Reflections

2016
AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER
ANNUAL ALUMNI JOURNAL
OVERVIEW

ABOUT THE AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER

Established in 2000, the Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC), a partner of the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, is a cultural and educational institution located in Oświęcim, Poland. Located less than two miles from Auschwitz-Birkenau, the AJC strives to juxtapose the enormity of the destruction of human life with the vibrant lives of the Jewish people who once lived in the adjacent town and throughout Poland. The AJC’s mission is also to provide all visitors with an opportunity to memorialize victims of the Holocaust through the study of the life and culture of a formerly Jewish town and to offer educational programs that allow new generations to explore the meaning and contemporary implications of the Holocaust. The AJC—including a museum, education center, synagogue, and café—is a place of understanding, education, memory, and prayer for all people. In addition to on-site educational offerings, the AJC offers international academic opportunities including the American Service Academies Program, Fellows Program, Program for Students Abroad, Human Rights Summer Program, and Customized Programs throughout the year.
ABOUT REFLECTIONS

*Reflections* is an annual academic journal of selected pieces by AJC program alumni. Its aim is to capture the perspectives, experiences, and interests of that year’s participants. The AJC Newsletter, published three times per year, provides snapshots of the Center’s work; *Reflections* is an in-depth supplement that will be published at the end of each year. The following are authored by alumni of the following programs:

The **American Service Academies Program (ASAP)** is a two-week educational initiative for a select group of cadets and midshipmen from the U.S. Military, Naval Academy, Coast Guard, and Air Force academies. Launched in June 2004 with six students, the program has more than doubled in size to fourteen participants. Focusing on the Holocaust and related contemporary moral and ethical dilemmas, this in situ program not only educates students about the past, but also stimulates dialogue about its relationship to the present and the future. Throughout the program, the group works to gain a better understanding of pre-war Jewish life and its subsequent devastation. Within this framework, students are challenged to understand what can happen in the absence of open and democratic governing institutions — when evil is given free reign, when fear overpowers ethics, and when democratic ideals are not defended.

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

The **AJC Program for Students Abroad** was established in 2010 as long-weekend programs in Kraków and Oświęcim open to students of all backgrounds studying in Europe, Israel, and the region. The program, which includes a scholarly visit to Oświęcim/Auschwitz, provides an academic environment through which participants engage intensively with the history of the Holocaust and Jewish life in Poland. To date, over 200 students from around the world have participated in the PSA, some of whom have gone on to become AJC Fellows.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Overview

### 2016 AMERICAN SERVICE ACADEMIES PROGRAM ALUMNI

**Victory by Resistance**<br> Tyler Gness, United States Military Academy

**Habits of Obedience: The Holocaust and Now**<br> Shannon Wissemann, United States Military Academy

### 2016 FELLOWS PROGRAM: A BRIDGE TO HISTORY ALUMNI

**Music’s Link to Memory**<br> Alexandra Birch, Arizona State University

**‘Not Our Nation’: Public Holocaust Commemoration in Poland**<br> Alana Holland, University of Kansas

**Memory and History Intertwined: An Investigation of Sports Culture and Holocaust Remembrance**<br> Sebastian Huebel, University of British Columbia

**Absence as Opportunity: A Comparison of Two Memorial Sites**<br> Jane’a Johnson, Brown University

**Synagogue as Memorial: Architectural Interventions to Polish Synagogues**<br> Rebecca D. Pollack, CUNY Graduate Center

**Symbolic Identity and Social Acceptance at the Kraków Jewish Culture Festival**<br> Lucas Wilson, Florida Atlantic University

### 2016 PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS ABROAD ALUMNI

**In the Shadow of Tragedy: Life After Columbine**<br> Molly Geoghegan, National University of Ireland Galway

## Contributors

| REFLECTIONS | 2016 AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER ANNUAL ALUMNI JOURNAL |
Victory by Resistance

TYLER GNESSE

Throughout the American Service Academies Program, we had the opportunity to meet many individuals who helped us understand and contextualize the history of the Holocaust and our roles as officers today. Among these people was Major Andrzej Wiczyński who was part of the Warsaw Uprising. Major Wiczyński, and his Polish peers who were as young as 14, fought against a professional German army with courage and defiance. Their resistance to take back their country, and their lives, was more than courageous; it was heroic. Speaking with Major Wiczyński, I tried to understand the plight of the Warsaw Uprising participants. To hear of his experience being helplessly outnumbered and fighting for a belief inspired me.

Walking around Warsaw from the Warsaw Rising Museum to the various historical sites, I felt closer to conceptualizing the life path of the individuals who fought fearlessly throughout history. The resisters fought not because of the idea of complete military victory, but for the pride and hope for the future, to continue their culture, families, and future. I was deeply moved by my time in Poland, and I continue to grow every day from this experience.

During our time in the city, we had the opportunity to view the site of the Jewish resistance headquarters that was destroyed by the Nazis during a major offensive in the city’s wartime ghetto. During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Jewish resistance fighters holed up in the small bunker, where they fought against their oppressors. This was extremely moving to me because I instantly realized the fortitude of character that the resistance fighters had, surrounded, and with limited provisions and fighting materials. To them, fighting to stand against moral evil, and die in the battle against it, was a victory in itself. Their memory is a victory.

Reading about the plight of the Jews was also moving because of the hardships associated with being in the ghetto. The odds against the uprising participants shone through to me whilst walking through the bullet-riddled Jewish cemetery. Most of Warsaw was destroyed during the war, but the cemetery tells all about the fighting throughout the period as untouched-unfixed evidence. The sheer amount of bullet holes signified the intense fighting that happened on those sacred grounds. Seeing
the historic ghetto walls and cemetery put a depth of emotion into the readings and
the displays in museums. Seeing the mass graves of the Jewish fighters and the
Warsaw Uprising soldiers created a connection with history that was invaluable
to my learning.

The striking information that I contemplated in detail was the plight of Jewish
resisters. Jews had almost no access to weaponry, food, or medical supplies, all of
which had to be smuggled in. Still, they openly attacked German forces. Fighting,
stealing, and creating an underground opened up survival opportunities for the
fighters, but, perhaps, survival was not the major goal. It seemed the fight against
tyranny was the major objective, and to me, it represented a more important fight
than mere survival.

Major Andrzej Wiczyński encouraged me to look inward on my personal attributes.
As a 22-year-old man, I have seen hardship, but none close to what Major Wiczyński
saw at the age of 14. I thought deeply if I would have had the courage to fight for
what I believed in at that age—and more so, if I could lead a platoon of 44 other boys
to do the same. I thought about the stress of dealing with academics, athletics, and
leadership positions during the school year. I thought about how I handle my
frustration and how I express my emotions to the people I love or care about. Lastly,
I thought about my commitment and motivations to serve, and compared them to
the desperate situation of these young warriors. I grew an enormous admiration for
Major Wiczyński, and since my encounter with him, I have brought a new fire to
my daily grind. I no longer worry about little problems because they could always be
worse; if these school-age children could endure such trials, none of my modern first
world problems should defeat me. I cannot laugh in the face of death like they did,
and I cannot compare myself to their lives. However, I can learn from their
experiences to become a better version of myself.

Walking away from the gravesites of the resistance fighters, I felt a wave of strength,
instead of sadness, from their sacrifice. The fighters achieved victory by people like
our group visiting and remembering them. The indomitable human spirit was shown
in these fighters, and knowing now about their specific back-to-the-wall fight really
put a fire into my soul. Before, I thought that mankind was limited. After, I walked
again from the memorial pondering how all of my fights are miniscule and
manageable. Futility is not a word, because as shown with the resistance, any act
against evil, even in “futility,” is achieving victory.
As a future military leader, learning about the struggles of these strong people will greatly benefit me. I was honored to have heard Major Wiczyński speak, and to have the opportunity to see the memorials and the structural history of a war-torn country. I firmly believe that the resistance was a victory because future generations are able to visit the sites and learn these lessons. I was blessed with the ability to attend the American Service Academies Program through the Auschwitz Jewish Center, and I am stronger for seeing the struggles of mankind.
The true measure of authority reflects a pattern of obedience exhibited in response to its use. Effective authority necessitates consistent and immediate obedience, which, in turn, reinforces one’s position of authority regardless of its legitimacy. In this sense, authority manifests as a force whose legitimacy does not depend on the caliber of the man who wields it.

In one or two short years, each of us from the American Service Academies Program will hold authority as commissioned officers in the United States Armed Forces. Our commissions afford us this power whether we make good decisions or bad, whether we are right or we are wrong. As such, we will have a responsibility far greater than ourselves, one that transcends responsibility for our own words and actions; indeed, we will exercise the responsibility of our rank. Therefore, we must carefully consider all that we say and do. In the military, soldiers, sailors, and airmen tend to watch, evaluate, and often mimic the actions and attitudes of their officers. For this reason, our respective institutions consistently remind us to be “leaders of character” and to “choose the harder right over the easier wrong.”

As we do so, we must never forget the destruction of the Holocaust, instead using it as a constant reminder of the influence that we have on others and of our responsibility to ensure that we use this influence for the common good of those with and for whom we serve. The history of the Holocaust reveals just how readily and willingly civilians and soldiers alike obey uniformed authority. Now, like then, it can be difficult for subordinates to see past authority and evaluate the morality—or lack thereof—of an order or policy. Some find it difficult to judge when it is appropriate to question an order; after all, soldiers, civilians, and other subordinates rarely have access to all the information the person of authority works with. Our soldiers, especially our non-commissioned officers (NCOs), must be able to trust us to use our access to information and our authority to make correct and moral decisions. We, in return, must take responsibility for the actions of all our
subordinates. The authority of our rank reflects the sacred responsibility we have for everyone beholden to it.

This lesson was particularly poignant in Poland as we engaged with the negative potential of authority exercised by Axis leaders during the Holocaust. Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party expertly manipulated the existing political systems to gain the trust and obedience of the people. Although immoral and unethical as a leader, Hitler rose to power in accordance with Germany’s legitimate election process. He ran for office, and the people voted for him. Afterwards, Hitler effectively ruled within the legal bounds of his office. With this power, he expanded his party’s legal authority and played upon the fears off the people. As a result, few realized the true and lasting consequences of the Nazi message. The majority of Germans simply accepted the message, position, and direction of the Nazi Party.

Later, in his conquest of Poland, Hitler used police forces to implement Nazi policies, particularly with respect to the extermination and deportation of the Jewish population.¹ This strategy proved extremely effective. Indeed, the statistics are astounding. For example, over the course of a single year, each police officer murdered over 160 people.² Beyond the horror of these numbers, what is, perhaps, most shocking is that a battalion of 500 men, who were not even soldiers, maintained authority and influence over the more than 83,000 people they were instructed only to kill.³

Concentration camps and killing centers further manifested the phenomenon of habitual obedience during World War II. Comparatively few people in authority managed the entire extermination process, from the initial deportation to a camp, through the reception and selection in the camp, to operating gas chambers. The Nazis employed numerous methods of deception while executing their “Final Solution.” In effect, prisoners, who outnumbered their captors, were controlled by fear, and the order of authority and obedience. The Nazis used their uniforms as a visual sign of authority to claim power over their victims. Predictably, their authority accrued as others grew increasingly obedient and, therefore, subservient, to it.

² Ibid., 36.
³ Ibid., 36.
Trainload after trainload of prisoners fell into the habit of obedience exhibited by those who had come before them until it was too late for many to resist. This domino-effect of obedience created, and was perpetuated by, an increased normality in the behavior of both parties, until the soldiers saw cruelty and murder as “their everyday duty,” and the prisoners saw pain, suffering, and death as their inevitable and ever-present state of being. Each action and reaction created a new norm, which exhibited, and supported, roles of authority and subordination, and which, over time, transformed the identity of each person involved. In this fashion, the genocide and destruction began with the basic structure of authority and obedience.

This same structure provides the backbone of everything we do in the United States Army; it keeps the organization running smoothly and holds formations together as cohesive units. Officers exercise authority, and soldiers obediently execute their orders. Otherwise, the Army would crumble. Soon, those of us participating in this program will be those officers. We will be giving the orders.

Ultimately, the habit of obedience demanded by the rank structure of the military can lead either to the protection of liberty, or to its destruction. Such obedience will keep us coordinated and effective as a cohesive fighting force. We will have the responsibility, as officers, to ensure that we exercise authority, and demand obedience, within the boundaries of justice and just war. In short, it is our responsibility to prevent genocide through the misuse of military authority. We must ensure that genocide never occurs on our watch. That is the power of authority. That is the power of an officer. That is the power we will hold. That is the responsibility we must accept. And I do.

Works Cited


---

5 Ibid., 150.
Music’s Link to Memory

ALEXANDRA BIRCH

On the way to a Brahms rehearsal in northern Germany, I tripped over something on the sidewalk. Beneath my feet, in front of their former home, were the names Alice, Julius, and Selma Wolf, all victims of Auschwitz, who died in 1943. Playing chamber music in the serene German town of Saarburg, the Wolfs’ legacy had not been present in my mind. I showed the *stolperstein* (stepping stone) to my colleagues. The Holocaust may fade in our memory, but it does not disappear. Utilizing the arts—individualistic by necessity—to bring life back to individual victims serves as an effective way of communicating the immensity of loss.

The Wolfs from Saarburg were not musicians. However, this experience led me to wonder how memory can also be linked to music. Like a physical representation, musical commemoration allows for cross-generational and cross-cultural remembrance, as concerts can appeal to many, and are meaningful without the use of spoken language. Just as the stepping stones commemorate this family in their hometown, I wondered how to engage with musical "stepping stones" in classical music. Can Holocaust works be placed in musical literature as a method of remembering Jewish composers? A Jewish piece sitting on a concert program like a stone on the street; undeniably there, but strangely displaced by time and the atrocities that left only a stone as a reminder.

Classical music, arguably, is born out of Germanic tradition. Most of the favorite composers performed orchestrally are Germanic: Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Strauss, Wagner, Mozart, and Bach.¹ The running joke among musicians is that a concert is not complete without one of the "Three B’s"—Beethoven, Brahms, or Bach. Additionally, of the finest orchestras in the world, the Vienna and Berlin philharmonics are always at the top of the list.

However, and problematically so, this is a parallel view of music that Herbert Gerigk envisioned in *Lexikon der Juden in der Musik*. The emphatic creation of a German cultural landscape was critical in the Third Reich to shape a racial community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Nazi art and music sought to eliminate what the Nazis considered degenerate Jewish and foreign influences (including Slavic and "Bolshevik"). Under Nazism, manuscripts of Mahler and Mendelssohn were destroyed, and Aryan giants like Beethoven, Bach, and Wagner were championed. Artistic censorship is nothing new in dictatorships. From Hitler to Stalin, Mao, Suharto, and Pol Pot, intellectuals and artists are among the first targets of an oppressive regime, and the arts are easily and swiftly suppressed as tools of self-expression. Often, the dictatorial culture is bastardized and twisted beyond recognition. The goal of commemoration must not be to avoid or villainize Germanic music or art, but to enhance it with a secondary perspective.

How do we reconcile this prevalence of German culture in classical music, while still giving credence to the victim culture? In commemoration, it is vital to remember the victims not exclusively for their victimhood. With the immensity of the Holocaust, many victims are simply missing, and along with them, thousands of individual stories. For musicians, this represents lost talent, and lost compositions. In expanding the canon of classical music it is vital to include these lost works. Towns in Germany and Poland that are now devoid of Jews often possess remnants of their Jewish past: an abandoned synagogue, a *mikvah* turned strip club, a lone *bima*. In bringing back the musical works of the dead, we create a cultural space of remembrance. Just as physical memorials face concerns of authenticity, musical works are the authentic spirit and sentiment of the victim. Both the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the Auschwitz Jewish Center highlight Jewish life prior to the war. Preservation of music—compositions, recordings, and instruments themselves—commemorates the soul of the person, a true manifestation of what was most

---

3 As part of the AJC program, we visited the ruins of what used to be the synagogue in Działoszyce, which are protected by the European Union.
4 The former *mikvah*, or Jewish ritual bath, of Chmielnik is located in the basement of a now abandoned strip club/night club.
5 The *bima*, a raised podium, of the Tarnów synagogue, is all that remains from the city’s former Jewish prayer house.
important to them. Viktor Ullmann, Hans Krasa, Pavel Haas, and others should be remembered for their contributions to music, rather than for their murder in Auschwitz.

By giving dead composers new life with performances of their works, we preserve their past. Artifacts that belonged to the dead—talliot, glasses, dolls, shoes—are preserved as part of the humanity of the victims. Similarly, musical artifacts inserted in the classical music oeuvre may cause an audience to stumble over a name with which they are less familiar. This has the exact intended effect that while beautiful art—Germanic music—may be celebrated, it is not without an equal legacy of genocide. German, Polish, Soviet music is incomplete without the voices of its dead. Reconstructing memory not only serves the victim, but also keeps a part of its soul alive.

Works Cited


---

8 Tallit (plural tallitot) is a Jewish prayer shawl.
On July 4, 2016, the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows traveled to Kielce to visit the site of the pogrom that took place on the same day 70 years ago at 7 Planty Street. Most of us did not know that Poland’s president, Andrzej Duda, was expected to come for the 70th commemoration of the tragedy. I was excited but apprehensive about the prospect of hearing the President of Poland address the events in person. I had been following his Law and Justice Party’s initiative on the politics of historical memory and the government’s move to punish those who refer to “Polish concentration camps” with jail sentences. So as I stood in the crowd listening to his address, I was surprised to hear him announce that “Poland has no place for racism, has no place for xenophobia, has no place for anti-Semitism.” I privately reprimanded myself for approaching his speech with suspicion, because the president was preparing to apologize for such sentiments, which had made the Holocaust and its aftermath so devastating in Poland. Yet, after a few minutes, it became apparent that the speech would fall in line with his party’s current political policy.

President Duda’s initiative on “historical politics” is intended specifically to educate Poles in the greatest historical achievements of Poland in order to build a strong foundation of patriotism at home and a positive image of the country abroad. Describing his initiative, Duda said that “great historical policy requires investment—that is, to show the elements that create pride.” One of the main points of the initiative is to highlight the fact that “there was no institutional collaboration with the Germans” during the war. The president is correct in his assertion that there was no formal institutional collaboration in Poland, but the more difficult topic is the underlying social responsibility in Polish society for participation in crimes related to the Holocaust. Yet, historian Jan Grabowski details Polish participation in Nazi-


2 Ibid.
instigated crimes against Jews, while historian John Connelly treats passivity to the Nazis’ treatment of the Jews as indicative of collective “shared indifference,” a form of secondhand collaboration via inaction. Unease with the past has provided much of the fuel for the recent directions taken by the current government—including the legislation that made it illegal to refer to “Polish concentration/death camps” (polskie obozy koncentracyjne/śmierci) or to suggest that Poles shared responsibility for the Holocaust.

The recent controversy over the international media’s use of the adjective “Polish” as a modifier for the Nazi concentration camps illustrates a deep problem in the politics of Holocaust memory in Poland. When foreigners use this phrase to refer to the camps, members in ruling positions in Poland, and a large number of ordinary Polish citizens, have an extremely emotional reaction. Emotion and culture are linked, and this is often informed by lexicon and grammar in a language. Sometimes the different linguistic usage among languages can unintentionally create hostile situations. Stanislaw Baranczak, a scholar of Polish literature, wrote that sometimes “the semantic incompatibilities which are so firmly ingrained in languages and cultures…make mutual communication impossible.”

In English, “Polish” can be a geographic or composition indicator—meaning that when a foreigner uses the phrase “Polish concentration camp,” he/she is referring to concentration camps on Polish territory (the preferred Polish way: obozy koncentracyjne na terenie Polski), or camps that mostly contained Polish citizens. In English, there can be different adjectival forms that denote either victim or perpetrator. For example, compare the English phraseology “the Armenian Genocide” with “the Stalinist terror.” The first instance denotes a genocide specifically targeting Armenians, not a genocide perpetrated by them. The second instance refers to terror organized and committed by Stalin and his regime. One might also consider the Russian terminology for the genocide of the Jews during

---

World War II—еврейская катастрофа (Jewish catastrophe)—before the term Holocaust (Holocaust) came into standard use in the 1990s. “Jewish” denotes victimhood, not perpetration.

But in Polish, the use of the adjective “Polish” to modify the camps suggests ownership, implying that Poles were responsible for creating and running the camps. This, of course, was not true, and when foreigners use this terminology, they do not intend to imply that it was so. Yet, this semantic complexity has resulted in a situation by which many Poles have an extreme emotional reaction to what they perceive as blatant falsification of history.

Similar problems of semantics arise in other areas that involve ethnicity/race, historical wrongs, and the nation. For example, in the United States, the controversy over the “Black Lives Matter” movement has proven that in their insistence on rebutting with “All Lives Matter,” a significant percentage of white Americans, about fifty percent, are reluctant to accept national responsibility for the history of slavery. Many white Americans are also reluctant to admit that the United States is still a society with subversive racism and structural discrimination based on race and ethnicity.

In Poland, fixation on the perceived misuse of the term “Polish concentration camp” belies the more complex questions of responsibility among Poles for the fate of their Jewish neighbors during and after the war, and is, arguably, a way for elites to divert attention away from unwanted historical truths. As such, when Duda gave his speech at the Kielce commemoration, he extracted the pogrom from both its Holocaust context and its Polish national context. Duda said that the pogrom had two dimensions: the state, and the social.

“[The pogrom] happened after the Second World War, after the terrible experience of the Holocaust. It happened in a country under a new power, the communist authorities. It happened in a country where during World War II the Polish Underground punished all informers, blackmailers, and those who were not in solidarity with each citizen in opposition to a common enemy, which was fascist Germany.”

---

7 Duda, “Przemówienie prezydenta A. Dudy wygłoszone podczas obchodów 70. rocznicy pogromu kieleckiego.”
In this and other excerpts, Duda separated this anti-Jewish violence from any that occurred during the war. He placed the blame on the communist authorities for both the instigation (the pogrom began after an unknown shot was fired, which he attributed to the security service) and the failure to immediately end the pogrom. The transcript of the speech available online is listed under the heading “Stalinism,” separating Polish citizens from the communist state.

“But it is also a social problem—a problem that not only the army and the police were here. Not only did the military and police attack, but so did ordinary people.”8 It is undeniable that ordinary citizens were responsible for the attacks against and murder of the Jews in Kielce after false rumors after a blood libel. Duda could not avoid mentioning this, strongly condemning it (“there is no excuse for anti-Semitic crime”9), but offered no retrospection himself on Polish society at the time:

“How this happened, why it happened, why people reacted in one way and not another—I leave this assessment to historians and sociologists.”10 Here he opened up a realm of research into the most difficult aspects of Polish-Jewish relations (which the more recent proposed legislation against responsibility for the Holocaust has threatened), but in doing so he presented a framework for interpretation—those who participated in anti-Jewish crimes are outside the nation, not real Poles:

“I want to strongly emphasize that those who committed this crime, here, July 4, 1946, are excluded from our society, excluded from the Republic of friends. Because how could they look into the eyes of all Poles of Jewish origin, who for Poland, died for our freedom for so many hundreds of years, for decades. Because how could they look into the eyes of the Ulma family and all those who, during World War II, helped to rescue Jews and risked their lives, often suffering? How could they look into the eyes of honest Polish citizens, honest people? They cannot look into their eyes, because such behavior never was, and I deeply believe never will be, accepted. The Republic excludes such people—there is no place for them in our common country, our great community, the community of Polish citizens.”11

But the early postwar period was actually a time in which Polish society was willing to address individual and social responsibility for participation in crimes related to the

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Holocaust. Many Polish citizens brought hundreds of their neighbors to trial for crimes committed during the war, including those against Jews beginning in 1944 and lasting into the 1950s. While these trials occurred during Communism with an overt political agenda, this does not mean that they were illegitimate.

While Duda emphasized the positive and heroic deeds of individual Poles, he implied that those who acted otherwise were deviant and did not represent the Polish nation. Ernest Renan, an early thinker on nationalist identity, wrote in 1882 that, “A heroic past with great men and glory is the social capital upon which the national idea rests.” The social capital upon which the national idea of today’s Poland is built is the myth of heroism and suffering in World War II and the fight against communism, together with heroic stories of rescuing Jews. Renan also wrote that “the essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things” which accounts for why “the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality.”

The ethnically homogenous Polish and Catholic nation of today’s Poland has not necessarily forgotten that members of the national body were complicit in the crimes of the Holocaust. But the current ruling party is pursuing a national agenda that encourages the desire among many Poles to screen out and erase dark memories that pose a threat to a positive national identity. Perhaps more painful than the knowledge that Poles committed crimes against Jews is the knowledge that the majority did not actively try to save them. This attitude toward the Holocaust and the role of the nation is not unique to Poland, but is shared among many individuals and governments across Europe.

For example, the Lithuanian film director Marius Ivaškevičius presented a less explicitly political articulation of the same sentiments behind the actions of the Polish governing party. In the context of contemporary Lithuanian national identity, Ivaškevičius also presented those who committed crimes against Jews as “outside” the nation:

“Because it wasn’t Lithuania who murdered our Jews, but gangs of murderers, aided and abetted by other criminals. Yes, they spoke our language, they made use of our symbols, they sang our national anthem, but this wasn’t the real Lithuania, this was a weakened Lithuania, divided by two foreign occupations which confused, deported and killed her minds, her authorities who might have, at least in words and thoughts,

---

12 Ernest Renan, Qu’est-ce qu’une nation? (Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992), Part III.
13 Ibid., Part I.
tried to oppose this bestiality. But time has passed, she has stood up again, restored herself, and found within the power to take responsibility for all those innocent victims, and to honor their memory.\footnote{Marius Ivaškevičius, “I'm Not Jewish,” Delfi, accessed July 24, 2016. http://www.lzb.lt/en/2016/09/09/im-not-jewish.}

Despite globalization and integrative structures like the European Union, many citizens today still want their nations to be powerful and presented positively in the international arena, and, therefore, ordinary citizens and elites alike often obfuscate their dark histories. But the idea that citizens harm their national identity and reputation when they openly confront and take responsibility for the negative actions of their nation’s citizens in the past is another myth worth deconstructing.

Works Cited


Wierzbicka, Anna. “Emotion, Language, and Cultural Scripts.” In Emotion and
Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence, edited by Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel

wPolityce.pl. “Narodowa Rada Rozwoju o polityce historycznej.” Accessed February
16, 2016.
When I visited Poland in the summer of 2016 as part of the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows Program, the EuroCup was in full force, with Poland and Germany both contesting for the trophy. As a cultural institution, soccer is the undisputed leader in the world of athletics in both countries, and, as a result, galvanizes a cross section of people in both societies. The fascination with sports can serve a transcendental purpose that goes beyond differences in race, class, ethnicity, gender, and age. I took it upon myself this past summer to observe sports euphoria within Polish society, and, simultaneously, perform the role, based on my own ethnic background, of a German soccer fan. My point of departure was: What does it mean to be recognized as German in Poland today, seventy years after the conclusion of World War II and the Holocaust? Was there a proper etiquette of behavior for a German in Poland? More specifically, would it be possible to wear a Germany jersey during the EuroCup?

When I packed my bags, I was unsure whether to bring my jersey in the first place. I was tempted to. I had never consciously associated my interest in sports with an explicit political statement; wearing a Germany jersey with my friends, or cheering for my team at home on the couch or amongst strangers in a public viewing venue has been mostly a fun experience. The more I thought about bringing this jersey to Poland, however, the more I realized that wearing a jersey in public with Germany’s national colors on it, is, however, a deliberate statement of national identity. As a symbolic icon, a national jersey identifies the bearer as a member of a collective (imagined) community, and thereby introduces to the public sphere the individual’s self-understanding of belonging. As the bearer of such a jersey, I make the conscious and willing decision to not only identify myself with the soccer team—or a respective player of that team—but on a more fundamental level, with the collective, in this case the nation that the soccer team represents.

Before I decided to bring the jersey, I realized that by identifying myself as German through my jersey, I would be making a political statement. I reckoned that through
my jersey, I would represent everything Germany stands for in today’s Poland. As a historian by training, however, my moral reservations to bring the shirt to Poland were closely related to the incessant reminder of Germany’s historic crimes against the country of Poland, its invasion in 1939, and the brutal atrocities committed against the Polish people, including the more than three million Polish Jews who perished in the Holocaust. My historical awareness knocked on the doors of my conscience. Would it be inappropriate to potentially anger and provoke Poles through the recognizability of my jersey? I decided to bring it to Poland and see what happens.

Why would it not be appropriate to bring the jersey?

Since 1945, Germany has walked an ambiguous, thorny path of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (an attempt of coming to terms with its past). In the postwar era, German society experienced a form of historical amnesia when the war and the Holocaust were rather tabooed and not spoken of. This changed in the 1960s with a sincerer societal opening and interest in German perpetrators, their deeds and crimes. With an exuberant output of Holocaust-focused media productions over several decades, especially the 1990s, over the last twenty-or-so years, the phenomenon of “Holocaust fatigue,” the perceived saturation of Holocaust-themed media productions such as films has emerged though new and important studies are still written and attempts to commemorate the victims are tenaciously upheld. Germany, in short, has undergone a remarkable transformation from war-crime denial, the downplaying thereof, to outright repentance and quests for forgiveness.

Thomas Berger claims that Germany has “set the global standard for guilt—it is the model penitent for the world.”¹ According to Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, “an astounding transformation has turned the recollections of a persecuted minority [the Jews] into the official public memory.”² Quoting Alf Lüdtke, both authors agree that the heightening of Holocaust sensibility since the 1990s has created a veritable memory industry that treats remembrance as moral imperative in Germany. And for Mary Fullbrook, even in the 21st century, new projects in Germany still spring up that “are designed to express a sense of identification with the victims and seek

---

atonement for a past for which no adults of working age are any longer responsible.” Such striking declarations by such renowned historians are not triumphalist history.

Over the course of seventy years, it is evident that Germany has established and cultivated cordial diplomatic relations with countries like Israel, Poland and Russia. Talks about untreated war crimes and calls for compensation have long vanished and if they surface, result in a minor echo among the populist parties of Europe. Questions of guilt and responsibility have long been settled and will not be reopened. In short, Germany might have learned its lesson, having gone through much pain and complications to reach a state of “normality”—a new zeitgeist that allows Germans in the 21st century to be visibly proud again of their country, culture, even their history, and that tolerates Germans hoisting their country’s flag without being instantaneously stigmatized as Neo-Nazis and soccer hooligans. The last two decades proved that this “new pride” can harmoniously coexist while Germans adhere to the ubiquitous moral reminder of not neglecting Germany’s mission of historical remembrance and commemoration of its past crimes.

Yet the question remains if other countries might see the German way of Vergangenheitsbewältigung—arguably an internal process within German society—in a similar light. Fullbrook and Jarausch and Meyer’s scholarly studies of memory and commemoration, despite their important contributions, I would argue, are still too often constrained by nationalist historiography with a focus on societal changes in Germany only. The transnational quest for analyzing how certain countries such as Poland for instance, see other countries like Germany and their attempts towards processing crimes committed in the past, including efforts of reconciliation and normalization, have hardly begun. While there can be no doubt that wearing a German jersey in Germany today would hardly trigger any reactions or receive attention, it is important to recall that this was not yet the case in the mid-1990s. And while it has become normality in Germany to express national pride, the politically motivated friendship in the diplomatic theatre between Germany and the countries it had invaded does not necessarily, and automatically, translate into a state of normality between the people in each country. Even though Germany has asked for forgiveness, most visibly enacted through the German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s Kniefall, or genuflection, at the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial in December

---

1970, this does not mean that Poles today perceive Germans in a particularly positive light.⁴

Upon arriving in Poland, I used the tactic of wearing my jersey the night of a German match (against Italy in this case) below another shirt; it was not visible at the moment I left the hotel for a pub together with my peers. I also wanted to shield myself from possible embarrassment in a foreign country if Germany lost. I feared that Poles might have had the pleasure of laughing at the cocky German who dared to wear a jersey in the city of Kraków, the closest major city to Auschwitz. To my indescribable pleasure, however, Germany beat Italy (a historic win), and, moved by the concomitant euphoria and the tranquilizing effect of a few pints consumed in the pub, I decided “to come out of the closet” and publicly show the jersey.

The reactions that followed were, perhaps to my surprise, benign. Kraków is a popular tourist destination; the pub we had selected had many German fans. Exhibiting my silly shirt was safe in such a microenvironment. Furthermore, my impression that the local Poles could be antagonized by my implicit provocation was not fulfilled in the slightest. Instead, my peers and I left with the impression that Poles had been rather pro-German during the game. Walking on the street afterwards, and then visiting an open-air concert of the Kraków Jewish Cultural Festival that was in the closing stages past midnight, I decided to continue the social experiment and enter the festival arena. With the German soccer win and the mental support of being in a group and not alone, I encountered what I call, in retrospect, perhaps some strange looks. Standing close to the concert stage listening to the music performances, conversations between festival visitors and our group commenced. I quickly realized that not everyone was comfortable with the German jersey at a place like this. Most people, of course, did not notice me, or would not have cared; at 2:00 AM the market square of Kraków’s Kazimierz district was also not as busy as before. Yet a handful of strange looks and comments that wearing the German jersey with three stars on it—which strangely enough were interpreted by one person as symbolizing a remnant of the Third Reich—was inappropriate, made me realize that my thoughts back in Canada had not been completely unfounded.⁵ Seventy years after the Holocaust, the memories and the legacies of this watershed event in human

---

⁴ Wikipedia coins Willy Brandt’s “Kniefall von Warschau” as a gesture of humility and penance towards the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

⁵ The three stars represent each World Cup championship win for Germany, in 1954, 1972, and 1990. Ironically, the year I bought the jersey, in 2014, Germany would win the fourth star. Thus in Kraków, I technically wore an outdated jersey, which, however, worked to the benefit of my social experiment.
history still lay at the surface in some contemporary European societies, and echoed emotional reactions by some.

For Germany’s next game, we had moved on to our next destination in Poland: Oświęcim. While I harbored moral constraints on wearing the jersey in Kraków, my first destination in Poland, I was even more insecure about the appropriateness to repeat my experiment so close to the infamous and internationally regarded epicenter of the Shoah: Auschwitz. However, with Germany’s loss in the game, my experiment quickly ended.

*Lessons*

My journey to Poland and the story of my jersey have shown me that a healthy portion of nationalism and patriotism for one’s own country does not constitute a problem; it is normal in a sense that national or ethnic pride is something that most humans develop. Be it in America, Indonesia, or Kenya, people grow up in cultural milieus that allow, or even endorse, the creation of feelings of national or ethnic belonging and subsequent pride. Due to its universality, signs of nationalism, even German nationalism, were rather unproblematic for the Polish people I encountered. With the cultural erosion of political borders and the coalescing of European nations into an open, welcoming, and friendly “space,” I perceived Poles as quite tolerant towards foreign visitors, including soccer fans. The historic complications and animosities that I had imagined prior to my trip did not surface, and the strange looks I did receive on the festival grounds, I would rather summarize as exceptional and hard to pinpoint; the few individuals I might have made uncomfortable were perhaps international visitors, some perhaps from Israel. Some were probably Jewish, and as a result, they might have interpreted—for good reason—the appearance of my jersey on the festival grounds as an inappropriate gesture.

Overall, this trip has shown to me that the European idea of free borders and the shared values of peace and democracy, of closely cooperating through dialogue, despite the constant negative press coverage of the innumerable problems within the union, ranging from economic issues to the so-called refugee crisis, constitutes a moral bulwark against excessive nationalism, chauvinism, and radicalism. In Poland and elsewhere, the European idea is being lived, and this significant and tremendous cultural transformation—from being belligerent enemies to becoming allies, if not friends—is probably the most significant accomplishment in the long trajectory of European history. My jersey proved this.
In this social experiment, my objective was to gain a better understanding of Polish-German relations. My experience was that German symbols of nationalism in a country such as Poland were not perceived critically. I also learned that with a current resurgence of nationalist right-wing politics in Poland, showing flags and national colors have become increasingly common (as in other European countries). Looking for signs of Polish nationalism through the lens of soccer, I was rather surprised that weeks after Poland’s defeat in the tournament, Polish flags on balconies, people wearing Polish soccer jackets or keeping stickers of Polish flags on their cars, was still quite common. And thanks to the help of our very gifted program facilitator Maciek Zabierowski, who occasionally pointed out nationalist, right-wing soccer emblems on traffic posts, or graffiti on houses, some even with anti-Semitic elements in it, I realized that soccer in Poland, as in Germany and everywhere else, can be clearly misused as a tool for more extremist, nationalist propaganda.⁶

Despite the overwhelming acceptance of the European idea in Poland and beyond (not to be confused with the politics of the EU), the times of jingoism, chauvinism, and hurrah-patriotism are not over, and the parts of societies that are endorsing such values and beliefs are in fact gaining momentum. But with such kind of soccer fans, I did not want to be identified. So was it perhaps wrong then to wear the jersey, because my public act of doing so could be interpreted as yet another sign of the growing anti-multicultural nationalism that is becoming increasingly common and seemingly acceptable in Europe?

---

The problem with an overdose of nationalist fervor is the lack of balance, the disappearance of an equilibrium that guards a responsibility for awareness of past historical events and crimes like the Holocaust but that also allows space to celebrate one country’s heritage and culture. It is not the objective of this paper to argue that Germany is the shining star amongst the nations that have come to atone, ask for forgiveness, and reappear refined and cleansed, while other countries still have a complicated relationship to its past, with discussions of collaboration, collaboration and complicity being quite explosive and controversial. Poland might seem to fall into this latter category since the awareness that the country once had a flourishing Jewish presence that was eradicated mostly, but not exclusively, by German perpetrators is not strongly embedded (yet) in Polish socio-cultural life. If the story of my jersey proved one thing, then it is that symbols of nationalism, if properly understood, need to be contextualized with the human beings that create them and use them. A jersey can be a benign piece of clothing, a sign of national pride, a sign of historical reconciliation and understanding, or it can be a sign of resurging ultranationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. It is up to us to be vigilant and thoughtfully judge the appropriateness of using such symbols, which we cannot live without.

Works Cited


8 Quite the opposite. German society also currently witnesses a radicalization in nationalist politics with the recent founding of a populist, anti-European party that has scored high results in state elections. Using soccer as a point of departure, Maria Stehle and Beverly Weber argue that in Germany, too, questions of nationalism and multiculturalism have led to polarizations within society. Both claim that “the coexistence of contradictory discourses in circulation – the persistent articulation of a multicultural crisis and the pride in a successfully diverse Germany – provides a fundamental tension that defines “feeling Germany German?” in the first part of the twenty-first-century. Maria Stehle and Beverly Weber, “German Soccer, the 2010 World Cup and Multicultural Belonging,” German Studies Review 36.1 (2013): 105.

Absence as Opportunity:  
A Comparison of Two Memorial Sites

JANE'A JOHNSON

Treblinka is a quiet, eerie place. There are no statistics on how many people visit Treblinka each year, and unlike Auschwitz-Birkenau, no pope has ever come to pay his respects. There are no restaurants across the street, no large parking lots filled with campers and RVs. There is only vastness, forest, and emptiness. It is in many ways the polar opposite of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, with little to no people, not a single tour guide, and no obvious indication that there was ever a death camp on the grounds. But there was a death camp, and it was the deadliest of all of them, killing over 700,000 people in a little over a year. The Nazis deported so many people to Treblinka in autumn 1942, and so quickly, that bodies lay strewn about the camp, decaying in the open air. In autumn 1943, SS guards forced the remaining prisoners to destroy the camp, and then shot them.

In 1998, philosopher Giorgio Agamben published a book called Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive. The fundamental premise of Remnants of Auschwitz, is that there is a lacuna at the heart of testimony—a gap that has not been confronted in our explorations, explanations, and summations of the lessons of Auschwitz. Agamben writes that Auschwitz is, “the very aporia of historical knowledge: a non-coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension.” While Agamben was particularly concerned with testimony, I would like to expand this idea to interrogate the overreliance on specific kinds of objects, physical sites, and evidence commonly used to teach about the Holocaust. Ironically, it is Auschwitz’s abundance—both in material artifacts and memories—that I believe encourages verification, but prevents comprehension.

---

2 Ibid., 84.
3 Ibid., 373.
By focusing on lack, we might move away from simple verification to comprehension, and turn historical facts into moral facts. Historian Dominick LaCapra has argued that dealing with the historically grounded, concrete concept of loss or lack, can promote both intellectual clarity and honest ethical engagement.⁵ By focusing on lack, we might permanently move away from Auschwitz and death camps as an empty signifier for the Holocaust, and open up deeper ways of understanding genocide more broadly.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum was founded by a resolution of the Polish parliament on July 2, 1947, shortly after World War II ended, and was managed by the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art.⁶ The first permanent exhibition was designed in Communist Poland, and was largely reflective of Cold War tensions. By 1960, after Stalin’s death, national pavilions began to be erected on the grounds.⁷ These pavilions, politicized and shaped by national politics from the outset, can teach us more about an individual country’s national politics at the time of the exhibition design, than they do about the catastrophe of a world war, genocide, or the aftermath of wandering, despair, statelessness, and population transfer.

Treblinka’s memorial, on the other hand, is managed by local authorities as a branch of the nearby city of Siedlce.⁸ Because not a single building or even a barbed wire remain of Treblinka, the 17,000 jagged granite pillars of various sizes that surround a larger, main monument, completely dominate the landscape.⁹ Some pillars have the names of the towns from which people were deported, and correspond in size to the size of the population from each town, thus making a rather interesting, necessary bridge between deportation and extermination. There is also a set of larger stones inscribed with the countries of origin of the victims, but they are pillars like any other, and integrate national identity without allowing it to overshadow or exclude.¹⁰ It also features several concrete railroad ties leading up to

---

the granite pillars. Rather than appearing as a frozen, static space, the void can move visitors to think and reflect, rather than consume.

The Treblinka memorial was dedicated in 1964, although there had been a design competition for the site thirteen years earlier. The original winning design, which emphasized Jewish suffering, was, for ideological reasons that insisted on deemphasizing difference, never built. Treblinka, unlike Auschwitz, was constructed for the sole purpose of exterminating Jews, although other groups, like Sinti and Roma, and non-Jewish Poles, were also killed in the camp. Unlike Auschwitz, very few people lived through Treblinka to come back and tell the tale.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum remains a political lightening rod not simply because of the site’s historical significance, but because of the particular way in which the site was constructed as a privileged, singular, all-encompassing space of memory from its very beginning in 1947. It is important to emphasize that the full name of the institution is The Former German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, and the constant jostling over its memorial dimension has made it very difficult to develop truly innovative solutions to teaching the Holocaust. Any educational programming or exhibitions have to contend with Auschwitz as a “singular space of memory,” with its complex set of conflicting stories and interests—unless they were to abandon this framework all together.

Several disputes have erupted at Auschwitz, for a myriad of reasons. The camp has traditionally been associated exclusively with Jewish suffering. The camp has most recently been associated exclusively with Jewish suffering. However, when the national pavilions at Auschwitz were first conceived, the Sinti and Roma were not given a pavilion, since, despite being victims of Nazi persecution, medical experimentation, and extermination, they did not belong exclusively to one nation. Originally, the exhibitions were created to emphasize nationality over other affiliations like race, ethnicity or religion. Other groups—including homosexuals and Jehovah’s witnesses—were also excluded initially. When the national pavilions at Auschwitz were first conceived, the Sinti and Roma were not given a pavilion, since,

13 This is particularly true outside of Poland. However, the Polish government and the general Polish public do not see the camp as primarily a site of Jewish suffering, but one of Polish sacrifice.
Despite being victims of Nazi persecution, medical experimentation, and extermination, they did not belong exclusively to one nation. Other groups—including homosexuals and Jehovah’s witnesses—were also excluded initially.

Austria’s national pavilion, which was opened in Auschwitz’s Block 17 in March 1978, was heavily criticized for its portrayal of the Austrian people as passive victims of National Socialism. Only recently has the pavilion been redesigned as a part of a partnership between the Austrian Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Education, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, and the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria and the Federal Provinces. According to Hannah Lessing, the Austrian representative from the International Committee of the Auschwitz Foundation, “Austria’s role during the National Socialist regime as currently portrayed in this exhibition does not correspond with the historical and political identity of present-day Austria.”

Similar issues in competing historical narratives have surfaced. In 2007, the museum clashed with the Russian Federation over the citizenship of over one million victims from countries occupied by the Soviet Union under the Stalin-Hitler Pact.

Quarrels over the memory of Auschwitz do not begin and end with national politics. Religion and the individual rights of survivors have been sticking points, too. There was considerable anxiety around a group of Carmelite nuns that moved into a building formerly used by the Nazis to store Zyklon B gas, and who erected a cross, used by Pope John Paul II in his 1979 mass at Auschwitz, which itself was controversial. In 2006, the museum declined to return the paintings of the Sinti and Roma people created by a Jewish prisoner, Dinah Gottliebova-Babbitt, for Doctor Josef Mengele—arguing that the paintings were evidence of a crime to be kept in their place of origin for all eternity, rather than an artistic production. The two, however, are not always mutually exclusive, and the obsession with accumulating

---

17 “Museum’s position on issue of portraits made by Dinah Gottliebova-Babbitt” 2006.
and categorizing objects as mere evidence of crimes can obscure the subjective, personal nature of the experiences of individuals in camps. It is certainly contradictory to insist on humanizing victims but deny the complicated circumstances under which human beings can function. To ignore the fact that Dinah Gottliebova-Babbitt’s work can be both evidence of a crime and artwork is to deny her humanity and to re-victimize her for reasons that are misguided on two levels. Physical objects alone do not tell us precisely what we ought to do, and they do not precisely represent reality.

The pedagogical philosophy of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum also remains deeply tied to the primacy of Auschwitz as a physical site. The official policy of the museum is “to preserve authenticity.”18 Scores of conservationists are employed to preserve brick barracks and train cars, to fence off the remains of crematoria, all of which would otherwise crumble into dust. The museum has an entirely separate foundation, created in 2009, to manage funds in order to keep the site preserved for posterity.19 In the permanent exhibition, there are thousands of shoes, suitcases, glasses, dishware, and other personal artifacts. These objects are so overwhelming, and real, except that they are all behind glass cases, in climate-controlled rooms. And the facts of Auschwitz, indeed the evidence of the Holocaust, are swallowed whole by the sheer amount of things.

Rather than fostering learning, these things can become a kind of hollow evidence, a kind of incomplete, inadequate testimony. Not quite the real thing, they are an uncanny trace from which one becomes more and more distant the longer he or she looks, until finally, the visitor can take no more, and the object comes to stand in for the real thing—a kind of “real thing” that lacks the power to spur comprehension. The clearest example of this phenomenon is the use of the inmates’ drawings in the permanent exhibition for spaces that no longer exist, or the use of photographs from the Sonderkommando to show the only known images of prisoners being sent to the gas chambers.

Treblinka lacks material and memory, but if offers non-fragmented, contemplative space. Over ninety percent of Auschwitz-Birkenau tours are guided by highly

trained tour guides. On the other hand, Treblinka is designed to be completely self-guided. It is important to remember that most victims never actually lived in camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau or Treblinka, since they were taken straight to the gas chambers. Many died of suffocation or dehydration on trains, en route to the camps. Countless others were driven from their homes with the help of collaborators, shot, and buried in unmarked mass graves. Still others died of starvation and disease in walled off ghettos. Treblinka’s status as a place with very little material or memory left, has much to teach us about the counterintuitive ways that people can learn, and the difference between a historical fact and a moral fact. It has much to teach us about the dangers of compartmentalizing and cordonning off the places where we allow ourselves to reflect on history.

An updated exhibition at Treblinka that emphasizes the specificity of the site, its connection to other concentration camps and killing centers, and the fate of its survivors, would help to round out the experience for visitors. Additionally, a history of the site and its memorial (including the memorial that was never built) would provide an opportunity to emphasize continuity between historical periods. A small on-site library with lodging for researchers might encourage more publishing, study guides, curriculum, and works on Treblinka. The year 2001 was the first time the museum published information in English about the site; there is still much work to be done.

There is an opportunity in places and spaces where next to nothing exists to imagine the ways we encourage people to think and feel about the Holocaust. Instead of thinking about voids as the enemy, and the ways that we can fill them, I hope that scholars and teachers can figure out new and creative ways of using them as powerful tools to promote understanding.

Works Cited


**Works Consulted**


The narrative of the Holocaust in many ways centers on the built environment: camps, ghettos, railway stations, barracks, hideaways, etc. Not only does the historical narrative of the Holocaust revolve around physical spaces, but contemporary culture also uses the built environment as a method of learning and remembering by constructing monuments to memorialize the Holocaust. The built environment is crucial for understanding the narrative of the Holocaust and people’s responses to it. My experience in Poland as an Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellow was defined by the architectural and urban sites we visited such as the former Kraków ghetto, the barracks at Auschwitz, the absence of infrastructure at Treblinka, both the active and abandoned synagogues in Poland, as well as many others. However, architecture and urban structures are emphasized in discussions of prewar Europe, since most of the architecture has been destroyed. When considering prewar European Jewry, thoughts of Yiddish, Zionism, Chassidism, and shtetl culture come to mind, not styles of buildings and urban planning. There are very few structures left to understand what life was like before the Holocaust, and the few that do exist, often have been altered or repurposed.

According to the architectural theorist Henri Lefebvre, there is mental space and real space; he posits that the social production of space merges the two. In the case of the former synagogues in Poland, the way Poles and tourists use the sites today affect the meaning, or the symbolic space of the buildings. Throughout the fellowship, we saw several former synagogues in Chmielnik, Szydłów, and Działoszyce. None of these synagogues are active, and each presents a different typology of memorialization in Poland. These particular towns demonstrate three different methods of architectural intervention to the synagogues. Before the Holocaust, all three towns had sizable Jewish communities, and after the war, they were devoid of any Jewish presence. The synagogue structures endured, and thus the local Polish communities converted the sites into places of memory.

Social space is a space shaped by human action, and, therefore, is always changing and modifying itself. Lefebvre’s construction of social production of space can be only understood by considering the social appropriation and use of these spaces. An examination of the social and functional space of these former synagogues will enable one to understand the changing meaning and function of the sites from former places of worship to memorials. This will demonstrate how each of these contemporary interventions evokes specific memory in the memorials to the Jews of Chmielnik, Szydlów, and Działoszyce.

In Chmielnik, the synagogue and cemetery were converted into a full-scale museum and memorial that incorporates objects as one would see in a museum with wall texts, labels, and multi-media features for visitors. The synagogue was built in 1630, but renovated many times over the years. It is a masonry building with barrel vaulting, allowing for high ceilings. Prior to the synagogue’s 2013 renovation into a modern museum, the building stood empty and had been used as a Nazi warehouse during the Holocaust. Even after the Nazi abandonment, 18th century frescos depicting the zodiac remained a visible reminder of a time when Chmielnik was eighty percent Jewish. The three million dollar renovation retained as much of the original walls and decoration as possible “to bear witness to the past destruction.” Yet, the construction drastically changed the interior, inserting a metal cube in the sanctuary, and converting the women’s gallery into a space for performances. Officially called the Świętokrzyski Shtetl Center, the museum’s design is oriented around the metal cube on which Jewish artifacts from the town are explained by text and audio. Each artifact has an educational purpose, explaining Jewish practices, holidays, and life in Chmielnik. In the center of the sanctuary, there is a full-scale, transparent, glass reproduction of a bimah, designed to radiate light throughout the space. The roof was restored in glass, creating a visual connection to the bimah.

The architectural interventions in Chmielnik’s synagogue demonstrate a thoughtful, well-curated, local museum. They prioritize experiential learning in order to make rituals come alive through the use of audio recordings of prayers and the glass bimah. The curatorial mediations to the sanctuary allow Judaism to be examined as both a historical, and contemporary phenomenon. The space that once functioned for prayers still retains the memory of its original function through the multimedia; but additionally, the conversion of the women’s gallery into a space where performances

---

3 A bimah is a raised platform in a synagogue.
can take place ensures that the building remains an active space. Considering it through Lefebvre’s lens, the physical building is used for these new purposes and still reflects its original intention, but in a modern way. Lefebvre writes, “An already produced space can be decoded, can be read. Such a space implies a process of signification.”4 The building is used as an active space, albeit not for prayer, but for engagement with Jewish culture and memory, which better reflects the contemporary nature of Chmielnik. In addition to the museum, Chmielnik holds an annual Jewish Culture Festival. Put on by the Polish residents of the town, they perform Jewish dances and Klezmer concerts, and have a Jewish Song Youth competition.5 In Chmielnik, the contemporary culture of the town translates into the design of the space. They created a museum as a physical manifestation of their educational agenda. The social systems of the space, the interactions, and contemporary function of the building itself are symbolic of the town’s experiential learning practices.

Unlike Chmielnik, in Szydłów the interventions to the synagogue did not result in an experiential space, but an ethnographic look at Judaism. In Szydłów, the restoration of the synagogue is a memorial to the destroyed Jewish community. But the space is not used for contemporary performances or education. Instead, the assortment of Judaica and Jewish-inspired art reflects Jewish life and culture before the war. Further, the museum makes no attempt to engage with Judaism as an active religion or culture. Contemporary Polish artists created art for the museum, but their subject matter is biblical or pre-war, and approaches Judaism as the “Other.” There is very little educational agenda, and the site houses an inactive, unmoving, voyeuristic approach to Judaism.

The synagogue in Szydłów was built in the 1530s. It resembles a fortress with heavy stone masonry and buttresses on all sides. The windows are long, slender, and culminate with an arch. These lunette windows create a dramatic effect on the interior sanctuary. The original, built-in stone Torah ark remains preserved. Before the war, the Jewish community of Szydłów had about 700 members. The synagogue building was heavily damaged during World War II. It survived because it served as a weapons and food storage facility. In the 1960s, it was renovated to function as a library and cultural center. Later, in the 1980s, the town renovated the building, attempting to restore its original character. During this restoration, lamps and other

4 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 17.
Judaica were found that formed the base of the current museum exhibition. Unlike in Chmielnik, the conservation process did not modernize or update the building; it was restored to its previous state. There were no renovations to make it a museum space, or to organize it differently. In a sense, it almost functions as a warehouse for Judaica, albeit not a repository as the Nazis used it, but the lack of intentionality in the architecture, and the haphazard layout of the Judaica make the space seem static. The building appears to function as a space that happens to hold these objects, and has occasional visitors, rather than a museum that wants to educate the broader public about the objects.

Lastly, the memorial quality of the synagogue in Działoszyce is not felt through a museum experience, but the synagogue’s ruins have instead been left in the guise of a traditional monument marked by a plaque. Działoszyce housed a wealthy Jewish community that flourished in the 19th century. At the turn of the century, the town was about ninety percent Jewish and had many Jewish-owned factories and businesses. The synagogue was built in 1852, and is a brick structure that originally had a pitched roof. The neoclassical design included columns, arched windows, and a pedimental portico as the entrance, which originally had Hebrew inscriptions. Later, the synagogue was extended to include a school, library, ritual bath, and an apartment for the rabbi. The monumental structure now stands in a state of ruin. Roofless, the remaining pediment and columns tower over the street as a constant reminder of the lost community. In 2015, the town placed a plaque on the side of the synagogue that reads, “We want the plaque to remind us about what happened but also to warn against pursing nationalist ideas as they can trigger such tragic events as the one that took place here on September 3, 1943.”

It can be argued that the feeling of emptiness expressed from Działoszyce’s ruined synagogue reflects the constant tug-of-war between the Polish communities and the abandoned Jewish sites within them. The synagogue’s recent history is just one example of the many Jewish sites that remained barren until someone took agency,

---


and even then, the accountability for a site is expensive and tiresome.\(^9\) When formally Jewish property is bought Polish residents can claim they need reimbursement for maintaining the property over the years. Organizations such as the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FPJH) and the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland raise money to purchase or maintain sites, yet still hundreds remain empty and unkempt.\(^10\) Działoszyce is an example of a synagogue that has been restored and maintained, but the decision to leave it in its ruined state, and only make architectural interventions to ensure safety, can be seen as a metaphor for many other unclaimed or lost synagogues of pre-war Poland. In Działoszyce, the choice to turn the synagogue into a traditional, monumental memorial is not only tied to the symbolic space of the town’s non-existent Jewish population, but also to the state of other similar buildings in Poland.

All three of these typologies express one important similarity. Whether it is a more traditional memorial, a space of experiential learning, or an ethnographic look at the past, the architectural interventions to these synagogues are physical manifestations of the number zero. There are zero Jews living in Działoszyce, Chmielnik, and Szydłow, and thus the different architectural interventions or typologies rendered in these buildings produce a memorial effect. Jews do not use any of these buildings as synagogues for prayer or for other rituals. Poles and tourists visit these spaces to learn about the historical past of these communities. However, the various typologies demonstrate different social practices in each of these spaces. Lefebvre writes that a monument does not “have a signified (or signifieds); rather, it has a horizon of meanings; a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning come monumentality to the fore.”\(^11\) The three examples of synagogues in Działoszyce, Chmielnik, and Szydłow demonstrate that “horizon of meaning.” Essentially, they are the same: a synagogue in a former shtetl where no Jews currently live now functions as a memorial to the murdered Jews of each town. Yet, by understanding how each town decided upon different architectural interventions to its respective synagogue allows the visitor to consider the ways in which the spaces of memorials have been inscribed with individual meaning and interpretation.


\(^10\) Ibid.

Works Cited


Symbolic Identity and Social Acceptance at the Kraków Jewish Culture Festival

LUCAS WILSON

Growing out of an acute need to remember Poland’s lost Jewry, as well as out of a need to celebrate the rich expressions of Jewish culture that was long ignored over a span of several decades after the Holocaust, the Kraków Jewish Festival attracts both secular and religious Jews and non-Jews alike from across Europe and beyond. Among the diverse Festival-goers, the Festival draws local Poles, as well as an international gathering of goyim (non-Jews) of seemingly every gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, and sexual orientation. With such a varied and heterogeneous population, there are many minority visitors who do not fit the mould of the white, heteronormative, Christian Pole that comprises the average demographic in Poland, but instead, a number of these non-Jewish minorities are easily recognizable by various outward markers of difference.

At the Festival, individuals with such markers of difference are certainly noticed,¹ but they do not become a display to be surveilled; rather, minority individuals enjoy a sense of relative comfortability at the Festival where they are recognized for their differences but are largely not watched or stared at as a result. Such is not always the case, though, for minority groups beyond the borders of the Festival.

Whether it be the visibility of certain physical characteristics that code individuals as part of a certain race or religion or perhaps the actions or inactions of individuals that communicate difference, minorities have experienced and continue to be subject to the ever-watchful eye of the dominant culture in the public domain. Putting the Jewish Festival aside for a moment, I want to note how for centuries Jews, as they went about quotidian tasks in their day-to-day lives, have endured the controlling gaze of the political powers that be (most commonly, Christian governments and rulers); from their work-related activities in market squares and shops to their travel to and from synagogue, Jews have often been subject to Christians’ political dominance exerted over them. That is, Christians have made Jews well aware of their

¹ And for an individual to say that he/she does not notice difference should be understood as willful ignorance.
surveillance of their activities, their behaviors, and their very persons in the public sphere. Indeed, various edicts and promulgations targeted against Jews have communicated such monitoring. Of course, such legal persecution has significantly waned in the past couple centuries and Jews’ activities are no longer under such strict governmental watch, but residual effects endure today. The surveillance to which Jews, specifically of the Conservative and Orthodox denominations, are subject is a function of their ostensible physical differences (i.e., their choice of clothing, their hairstyles, etc.) and remains a reality for many. Though they may not necessarily be controlled in a way that is overt, the constant glances and sustained stares of onlookers oftentimes govern how Jewish individuals with outward markers of their Jewishness inhabit or move through certain public spaces, never affording them the freedom simply to be themselves without the worry of how others might perceive them. At most times in the public domain, identifiable Jews must be aware of others’ perceptions of them, never taking for granted any sense of civic or cultural invisibility. The same cognizance of constant surveillance, albeit differently motivated, also remains at the forefront of many other minorities’ minds when they leave the safety of their homes.

One such minority group that remains under the watchful eye of the dominant culture is the LGBTQIA+ community, a community of which I am a part; my community faces the continued observation of a heterocentric society that disallows us to be ourselves un-self-consciously in public because of the recurrent heteronormative gaze that signals to us that we are spectacular in the literal sense of the word or, otherwise put, that we are a spectacle to be watched, as well as to be judged, and oftentimes to be ridiculed. In the public purview, LGBTQIA+ folk must perform according to traditional gendered scripts that prescribe how biologically male persons ought to act one way and how biologically female persons ought to act another. The emotional labor of self-consciously considering if we are following or transgressing cultural gender codes—whether it be through the colors or styles of our garments, the length or fit of our shorts, or the cut of our hair—is, to be frank, exceptionally taxing; we must constantly be conscious of our surroundings to see if we are safe to be ourselves or if we must alter how we act so as not to be noticed.

---

2 Veit Harlan’s quintessential piece of Nazi propaganda Jud Süss portrays how many believed they were in need of “Christian” surveillance over Jews because of their specious threat to the Aryan state. The film plays off this anxiety surrounding the need to watch Jews in order to “protect” themselves over a Jewish takeover of the polis, an anxiety that was in no way new to Germans at the time of the film’s release but had been a part of the public consciousness for years. See Jud Süss, directed by Veit Harlan (1940; International Historic Films, Inc., 2008), DVD.
I want to note here that being stared at for one’s physical appearance that codes one as “gay” or “lesbian” or “queer” is largely a North American phenomenon—and does not seem to be as much of an issue in Poland or Europe at large. This is not to say that Poland or Europe are in any way less homophobic than their North American counterpart, but it is to say that the codes that signal a non-normative identity are not synonymous on both continents. In the North American context, queer individuals find expression of their sexuality in their sartorial or pileous choices, whereas in the European context, there is less of an ostensible conceptual apparatus that signals one’s sexuality through one’s physical style. As such, in Europe, many men’s wardrobes align with the North American definition of a “metrosexual” aesthetic (i.e., capris, flood pants, foppish and tightfitting apparel, handbags, etc.), and it is not uncommon for European women to adopt a more androgynous style than women across the Atlantic (i.e., shortly cropped hair, muted colors, etc.), thus disabling or, at minimum, inhibiting easy categorization of another’s sexuality based on their physical appearance. Homoerotic physical actions, however, do indeed—as they would almost anywhere, including Europe—communicate one’s sexuality (i.e., sustained physical contact, kissing, etc.). As such, many LGBTQIA+ individuals refrain from expressing their affection for their same-sex partners outside of private or safe spaces because of their self-consciousness, and it is this self-consciousness that robs us of comfortably being ourselves when in public.

In almost any context, such self-consciousness, however, often dissipates when the minority becomes the majority, as is the case in, for example, in the confines of gay bars for members of the LGBTQIA+ community—or, even symbolically, at celebrations like the Kraków Jewish Festival. Let me take a moment to explain what I mean here by “symbolically” in the context of the Festival. Jews are a minority group—a group that has been despised and considered suspect throughout the centuries but over recent decades in Poland has become an ethnic, religious, and cultural group that is recognized and, as evidenced by the Festival, even celebrated. Such a status for Jews, although there are few Jews remaining in Poland, offers them

---

3 I want to emphasize my word choice, here: I employ the term “[h]omoerotic” and not “homosocial.” This diction is intentional, seeing as many men in Europe are much more affectionate and tactile with their friends than are men in North America. It is not uncommon to see men with their arms around each other; men leaning on their male friends; or men kiss each other on the cheek as a form of greeting one other, as I saw during my time in Poland. Such actions carry an imbued homoerotic connotation in North America but do not necessarily in Europe. As a result, queer men (and queer women, as well as gender nonconforming individuals) are less ostensibly recognized in their day-to-day lives as are those in North America, but, indeed, as noted above, homoerotic behavior carries the same meaning on both continents.
a sense of inclusion and acceptance in Polish life—a status that, historically, was not afforded to them, or was “afforded” to them only on a provisional or limited basis. Inspired by this ethos of inclusion and acceptance that Jewish folk today by and large experience in Poland, other minority groups come to occupy, symbolically, the position of “Jews” when participating in the Festival events; that is, the Festival creates an environment that is open to a wide range of minorities, inviting them to take part in Festival events, while offering them a comparable sense of inclusion and acceptance that Jews in Poland now largely enjoy. Thus, minority individuals, during the Festival, can be understood as symbolic “Jews.”

Specifically for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, such a symbolic status acquired during the Festival becomes vital when expressing physical, overt signs of love or affection for same-sex partners, if they are to remain undisturbed by the heteronormative gaze—an experience that, in the workaday world, rarely comes to fruition. Dr. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, lecturer at Jagiellonian University, agrees that the Festival creates a more conducive environment for LGBTQIA+ folk to express themselves more freely than in Polish society as a whole; she also argues, with emphatic relief and excitement, that Poland is becoming more and more accepting of alternative sexualities in urban spaces like Kraków and Warsaw. I cannot help but think that such acceptance is a function of events like the Festival and other occasions of multicultural exchange, where minorities reclaim their voices in solidarity with other minorities, and where they can become more visible and, in time, more normalized in Polish society. Such a normalizing effect of the Kraków Jewish Festival demonstrates the power of solidarity of and with minorities—both the solidarity of minorities as they gain recognition and political power, and also the generative cooperation between non-minorities and minorities to build a more accepting culture of difference. And it is this culture of difference that the Festival constructs, where casual gestures of affection between same-sex partners are considered less political acts of transgression and more accepted signs of normal, human love.

Of course, the Festival is not a utopic space where all discriminatory biases and hateful preconceptions miraculously evaporate. There are undoubtedly many visitors

---

4 In no way am I arguing that anti-Semitism has been completely laid to rest in Poland and that anti-Semitic attacks are exclusively “a thing of the past”; what I am arguing, however, is that the situation of Jewish folk in Poland has been markedly ameliorated and that of the ten or so active Jewish communities in Poland today, many experience a convivial and, oftentimes, symbiotic relationship with their non-Jewish neighbors.

5 Annamaria Orla-Bukowska (lecturer at Jagiellonian University) in discussion with the author, July 2016.
who attend the Festival, yet they fail to see any parallel between their prejudice and that of the Nazis and their collaborators—not recognizing how hatred, if left unchecked, can lead to death-dealing consequences as was the case at the time of the Holocaust. The central foci of the Jewish Festival, however—the celebration and the remembrance of Jewish life and culture in Poland—in tandem with the vast gathering of minorities, promote a spirit of inclusion and acceptance, encouraging all visitors “to come as they are” and to let others “be as they are.” And in this spirit of inclusion and acceptance, those who fall outside of the categorical confines of the heterocentric hegemonic norm, that is, those who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, come to occupy the symbolic status of a “Jew.” For the LGBTQIA+ community, public expression of their sexual orientation, traditionally and historically understood as a violation of patriarchal norms, is reimagined in the symbolic world of the Festival as a celebratory feature of the multicultural experience in our historical moment. It is this celebration of difference—as well as the intentional resistance against discrimination and hatred that Festival programs speak against—that engenders a culture where otherness is of course recognized but is not used as an ideological “justification” to divide, where difference is framed as an invitation to exchange and as something to be celebrated. As the Kraków Jewish Festival takes seriously this need to recognize and celebrate difference, they continue to forge ahead towards a healed and repaired tomorrow for all.

Works Cited

“Weren’t you scared?”

It is the inevitable follow-up question I receive after revealing the name of my high school alma mater, Columbine High School, where the infamous 1999 shooting took place that claimed thirteen lives. Most people hear the word “Columbine” and associate it with tragedy, a pivotal moment in America’s history of gun violence that began to shine a brighter light on the problem. I think of pep rallies, taking part in plays, and awkward adolescent dances, singing along to Justin Timberlake with my friends.

When I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in April 2016 with the Auschwitz Jewish Center’s Program for Students Abroad, we stayed the night in the Polish town of Oświęcim—the original Polish name from which the German word “Auschwitz” is derived. I was unexpectedly struck by the parallel with Oświęcim—much like my hometown of Littleton, Colorado—as becoming synonymous with a tragedy, a scene of a crime. More than 1.5 million people visit Auschwitz each year, yet few are aware that Oświęcim is home to some 35,000 Polish people who maintain normal, daily lives.

Let me be clear: I do not mean to compare two tragedies. A school shooting and the Holocaust are vastly different devastations in entirely separate contexts. But this common thread brings about the same question raised by the photo series in the Kluger House at the AJC, Land of Oś: Life in the Shadow of Auschwitz by Danny Ghitis: How can life exist in the aftermath of such overwhelming evil? What’s more, why do people want to visit these sites of sadness?

During my second year of high school, I directed a tourist who was wandering the hallways taking photographs, out of the building and to the nearby Columbine memorial. I was angry, not because I was late to class, but because that person saw my school as a place to be mourned, not a place where hundreds of students were
learning.

For some, to see something is to believe it. By visiting these locations, perhaps they can fully comprehend what surpassed. But truly, how can we ever understand the magnitude or meaning of such heinous acts? At Birkenau, I was baffled into silence by its vastness alone.

In a world where people select their travel destinations based on reported violence, we must remember that evil can be present and acted upon anywhere. However, if we choose to be afraid of every place that has bore witness to tragedy, then we choose to be afraid of the earth itself. If we cut ourselves off from certain experiences or places on the basis of terrible things occurring there, then we, too, surrender to the same evil.

No, I was not scared to attend my high school.

This coming fall, a new group of teenagers will attend their freshman orientation and go on to journey through the exciting and strange years of adolescence.

Birds chirped and flowers were blooming the morning we arrived in Oświęcim as people went about their day.

The George Santayana quote greeting visitors in the first bunker of Auschwitz seems fitting: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

In carrying on with life, we carry the memory of the past. I believe that this is the best and most effective way, in which we can pay homage and move forward.

Let us triumph over these devastations by continuing to live.
Tyler Gness is a 22-year-old Junior at the United States Military Academy (USMA). He is studying Defense and Strategic Studies, and plans on taking a new genocide studies class to learn more about mass atrocities prevention. Tyler spends most of his free time exploring the outdoors, lifting weights, and taking on new challenges in academia. As an Annapolis, MD, native, Tyler’s favorite activity is eating crabs with his family. Tyler attended the Ohio State University as well as the University of Wyoming before attending USMA, and is thus both a proud Buckeye fan, as well as a proud Cowboy. Tyler plans on graduating USMA with the class of 2018 and branching Infantry.

A New York native, Shannon Wissemann grew up on Long Island, and is now in her third year at the United States Military Academy at West Point. She is a member of her company’s Sandhurst team, which competes in an international military competition testing military skills, stamina, strength, leadership, and teamwork. Shannon works now as the Counselor for her battalion. Outside of company, Shannon is a leader in the Catholic community, often managing alongside others to plan events, and as a Scoutmasters’ Club volunteer, helping to facilitate a cadet-run camp for scouts. She enjoys swimming, snowboarding, reading, and traveling.

Violinist and Violist Alexandra Birch is a Doctor of Musical Arts student with Dr. Katherine McLin at Arizona State University. As a soloist and chamber musician, Miss Birch has toured extensively in the USA, Asia, Russia and Europe in over 20 countries including performances in Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Bolshoi Theatre, and the Mariinski Theater. She is a prizewinner in numerous national and international competitions including AFAF Romantic Music competition, International Brahms Competition, American Protégé Competition, IBLA competition, Moscow Conservatory Concerto competition, and Four Seasons Orchestra Mozart, Bach, and Spanish competitions. Miss Birch additionally holds a Bachelors of Music and Masters of Music from Arizona State University. She maintains an active research and academic presence with a focus on music in Soviet regimes, music from the Holocaust, and undiscovered composers. She has conducted research, with generous support, at USHMM, Yad Vashem, GARF (Russia), and VNLU (Ukraine). She frequently presents at conferences addressing genocide and the arts, and preservation of cultures through music. Miss Birch is a committed
teacher who performs Holocaust and Soviet era works herself, but also who is a sought-after clinician to promote new works to students in masterclasses in the USA, Germany, and Russia.

**Alana Holland** is a PhD candidate in Modern Russian and East European History at the University of Kansas. She also has minor fields in Modern Europe and Nation/Empire. She completed an MA in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2015. Much of her work focuses on Holocaust, genocide, and memory studies. Alana’s dissertation project examines early postwar criminal trials in eastern Poland and the Soviet west. She uses the analytical lens of emotion to understand how non-Jews in the Polish-Soviet west responded to the fate of the Jews during and after World War II. Her project shows the early stages of construction of memory of the Holocaust in Poland, and contributes to understanding the aftermath and construction of memory in post-genocide societies.

**Sebastian Huebel** is a 5th year PhD student in the Department of History at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver who studies the history of German-Jewish masculinities in the Third Reich. After moving from Germany to Canada in 2003, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Thompson Rivers University (2007) and a Master’s Degree at the University of Victoria in 2009 (thesis: the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestras in the Third Reich). His doctoral dissertation is anticipated to be finished in the summer/early fall of 2017. Having acquired teaching experience at several colleges, since 2014, Sebastian has been an instructor of European history at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

**Jane’a Johnson** is pursuing a PhD in Modern Culture and Media at Brown University. She holds a BA in Philosophy from Spelman College and an MA in Cinema and Media Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles. Jane’a’s research interests include media archives and trauma, human rights, and collective memory.

**Rebecca D. Pollack** is a PhD candidate in Art History at the CUNY Graduate Center. Her focus is 20th and 21st century public art, with a specialty in memorials. Her dissertation will examine publicly funded Holocaust memorials and memorial institutions in the United Kingdom from the perspective of art, architecture, and exhibition practices to discern a national, British typology of Holocaust memorialization. Through her research, she hopes to demonstrate how these memorials intersect within their historic contemporary society, developing a trajectory of British society’s relationship not just to the Holocaust, but genocide.
Rebecca has a BA from Brandeis in Art History and Sculpture, and teaches art history at Brooklyn College and architectural history at City College.

After graduating from Liberty University with a BA in English, summa cum laude, Lucas Wilson went on to complete an MA in English from McMaster University in Hamilton, ON. He continued to Vanderbilt University to complete his MTS with a Certificate in Jewish Studies and received The Academic Achievement Award for graduating first in his class. He stayed in Nashville for another year and taught both literature and composition at Lipscomb University as an instructor, as well as a course on the Holocaust at Vanderbilt Summer Academy. Lucas is currently a Presidential Fellow and PhD student at Florida Atlantic University, studying under Alan L. Berger and working on his dissertation that explores representations of domestic space and the transmission of trauma and memory in second-generation Holocaust literature. He has received several scholarships and awards for his work in Holocaust studies, including the Zaglember Society Scholarship awarded by The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, a Charleston Research Fellowship, a New York Public Library Short-Term Fellowship, and an Imagination Grant to study the emerging video archive of second-generation Holocaust witnesses. Beyond second-generation Holocaust literature, Lucas’ research interests include Holocaust literature, theories of space and place, Christian theology, and Canadian literature.

Program for Students Abroad Alumni

Molly Geoghegan is a writer, marketer, and graduate of DePaul University where she graduated magna cum laude with a BA in Media and Cinema Studies. A working visa brought her to Dublin, Ireland, where she continues to build a portfolio, and freelance. She credits the AJC Program for Students Abroad with motivating her to continue learning and writing about international relations. She credits the AJC Program for Students Abroad with motivating her to continue learning about international relations and will attend the National University of Ireland Galway this fall to study globalization and gender.
THE AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER OPERATES UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE — A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST

WWW.ACJF.PL | WWW.MJHNYC.ORG

FUNDED IN PART BY

Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany