The Ruin and Restoration of Sacred Space: (Re)Construction of Eastern Europe and the Memorialization of Synagogues and Jewish Cemeteries

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Contemporary research on the reconstruction of Jewish spaces in Eastern Europe[1] tends to focus on the imagination and supposed re-creation of 'Jewishness'; on the emergence of "an intense, visible, vivid Jewish presence in places where few Jews actually live," or the "'virtually Jewish' phenomenon" whereby non-Jewish communities fill in the 'blank spaces' of Jewishness.[2] This paper engages with a small body of literature—building on the work of scholars like Ruth Ellen Gruber, James E. Young, and Andrea Pető—which addresses the preservation and monumentalization of Jewish spaces and structures which predominantly serve(d) the religious and ritual needs of the community and have been perceived as 'authentically Jewish,' namely synagogues and cemeteries.

My paper traces the ways in which predominantly non-Jewish communities have (or have not) reconceptualized sacred spaces in ruin as historically and culturally valuable monuments. Furthermore, I will consider how shifting perceptions of these spaces have affected how these monuments have been reintegrated (or left unintegrated) into urban spaces as 'Holocaust memorials.' I will use the reconstruction of three Eastern European cities—East Berlin, Budapest, and Warsaw—as case studies, as

[1] By 'Eastern Europe,' I refer to those countries and spaces considered 'Eastern' in Cold War geopolitical imaginaries.
[2] Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 99, no. 4 (2009): 487–504.

each had significant pre-war Jewish communities and extensive post-war 'Jewish rubble.'[3] I argue that the restoration of synagogues and cemeteries, as well as the preservation of the artifacts and ruins of Jewish religious and communal life, ought to be understood in relation to the formation of national memories, cosmopolitan identities, and the transformation of cities in the final quarter of the 20th century. Moreover, I contend that the physical re-construction and collective re-imagining of these spaces as 'Holocaust memorials' is deeply entwined with contemporary desires to establish a sense of identity—a sense of who 'we' are as particular communities with supposedly universal commitments to human rights. Experiences of political uncertainty, economic insecurity, and global integration further intensified questions of identity within Eastern European communities still attempting to manage and overcome an 'uncomfortable past.

I discuss three general phases of the post-war reconstruction and reimagination of 'Jewish rubble' which roughly correspond with sequential periods of 25 years. First, I consider the general conditions of synagogues, cemeteries, and other Jewish spaces in the immediate wake of the Second World War, and assess local and national responses to these desecrated sites. Then, I move to discuss late 20th-century projects to memorialize these spaces and to, generally speaking, reconcile with the 'uncomfortable past.' Finally, I address efforts to integrate synagogues and Jewish cemeteries—restructured as Holocaust memorials—into the urban landscapes of internationalized and cosmopolitan cities.

[3] Michael Meng offers the term 'Jewish rubble,' in reference to the material ruins of cemeteries, synagogues, and other community spaces, in his seminal book *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 60.

Immediate Post-War Images and Responses

Shattered cities. Smouldering ovens. Stacked corpses. Steeples like cigar studs. Such are the images of Europe in 1945, images of a civilization in ruins.
— Modris Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak*

It would be difficult to overstate the devastation and destruction that was inflicted upon the populations and major urban centres of Eastern Europe. Throughout the Second World War, aerial bombings, sieges, and battles between Allied and Axis combatants played a part in laying waste to the cities of Warsaw, Budapest, and Berlin. Additionally, German forces systematically demolished Warsaw in a punitive action, flattening the city district by district, as well as paralyzing Budapest with the bombing of all its bridges across the Danube.[4] By the time Nazi Germany unconditionally surrendered in 1945, the Allied air and land campaigns had caused the deaths of tens of thousands of Berliners and had reduced 600,000 homes to rubble.[5] To this day, one will inevitably stumble across Berlin's many *Schuttberge*, mounds of war-time debris that have been manicured and landscaped to appear as parks or natural green spaces.[6] The scope and intensity of the war-time destruction demanded, over the course of several years, "the wholesale rehabilitation of the cities in Europe," which, as Lewis Mumford writes, required an "almost superhuman mobilization of

[4] Andrea Tóth, "The Destroyed Budapest in Shocking Pictures," *Daily News Hungary*, 30 May 2015, https://dailynewshungary.com/the-destroyed-budapest-in-shocking-pictures/.
[5] Modris Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century* (Mariner Books: New York, 1999), 219.
[6] "The Artificial Hills of Berlin (and Guangdong)," *Pruned: On Landscape Architecture and Related Fields*, 8 February 2009, http://pruned.blogspot.com/2009/02/artificial-hills-of-berlin-and.html.

energies."[7]

Within this context, city planning in the wake of the destruction from the Second World War can be understood as both backward- and forward-looking. Architects and engineers on both sides of the quickly-descending Iron Curtain worked to restore historically- and culturally-significant districts and monuments. However, they also had to consider and accommodate the practical needs of the city with regards to its development. In light of these two often conflicting projects—to restore the city's history and to develop modern infrastructure—city planners, emerging national governments, and municipal authorities would, indeed, have very different ideas concerning what ought to be done with the material ruins of Jewish history and culture which, in many instances, appeared to have been abandoned after the war.

The systematic annihilation of European Jewry, the engineering and execution of the so-called Final Solution during the Holocaust, in addition to Jewish emigration after the war, left thousands of Jewish sites without obvious caretakers or heirs. Thus, Jewish property fell into (or, notably, remained in) the possession of the emergent states or municipal authorities.[8] Although some Jewish property in West Germany was returned to the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO), it was often sold back to the state. The money made from these sales was subsequently used to support survivors of the Holocaust.[9] In the East, the

[7] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), 557.
[8] Yechiel Weizman, "Unsettled Possession: the question of ownership of Jewish sites in Poland after the Holocaust from a local perspective," *Jewish Culture and History* 18, no.1 (2017): 35-36.
[9] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 32.

Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) rejected restitution, equating the return of communally-held property to lending support to "Israeli capitalists."[10] Yet, many, if not most, of the material traces of Jewish life in East Berlin survived the initial clearing of post-war rubble in various stages of restoration or decay. Aided by the Marshall Plan, Western visions of modern Berlin, of its new "urban core," were realized rather quickly; 'Jewish rubble,' devalued or possessed by the state, was cleared away or repurposed.[11] In the Communist East, decisions regarding the future of the ruins of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries were frequently deferred until later, leaving whatever was left in the wake of the war to crumble and decay.[12]

In Communist Poland, Jewish property held in common before its seizure by authorities was said to be "*Mienie Pożydowski*," translated as 'formerly Jewish Property,' predicated on the state's assertion that, after the war, Jewish properties were heirless and that Jewish communities were without legacy or presence.[13] The legal assertion of the discontinuity of Jewish communities in Poland by the communist administration barred the few Jewish organizations existing at the time from representing pre-war communities, thereby preventing the reclamation of synagogues, ceme-

[10] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 46.
[11] Mumford, *The City in History*, 557
[12] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 255. It should also be noted that, without protection or upkeep, many synagogues were condemned, or deemed to be hazards to public safety, and subsequently demolished. However, as will be discussed, the spaces in ruins, generally left untouched, could be (partially) restored later on. As an example, the Synagogue on Orianienburger Strasse remained essentially untouched until the 1950's when, notably, the bombed-out prayer hall was demolished and the space cleared of hazards.
[13] Weizman, "Unsettled Possession," 39.

teries, and other communally-held Jewish sites.[14] Although Jews would be permitted to "use and manage" sites for religious purposes, the fragile and dispossessed Jewish communities could not sell or lease the property, nor could they make claims on properties in as many as 1,200 towns and villages with vanquished Jewish communities.[15]

Three themes—proposed by Michael Meng, historian of post-war Europe—characterized the rebuilding of Warsaw in the years following 1945: "modernism, socialist realism, and historic reconstructionism."[16] Warsaw's old town and national monuments would be meticulously "resurrected" while Muranów—a neighbouring Jewish district later ghettoized and razed to the ground by the Nazis after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April, 1943 would come to serve as a representation of a "socialist future," transformed into wide boulevards and green spaces flanked by rows of Soviet-styled apartments.[17] The Great Synagogue in Warsaw, on the edge of both Old Town and Muranów, was blown up by the SS in 1943 and its remnants swept away later under the Communist government.

The post-war rebuilding of Budapest was perhaps more eclectic than in Berlin and Warsaw. The Old Town, the Buda Castle, and the 'iconic' bridges uniting the two cities of Buda and Pest, were all meticulously

[14] Weizman, "Unsettled Possession," 48. Although this "principle of disinheritance" was most strictly applied to what was left of Jewish property in the capital city, Warsaw, Jewish communities elsewhere—in the briefly semi-autonomous Polish municipalities—could sometimes anticipate the return of Jewish property.
[15] Weizman explores the legal and tenancy restrictions set on Jewish properties in "Unsettled Possession," 38; The statistic regarding the restrictions placed on Polish Jews concerning property ownership is drawn from Jonathan Webber, "Making Sense of the Holocaust in Contemporary Poland: The Real and the Imagines, the Contradictions and the Paradoxes," *Jednak Książki. Gdańskie Czasopismo Humanistyczne* 6 "The Holocaust and the Contemporary World," (2016): 18.
[16] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 103.
[17] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 73, 103.

reconstructed and often accompanied with small plaques commemorating the restoration work.[18] For the most part, the three synagogues (located on the Dohány, Rumbach, and Kazinczy streets within the Budapest Ghetto) sustained less damage than similarly-sized synagogues in Berlin and Warsaw, but were either closed or used for other purposes (such as detention or command centres) during the course of the war. Nevertheless, the devastated Jewish communities that survived ghettoization and deportation struggled to restore and maintain the interiors and functionalities of the synagogues. For instance, the interior of the Rumbach Street Synagogue has essentially remained, until recently, in the desecrated state in which it was left in 1945.[19]

Although the cities of Berlin, Warsaw, and Budapest each faced unique problems and varying degrees of devastation in the wake of the Second World War, two common threads weaved through the ways in which local, non-Jewish authorities approached post-war urban reconstruction and responded to 'Jewish rubble': first, the urgency to build new national identities and, second, the hesitancy to address the circumstances through which Jewish communities were dispossessed and destroyed.

Emblematic of these threads is the concept of *Stunde Null* ('Hour Zero'), which was embraced in the immediate post-war period by some 'forward-looking' German citizens and politicians eager to rebuild their lives (and nation) with a clean slate. *Stunde Null* implied a radical, sweeping break from Germany's National Socialist (NS) past and has been criticized by scholars (such as Eksteins) as an attempt to disburden post-war

[18] See Appendix, Figure 1.
[19] "About Hungary, Budapest and the Jewish Quarter," *Great Synagogue (Hidden Treasures of Budapest)*, 2009, http://www.greatsynagogue.hu/articles.html#1001.

Germany of its responsibility for NS atrocities.[20] "Against a backdrop of utter devastation," the idea of *Stunde Null*—of physically constructing new cities and collectively negotiating new political orders and social values from a fresh beginning—gained force.[21] A similar idea underscored the formation and evolution of political identification in East Germany, where citizens adopted a sense of victimization by the Third Reich and expressed a fundamental turning away from the capitalist and imperialist systems that reached their apex with National Socialism.[22] Berlin, then, could be perceived as the city in which new national and communal identities could be formulated and negotiated. As opposed to most of the debris Berliners encountered, neglected and anonymized 'Jewish rubble' reflected not only the devastation of war, but also the deliberate and violent erasure of Jewish public presence and genocide at an unprecedented scale, leaving empty spaces and a sense of absence.[23] Building over—and subsequently forgetting—or deferring decisions regarding the future of the religious sites until later, leaving difficult questions unsettled, characterized the general responses to 'Jewish rubble' in the immediate post-war years.

Likewise, city-planners and local authorities in Warsaw also engaged in nation-building projects which downplayed discussions of the 'uncomfortable past.'[24] In popular culture, Warsaw was often imagined as "Poland's Martyr City," as a symbol of a nation born anew from smouldering waste. Memories of victimization and 'anti-fascist' resistance shaped

[20] Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak*, 214.
[21] Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak*, 214.
[22] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 44.
[23] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 4.
[24] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 256.

many of the monuments in the 'renewed' national capital: the Anielewicz Mound (1946), the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes (1948), and the Monument to Brotherhood in Arms (1945). More than this, memorials to Jewish resistance and victimization—as noted by James E. Young, prominent scholar of cultural memory—would be interpreted and used for various causes by some Polish advocacy groups as memorials to Polish resistance and victimization, Jews remembered as *Poles* of Jewish faith.[25]

Concerning the post-war reconstruction of Budapest, the aforementioned trends of rebuilding national identities and hesitating to address Jewish absences are evident. For instance, a plaque erected in the immediate post-war period near the Dohány Street Synagogue reads: "In the Fascist period one of the gates to the Budapest ghetto stood here. The liberating Soviet Army broke down the ghetto walls on 18 January 1945."[26] Similar to the approaches to memorialization taken in Poland, the plaque marking the place of Jewish suffering makes little reference to the Jewish victims and underscores resistance to—and liberation from—NS terror. Although there have been "major urban renewal plans for a century," the architectural marvels and 'character' of the Jewish district and ghetto has, for the most part, survived until the present day.[27] In regards to a Hungarian hesitancy to address the material ruins of a traumatic past, Jewish spac-

[25] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 117.
[26] Tim Cole, "Commemorating 'Pariah Landscapes': Memorialising the Budapest Ghetto, 1945-2000," Review of Landscape and Memory, by Simon Schama. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 11, no.4 (2002): 369. See Appendix, Figure 2.
[27] Agnes Bohm and Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Fighting for Budapest's Ghetto," *Cleveland Jewish News*, 21 July 2004. https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/archives/fighting-for-budapest-s-ghetto/article_3f68e88a-089c-5984-a7fc-973af1aafb3e.html.

es in Budapest were left to decay as a consequence of deferred decisions, long-term neglect, and later abandonment. Synagogues and cemeteries would later require serious restorative interventions to address war-time scarring; but, more so, they required interventions to address decades of their neglect.

Late 20th Century Restoration and Memorialization

We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live.

— Hannah Arendt, Preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1950

From the 1960s through the 1980s, the Holocaust became a topic of great international interest and discussion for both public audiences and academics. For instance, the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 brought NS crimes to the centre of global awareness and spurred a new openness to sharing and publicizing memories of traumatic experiences of the Holocaust.[28] Additionally, the popularity of social history in the 1960s and 70s stirred academics to study the conditions of everyday life and apply new sociological and historiographical methods to the study of ethnic minorities and 'Others.' Related to this, growing enthusiasm for tracing family histories led ordinary people to examine their distant roots in East-

[28] *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, "Eichmann Trial," Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed 16 July 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005179.

ern Europe and perhaps venture abroad.[29] Later films and documentaries such as *Shoah*—a Holocaust documentary released in 1985—and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) contributed to the diffusion and growth of media representations of the Holocaust to large, international audiences.[30]

The 1980s saw the emergence and growth of a "Culture of Remembrance," a term used by Eszter B. Gantner—historian of urbanization in Eastern Europe—to describe the evolving and formative dynamics between "present symbolic practices" (routine performances with symbolic significance) and "material traces" of Jewish pasts.[31] Included as a 'symbolic practice' is the renovation of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, and the accompanying re-integration of these spaces into urban landscapes. By the 1980s, the sites and ruins which had been devalued, neglected, and left in various states of disrepair were scarce. Interventions to preserve what was left of these sites were deemed 'urgently needed' by concerned publics, which reflected a contemporary public anxiety of losing what was recently considered historically and culturally valuable. Four to five decades after the Holocaust, and over the course of fifteen years, three major synagogues would be fully or partially restored: the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw was rebuilt from 1977 to 1983; the façade, dome, and some rooms of the Oranienburger Strasse Synagogue were reconstructed from 1988 to

[29] David Clark, "Sites of Memory or Aids to Multiculturalism? Conflicting Uses of Jewish Heritage Sites," *Sociological Research Online* 12, no.2 (March 2007): 1.13.
[30] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no.1 (February 2002): 95.
[31] Eszter B. Gantner, "Interpreting the Jewish Quarter," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 23, no.2 (2014): 30.

1993; and the Dohány Street Synagogue was restored from 1988 to 1993.[32]

Encounters with the traces of Jewish life were, more often than not, influenced by a heightened consciousness of the Holocaust, reinforcing the re-imagining of many sacred spaces as memorial spaces, places to be rehabilitated as to commemorate and honour Jewish victims of the Holocaust.[33] In 1987, Richard Kostelanetz, a producer and director of a film about the Jewish Cemetery in Weissensee, wrote to the *New York Times* about the "lost world" in East Berlin: "Many of the gravestones have spaces with no names etched in, themselves signifying the expectation that other relatives would later be buried there; these blanks thus become symbols of the subsequent absence of Jews not just from Weissensee but from Berlin."[34] Kostelanetz's emphasis on loss and absence, here and throughout the article, could be criticized as overshadowing theexistence of surviving Jewish communities, as simply nostalgic longing for an irretrievable past. However, responses like this to the Weissensee Jewish cemetery—valuing the material traces of Judaism increasingly seen as "evocative ruins of the past that had to be restored, preserved, and commemorated"—signalled an extraordinary change in popular attitudes toward the previously disregarded and devalued 'Jewish rubble.'[35]

International tourism, activism, and 'heritage grants' would pressure and incentivize Eastern European governments to memorialize Jewish victims of the Holocaust and to intervene to prevent the continued

[32] The Nożyk Synagogue—unlike the Great Synagogue, which was totally demolished—was used as a stable and storehouse by the Nazis and sustained less damage.
[33] Webber, "Making Sense of the Holocaust in Contemporary Poland," 23.
[34] Richard Kostelanetz, "A Lost World Interred in Berlin," *New York Times*, 8 November 1987. https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/08/travel/a-lost-world-interred-in-berlin.html
[35] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 8.

neglect of sacred spaces. This was especially true in Poland and Hungary, which received a surge of international tourists, visitors, and pilgrims in the 1980s. With this surge came the emergence of various local volunteer and advocacy groups, pushing for the preservation of the weathering and crumbling religious sites.[36] In addition, international governments and private foundations began offering grants for, or became partners in, the restoration of synagogues, cemeteries, and other heritage sites in foreign countries. For example, in 1990, after nearly a decade of negotiations, the US Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad received national funding that was to be set aside, in part, for the preservation of Jewish heritage sites in Eastern Europe.[37]

After having left Jewish sites in various states of disrepair and neglect—their reconstruction deemed unnecessary for rebuilding local and national communities—these sites were suddenly recognized by diverse peoples and groups as culturally and historically significant. To understand shifting perceptions of Jewish religious sites in ruins, we must first consider the shift in how societies have understood their collective responsibilities to recall and engage with their dark and traumatic pasts. The process of restoring Jewish sites and of reopening them with ceremonies may be understood as part of the process of remembering, negotiating, and reinforcing through public rituals a "canonical interpretation" of the past whereby the Holocaust is placed as an integral part of the 20th-century

[36] For an assessment of the relationship between international tourism and heritage grants and the reconstruction of Jewish sites in Eastern Europe, see Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, chap. 4; see also Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: Monuments to Jewish Experience in Eastern Europe."

[37] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 219. Since 1992, over 23 agreements have been made with European governments to restore and preserve Jewish sites.

European history.[38]

Joanna B. Michlic, scholar of Polish-Jewish history, notes three trends in how pre-war Jewish communities have been predominantly remembered since the 1990s: (1) remembering the past so as to mourn and commemorate, to come to terms with the Holocaust's origins and address its legacy; (2) remembering the past so as to satisfy expectations of the international community, to better international relations and to mark a break from the past; and (3) remembering the past (ceremoniously or monumentally) so as to forget it by means of establishing an endpoint, to disburden oneself and society from the need to remember an uncomfortable past in perpetuity.[39] All three of these trends are present to a greater or lesser extent in how groups and individuals have come to re-value the visible presence of synagogues and cemeteries as places of great symbolic and historical significance. But, even so, we ought to consider what exactly is being remembered about these sites, what they are constructed to re-present, and to what end. In conjunction with this, we must also consider how these places have (or have not been) integrated into cities and societies that are often undergoing rapid transformations. Speaking to the effects of the currents of societal change, Esther Jilovsky, researcher of Holocaust memory culture, argues that "whatever meaning is found in a particular place is not created by the site itself, but by its representation and percep-

[38] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 49.
[39] Joanna Beata Michlic, "Memories of Jews and the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eastern Europe," in *The Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century: Contesting/Contested Memories*, eds. David Seymour & Mercedes Camino (Routledge: New York, 2017), 133-34.

tion in a particular and cultural narrative framework."[40] In other words, the reconstruction of Jewish spaces engages not only with the repair of the material remnants of synagogues and cemeteries, but also with their representation.

Synagogues and Cemeteries as Memorials in the 21st Century City

To what extent is our understanding of the possibilities of contemporary transformations constrained by our assumptions about the historical processes that have made us what we are now? Threatened by the implication of questions like [this], a retreat to a clear point of origin from which contemporary trajectories may be delineated and continuities generalized, can seem very comforting.
— R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside*

The city—with its monuments, large and small, and visible symbols of what has been made together—is perhaps "the best organ of memory man has yet created," serving to shape and reinforce a collective sense of self and belonging.[41] Monuments, public works of art, architectural styles, and city cartographies tend to reflect who we are and who we collectively aspire to be. Since the end of the Cold War, new technologies of communication and travel have extended our social boundaries beyond the borders of the nation-state, fundamentally challenging nationalized concepts of 'self' and 'belonging.'[42] Within the context of globalisation, 21st-century cities are being physically and conceptually reconstructed to reflect the identifications of citizens as members of a globalised community. With this in mind, this paper moves to discuss how synagogues and

[40] Esther Jilovsky, *Remembering the Holocaust: Generations, Witnessing and Place* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 125.
[41] Mumford, *The City in History*, 562.
[42] James Tully, ed., "Communication and Imperialism," in *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume 2: Imperialism and Civic Freedom*, vol. 2, Ideas in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 166–94.

Jewish cemeteries have been integrated into 21st-century cities as Holocaust memorials, and some of the consequences and critiques thereof.

I propose that, like earlier responses to 'Jewish rubble,' contemporary engagement with these (reconstructed) material ruins of Jewish life reflects both a new urgency to construct forward-looking, cosmopolitan identities and a desire to manage a deeply uncomfortable past. David M. Seymour, a legal scholar, has critiqued this move towards a de-territorialized and de-historicised holocaust as an attempt to distance the world of today from that of the past, and to "instrumentalize" Holocaust memories for political ends, to advance one particular narrative or another.[43] Considering this, I argue that the present day preservation of synagogues and cemeteries as memorials to Jewish victims of the Holocaust is animated by questions and anxieties echoing those of previous generations, generalized as: (1) creating a public and collective identity, and doing so by (2) managing the relation between (the story connecting) the present and the tragic past. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, two sociologists, propose that collective memories in an age of globalization have transcended their traditional, national boundaries, and have taken on a more cosmopolitan character.[44] The Holocaust, as Levy and Sznaider argue, is overwhelmingly understood as memories of representations rather than experiences, in the process becoming a "decontextualized event" which has "unquestionable moral value" as, for instance, the ultimate gauge for measuring harm

[43] David M. Seymour, "Holocaust Memory: Between Universal and Particular," in *The Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century: Contesting/Contested Memories*, Eds. David Seymour & Mercedes Camino (Routledge: New York, 2017), 18, 28.
[44] Levy and Sznaider, "Memory Unbound," 88.

and evil.[45]

Following the reunification of Germany in 1990, Berlin would undergo urban and cultural renewal as an international and multicultural city displaying its citizens' diversity.[46] As part of this gradual process of displaying difference, from 1988 to 1993, the New Synagogue on Oranienburger Strasse was partially reconstructed to house a small museum, administrative offices, classrooms, and, later in 1995, a small congregation.[47] The New Synagogue's elaborate façade and prominent dome, designed in the mid-1800s to "announce the public face of Judaism," today stands in contrast to the traditional, monumental architecture found on Berlin's Museum Island and in harmony with a range of eclectic styles dispersed all over the city.[48] Near the New Synagogue, is the Grosse Hamburger Strasse Cemetery. During the Second World War, the cemetery was desecrated by German military forces so its land could be used to construct an air-raid shelter. In the last years of the war, the cemetery was used as a mass grave for over 3,000 soldiers and civilians. Today, thirteen figures—originally intended to be placed at the site of the Ravensbrück concentration camp—stand near the cemetery as memorials to the members of Berlin's Jewish community who were murdered by the Nazi regime. On the outside wall of the cemetery is a plaque recalling the war-time traumas, pleading: "Do

[45] Levy and Sznaider, "Memory Unbound," 97.
[46] Janet Ward, "Berlin, The Virtual Global City," *Journal of Visual Culture* 3, no.2 (2004): 250.
[47] "The History of the New Synagogue," *Synagogue Oranienburger Straße*, 2018, http://www.or-synagoge.de/html/en_history.htm.
[48] Saskia Coenen Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogue and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 259.

not forget. Resist war. Embrace peace."[49] A universal message is distilled from a particular tragedy, and the cemetery (and mass grave) appears transformed into a quiet place of reflection.

Another example of the restoration of desecrated Jewish spaces as Holocaust memorials can be found in the Weissensee Jewish Cemetary in Berlin, where, in 1992, an urn containing the ashes of those murdered in Auschwitz was placed.[50] By 2005, an estimated 40 million Euros would be needed to restore the neglected cemetery spanning 42 hectares.[51] Desperate to preserve what had been publicly deemed culturally significant, city councillors and leaders of the Jewish community endeavoured to have the cemetery added to the list of UNESCO world heritage monuments; through UNESCO, the city would receive funding for the cemetery's restoration.[52] In the sense that "the city of the dead is the forerunner, almost the core, of every living city," the decrepit and neglected state of the Weissensee Cemetery became uncomfortably emblematic of the state of Jewish community in Berlin.[53] In this way, the restoration of the cemetery served as a mode for addressing the abject past and its contemporary legacies, as symbolic as the actions may have been.

Ending 40 years of Communist rule in Poland, the political and social revolutions of 1989 spurred the rise of liberal democratic institu-

[49] Sam Gruber, "Germany: Berlin's Old Cemetery at Grosse Hamburger Str., A Good Example of How to Protect and Present a Despoiled Urban Cemetery," *Samuel Gruber's Jewish Art & Monuments*, 3 December 2016, http://samgrubersjewishartmonuments.blogspot.com/2016/12/germany-berlins-old-cemetery-at-grosse.html.
[50] "Weissensee Cemetery," *Jewish Community of Berlin*, accessed 25 July 2018, http://www.jg-berlin.org/en/judaism/cemeteries/weissensee.html.
[51] DW Staff, "UNESCO Bid for Berlin Jewish Cemetery," *DW News*, 30 August 2005, https://www.dw.com/en/unesco-bid-for-berlin-jewish-cemetery/a-1695318.
[52] DW Staff, "UNESCO Bid."
[53] Mumford, *The City in History*, 7.

tions and orders in the Eastern Bloc. The transformation of Polish politics towards the end of the Cold War contributed to collective re-imaginings of Polish identities and ambitions in the radically changing world.[54] In 2006, a large memorial stone was installed next to the Anielewicz Mound. In Yiddish, Polish, and English, the memorial stone reads: "Here they [over 100 Jewish fighters] rest, buried where they fell, to remind us that the whole Earth is their grave."[55] Addressing an audience of tens of thousands of international visitors and pilgrims each year, the memorial's emphasis on the Earth as a grave—the world as born from tremendous loss and impacted by absence—gives global significance to local traumas of war.

In light of memorials which emphasize the destruction and tragic end of Jewish life in Warsaw, the Nożyk Synagogue has stood since its restoration in 1983 as a monument to the pre-war Jewish community.[56] As the sole surviving synagogue in Warsaw, its reconstruction was aided by financial assistance from the state. Today, its mission is to prevent "the loss of identity, assimilation, and the abandonment of tradition" which, elsewhere, has led to the disappearance of many post-war Jewish commu-

[54] Leszek Koczanowicz, "Polish Nationalism and National Identity," *Geschichte und Gegenwart* 25, no. 4 (1996): 241-249; Further, in "Postwar Years (1994 to the present)," *POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*, accessed 27 July 2018, http://www.polin.pl/en/wystawy-wystawa-glowna-galerie/postwar. "After 1989, Jewish culture and history came to occupy an important place in the minds of Poles, as the numerous artistic projects and publications presented in the last part of the [museum] gallery confirm. Universities are offering courses and degrees in Jewish Studies, and Poland has become a popular destination for Jews from all over the world."

[55] See Appendix, Figure 3.

[56] "Nożyk Synagogue," *Jewish Community of Warsaw*, accessed 28 July 2018, http://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/en/religion/nozyk-synagogue/. The inner walls of the synagogue remain unpainted as a memorial to the murdered, for "there is a Jewish legend that speaks of the custom of refraining from repainting the synagogue walls, because it is believed that the prayers of previous generations stick to them as dust would."

nities across Poland.[57] In 1989, "fewer than four dozen people, mostly men in their 60s and 70s," regularly attended services at the Nożyk Synagogue, preserving the living memories of the synagogue's past congregation and community at the risk of continually fading.[58] Both the Nożyk Synagogue and the Okopowa Jewish Cemetery—established in 1806 and registered in 1973 as historic sites to be protected by the city—have been frequented more by international visitors than local Jewish communities, consequently becoming transnational spaces.[59] As such, the interests and concerns of international publics and communities have influenced the restoration of sacred sites, and interventions to preserve these spaces have been increasingly undertaken with international audiences in mind.

However, local audiences and publics have not been forgotten during the construction of museums and other sites of memory in Warsaw. The elaborately painted wooden ceiling and *bimah* of Gwoździec Synagogue, originally constructed in the mid-1600s and destroyed during both World Wars, was recreated by an international team and installed as a central component of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which opened in 2014.[60] The 'Gwoździec Re!construction Project' involved much more than woodworking and painting; educational, hands-on workshops were held in seven synagogues across Poland, intended to

[57] "Nożyk Synagogue."
[58] Anthony Wilson-Smith, "After the Holocaust: A Jewish Community Withers Away," *Maclean's* 102 no.36 (September 1989), 51. Gale Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly. Jewish congregants here "know of only 25 people under 40 in Warsaw[,] a city of 1.7 million," who identify themselves as Jewish.
[59] "The Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery," *Jewish Community of Warsaw*, accessed 28 July 2018, http://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/en/for-visitors/warsaw/okopowa/
[60] "Gwoździec Re!construction," *POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews*, accessed 3 August 2018, http://www.polin.pl/en/exhibitions-core-exhibition/gwozdziec-reconstruction.

spark local community interests—both Jewish and non-Jewish—to discover Jewish histories while preserving synagogues in their own towns.[61] In this way, international initiatives and effort to restore Jewish ruins helped to spark local conversations.

Following the end of the Cold War, Soviet troops departed Hungary. The newly liberal-democratic Hungarian state would soon have to engage with emerging questions regarding the definition of a European culture and citizenship, questions which also led to the "re-definition of collective identities along ethno-national lines."[62] In 2014, the Hungarian government established the VERITAS Research Institute for History to study and 'reevaluate' the country's past 150 years, and, in their own words, to produce accounts of the past to "serve the spiritual reunification of our nation, strengthen the Hungarian identity and become part of our educational system."[63] The list of topics to be re-evaluated is extensive, but nowhere does the research institute indicate intentions to study the Holocaust in Hungary and the trauma inflicted against the Jewish community.[64]

The pre-war Jewish in Budapest, which made up approximately 15-20 per cent of the population, was reduced to less than one percent during the Holocaust in Hungary. Three prominent synagogues survived

[61] "Gwoździec Re!construction."
[62] Katalin Deme, "From Restored Past to Unsettled Present: New Challenges for Jewish Museums in East Central Europe," *East European Jewish Affairs* 45, nos. 2-3 (2015): 252.
[63] "Lectori Salutem," *VERITAS Research Institute*, 2018 http://www.veritasintezet.hu/en/.
[64] "The Research Teams' Objectives," *VERITAS Research Institute*, 2018 http://www.veritasintezet.hu/en/the-research-teams-objectives; & Andrea Petö, "Hungary 70': Non-remembering the Holocaust in Hungary," *Culture & History Digital Journal* 3, no.2 (2014): 233.

the turmoil and destruction of the Second World War. They are testaments to the city's past as a home to generations of Hungarian Jews, and they mark the three points of the contemporary "Jewish triangle" which spatially demarcates the place of a former Jewish district and the ghetto.[65] But, as some scholars have asserted, the visibility of these three sites has had the effect of drawing attention away from Jewish synagogues and cemeteries in ruins beyond the Jewish triangle, and away from places with active Jewish communities.[66]

The "most important Hungarian Holocaust memorial," according to a sign erected by the National Heritage Institute, is the Heroes' Graveyard, which is located next to the Dohány street Synagogue. The Graveyard is made up of common graves for 2,000 Jews forcibly confined by the Arrow Cross regime to the miserable conditions within the Ghetto. Monuments near the graves in the fenced off Raul Wallenberg Holocaust Memorial Park draw attention to Hungarian Jewish victims and to those who risked their lives to protect Jews. The language of 'most important' is significant; it suggests that whatever memorialization was deemed necessary has already been completed—the work, in a sense, concluded.

The problems and questions regarding the memories of the Holocaust and collective understandings of antisemitism in Hungary might be publicly perceived as sufficiently explored. The House of Terror, established in 2002, which presents *a* history of "double occupation," men-

[65] Kinga Frojimovics et al., *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites, History*, ed. Géza Komoróczy (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 107. The Dohány, Kazinczy and Rumbach street synagogues mark out the "Jewish triangle" (or 'Synagogue triangle').
[66] Gantner, "Interpreting the Jewish Quarter," 34; Frojimovics et al., *Jewish Budapest*, 468.

tions the execution of the 'Final Solution' in Hungary a few times, but the language throughout the museum constructs a clear separation between the categories of 'occupiers'/'occupied' and 'perpetrators'/'victims.'[67] Complicating a popular narrative that antisemitism was exclusive to those who had occupied Hungary and had since left, renovations of Budapest's Dohány Street Synagogue in the mid-1990s brought to light concealed archives left by the Jewish community. Amidst fears of rising anti-Zionism and new forms of antisemitism in Hungary, the Jewish community hid archival documents in the walls of the Synagogue in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to be remembered and exposed only later during renovations.[68] The restoration of the monumental synagogue, which had intended to secure the preservation of material artifacts and traces of Jewish religious life, appears as a performative embrace of Jewish life. Reconstruction projects, bringing elements of the past into view, may facilitate sincere public engagement with memories of pre-war persecution—of early Hungarian complicity and indifference to suffering. Interventions to preserve Jewish sites in Budapest serve as opportunities to challenge the national narratives overlaying popular interpretations of Hungarian-Jewish history and society today.

Conclusion

This paper moves to offer final remarks concerning the ways in which the material traces of Jewish religion, life, and history have been revalued and restored as Holocaust memorials after decades of neglect. The

[67] "Double Occupation," Information sheet in English retrieved from the House of Terror, Budapest, May 25, 2018.
[68] Frojimovics et al., *Jewish Budapest*, 113.

re/presentation of 'Jewishness' in urban landscapes—through the reconstruction of sites typically understood as authentic and reflecting centuries of life—has been the subject of great critique in recent years. Richard Schneider, commenting on his experiences as a Jew in Berlin, wrote that he "relat[ed] to the void in the rear courtyard of the Oranienburger Synagogue," the empty space that lies hidden behind an impressive façade.[69] Furthermore, he expressed his frustrations with the "empty official relationship" between Jews and non-Jews and the spiralling loss of the "eternal heart of Judaism"—belief, learning, and tradition.[70] The reconstruction of the synagogue, as Schneider makes perfectly clear, is not a substitute for critical engagement with the traumatic past and its contemporary legacies, nor is a building or graveyard alone going to act as a bridge between present and pre-war religious life. Michael Meng criticizes what he describes as the wide-spread tendency to use Jewish visibility and presence as "yardsticks of national recovery," to interpret reconstructed synagogues and cemeteries as indicators of progress, contemporary tolerance, and plurality.[71] Furthermore, "redemptive cosmopolitanism," symbolic displays of tolerance and feeling as though one has mastered and overcome a traumatic past, Meng argues, must be instead replaced by "reflective cosmopolitanism," critical and active engagement with the link we construct between past and present realities.[72] In another sense, the reconstruction synagogues and cemeteries as Holocaust memorials and symbols of diver-

[69] Richard Schneider, "The Jew Under Glass: The Problem of Being an Exhibition Object," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 36, no.2 (Autumn 2003): 29.
[70] Schneider, "The Jew Under Glass", 26, 32.
[71] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 252
[72] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 266.

sity and progress must also be met with a re-examination of 'ourselves' and 'our' relation to the memories of a traumatic past lived by 'others' and to the stories of enduring trauma felt by 'them.'

In summary, the reconstruction and incorporation of landmarks and monuments into our urban landscapes allows residents and visitors to "understand what is special or distinctive" about a city, and speaks to the values and stories the city's community "wish[es] to restore and carry forward over successive generations."[73] The decisions to build over, restore, or preserve post-war 'Jewish rubble,' influence and are themselves influenced by how societies understand and construct collective identities and imagine their place in history, both as inheritors of the past and makers of the future. To understand collective physical and social re-constructions of synagogues and cemeteries in Eastern Europe, I would propose—beyond gauging the growth or decline of Jewish communities, of antisemitism, or of financial support for 'heritage sites'—examining how cities have come to define 'belonging' and have appealed to cosmopolitan, international, or national communities and interests in an age of globalization. This paper does not seek to rank the discussed cities according to a general sense of how they set the foundations for 'better' or 'worse' forms and purposes of memorialization. Rather, the goal is to suggest that perhaps an important element—chiefly, the transformation of cities coinciding with emergence of collective identities beyond their traditional boundaries—has been overlooked in studies of Holocaust memorialization in the 21st-century

[73] John V. Maciuika, "The Historic Preservation Fallacy? Transnational Culture, Urban Identity, and Monumental Architecture in Berlin and Dresden." In *Transnationalism and the German City*, eds. Jeffry M. Diefendorf and Janet Ward (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 244.

and may prove crucial to understanding a variety of responses to the material traces of Jewish life in urban landscapes.

Appendix

Figure 1. Tower of the Church of Mary Magdalene. Tower reconstructed, Nave — destroyed in the Second World War — foundations and walls marked.

Figure 2. Sign on fence around Dohány Street Synagogue

Figure 3. Stone installed in 2006 near the resting place of over 100 Jews who perished during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

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