden houses still found in the town, the large Dominican church that dominates Sejny's landscape, and the White Synagogue on one of Sejny's main streets. They supplemented the drawings with prose and copies of old photographs. The result was a collage of mixed media and information, created from the personal memories passed from elder to child (Szroeder 2001).

The enthusiasm for the project led Pogranicze staff and residents to build a model of prewar Sejny from clay and paper, indicating the dwellings associated with different ethnicities and various houses of worship, including a Lithuanian publishing house and a Hebrew school. The map and the model were displayed along with commentary from the children, such as: "we of course could not forget the Protestant Church, today's 'little church,' left behind by Sejny's Germans" (Szroeder 2001). The concern for representation acknowledging religious, linguistic, and ethnic "others," the brief mention of a lost German community with

no further elaboration, and the framework of memory ("we could not forget") are all illustrative of Pogranicze's ingredients for community building. Pogranicze published the oral histories, photos of the map and model, children's commentaries and additional excerpts about Sejny's diversity from journalists and scholars in an album that itself reproduces the ethos of ethnic collage (Szroeder 2001).

What distinguishes Pogranicze's activism from the reconciliation paradigm, criticized in the first chapter? Of the three memory activist groups, Pogranicze's work is closest to what the reconciliation paradigm promotes: different "sides" of a conflict-ridden past come together as equals, seeking understanding as a step toward healing. However, I would argue that this group's work triangulates the duality of the reconciliation paradigm by moving the town's identity to the center of social relations. In some ways similarly to Brama Grodzka's Lublin, Pogranicze required Sejny residents—those participating in its events—to renarrate their identities as generated by a specific regional experience, and, moreover, as embedded within a web of "other" identifications. If we think of a reconciliation model as asking two separated groups to come together (our definition from the first chapter), Pogranicze asked individuals to reconsider "self" after an extended foray into the experience of "another," filtered through the unique life in this unique location. Just as an orchestra produces music only by a careful, intentional arrangement of very different instruments, Sejny generates community only by the arrangement of residents' ethnic, linguistic and religious identities. As Czyżewski noted above, the goal was not healing but the vibrant, continuous energy of the intrepid traveler.

At first read, Pogranicze's activities were productive, unproblematic responses to long-standing difficulties in creating community in rural Central Europe. The organization was embraced by scholars, artists, and international foundations promoting cultural tolerance. By the late 1990s, Pogranicze Sejny was an institution in the region. Its publishing house won awards. In the early 2000s, it published Jan Gross's *Neighbors* in Polish, further cementing its reputation as a voice for cultural change in Poland. Its activities aligned well with the cultural priorities of the European Union, which Poland entered in 2004, and international institutions supporting progressive political change. Czyżewski's awards included Israel's Dan David Prize for global impact in 2014 and the 2015 Irena Sendler Memorial Award from the Taube Foundation, as a "pioneer in multicultural civic engagement in Poland" (Taube 2015).

However, the reading of Sejny's history offered by Pogranicze is not the only story of Suwałki's past. Pogranicze's "multicultural model" reproduced the impression that each identity in Sejny approaches the table with an equivalent wound, and an equivalent attachment to ethnicity and separateness. The multicultural model, in this context, required an expressed identity as the condition for the community and then asks for a suspension of what is posed as historical grudges. In unacknowledged ways Pogranicze fed into the "unceasing" focus on ethnicity in Sejny (Bieńkowska 2012), basing its work on a history without empire. What if Sejny's past episodes of violence did indeed have a reason—legacies of harm, in Jennifer Harvey's language?

To illustrate the possibilities and limitations of the multicultural identity model, what follows below is further historical context into how competition among external empires and states transformed Sejny's many ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences into reasons for exclusion and violence. While all historical representation is selective, what I offer below are aspects of the region's past dynamics that do not find their way into Pogranicze's activities. They are excluded, I argue, because they do not support the circulating energy of interaction across difference that Pogranicze pursues. The aspects of the past chosen here help to explain why Pogranicze encountered such separation and distrust in the early 1990s and suggest sources of potentially ongoing "legacies of harm." They raise the question of whether Pogranicze's memory activism places the possibility of addressing structural inequalities at an even greater distance.

The golden age of Sejny's diversity was the 1800s, when the multiconfessional, multi-ethnic Russian Empire controlled this part of what would become today's Poland. The policies of the governing authorities variously oppressed or supported different groups according to state goals of the moment. Until the twentieth century, Sejny was on the westernmost edge of the empire, subject to coercive policies of "russification." However, recent scholarship points out that tsarist authorities implemented russification on a situational, strategic basis, hoping always to quiet the various communities living on its far borders (Weeks 2008). In addition to an inconsistent application of language requirements and educational policy, Paul Werth (2014) has shown that Russian imperial power did not as a matter of course insist on the primacy of the Russian Orthodox Church in all geographic corners. Sejny's religious "diversity" derives in part from these imperial policies. From the late 1700s, tsarist

authorities allowed "foreign faiths" substantial privileges, viewing religiosity itself as a stabilizing force. From the late 1800s until 1905, a period when Poland's nationalist rebellions made control of the western boundaries of the empire increasingly difficult, the Russian state periodically supported the activities of the Roman Catholic Church and, to some extent, the Old Believers (Blobaum 1990). It also, however, reacted strongly to the recurrent Polish insurrections against Russian rule, developing strands of vicious anti-Catholicism, equating all Polish speakers with that religion.

While in the late 1880s and early 1900s state authorities viewed populations attached to religious institutions as more governable, religious institutions themselves had a different view. Robert Blobaum documents the violence on the ground committed by Catholics against Jews, between Lutherans and Catholics, and between Catholics and Orthodox congregations in Chełm, the region south of Suwałki and similarly on the edge of the empire (1990). Jews, in particular, endured episodes of uncontrolled mob violence (in addition to "everyday" anti-Semitic violence) from Catholic religious communities in the Suwałki region (Staliunas 2006, 2015). Polish speaking elites mobilized support for their rebellions against Russian rule from the late 1700s onward by constructing "Polishness" as "Catholic" and vice versa—"Catholic" was interpreted as the opposite of "Orthodox."

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Jewish community of Sejny had close ties with the Jews of Suwałki, Augustów, Puńsk, and other small towns in the region. They also shared a connection with Jewish communities in Lithuania, just a few miles away. By the time World War I broke out, Sejny and Suwałki Jews were accustomed to waves of impoverished Jewish refugees arriving from the east to seek shelter from pogroms and deportation. These refugees were served by Jewish welfare organizations and taken into private homes. Both towns had well-developed Jewish communal institutions, such as schools, hospitals, houses of worship and youth organizations, as well as a range of political parties.

At the same time that Jews flooded into Sejny and Suwałki, the non-Jewish residents forced longtime Jewish families to leave. Yehezkel Berlzon (1961) writes in one of the Suwałki yizkhor books:

> With the outbreak of the First World War, everything changed radically. Some Jews fled because of the encroaching battlefront, and some were

> recruited into the Russian army. The Jewish economy was disrupted and poverty was widespread. There were rumours [among non-Jews] that Jews were hoarding food, which led to a minor pogrom in Suwalk. There were also the usual libels that Jews were spies, etc., and in 1915 many Jews were expelled from Suwalk for that reason. (1961: n.p.)

These local Suwałki initiatives against Jews intertwined with the constantly shifting frontline of fighting between Russian and German armies. Sejny and Suwałki were in the precise location at which these rival powers confronted each other. These armies often expelled Jews and appropriated their property as they moved over territory. During World War I, both towns were occupied successively by troops from Russia, then Germany, then Russia.

Alongside these occupations, non-Jewish Poles and Lithuanians launched an intense series of local battles with each other to compete for control of the region (Smele 2015). Poles and Lithuanians each desperately hoped for independence as states after the war, wanted Sejny and Suwałki to be part of that new territory, and perceived that the victory of one of them would necessarily mean a loss for the other. In 1916, the German state occupying the region (at that moment) encouraged such hopes as a move against Russian control and to gain support; German authorities established a multi-ethnic local government, armed Lithuanians for a local police, and made Lithuanian and Yiddish the official languages of the Suwałki Triangle. They then suddenly withdrew. The emerging states of Poland and Lithuania each moved quickly to grab Sejny for itself.

In August 1919, the multi-ethnic character of Sejny created the conditions for a brutal civil conflict in this small town. Almost every single Polish or Lithuanian male took up arms, plentiful since the recent end of the First World War. Sejny Poles feared that Lithuanian rule would threaten them; Sejny Lithuanians feared Polish rule; both chose instability over stability. Initial street fighting was exacerbated when ethnic Poles from outside of Sejny arrived as militias to fight Lithuanians. The government of Lithuania recruited irregular militia as well as regulars to fight Poles. The irregular nature of the conflict meant that prisoners were not taken, civilians not protected. Over the course of three weeks each side claimed victory several times. The Polish Army arrived in September and forced the Lithuanian soldiers and armed civilians to retreat. It installed an ethnically Polish local government and severely punished the

Lithuanian community in Sejny. Poles shut down all Lithuanian institutions (including those represented on Pogranicze's children's map), Yiddish and Lithuanian were no longer recognized languages, and deported Lithuanian cultural, political, and religious leaders with the threat of buring homes (Skłodowski 2000; Lečius 2002). Even Polish Catholic priests joined what one scholar calls a "witch hunt" to identify and expel Lithuanian Catholic and Protestant clergy (Buchowski 2003: 183).

The Lithuanian government protested the treatment of ethnic Lithuanian civilians by Poland, but its larger concern was Poland's aim of expanding its territory to include Vilinus, Lithuania's capital. Historians in Lithuania place the battles in the Suwałki region and the Sejny Uprising solidly in the context of the new Lithuanian state's struggles to remain sovereign and hold onto Kaunas and Vilinus (Davoliūtė 2013). In other words, this was a war between Poland and Lithuania in which Polish repression of Lithuanian civilians was a tool. Lithuanians in Sejny and in Lithuania proper feel keenly that Poland has never taken responsibility for its treatment of Sejny Lithuanians in this period. This feeling is intensified by local Polish celebrations of the eventual victory of Sejny Poles over Sejny Lithuanians.

The Polish army marched eastward to battle both Lithuanians and the Soviet army in 1920, quartering in Sejny and Suwałki on the way. The Soviet Army counterattacked, took the territory of the Suwałki Triangle, occupied both towns and turned Sejny over to Lithuanian authorities. These authorities attempted to reverse the ethnic cleansing of the previous year, or, more accurately, replace it with an ethnic cleansing of Poles. For example, they made Lithuanian the official language and installed Lithuanian Sejny residents in local government. A few weeks later, however, the Polish Army defeated the Soviet Army at the Battle of Warsaw. Polish troops returned. Sejny again underwent a month of constant occupation and war as regular army units of Poland and Lithuania fought for control.

The commander of Polish forces was Jozef Piłsudski, who would become the first president of Poland's second republic; the 1920 Battle of Warsaw became a defining symbol for Poland's interwar independence as a sovereign state (Hein 2002). For many of the Polish speakers in Sejny, their town was the westernmost outpost for Piłsudski's troops (Łach 2010). Members of the Sejny Polish paramilitaries that had fought the Sejny Lithuanians in 1919 joined Piłsudski's forces as he battled the

Soviets (relabeled the "Russians" in Polish Sejny's local history). In other words, Poles fought as Poles, and because they were Poles, as opposed to Lithuanians, Jews, Germans, and Ukrainians. They fought as Poles who had saved Sejny from these "other" groups. In this version, Sejny was crucial to Poland's victory and thus to Poland's independence. To loosen one's attachment to one's Polishness risks writing oneself out of the story of Poland itself.

The effects of the larger military occupations were intensified and distorted by their manifestation in ethnicized forms in the neighborhoods of the town. Neighbors had strong reasons to turn against each other. People who had lived for generations in Sejny lost their homes and businesses when they were forced to relocate to their proper "ethnic" part of town. Ethnicity became not just an expression of belonging, and not just a practice of affiliation with past generations. It was an active element in the transformation of a war among empires into a war among neighbors.

Sejny was again occupied in September 1939 by multiple armies within a single month. First the Soviet Union, and then Germany took over because the border demarcation between the two—set by the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact—was ambiguous at the precise location of the Suwałki Triangle. In Suwałki the ethnic Poles who had governed the town since 1920 fled as a group when they realized the Soviet army was near, leaving no municipal authority (Berlzan 1961). The "other" Suwałki citizens had to improvise their own civic organizations to communicate with the occupier. After a short period of occupation by the Soviets, the Nazis returned in October. They demanded Jewish property and funds, shooting civilians periodically, and then expelled all Jews from the town (Berlzan 1961). As was the case elsewhere in Poland, Jewish property was given to German officers and administrators first, and then left for the non-Jewish citizens of Suwałki to take.

As the Jews of Suwałki were preparing to leave, they heard news from Sejny. The Nazi authorities also expelled Sejny's Jews, who fled by foot through the forests and across the lakes to attempt to enter Lithuania, a short distance away. At this time Lithuania was temporarily a safe haven, since the Soviet strategy was to temporarily grant it independence. Lithuanian authorities refused to allow the Sejny Jews across the border. A few did enter illegally, including 3000 from Suwałki, given refuge by Lithuania's Jewish organizations. One Jewish organization in Kovno sent money to the border to pay Lithuanian peasants to smuggle Suwałki Jews in (Berlzan 1961). But most of Sejny's Jews were turned back, and

began to simply roam the rural area that is the borderland between Sejny and Lithuania, sleeping in fields. "…[T]hey were just roaming around in no-man's land between Germany and Lithuania" (Berlzan 1961). By December the Nazis had killed the Jewish families of Sejny or picked them up for forced labor.

As Kozłowski (2011) notes, the Suwałki Triangle was and is located in an "arena" of "rivalry" stretching back to the tenth century (p. 41). Sejny and Suwałki residents found themselves in a territorial space that was, over time, repeatedly claimed by more than one political power. Stability in the form of a clear and defensible attachment to a sovereign force was rare. Ethnic identification was demanded but rendered one vulnerable to violence.

Kozłowski (2011) puts it this way: "This is a story about tradition that was forgotten, people that survived the hell of never-ending wars and totalitarian systems, artefacts that outlived memory, and hope for a better life. This is a story about the Podlasie landscape" (p. 2).

A public event occurs every July just down the block from Pogranicze's courtyard, but not sponsored by it. Sejny's official monument to the dead of the Sejny Uprising and the subsequent Polish battle with the Lithuanian and Soviet Armies stands at the end of Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego street, a main avenue in the town. The four-sided monument honors the "defenders of the fatherland" in the "Sejny Uprising," Polish Sejny battalions among Piłsudski's forces, a Suwałki regiment also fighting for Piłsudski, and a prayer to the Virgin Mary thanking her for "protection of believing people." The corner is also a courtyard, visible to everyone on the street. On a sunny Sunday morning after nearby church services are over, a van pulls up and folding chairs are taken out and arranged in rows. A podium in front of the chairs is readied for the mayor and other Polish participants. The monument is decorated with flowers and Poland's distinctive red and white flags. The town authorities speak to the sacrifices made by "Sejny residents" for Poland, then march as a group to the cemetery for fallen Polish soldiers. The Lithuanian cemetery is elsewhere. The Jewish cemetery is also elsewhere, left in disrepair until Pogranicze organized an event involving its restoration.

The complexity of the hierarchies, exclusions and violence embedded in ethnic and religious identification in this region is indeed difficult to capture. What looks like simple diversity at first glance might be better described as the outcome of coercive relationships between government and people, and among different groups of people, some of whom enjoy

more protection from the state than others. One could even say that language use was strategic and situational (the Prussian authorities in the late 1800s forced Polish speakers to speak in German only), and religiosity could have indicated what one was *not* as much as what one believed. In any case, in Sejny we cannot say that someone simply *was* an ethnicity. Each category carried a highly charged history in which others are implicated.

This is not to say that the Poland-Lithuanian borderland is a site of inherent ethnic conflict, or that Pogranicze's memory practices are products of an idealization of harmony. Scholarship on East European communities with multiple ethnic, religious, and linguistic identifications documents the range of interactions, from "national indifference" (Zahra 2010) to "cultural distance" (Lehman 2001) to careful deference (Pasieka 2015). It is, rather, to point out that what is taken by much of this scholarship as an "identity" is the outcome of a long process of developing survival strategies in a border zone. The "redress and repair" required to develop a sustainable, justice-based communal life most likely involves those strategies that go beyond deeply engaged exposure to alternative traditions. Thus, Pogranicze is not limited by the weaknesses of the reconciliation approach but does not go far enough beyond it.

Sejny's synagogue and yeshiva are available for a clay model because the people that built them and sustained them were dispossessed, sent away, then brutally murdered. A case can be made that they signify the opposite of sanctuary—they signify the success of violent exclusion.

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CHAPTER 4

Memory Activism in a Porous Field

Abstract This chapter analyzes the experience of Kraków's Center for Jewish Culture. Originally an organization aimed at the architectural preservation of the city's Jewish section, Kazimierz, the Center gradually became an advocate for the creation of "civic space." The Center began to define this space as space for the questioning of Polish anti-Semitism and its prevalence in the Catholic Church. The Center's evolution was in part, this chapter argues, a response to competitive memory actors, who intentionally or unintentionally created pathways to the Jewish past that emphasized tourism. These actors included the annual Festival of Jewish Culture, centered on international klezmer musicians, and tours based on Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List*. For the Center and it allies, attachment to Polish innocence must be ruptured.

Keywords Kraków · Kazimierz · Schindler · Jewish culture · Tourism Anti-Semitism

In the early 1990s, in Kraków, few visitors ventured beyond the city's beautiful Old Town, itself a seemingly endless array of charming streets and medieval buildings, except perhaps to take a few steps outside of the city's "ring" to tour the Wawel Royal Castle. Very few people, whether tourists or natives of Poland, took the long walk down Stradomska Street to what had been the Jewish Quarter of old Kraków, called Kazimierz. Kraków's Old Town had been restored, updated and oriented toward

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tourists already in the late 1980's; Kazimierz stood in stark contrast as one approached, dotted with neglected buildings, many empty and boarded up, derelict, and difficult to negotiate. However, the Nazis had not destroyed historic Kazimierz, because they located the Jewish ghetto elsewhere. Thus, prewar Jewish structures stood throughout the neighborhood, some intact. If one wanted to visit Kraków's only historic synagogues and Jewish cemetery, one had to decipher Kazimierz's twists and turns to locate them deep inside the neighborhood.

Near Kazimierz's outer edge the visitor in the early 1990s would likely have encountered one of the area's only new buildings, a strikingly beautiful, renovated building with the distinctive tall rounded windows and low profile of the Jewish prayer house it had been in the 1880s. Its position on the corner, the glass entry doors, and post-1989 signage announced it as the "Center for Jewish Culture," and as welcoming for an outsider attempting to decode the layout and history of the neighborhood. The prominence of the Center's building was intentional. It had opened in 1993 only after several years of international fundraising, lobbying, persuasion and paperwork, stops, and starts. This was due in part to the difficulty of property rights issues in this period, when the state legally owned neglected buildings but had allowed various local actors de facto control over time (Weizman 2016). The interior of the building was also remarkable, with extensive exhibition space, meeting rooms, offices, and a bookstore.

Thus, the Center's existence was itself an achievement. It marked a commitment to Kazimierz and to the historic preservation of the many sites—streets, markets, synagogues, bathhouses, schools—hidden underneath the veneer of neglect and disrepair. It functioned as a physical, symbolic and narrative gateway to the rest of Kazimierz. Via the Center's building, the visitor encountered a tactile expression of respect for Jewish material culture, a model of what the founders were hoping for other buildings, and a standard for renovation. Inside one could find published material and knowledgeable staff, able to point out traces of Kraków's Jewish past.

At the same time, the Center did not view itself in the early 1990s as a service for tourists or researchers seeking guidance. Its mission was historic preservation. As its founder, Joachim Russek, stated in a 2014 interview, "The stimulus for creating the Center was a historical reflection. Kazimierz [had become] a forgotten address" (Russek 2014). He went on to stress the association of the name "Kazimierz" with Jewish

history, and implicitly criticized its neglect. Kazimierz had "more than sixty thousand residents before the war, constituting one quarter of Kraków!" To have allowed this neighborhood to fall into neglect was a byproduct of a gap in historical knowledge.

By 2016, things had changed radically. Kazimierz had become a center for investment, drawn by the increasing number of visitors seeking specific experiences of the Jewish past and present. The surge of outsiders, bringing with them the specific perspective of the "tourist," that is, the visitor seeking a specific experience based partly on preconceived knowledge and partly on the expectation of new and unexpected stimuli, altered this neighborhood significantly. This tourism is best broken down into three different types, each with its own dynamic: those seeking specific heritage experiences; those inspired by Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List*; and those coming to Kraków for the annual Festival of Jewish Culture. These visitors drew in businesses catering to them, and Kazimierz grew in reputation to become a popular neighborhood, with shops, bars, and restaurants—most out of alignment with its historic Jewish character. This chapter also details the impact that the "tourist gaze" had on Kraków and Kazimierz, and argues that this "outside" set of expectations and fantasies shaped the development of the Center for Jewish Culture from its circumscribed focus on the architectural preservation and history to its memory activism.

This book views the Center for Jewish Culture as a memory activist organization because of the Center's shift away from history, toward an engagement with the difficult issues of relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles in past and present. This shift will be elaborated below. Like Brama Grodzka and Pogranicze Sejny, the Center worked with an assumption about Polishness, and with a strategy of assigning trauma. However, as noted above, Kazimierz's identity shifted as well in the post-1989 period.

Several excellent scholarly works have presented the complexities of Kazimierz's changing identity, and address whether Kazimierz can function as an example of how Polishness and Jewishness can be reconciled. Erica Lehrer, in particular, makes a compelling case that the Jewish identities which emerged from the revitalized Kazimierz in the post-1989 years are manifestations of an authentic recuperation of Poland's Jewish past, propelled forward by individuals with Jewish links who have created Jewish "spaces" (2013). These spaces allow for the exploration of Jewishness, Polishness, and Jewish–Polish relations. Lehrer extended her

conceptualization to a co-authored work with Michael Meng, in which they documented the capacity of spaces marked as "Jewish" to support multiple forms of Jewishness in Europe (Lehrer and Meng 2015). If we place the Center for Jewish History in Lehrer and Meng's framework, we find it to be one of many advocates for increasing the awareness of Jewish space in Poland.

In parallel to the work on Jewish space, Polish scholars have developed a renewed interest in recovering the meaning of Kazimierz for Jewish and non-Jewish Poles in a cultural sense. Izabela Suchojad developed a study of how Kazimierz itself has functioned as a maker of meaning (2010). In her survey of literature in Polish, she finds that Kazimierz came to signify a place of danger, but also of magical possibility. These qualities are worked through in terms of Kazimierz the place, as an alternative way of representing Jewishness itself, and its meaning for both Jews and Christian Poles. But they are also intertwined with Kazimierz's specific history. Originally outside of Kraków proper, the region to which Jews were expelled in the 1400s, Kazimierz became a center of Jewish educational and community life. As was the case in most cities, synagogues kept Jews living close by even when residence restrictions were lifted in the 1700s. Many Jewish families moved into central Kraków in the early twentieth century, and Kazimierz became a place identified with spirituality and the past (Duda 2003). When the Nazis occupied Kraków, they forced all Jews into a new ghetto, not in Kazimierz but in Podgórze. In light of Suchojad's work, the Center for Jewish Culture can be viewed as an advocate for fastening this complex Kazimierz identity more tightly to Kraków's identity and Poland's history.

Kazimierz is also a topic in Ruth Ellen Gruber's criticism of Jewish spaces in Europe, *Virtually Jewish* (2002). For Gruber, memory activism and the creation of these spaces is "ironic," in that they are pursued almost exclusively by people who are not Jewish. She argues that these initiatives are forms of evasion of difficult truths rather than confrontations with them; in a Kraków with almost no Jews, who would contest the claims to Jewish space and Polish-Jewish reconciliation? These claims are, for Gruber, symptoms of "a longing for lost Jews," with no commensurate "longing" to acknowledge any role in their expulsion and murder (2002: 4). In Gruber's framework, Russek and the Center for Jewish Culture are misguided at best, creating simulacra of things that should be mourned as lost forever.

The Jewish past of Kraków clearly has multiple contestants. Two of these significantly altered the environment in which the Center for Jewish Culture operated: Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List* and the annual Festival of Jewish Culture. Unlike Sejny, a small town in a region far from a major city, Kraków's urban concentration of universities, cultural institutions and tourism allowed for multiple participants to enter the discussion regarding how to best remember Jewish life. This environment meant that the Center needed to work harder to establish its specific identity in contrast to other initiatives, yet at the same time cooperate with these other groups in the service of the general mission of highlighting Jewish history.

Schindler's List was a blockbuster Hollywood movie, bringing the topic of the Jewish Shoah to mainstream audiences worldwide, via Steven Spielberg's production and direction techniques. Spielberg filmed in Poland, used local residents as extras and staff, and filmed in black and white, all of which became part of the overall impression that the film was "realistic." The blending of the real and the creation of an effect of reality is captured in this quotation by Spielberg's Polish guide:

> In the afternoon we move to Szeroka Street. At the end of the short street between Dajwor and Szeroka streets in Krakow's Kazimierz district a gate and a fragment of the ghetto wall was reconstructed. The real ghetto was in Podgorze on the right bank of the Wisla River, but … the topography of that part of Krakow [had] changed—new streets, new modern buildings, including a glass high-rise … so Spielberg chose the Szeroka Street and neighborhood to build his own replica of a ghetto. (Palowski 1998: 52)

In other words, the Spielberg ghetto was placed in Kazimierz, in part because of its lack of economic development, its absence of "a glass high-rise."

The film's topic was not only the Jewish encounter with the Nazi occupation, but the character of Oskar Schindler, a German business owner who used Jewish forced labor during the war. Spielberg dramatically presents Schindler's business dealings with other Nazis, his encounters with a brutal concentration camp commander, and his efforts to protect the Jewish work force in his factories and their families from deportation. In addition, he includes scenes of the Nazis forcing Jewish families to move into a ghetto, as well as a temporary deportation to

Auschwitz and a liberation scene. Each of these dramatic elements had "real life" settings in Poland. The Spielberg team spent many months moving around the Kraków area to capture "realistic" settings for Schindler's home, his factory, and the concentration camp.

Several non-Polish scholars have critiqued *Schindler's List*, and have included the issue of the impression that the film was "real." Geoffrey Hartman pointed out the discomfort with taking in a film that is both a stylized aesthetic formation aimed at a mass audience, and a representation of Jewish death (1995). Miriam Bratu Hansen argued otherwise, that the film moved forward our conversation about the issues of representation and Holocaust memory, in part because it was a "Hollywood" product (1996). Christoph Classen carefully and precisely analyzed the film as a response to the growing need for memory images, and the demand of authenticity that Holocaust work requires (2009). Tim Cole identified the film as "myth-making" for US audiences, especially in its focus on Schindler himself as a rescuer (2000).

For Polish audiences, the reception was complex. A director of Spielberg's stature had spent time in Poland filming, which in itself generated excitement and curiosity regarding the finished product. However, the overly drawn characterizations were offensive in Poland; *Gazeta Wyborcza* compared *Schindler's List* to a Disney film. Ultimately, the film was overtaken in a sense by Roman Polanski's *The Pianist*, also filmed in Polish locations, also with historically accurate scenes, but more nuanced and precise in its rendering of the experience of the occupation for Poles (Śliwińska 2011).

Audience reaction to the film (outside of Poland) generated an interest not in the former Jewish community but in the character of Oskar Schindler, the non-Jewish protagonist. Individual tourist and tour guides began to identify "Schindler sites," such as his former apartment in the center of the city and the site of his factory (Classen 2009). People traveling to Europe began to view Kraków as a destination because of the film. By the mid-1990s, it became clear that many tourists were approaching the Kazimierz district via Schindler and via the experience represented in the film. They sought out imagery that reflected or concretized the images of the film itself.

In addition, Schindler tourists brought with them their experience of watching the film, and their particular reception of its trauma—which itself was traumatic on some level. They sought out the settings for shocking events depicted in the film, such as violence in the Jewish

ghetto. Visitors especially sought out the setting for the "girl in the red coat," an image that Spielberg presents as traumatizing Schindler (as played by an actor). Spielberg's assignment of trauma framed their reception of the buildings, walkways and material environment of the Jewish district. This is true even though the actual Nazi-created ghetto is located in a different part of Kraków from Kazimierz, as Palowski noted above. The tourist gaze projected an historical narrative produced not necessarily by the film, which was clearly a "Hollywood production," but generated by individuals' reception of the film; this narrative was superimposed onto the landscape of Kazimierz (Ashworth 2003).

In contrast to *Schindler's List*, the Jewish Culture Festival has been and still is an internally generated phenomenon, initially conceived by one individual, Janusz Makuch, a non-Jew, in the late 1980s. The festival is an annual week-long series of outdoor musical concerts, social events, and public performances, all highlighting their Jewish elements. It is international in terms of performers and audience, and draws thousands of visitors to Kraków each year in June. It did not originally take place in Kazimierz, but in a small plaza just off the main square in the center of Kraków's Old Town. It was not contained by this plaza, however, as many "side" concerts, local musicians and artists, and public performances occur simultaneously, to take advantage of the massive audience. In recent years, it has moved into Kazimierz. The festival is highly anticipated by local businesses, who put out kiosks, stands, and food and drink specials linked to "Jewish culture." Makuch has increased the range of performances over time and become a highly visible proponent of "Jewish culture" in Poland.

As expertly analyzed by Magdalena Waligórska (2013), the festival has become central to the growth of klezmer music, which has developed a following as authentic "Jewish" music. Klezmer musicians have come to rely on the festival as their main venue, at times recording there. The visitor to Kraków comes for the festival, but is drawn into an engagement with local Polish and Jewish history; this visitor is likely to be Jewish herself, as heritage tourism at times intersects with the festival. Waligórska argues that the festival increases the possibilities for historical knowledge, reflection, exposure to "Jewish culture," and the interest on the part of non-Jewish Poles in Poland's Jewish past, a view supported by many of the klezmer musicians and Makuch himself.

Waligórska's portrayal of the Jewish Culture Festival is an open, carnival-like circulation of cultural material and identities. Poles, Jews,

Germans, and Americans (for example) meet as equals in the enjoyment of a musical form that is difficult to find in their home locations. The energy of the festival seems to carry them forward in exploring the more problematic aspects of Poland's Jewish past, and in so doing, they wander through historic Kazimierz. The festival presents itself as an opportunity to celebrate a multiplicity of musical forms, some of which had been marginalized or neglected when Jewish community life disappeared in Europe. It emphasizes the global face of Jewish culture and offers the audience a thriving, vigorous, celebratory experience.

The powerful impact of Schindler tourism and the Jewish Culture Festival on Kazimierz had the potential to displace the work of the Center for Jewish Culture. Visitors arrived at the Center seeking reinforcement of their understandings of the Jewish ghetto as portrayed in the film, or to enhance their experience of the music festival. In light of these memory dynamics, the Center for Jewish Culture's focus on the restoration of Kazimierz became a more broadly defined effort to re-establish the cultural memory of Jewish community life in Poland—via a focus on Krakow as an urban center with its own unique history—and to facilitate a re-evaluation of the historical and present-day relationships between Christians and Jews in Poland.

When the Center defined its restoration activities and explained their importance, it became implicated in a narrative of why such restoration was needed, why Kazimierz had been neglected and marginalized when other parts of Krakow were restored and upgraded, and what the loss of its Jewish community has meant for the development of Polish national identity. This linkage of restoration to "memory activism" can be seen in its mission statement from 2003:

> …The protection of the Jewish heritage of Krakow's Kazimierz and the preservation of the memory of the centuries old presence of Jews in Poland, and Polish-Jewish co-existence; the dissemination of knowledge of the history and culture of Polish Jews among the younger generation; the creation of a basis for Polish-Jewish dialogue; [and] the promotion of the values of an open civil society. (Center for Jewish Culture 2003).

One could say the Center positioned itself as the steward of historical accuracy in the face of contending memory motivations.

As the mission statement indicated, the Center's activities interpreted memory work to be the "protection" of heritage and "preservation" of

memory, both threatened by what I would argue was an appropriation of the space for memory by the Schindler and Culture Festival visitors. In contrast to the activism of Brama Grodzka and Pogranicze Sejny, the Center for Jewish Culture continued in the 2000s to interpret the greatest need in Kraków to be the preservation of the buildings and streets that made Kazimierz a Jewish quarter. While Sejny had only one synagogue restored, Kazimierz was home to seven synagogues, prayer houses, a bath house, a cemetery, and many spaces of ritual, commerce, public life and private homes (Duda 2003). But what made Kazimierz a Jewish quarter was moving away from this preservation focus, as not only tourists but businesspeople catering to them changed the character of the area.

Thus, the Center committed itself to creating a new space for "Polish-Jewish dialogue" and an "open civil society." This space was not material but emerged from a set of practices that it hoped would restore the awareness of Jewish marginalization to the meaning of Kazimierz. The organization came to view itself as a "civic initiative" rather than an "ethnic institution" celebrating or reviving Jewish culture (Gądek 2001). It developed programs focused on the present-day conflicts and issues, a shift from its initial founding vision which led to an increasing number of people visiting the building and attending events. It began to use the vocabulary of loss instead of preservation. In the words of staff member Robert Gądek, "it is hard to understand the dimension of the Holocaust if you don't understand the richness of Jewish culture." For the Center, a full understanding of what was lost in the Holocaust—for Jews and for Poles—is central to the idea of a healthy civic community (Gądek 2001).

What does a "civic initiative" or "civic community" really mean? For Gądek the Center "provided a safe space" for non-Jewish Poles who were "beginning to talk about" issues of anti-Semitism and the construction of public memory (Gądek 2001). In his view, the stimulus for these discussions was the publication of *Neighbors* and the negative reactions to Gross's work. Gądek diagnosed the negative reactions—as well as the response of silence—as an indication of inner conflict. People knew that "in the past everything was hidden," but also experienced a range of emotions and enormous resistance to the controversy's main message: that ethnic Poles had killed people they had known to be innocent. Poles were to *blame*. As they began the process of emerging from their silence, many in Kraków and surrounding areas came to the Center to "ask basic questions" about Poles and Jews. Center staff made a conscious effort to

create an environment that respected and valued the questions and discussions of all visitors. In the end, the "civic initiative" was the commitment to creating a home for conversations about the most difficult issues in the public domain.

The Center also went further than creating space. It developed a series of initiatives on the Polish Catholic Church and the issue of anti-Semitism. Kraków has a strong identity as a center of Catholic Church activity. At the same time—and perhaps because it has such a rich tradition of Catholic inquiry and activism– it is home to a number of clerics who have criticized the Church for its lack of leadership on issues of the Jewish past and Polish–Jewish relations (see Michlic and Polonsky 2005). The Center held conferences on the theme of the Church and anti-Semitism, and provided support and a forum for Father Stanisław Musiał, a prominent voice criticizing anti-Semitism from within the Catholic clergy. Because he was discouraged from speaking in official forums by the Church hierarchy (although he frequently wrote for *Tygodnik Powszechny*), the Center's availability and willingness to create programs featuring Musiał substantially increased the number of people who could hear him.

Musiał's most developed statement on anti-Semitism was the essay, "Czarne jest czarne," originally published in 1997 in *Tygodnik Powszechny* but frequently reprinted, winning him the Grand Press prize for the most important piece in the Polish press (Musiał 1997). Translated as "Black is black," the essay linked the Holocaust to anti-Semitism in Europe, and anti-Semitism in Poland to Nazism, in that Polish "intolerance" of Jews led to their exclusion and murder by Nazis. Musiał singled out Henryk Jankowski, a prominent priest in Gdańsk known for his links to the Solidarity movement, and for his anti-Jewish public statements in the name of "the Polish people." He pointed out the passivity of the reception of Jankowski's rhetoric. "It seems to me that in our fatherland it will be a long time before anti-Semitic statements get people up on their feet [to protest]." For Musiał, this meant that anti-Semitism was not commonly regarded as a threat to Poland, nor as a sin to the Christian. Yet anti-Semitic speech "brutalizes us." Excusing it away, as the quirks of an individual, is a "banalization of evil," dilutes individual conscience, and presents "black as white."

Musiał highlighted one of the anti-Semitic formulas familiar in Poland, that a "Jewish minority" secretly controls economics, politics, or cultural institutions, and must be cast out. This indeed was part of

Jankowski's rhetoric. Musiał wrote at length about the practice of identifying a person by religion, ethnicity, or heritage. "Not a single Pole living today is in a position to prove his pure 'racial' Polishness, a thing which does not even exist."

This assertion is central to understanding Musiał's approach to anti-Semitism. He was not calling for a dialogue between those who subscribe to a politics of suspicion of Jews, and those who do not. In fact, his statement rules out the possibility of such a dialogue. The goal of memory activism, for him, is not to increase one side's understanding of the other, nor is it to explore the meaning of Poland's Jewish past. It is to call anti-Jewish speech by its real name. It is to connect it to its real historical significance. The defense of one's Polishness is the defense of a chimera, an illusion.

To extend this point, Musiał's essay does not seem to view anti-Semitism as a collection of attitudes or a habit of thinking. For him, it is a sin, a deep estrangement from one's own conscience and one's own humanity. It "brutalizes us." To collapse into estrangement is a moral failure that leads to genocide. Thus, for Musiał and the Center for Jewish Culture, the discourse of reconciliation leads nowhere, because it requires two parties, two perspectives, two experiences. But two views of anti-Semitism do not exist; two views of *Neighbors* do not exist. There are only facts. Black is black.

The Center for Jewish Culture's extension into a confrontation with Polish anti-Semitism was, I would argue, a form of memory activism that identified the stance of Polish defensiveness as the obstacle to engaging with what the Jewish dimension of Poland means for Polish identity. Perhaps surprisingly for an organization supporting Jewish culture, it used a partnership with a Catholic clergyman to create a pathway for Poles to begin to renegotiate the attachment to a narrative Polish innocence. Musiał's status as a priest in Kraków enabled him to deliver a message that would have been perceived as inflammatory from another source. It also created a specific type of public for memory activism. At the sessions I attended in which Musiał presented his analysis of Poland's past and present, after ending he was quickly surrounded by elderly women hoping to get his personal attention, a phenomenon that is not uncommon for priests in Poland. After one talk more than twenty people rushed to the spot at the front of the room where Musiał was standing and very closely encircled him, touching his sleeves, bringing their faces into close proximity with his. He remained in place, gently responding

to each person one by one with equanimity. There was a clear embodied dimension to Musiał's interaction with parts of his audience.

We cannot say how the audience members seeking contact with Musiał were affected by the content of his arguments about anti-Semitism. Perhaps they restricted themselves to their delight in just listening to a priest. Direct observation supports the idea that very different types of people attend a talk given by a priest than attend a memory activist public event, and the Center for Jewish Culture was able to reach an audience that would have not likely otherwise have listened to a talk challenging their self-conception as Poles. In Poland, a Catholic priest's presence alone renders a space "Catholic," and thus comforting, welcoming and with an element of ceremony for those who identify as Catholic. In this way, Musiał's physical presence and physical self-presentation to his audience were integral to the content of his message.

The Center for Jewish Culture operated a constant flow of lectures, films, open discussions and exhibits throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. One of its most significant events was its 2000 conference titled "The Polish Catholic Church and the Struggle Against Anti-Semitism," which brought together many of the leaders of Catholic–Jewish reconciliation efforts in Poland, such as Konstanty Gebert, Michał Czajkowski and Musiał himself. At this time the Catholic Church in Poland had its own "Committee for Dialogue with Judaism," as well as members of the church hierarchy serving on the government's Council of Christians and Jews, using both to communicate official responses to crises in Polish–Jewish relations and to send official representatives to events such as the formal government apology for Jedwabne. The Center for Jewish Culture did not view itself as an agent for reconciliation per se in 2000 when it sponsored the conference. The conference was an event in which Church representatives had to engage not with common ground between the Christian and the Jewish "side," but with anti-Semitism, including that within the Church. The conference proceedings were published and prominently displayed in the Center's bookstore (Oppenheim 2001).

The case of the Center for Jewish History depicts an organization that began with a limited understanding of memory, the architectural renovation of a neglected section of Kraków, and was forced to move into activism when confronted with new participants in the local memory culture. Its experience demonstrates the porous field of memory, and the ability of local, national and international forces to shape how memory practices

unfold. As it moved deeper into a confrontation with the Catholic Church in Poland, the Center came to a more capacious understanding of the losses entailed by the Holocaust. Architectural preservation led, logically, to the need for historical accuracy once Kazimierz became a tourist destination, which then led to the need to tackle directly the role of anti-Semitism in Polish identity. The trauma of Jewish deportation and murder is of one piece with the attachment to Polish innocence.

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CHAPTER 5

The State as Context and Competitor in Memory Politics

Abstract This chapter presents the Polish state as an emerging memory activist. In the initial post-1989 period, the Polish government was concerned with economic policy and electoral politics, although policies and rhetoric positioning the communist past as a criminal past (lustration) did appear as different political parties occupied the presidency and held parliamentary majorities. The creation of Poland's official memory organization, the Institute of National Remembrance, and its mission are analyzed. The chapter also addresses the development of Polin, Warsaw's Museum of Polish Jews. It offers an analysis of the Smolensk plane crash and its role in the creation of the Law and Justice Party's policies aimed at controlling Poland's public memory work. In this case, it is the state itself which has been assigned traumatization.

Keywords State · Polin · Institute for National Remembrance Smolensk · Memory · Trauma

Civil society actors have to contend with the state, and memory politics are no exception. The state, in this case, Poland's official government, varied its stance on issues of Poland's Jewish past in the post-1989 period as different electoral coalitions were voted in. This chapter offers a discussion of the government as a context conditioning the shape of memory activism, and as a competitor for influence in representing the past. To a large extent in the late 1980s and early 1990s issues of

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Polish–Jewish relations bubbled up from below, as artists and academics began to delve into aspects of Poland's history that had been discouraged under Communist Party rule. In 2000, however, society was confronted with Jan Gross's book *Neighbors*, which functioned both as a new historical finding and a call for a moral reckoning with the role of average Poles in wartime atrocities targeting Jews. We have seen the impact of *Neighbors* on memory activism in the previous chapters. The book's international as well as national reception forced the Polish government to develop a response as well, and thus become a reluctant actor in Holocaust memory politics. The state had to find its memory voice on issues of Polish–Jewish relations; once it did, it could function as a partner to international organizations, other states, and domestic constituencies who wanted to see Poland become a site for active remembrance of its historic Jewish communities. The culmination of this process was Polin, the official Museum of Polish Jewry. However, as will be discussed below, the development of an institutionalized state voice in memory making meant that a change of government, as occurred in 2015 with the Law and Justice Party's electoral victory, allowed for a change in the state's memory agenda.

This book is concerned with memory activism on issues of ethnic exclusion and violence, but of course "memory politics" encompasses any public act of recall that might possibly be contentious (Assmann 2016). States engage in a near constant "production of official narratives" about the past, in large part to avoid losing control of representations regarding their legitimacy to non-state actors (Wertsch 2002). Poland has been no exception. If we focus on the post-1989 period, we find that electoral competition created incentives for competing narratives not only about the founding of the Third Republic, but about how Poland's earlier historical periods should shape who governs. When it came to narratives about the past, the post-1989 Polish state was frequently concerned with the period of Communist Party rule, the role of the secret police in that rule, and whether to prevent politicians who had participated in government at that time from holding office (Millard 2010). Currents of anti-Semitism appeared in these narratives at times (Grudzińska Gross 1992). But the topic of relations between Catholic Poles and other ethnic and religious groups was not a priority for the state.

The state did, however, have an extensive agenda for revising public space to excise the traces of Communist Party rule. The new government

in 1990 had to make decisions about images on currency and postage, names of streets, schools and even towns, and statues, memorials, and plazas dedicated to Soviet or Polish Communist Party personas and political events. This process continued through the 1990s. As Eva Ochman documents in precise detail, many of these decisions included the voices of cultural elites, scholars, locally mobilized groups and an often fractious parliament, and the government rarely had free rein in creating a new symbolic landscape of its own making (2013).

A turning point was the parliament's establishment of the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowe, or IPN) in 1998. The IPN was and continues to be Poland's official historical research institute, intended to function as the main body documenting war crimes in the past and disseminating the findings. It was given legal prerogatives beyond those of state historical institutes in other countries and has investigative and prosecution powers (Act 2016). The animating spirit behind its creation was to ensure that communist-era, as well as Nazi crimes against Polish citizens, would be thoroughly investigated and made public. Many hoped that the IPN would be neutral, professional, credible, and enjoy the confidence of the public, but some have pointed out that its professionally privileged position within the discipline of history (as an arm of the state) and the overtly nationalist content of its mission led to its over-politicization (Behr 2017). IPN was given authority over the huge collection of secret police files from the communist period, which included documentation of ordinary citizens who collaborated or passed along information on others to a large or small degree. A significant controversy erupted when the IPN released information in 2016 that Lech Wałesa, Poland's first president and symbol of the Solidarity movement, had passed along information in the 1970s. The wide-ranging power of the IPN became clear and politicians in the opposition called for its elimination (Kozubal 2017).

At the same time that the IPN was developing its institutional role in state memory politics, the state began to (reluctantly) explore the creation of an internationally regarded museum and memorial to Poland's Jews. As Robin Ostow details, in 1993 two Polish–Jewish historians, Grażyna Pawlak and Jerzy Halberstadt, had temporarily moved to the United States to work with the Lauder Foundation and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, respectively (Ostow 2008). Both institutions served as incubators for the idea of a potential museum space

in Poland focused on Poland's Jewish history, and both provided support to Pawlak and Halberstadt in pursuing the project.

The consultants to the museum hoped "to create a new kind of historical space and to do so in the very place where 90% of Polish Jews and most of Europe's Jews were murdered, but without becoming a Holocaust museum" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2015: 149). That the museum would memorialize Jewish life rather than Jewish mass death became central early in the process. Turski stated that "when we have such a great black hole, an emptiness in the history of Poland which can be seen and felt, then comes the idea to do something to fill up this emptiness" (Turski 2014). The exhibitions would represent Polish Jewry in all of its variety, as a response to the "great black hole" of its absence.

It was clear the museum would have to be located in Warsaw, the capital. But there was resistance to its development and construction on many levels. The 1990s were a time of economic distress and uncertainty; municipal authorities did not want to allot valuable real estate in the city center to what they thought would essentially be a public works project. The idea of a museum of Jewish history was constantly met with competing "memory claims," such as adding more museums about the non-Jewish, Polish experience.

The president in 2000, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, began to support the museum as a means of establishing Poland as "European" and thus a candidate for European Union membership (Turski 2014). Poland's application to enter the European Union began to develop at this time. The application generated EU support for the museum and gave the Polish government an incentive to proceed forward. The state committed funding in 2003 (Wóycicka 2008). However, the cornerstone for Polin, the Museum of Polish Jewry, was not laid until 2007. From that point on, construction was riddled with delays, structural flaws, bureaucratic obstacles, and the floods that occurred throughout Europe (Halbersztadt 2013). In 2011, Halbersztadt, who had been director of the Museum since its conception, resigned in protest (Pinkas 2011). The exhibition space finally opened to the public in 2014.

The museum is architecturally stunning. It takes the visitor through a series of galleries, each representing a different historical period, each expertly curated by a team led by Barbara Kirchenblatt-Gimblett. The museum manages to convey spaciousness and intimacy simultaneously; one feels as if one is in a world within each gallery. In addition to exhibits the museum has scholarly resources and educational space. In line

with recent museology practices recommending a wide range of sensory experiences, the museum uses sound and oral histories to create a sense of a "multi-voiced" Jewish history (Murawska-Muthesius and Piotrowski 2015). Its location in the former Jewish ghetto, in a spatial relationship with the Ghetto Fighters Monument, contributes to its quality of being a sophisticated, informed pivot point for an engagement with Polish history.

How did the achievement of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews change the landscape for memory activism? It significantly altered the dynamics of Polish–Jewish rhetoric. The museum is a definitive statement regarding the importance of Jewish communities to Poland's national identity. But the relevant difference here is one of "memorialization" versus "memory activism." The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a representation of the full richness, variety, and depth of the communities Poland lost during the Holocaust and after, but it is a *space*, a fixed location in Warsaw. It cannot travel to Sejny, or Kraków, or the many small towns in Poland in which local histories must be recovered and addressed.

Although the Polish state was as much an obstacle as a facilitator of its development, the museum is now firmly part of the repertoire of Poland's official culture. The emergence of the state's assertive "memory voice" was not triggered by the establishment of the museum, nor by the series of controversies over Polish discourses about its excised Jewish communities. The many debates over Jewish memory in the post-1989 period did not truly transform the state into a memory activist. The conservative government of the Law and Justice Party, in power between 2005 and 2007, asserted a view of Polish national identity that positioned communism as the real threat to Poland. It pushed the Institute for National Remembrance to pursue investigations into the past of political competitors and other elites, arguing that anyone with a file dating from the Communist Party era should be subject to prosecution (Millard 2010). In this narrative communists, supported by Russia, threatened to render Poland vulnerable from within.

After a period in which the liberal Civic Platform was in power, the Law and Justice party returned. It became a much more successful contender for memory space after the deaths of Poland's political and military leadership in a plane crash in 2010. The sudden death of government officials in any country would cause instability, but these deaths occurred as the plane was traveling to Russia to commemorate a human rights violation perpetrated by Russians on ethnic Poles, the Katyń

massacre in 1940. The crash was an overwhelmingly powerful set of symbols, commonly referred to afterward by its location,"Smolensk."

The Law and Justice party put forward an interpretation of the crash that reinvigorated the "Polish innocence" narrative. Party leaders explained that Russia had assassinated Poland's leadership and that Poland was once again the victim of exploitation (Duval Smith 2016). In the 2015 elections, Law and Justice won both the presidency and a majority of seats in parliament. It quickly instituted a program of institutionalizing particular historical narratives, becoming what Korycki calls a "mnemonic warrior" (2017: 3). The overall policy, called *polityka historyczna*, aims to forced historians and social scientists to only publish material supportive of the Polish nation.

In addition to institutional changes, the Law and Justice government renewed its rhetoric of conspiracy. In this narrative, not only communists but unpatriotic members of the former Solidarity opposition movement are threats to Poland. In addition, this view states that historical findings that link ethnic Poles to war crimes leave Poland vulnerable; thus, such history writing is illegal and dangerous (Leszczyński 2016). Indeed, the government pursued libel charges against Jan Gross himself.

The development of a "mnemonic warrior" state brings us back to the issues of ideology in memory activism. The assertion of a particular view of the past appears to be more powerful when it is structured as a linked set of concepts and when it seems consistent and stable on the surface, that is, when it functions as an ideology. One is left to search for one's place within the ideological structure offered, because no alternative is permitted. The reach of the mnemonic warrior state is that much further because of the overwhelming trauma of the Smolensk plane crash. The signifiers seem almost too many to list: military and political leaders, the president, Russia, Katyń, Smolensk, death. They spill over with significance. Law and Justice's assignment of who or what has been traumatized are nothing less than Poland itself.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: Memory Beyond History

Abstract This chapter considers whether historical fact alone is powerful enough to contend with the cultural power of memory activism. Much of the work of memory activists concerns truth-telling and bringing historical information to the forefront of public consciousness. However, as the response to Gross's *Neighbors* and to the Smolensk crash demonstrate, the symbolic power mobilized by memory activism can undermine the aims and ethics of historical inquiry and the dissemination of historical knowledge. In this context, memory activists are crucial to keeping open pathways for questioning and working with the past in ways that address the emotional investment people may have in certain versions of national identity. Memory activism is a powerful partner to historical work in sustaining civil society.

Keywords Civil Society · Memory activism · History · National identity

In his influential essay first published in 1997, "Beyond Condemnation, Apologetics and Apologies," Antony Polonsky moved the study of Polish–Jewish relations beyond what had been two defensive postures, one rationalizing the anti-Jewish beliefs and actions on the part of non-Jewish Poles during World War II, and the other accusing those Poles of extending interwar anti-Jewish attitudes into support for the Nazi genocide (Polonsky 1997). Many of the contemporaneous and post-war accounts of the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles

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under Nazi occupation were "apologetics," that is, motivated by a priori commitments to justify either Polish innocence or Polish responsibility regarding the murder of Poland's Jews. Polonsky pointed out the overly general and fundamentally ahistorical nature of these apologetics, which even pervaded the practice of official apology-making by politicians. He provided an alternative: a detailed and nuanced compilation of the historical record. This impulse toward historical accuracy as a counterweight to the rhetoric of competing for victimhood manifests itself in Polonsky's masterful series of collected essays, *Polin*.

The memory activism of the late 1990s and early 2000s relied on this cultural and scholarly moment in which the recuperation of history became a priority for scholars and activists alike. These memory initiatives worked intensively with historians' tools: they recovered methods that had been brushed to the side such as oral history; they relegitimized ethnic identifications that had been treated as regressive or belittled; they rebuilt the material culture of the past, such as synagogues; they created platforms for perspectives and information that could not make their way into the public conversation via traditional means; and they energetically questioned the routine practices of overlooking the difficult questions of the past. Brama Grodzka in Lublin created a scrupulously detailed small-scale model of prewar Lublin that visitors could linger over, and curated photographic exhibitions of life in Lublin's Jewish Quarter. Pogranicze Sejny published Jan Gross's *Neighbors*, an event that was a crucial turning point in Polish–Jewish relations. It oversaw the restoration of Sejny's White Synagogue and normalized a discourse of ethnic pluralism in the region. The Center for Jewish Culture in Kraków long functioned as a gateway of sorts to Kazimierz, correcting stereotypes and pushing for historically accurate guidebooks, signage and general information for both tourists and local residents.

However, the animating impulse for all three groups was not historical accuracy but social change. Their frequently evolving aims bridled against the essential prudence of the historical method; they were committed to truth-telling, but not for its own sake. Responding to powerfully felt intuitions about how local environments affect individuals, the leaders, staff members, and allies of these groups worked with what was available around them, at times improvising, at times strategizing, but always moving toward a sense that Polish identity contained within it the possibility of self-revision.

In doing so, each group mobilized its own version of how to alter long-established habits of self-understanding, and how to address social

relationships that had been forged in the crucible of ethnic and religious violence, suspicion, and skepticism. Brama Grodzka developed a politics of local (Lubliner) identity that created space for residents to question their attachments to an inherited Polishness that obscured Lublin's Jewish past. It did not insist on a dialogue between Jews and Christians, nor did it push for a deep working through of guilt, shame or anger. Instead, it created practices that brought absence and loss from the past into present-day familiar material forms, such as streetlights and postmarks. Genuine reconciliation with the violent excision of Jewish communal life from one's home city is not possible, for Brama Grodzka. Put another way, some losses should simply not be reconciled. Pogranicze Sejny created practices and discourses of multiculturalism in a rural borderland characterized by a legacy of multi-ethnic violence. Its work was based on the belief that entering into the experience of an "other" is frightening yet liberating; dismantling the walls separating ethnic and religious communities was one of the most powerful practices possible in the Polish–Lithuanian border region. For Pogranicze, some type of "reconciliation" is possible, but it is an always ongoing process rather than an event with closure. The Center for Jewish Culture in Kraków began as a change agent hoping to revive a historically Jewish and neglected section of the city. In response to contending visions of how to remember Kraków's Jewish past, brought into play by first the Festival of Jewish Culture and then Schindler tourism, the Center became more active in asserting its view of appropriate historical remembrance. Ultimately, it came to engage with one of the most difficult issues in Poland's past, the anti-Semitism of the Catholic Church. In partnership with Father Stanisław Musiał, the Center advocated for the development of a Polish Catholic identity that relentlessly interrogated its own flaws.

There are some remarkable similarities among these three very different efforts. Each worked closely with local identity, focusing in particular on material cultures such as specific buildings and streets. Each had to develop its own understanding of national identity. I argue here that for activist groups, national identity is not a category of analysis (as it is for scholars) but an emotionally charged relationship of the individual with a specific narrative about her larger community's meaning in the world. It is an attachment that exists outside of rationalization, and outside of "history" as we tend to conceive of it and practice it.

This view of national identity as removed from the standards of historical accuracy and logic explains some of the power of the Polish state as

a memory actor in the 2015–2017 period. It sought to control the production of history through its laws forbidding criticism of Poland, but not because it feared any finding that a historian might produce from the dusty archives. To be a memory warrior one needs enemies. The accusations of complicity, treason and libel are performances of a sort, through which attachment to Polish innocence becomes more tightly sutured rather than loosened.

The repertoires of the memory activist organizations analyzed here are reasons for hope. They demonstrate an unwillingness to settle for the easy answer of reconciliation. They incorporate agility and creativity. They evince a deep respect for place and the losses that go along with those places. They represent our capacity to look at our flaws clearly, to be present with our inadequacies, and to refuse the fruitless search for innocence.

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