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Auschwitz in the Perception of Contemporary Poles

Abstract: Based upon survey research and drawing upon literature by historians and social scientists, this article discusses what Auschwitz means to Poles and how perceptions of it have changed since the 1990s. The article shows that Auschwitz means to nearly all Poles genocide, the Polish martyrdom, and the Jewish Holocaust at the same time. It also identifies and analyzes the processes thereby the number of Poles perceiving Auschwitz as primarily Jewish has increased from minimal to a relative majority and the number of those perceiving Auschwitz as primarily Polish, once being a relative majority, has decreased, albeit still remains fairly high. The article argues that the perception of Auschwitz in Poland has considerably become "Judaized," "de-Polonized," "de-nationalized," and "de-Catholized." It also draws conclusions from the case study of the changing perceptions of Auschwitz for social memory studies.

Keywords: Auschwitz, Holocaust, Poland, memory, surveys.

Introduction

Auschwitz was the most notorious Nazi German concentration and death camp—the site of annihilation of approximately 1.1 million people: almost 1 million Jews from various European countries (including Poland), 70–75,000 Poles (mostly ethnic and Roman Catholic), about 21,000 Gypsies—Sinti and Roma, nearly 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and 10–15,000 others (Piper 1992). After the war, particularly in the 1960s—1990s, it became a universally recognized symbol of the Holocaust—"the state-sponsored persecution and murder of European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945" (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2010). Yet in Poland, on whose pre-war territory annexed to the Third Reich the Nazis established this camp in 1940 and operated it until 1945, and on whose post-war territory the site, relics, memorial and museum of Auschwitz are located, it was presented and people perceived it mostly in different ways. Scholars dealing with the subject, such as Jonathan Huener (2003), Sławomir Kapralski (2013), Marek Kucia (2005), Michael C. Steinlauf (1997), Jonathan Webber (1993), Zofia Wóycicka (2009), and Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006) have indicated that Poles regarded Auschwitz, or "Oświęcim" as they usually referred to in Polish, as a national symbol—the symbol of the martyrdom of the Polish nation at the hands of the Germans during World War II. This "martyrological idiom" (Huener 2003: xiv) was epitomized in the Polish parliament's "Act on the remembrance of martyrdom of the Polish Nation and other Nations in Oświęcim" (Act 1947), which after minor amendments remains valid to this day. But Huener,

Kapralski, Kucia, Steinlauf, and Wóycicka also showed that this *Polish* meaning of Auschwitz was not the only one in Poland, nor, as those authors and also Zubrzycki proved, was it uniform. It has had its national (ethnic or state) and religious, Roman Catholic varieties. Alongside these Polish meanings, some of the scholars also identified one, two, or three other major kinds of meaning that Auschwitz had in Poland after the war: *international*—Auschwitz as the site and symbol of suffering and death of people from various countries and of various nationalities (Huener, Kapralski, Kucia, Wóycicka); *universalist*—Auschwitz as the site and symbol of human suffering, mass murder, genocide or crime against humanity, a symbol for peace and against war, a site of reconciliation, and a symbol of universal evil (Kucia); and *Jewish*—Auschwitz as the site and symbol of the Holocaust—the annihilation of Jews (Huener, Kapralski, Kucia, Steinlauf, Wóycicka). The scholars differed the most regarding the Jewish meaning of Auschwitz in Poland. Webber, discussing the different meanings that Auschwitz has to different people, and Zubrzycki, analyzing the conflict between the Jewish "Auschwitz" and the Polish "Oświęcim," believed that Poles did not perceive Auschwitz as a Jewish site and symbol. Huener (2003: 59–144, 228), who stressed the prominence of the "Polish-national martyrological idiom," following Steinlauf (1997: 117) wrote about the "marginalization of the Shoah" at Auschwitz in the post-war years. He indicated, however, some but few manifestations of the Jewish meaning on the site of the former camp. Similarly, Wóycicka analyzed the early post-war attempts at commemorating the annihilation of Jews at Auschwitz and wrote about the subsequent "tabooization of the Holocaust" (Wóycicka, 2009: 275). Kucia (2005: 181–200), agreeing with Huener and Steinlauf that the annihilation of Jews at Auschwitz was marginalized in post-war Poland, described an early indigenous "Jewish symbolism," albeit one that faded away after 1948 and became almost nonexistent after 1968. He also analyzed the rise of "Jewish symbolism" in Poland since the mid 1980s and its domination in the 1990s.

The analyses of meanings of Auschwitz mentioned above concerned primarily the manifestations of those meanings on the site of the former camp—the museum and its exhibitions, monuments, and commemorations. Some dealt with controversies over Auschwitz, public discourse, and education. The scholars referred to—historians and social scientists—employed various methods: analysis of documents and events, content analysis, discourse analysis, interviews, and observation. Few authors—Kapralski, Kucia, Steinlauf, and Zubrzycki—also concerned themselves with the social memory, social consciousness, public opinion or perceptions of Auschwitz as rendered in survey research. These were the surveys on nationwide samples representative of Poland's population carried out by two major Polish opinion research centers, CBOS [Social Opinion Research Center] (1995a, 1995b, 2005) and TNS OBOP [TNS Public Opinion Research Center] (2000a, 2000b). The CBOS survey of 1995, conducted before the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the camp, was the first national representative survey on Auschwitz in Poland; the surveys of 1995 and 2005, both carried out after the respective anniversary commemorations, were the follow-ups of the first one. The surveys conducted by TNS OBOP in 2000, designed and discussed by Kucia (2001a, 2001b, 2005), were the most comprehensive to date. They included some of the ques-

tions from the earlier CBOS surveys. In 2010 some of the questions from the earlier surveys (CBOS's and OBOP's) were asked again in another survey designed by Kucia and carried out by TNS OBOP, whose main results TNS OBOP (2010) and Kucia (2011) presented in reference to the earlier findings. As these latest publications were in Polish and hardly went beyond a mere presentation of the most important survey results, this article will attempt to extensively account for and discuss the most important findings of the recent and previous representative surveys concerning two aspects of social memory of Auschwitz in Poland—the awareness of the functions and symbolisms of Auschwitz and the perception of the foremost meaning of it—Polish or Jewish.

The general problem this article will address is what Auschwitz means to contemporary Poles and how these meanings have changed over the past years. The specific research problems that featured in the surveys and which this article will elaborate are the following: Do Poles still regard Auschwitz, or "Oświęcim," as their national symbol—the symbol of Polish martyrdom during World War II—and to what extent? Have they come to consider Auschwitz as the symbol of the Holocaust, and to what extent? Do Poles still contrast "Oświęcim," the symbol of Polish martyrdom, and "Auschwitz," the symbol of the Jewish Holocaust? Have Poles become aware of what Auschwitz was for and means to other groups—mainly Jews—and if so, to what degree? Have Poles become aware of other major functions of the camp? Have Poles perceived the international meaning of Auschwitz as a site and symbol of the suffering and martyrdom of many nations, and to what extent? Has the former camp had for them a universalist meaning as a symbol of genocide, and to what degree? Has this symbolism become related to Auschwitz's being the site and symbol of the Holocaust, and to what extent?

Awareness of Functions and Symbolisms of Auschwitz

Over the years of its existence, Auschwitz fulfilled numerous functions that have become the base for its various symbolic meanings. It was a concentration camp for prisoners from Nazi-conquered Poland, many of whom lost their lives in the camp, hence a Polish meaning. It also became a concentration camp for prisoners from other Nazi-occupied countries of Europe and was a camp for the Soviet prisoners of war. Both functions have born an international meaning. It was a deportation and annihilation site for Jews from various European countries. This has been a source of a Jewish meaning. It served as a deportation, incarceration, and, eventually, annihilation site for the Gypsies—Sinti and Roma. Jehovah's witnesses and homosexuals were also imprisoned in the camp. These functions have also had their symbolic meanings. The prisoners of Auschwitz underwent systematic annihilation due to poor living conditions, inadequate nutrition and clothing, strenuous forced work, disease, beating, and psychological terror. Pseudo-medical experiments were performed on them. Most Jewish deportees were murdered shortly upon arrival to the camp. Numerous camp prisoners died due to living conditions or were murdered in executions. The suffering

and death of over a million people made Auschwitz a site of genocide, which has created a universal meaning.

In January 2010,[1] the survey designed by Kucia and conducted by TNS OBOP addressed, *inter alia*, the problem whether and to what extent Poles are aware of the major functions and symbolisms of Auschwitz. This problem was put into a multi-item question whose results are presented in Table 1.[2]

Table 1

Awareness of Functions and Symbolisms of Auschwitz, 2010

When you hear the name "Oświęcim"—"Auschwitz (Auschwitz-Birkenau) camp," which of the characteristics that are given below do you associate with this site, and to what degree?

Percentages of respondents who gave affirmative, neutral, and negative answers to a given item.
Last column: "don't know" and no answer.

No.	Item	**yes**	neutral	no	d/k n/a
1	site of genocide	**95.0**	2.1	2.0	0.9
2	site of death of many Poles	**94.2**	3.1	2.3	0.4
3	symbol of the Holocaust—annihilation of Jews	**94.1**	2.8	2.0	1.1
4	site of annihilation of Jews	**94.1**	3.7	1.2	1.0
5	symbol of the martyrdom of Polish nation during World War II	**92.2**	3.3	3.7	0.8
6	camp where medical experiments on prisoners were done	**86.1**	5.2	6.0	2.7
7	concentration camp for prisoners of various nationalities	**85.7**	6.9	6.4	1.0
8	concentration camp for Polish prisoners	**81.0**	8.9	9.0	1.1
9	site of annihilation of Gypsies	**62.2**	10.5	18.3	9.0
10	camp in which the Soviet POWs perished	**47.6**	12.0	30.5	9.9
11	camp in which Jehovah's Witnesses were placed	**31.1**	10.4	36.9	21.6
12	camp in which homosexuals were placed	**30.7**	9.4	37.5	22.4

Fieldwork was carried out on 7–10 January 2010 by TNS OBOP through personal interviews with a national random route sample of 1,001 respondents representative of the country's population over 15 years of age. The maximal statistical measurement error is ±3 percent for the estimate level of 95 percent.

Source: rough data from TNS OBOP and own analysis.

[1] The objective of the survey was to capture the state of social memory of and public opinion on Auschwitz in Poland 65 years after the liberation of the camp, yet before this social memory and public opinion was influenced by the media coverage of the anniversary ceremony on 27 January 2010. Unfortunately, a few weeks before the survey was done, on 19 December 2009 the "Arbeit macht frei" sign was stolen from above the gate leading into the former Auschwitz main camp. The theft, the police search for the sign and its successful finding resulted in a wide presence of the topic of Auschwitz in the media that had an influence on the results of the survey that is difficult to assess.

[2] The same question (about ten items, nine of which were also asked in 2010) was asked in mid-January 2000. In that survey, Auschwitz was perceived as: (1) the site of the death of many Poles (by 88.9 percent respondents), (2) the site of genocide (87.9 percent), (3) the site of the annihilation of Jews (87.9 percent), (4) the symbol of the martyrdom of the Polish nation during World War II (87.2 percent), (5) the symbol of the Holocaust—annihilation of Jews (84.9 percent), (6) a concentration camp for prisoners of various nationalities (82.4 percent), (7) a camp where medical experiments on prisoners were performed (79.7 percent), (8) a concentration camp for Polish prisoners (72.7 percent), (9) the site of the annihilation of Gypsies (68.9 percent), and (10) a labor camp (68.3 percent) (Kucia 2001b: 641). The 2000 results, however, cannot be compared with the ones from 2010 because in 2000 the question was not asked to the entire sample but to a subset.

The functions and symbolisms of Auschwitz that were recognized the most and received positive answers from nearly all respondents were: the universalist "site of genocide"—from 95 percent, the Polish and the Jewish historical dimensions of the camp (the "site of death of many Poles" and the "site of the annihilation [*zagłada*] of Jews"—each from 94 percent), and the Jewish and Polish symbolic meanings of Auschwitz (the "symbol of the Holocaust—annihilation [*zagłada*] of Jews"—from 94 percent, and the "symbol of the martyrdom [*męczeństwo*] of the Polish nation during World War II"—from 92 percent). A deeper analysis revealed that the vast majority of respondents (87.4 percent) recognized all these five items at the same time. Thus, the key functions and symbolisms of Auschwitz—universalist, Jewish, and Polish—proved to be known to almost all people in today's Poland. These high results and their almost entire overlap showed, that in the social consciousness of Poles, there is no historical or symbolical clash between the Polish and Jewish aspects of Auschwitz. One may then say that, historically, Poles perceive both the Jewish Holocaust and the Polish martyrdom as two major components of the genocide that was committed in the camp. One may also say that, symbolically, the Jewish and Polish meanings of Auschwitz are two major aspects of its universal symbolism.

Three other characteristics of Auschwitz (pseudo-medical experiments, concentration camp for foreign and Polish nationals) proved to be known to the vast majority of Poles (81–86 percent). It is remarkable that, out of the three, the Polish aspect of Auschwitz ("concentration camp for Polish prisoners"), which had been chronologically the first and was presented as the most important in the post-war period, has become a little less prominent in the minds of the Poles than the international aspect of the camp ("concentration camp for prisoners of various nationalities"), which had been and was presented as secondary, and the pseudo-medical aspect ("camp where medical experiments on prisoners were performed"), which had been and was presented as far less important. It is also remarkable that the concentration camp function of Auschwitz, which is generic for its concept, as well as the fact the camp was notorious for pseudo-medical experiments, are not as widespread in the social consciousness of people in today's Poland as the universalist, Jewish, and Polish meaning that relate to the genocide that was perpetrated in the camp. One may then say that Auschwitz as perceived by Poles has gained in its universalist meaning and decreased in its specifically Polish meaning.

Far fewer, but still a good majority of Poles (62 percent) were aware of another significant function of the Auschwitz camp—being the "site of the annihilation (*zagłada*) of Gypsies." Slightly less than half of the respondents (48 percent) recognized yet another important function of Auschwitz—being the "camp in which Soviet POWs perished." Two minor functions of the camp happened to be recognized by less than half of respondents (31 percent): the "camp in which Jehovah's Witnesses were placed" and the "camp in which homosexuals were placed." Although the awareness of these functions was lower than that of genocide, Jewish Holocaust and Polish martyrdom, one may argue that it corresponded to the lower significance of the respective functions in the history of the camp and to the lesser intensity with which they have been represented in museum exhibitions, education, and especially the media.

Auschwitz: Polish or Jewish?

In 1985, when the controversy over the presence of the Carmelite convent at the former Auschwitz camp broke out, a conflict began in Poland over which group—Poles or Jews—has the "right of ownership" of the site of the most notorious concentration and death camp and the symbol that it became: whether "Oświęcim" means (primarily) the martyrdom of the Polish nation, as it has been presented and perceived in Poland since the early post-war years, or whether it means (primarily) the Holocaust, as the Jews demanded (Bartoszewski 1991; Rittner and Roth 1991; Klein 2001). This symbolic conflict over Auschwitz continued throughout the late 1980s and intensified in the early 1990s as the convent controversy escalated. It persisted despite Franciszek Piper, head historian from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, published results of his research into the number of the camp's victims (Piper 1992) which showed that their vast majority had been Jews (including ones from Poland), not Poles in the ethnic or even civic sense. The conflict went on even though in 1994 the new plaques at the main monument in the former Birkenau camp were installed with multi-lingual inscriptions reading "For ever let this place be / a cry of despair / and a warning to humanity, / where the Nazis murdered / about one and a half / million / men, women, and children, / mainly Jews / from various countries / of Europe / Auschwitz-Birkenau / 1940–45." The conflict accompanied the next Jewish-Polish controversies around the former camp (Kucia 2005: 52–56): over the church in Brzezinka (1994), the so-called "supermarket" (1996), the "Christian religious symbols" on the "field of ashes" in the former Birkenau camp (1996–97), and the so-called "pontifical cross" and the crosses that were placed in its "defense" on the gravel pit by the former main camp (1998–99) that Zubrzycki (2006) and others called the "War of the Crosses."

In January 1995, after the end of the convent controversy that proved to be the first phase of the conflict over Auschwitz the symbol, that is after Pope John Paul II had decided in 1993 that the Carmelite nuns should leave the contested building, and before the ceremonies of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the camp, which were going to be very important commemorative as well as political events, CBOS asked a national representative sample of adult Poles a question intended to measure the public opinion in Poland on the symbolic ownership of Auschwitz: "What above all do you associate the word 'Oświęcim' with? Is it for you: (1) above all a site of the martyrdom (*męczeństwo*) of the Polish nation, [or] (2) above all a site of the annihilation (*zagłada*) of Jews, [or] (3) other? If other, what?" CBOS repeated this question after the 50th anniversary ceremonies in 1995 and after the 60th anniversary in 2005. The question was also asked in national representative surveys designed by Kucia in 1996, 2000 (before and after the 55th anniversary), and 2010 (before the 65th anniversary). Kucia used CBOS question despite its content-related and methodological shortcomings,[3] in order to obtain comparable results that would

[3] Content-wise, the question presupposes that the notions "Pole" and "Jew" are mutually disjoint and that "Polish martyrdom" and "Jewish annihilation" are polar opposites. The former is false, as many Jews living in or coming from Poland have considered or consider themselves and have been considered or are considered as Jews-and-Poles, Poles-and-Jews or Poles. The latter fact is dubious, given current knowledge,

allow an assessment to be made as to whether and how much the opinion of Poles on the symbolic ownership of Auschwitz has changed. The results from all the surveys are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

What above all do you associate the word "Oświęcim" with? Is it for you…?
(semi-closed-ended question, one answer only)

	Percentages of respondents who chose a given category						
	13–16 Jan. 1995	3–6 Feb. 1995	8–13 Feb. 1996	15–17 Jan. 2000	28–30 Jan. 2000	28 Jan.–1 Feb. 2005	7–10 Jan. 2010
(1) above all a site of the martyrdom of the Polish nation	47	32	45	43	36	37	39
(2) above all a site of the annihilation of Jews	8	18	27	30	32	17	47
(3) other, what? …	40	46	26	22	28	43	8
*) a site of martyrdom of both Poles and Jews	9	6	5	5	5	7	2
*) a site of martyrdom of people of various nationalities	26	33	9	3	10	16	2
*) a site of genocide, destruction of humanity	5	7	12	14	13	7	3
Don't know anything about Oświęcim	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Difficult to say	1	1	0	3	2	2	5
Other answers than specified above	3	2	1	1	2	1	1
Sample size and fieldwork agency	N = 1,011 CBOS	N = 1,223 CBOS	N = 1,181 CBOS	N = 1,000 TNS OBOP	N = 1,103 TNS OBOP	N = 1,133 TNS OBOP	N = 1,001 TNS OBOP

*) analytically distinguished categories of other answers.

All surveys were carried out through personal interviews in respondents' homes.
CBOS used national random address samples representative of Poland's population aged over 18 years.
TNS OBOP asked national random route samples representative of the country's population over 15 years of age.
The maximal statistical measurement error is ±3 percent for the estimate level of 95 percent.

Data sources: CBOS (1995a: 4; 1995b: 3; 2005: 5), Kucia (1996: 7), and TNS OBOP (2000: 6; 2010: 10).

The longitudinal results of the question about the symbolic ownership of Auschwitz show that for over fifteen years three processes have taken place in Poland. First, there has been a steady and high increase in the opinion that Auschwitz is above all a Jewish symbol—the symbol of the Holocaust. This opinion, shared by a marginal group of Poles (8 percent) in 1995, gained almost a majority of adherents (47 percent) in 2010.

and politically biased. Methodologically, the question imposes a polar perception of "Oświęcim" as Polish or Jewish, which does not necessarily need to be the case, as the results of the question on the awareness of the functions and symbolisms of Auschwitz have shown.

Second, there has occurred a considerable decline in other answers (from 40 percent in 1995 to 8 percent in 2010) which contained primarily the perceptions of 'Oświęcim' in international and universalist terms. This decline has happened despite the anniversary ceremonies in 1995, 2000, and 2005, when the media showed many heads of states or governments, causing short-term increases of these opinions on Auschwitz (from 40 to 43, 22 to 28, and 43 percent, respectively). The data show that the group of those who gave other answers was declining as its members were becoming convinced that "Oświęcim" is above all a Jewish symbol. Third, a slow decrease has happened in the belief that the former camp is primarily a Polish symbol—the symbol of Polish martyrdom (from 47 percent in 1995, through 43 percent in 2000, to 39 percent in 2010). Although the group of Poles who perceive "Oświęcim" in these terms has remained fairly large, it is no longer in the majority. Of the three processes, the first calls for a deeper analysis and interpretation. It is also worthwhile to look closer at those believing that "Oświęcim" is primarily Polish and to attempt to interpret the decrease in that belief.[4]

The remarkable growth in the opinion that Auschwitz is to the Poles above all a site of the Jewish Holocaust may be interpreted as an impact of the media and education. The media have presented the historical fact of the Holocaust at the camp and the symbolical significance of that fact since the Carmelite convent controversy. They have also stressed that Jews constituted the vast majority of the camp's victims since the results of Piper's historical research were published, the new plaques at the Birkenau monument were placed, and the changes to the exhibition in the museum of Auschwitz were made. Since that time the role of Auschwitz in the Holocaust has also been presented in the school textbooks. Among all variables, the one that correlated with the choice of the Jewish meaning of Auschwitz the most was the awareness of the fact that Jews were the largest victim group of the camp.[5] The survey results provided evidence showing the impact of education and the media, particularly upon the young Poles. In 1995, 1996, and 2000, the youngest age cohorts consisting (mostly) of high school and university students chose the Jewish rather than the Polish or other meanings of Auschwitz the most frequently and much above the country's averages.[6] In 2010 the youngest cohort and students also scored well above the country's average, although other categories of respondents—entrepreneurs, inhabitants of largest cities, and people satisfied with their material situation—chose the Jewish meaning more

[4] The analysis and interpretation of both processes drew upon the rough data from TNS OBOP and information from the CBOS's reports.

[5] In 2010, 68 percent of the respondents aware that Jews were the largest victim group of Auschwitz held the opinion that "Oświęcim" was to them "above all a site of the annihilation of Jews." Interestingly, 21 percent of those respondents chose that "Oświęcim" was to them "above all a site of the martyrdom of the Polish nation." The fact that Jews were the largest victim group of Auschwitz was known to 61 percent of the entire sample.

[6] The answer that Auschwitz is "above all a site of the annihilation of Jews" received the following results: 1995: all—8 percent, students—23 percent, 18–24 year-olds—18 percent; 1996: all—28 percent, students—43 percent, 18–24 year-olds—37 percent; 2000 (before the anniversary): all—30 percent, students—45 percent, 15–19 year-olds—49 percent; 2000 (after the anniversary): all—32 percent, students—43 percent, 15–19 year-olds—43 percent.

frequently,[7] which indicates that the increase in the perception of the Jewishness of Auschwitz has ceased being primarily a generational issue. The impact of education and the media upon the youngest cohorts and students was stronger in the late 1990s than in the 2000s, but had a lasting character: in every following survey the age groups corresponding to the youngest cohorts from earlier surveys chose the Jewish meaning of Auschwitz more frequently or almost the same number of times as before.[8] In general, age proved to be a factor highly differentiating the choice of the Jewish meaning of Auschwitz. Interestingly, although in all years there was a tendency that the younger chose the Jewish option more frequently than the elder, this was not the case for all elder age cohorts.[9] Among socio-demographic variables, belonging to a socio-occupation group differentiated the most the choice of the Jewish rather than the Polish or other meanings of Auschwitz in all surveys: entrepreneurs, managers, and professionals chose the Jewish answer more frequently than workers, pensioners, peasants, and the unemployed,[10] which made the recognition of the primarily Jewish meaning of Auschwitz a characteristic of a higher socio-economic status. Age was the second factor in 1995, 1996, and 2000. In 2010, the level of education was the second most differentiating factor: the more educated chose the Jewish meaning more frequently than the less educated. Interestingly, this pattern did not feature in the earlier surveys, which indicates that the achieved level of education did not necessarily help perceive Auschwitz as primarily Jewish. The assessment of own material situation was the third differentiating factor in all years: those who assessed their situation as good chose the Jewish meaning more frequently than those who assessed their situation as bad,[11] which confirms that the perception of the Jewishness of Auschwitz has become a characteristic of a higher socio-economic status. Interestingly, political views did not differentiate the choices of the Jewish meaning very much, and the surveys did not detect any clear pattern of the influence of political views on those choices.[12] This demonstrates how apolitical Auschwitz is in Poland, unlike nearly all other public issues. Gender had an even weaker influence

[7] While 47 percent of all sample answered in 2010 that Auschwitz was to them "above all a site of the annihilation of Jews," that answer was chosen the most frequently by 62 percent of private entrepreneurs, followed by 57 percent of inhabitants of cities above 500,000 and those assessing their material situation as good. The youngest cohort (15–19 year-olds) scored 56 percent and students did 53 percent.

[8] In 1995, 18–24 year-olds scored 18 percent; in 2000, 20–29 year-olds reached 38 percent. In 2000, 15–19 year-olds scored 49 percent; in 2000, 20–29 year-olds had 47 percent.

[9] In 1995, the 45–54 year-olds scored higher (9 percent) than the 35–44 year-olds (7 percent). In 2000 (prior to the anniversary), the cohort 60 plus scored higher (26 percent) than the cohorts 30–39 (24 percent), 40–49 (25 percent), and 50–59 (23 percent). In 2010, the cohort 50–59 scored higher (51 percent) than the three younger cohorts (47, 48, and 45 percent, respectively).

[10] For example, in 2010, the Jewish meaning was chosen the most frequently by private entrepreneurs (62 percent) and the least frequently by pensioners and peasants (41 percent each).

[11] The proportions choices of the Jewish meaning according to the self-assessment of own material situation was the following: 1995: good—11 percent, medium—9 percent, bad—4 percent; 1996: good—28 percent, medium—29 percent, bad—26 percent; 2000 (after the anniversary): good—41 percent, medium—30 percent, bad—31 percent; 2010: good—57 percent, medium—46 percent, bad—38 percent.

[12] In 1995, the "centrists" chose the Jewish option more frequently (10 percent) than the "leftists" (9 percent), "rightists" (6 percent), and the undefined (6 percent). In 2000 (before the anniversary), the "rightists" chose that option the most (34 percent), while the "center-leftists" the least (23 percent). In 2010, the "leftists" scored the highest (57 percent) as the "rightists" did the lowest (41 percent).

on choosing the Jewish meaning than political views, although men have always chosen the Jewish meaning more frequently than women.[13] Surprisingly, religiosity (declared participation at religious practices) hardly differentiated the choice of the Jewish meaning of Auschwitz.[14] Given how much religion was involved in the symbolic Jewish-Polish conflict over Auschwitz (especially during the conflict's hottest phases—the Carmelite convent controversy and the "War of the Crosses"), one could expect far fewer regular church goers than irregular ones and non-practitioners stating that Auschwitz is primarily Jewish. The data from all surveys show that this was not the case, which indicates that Auschwitz has become in Poland an issue beyond religion.

Each of the surveys carried out between 1995 and 2010 revealed that numerous Poles hold the view that Auschwitz is to them primarily Polish. Although their proportion has shrunk over the years, it has remained fairly high. The data allow us to say that a major reason for the existence of such a large group is the ignorance (or non-acceptance) of the fact that Jews were the vast majority of the Auschwitz victims and the persistence of the belief that Poles constituted the majority.[15] The data also show that those adhering to the Polish meaning of Auschwitz share two characteristics: in each survey large majorities of them were women and declared regular religious practices.[16] The former is not at all surprising in the context of the latter: women are more religious than men. It is then religiosity rather than femininity that contributes to the persistence of the opinion that "Oświęcim" is primarily Polish. Thus a reason or perhaps the main reason for a slow decrease in support for this opinion over the years may lay in a steady decline of religiosity in Poland.

Although the results from 2010 showed that there exist two large groups of Poles who see Auschwitz in opposing terms: one as above all a Jewish symbol, and the other as above all a Polish symbol, these results—if viewed in the context of the data from the question about the awareness of various symbolisms and functions of Auschwitz, where almost all respondents perceived Auschwitz as a site of genocide, the site and symbol of the Holocaust, as well as the site and symbol of Polish martyrdom—prove

[13] 1995: men—8 percent, women—7 percent; 1996: men—31 percent, women—25 percent; 2000 (before the anniversary): men—34 percent, women—26 percent; 2000 (after the anniversary): men—33 percent, women—30 percent; 2010: men—52 percent, women—43 percent.

[14] In 1995, almost the same proportions of those declaring practices several times a week (9 percent), non-practitioners (8 percent), declaring practices several times a year (8 percent), and declaring practices once a week (7 percent) chose the Jewish meaning. In 2000 (before the anniversary), both the non-practitioners and the regular practitioners scored almost the same (32 and 31 percent, respectively), while the irregular practitioners were the lowest (25 percent). In 2010, the Jewish meaning was chosen by the same proportions of regular practitioners and non-practitioners (48 percent), but the irregular practitioners did not differ too much (46 percent).

[15] In 2010, 79 percent of the respondents believing that it was Poles who were the largest victim group of Auschwitz answered that "Oświęcim" was to them "above all a site of the martyrdom of the Polish nation." Interestingly, 13 percent of those respondents chose that "Oświęcim" was to them "above all a site of the annihilation of Jews."

[16] Respondents declaring regular religious practices (once a week) constituted the following proportions of the adherents to the Polish view of Auschwitz: 63 percent in 1995, 58 percent in 1996, 65 percent in 2000 before and 63 percent after the anniversary commemorations. Women counted 57 percent of those who believed that "Oświęcim" was primarily Polish in 1995 and 1996, 54 percent in 2000 before and 53 percent after the commemorations. In 2010 there were even more women in that group—58 percent, albeit a smaller proportion of those declaring regular practices—48 percent.

that in the social consciousness of Poles, no conflict exists between the Polish and Jewish symbolisms of the former camp.[17] Importantly, the vast majority of those who believed that "Oświęcim" is primarily a Polish symbol, when answering the question about the various functions and symbolisms of Auschwitz, recognized Auschwitz as the site and symbol of the Jewish Holocaust. Moreover, the results of both questions allow us to state that in Poland—as is the case in the wider world—Auschwitz has been becoming a universally recognized symbol of the Jewish Holocaust as a case of genocide.

Discussion and Conclusions

The objective of this article is to account for the perception of Auschwitz by contemporary Poles and to assess how this perception has changed over the past years, since various authors, especially Webber (1993), Steinlauf (1997), Huener (2003), Kucia (2005), and Zubrzycki (2006) wrote that Auschwitz, or "Oświęcim," had for Poles been primarily the symbol of Polish martyrdom, while, according to Steinlauf, Huener, and Kucia, the Jewish dimension of Auschwitz had been marginalized, and, according to Webber and Zubrzycki, the Polish meaning of "Oświęcim" had been juxtaposed with the Jewish meaning of Auschwitz as the symbol of the Holocaust. The method that this article employed was analysis and interpretation of the results of the existing surveys of the perceptions of Auschwitz in Poland that were conducted in 1995, 1996, 2000, 2005, and 2010. The results of these surveys show that there has occurred in Poland a considerable change of the perception of Auschwitz. Four developments seem to be the most important in this regard.

First, Poles have become increasingly aware that due to the mass murder of Jews perpetrated in Auschwitz it is a symbol or even *the* symbol of the Holocaust. The belief that "Oświęcim" means above all a site of the annihilation of Jews, which was very weak in 1995, turned dominant in 2010. One may then say that for the past fifteen years or more there has occurred in Poland a "Judaization" (to borrow the term that Zubrzycki discusses) of the social consciousness of Auschwitz. This process, the long-term effect of the convent and other Jewish-Polish controversies over the former camp as well as of the revision of the number of the camp's victims by the State Museum in Oświęcim, followed by the replacement of plaques at the Birkenau monument and changes in the main museum's exhibition, was made possible through the impact of the educational system and the media. In education, the Holocaust became a mandatory topic in the Polish national curriculum in 1996, a fact which speeded up the re-writing of old and writing of new history text books that was occurring after 1989 and facilitated changes in teaching practices. The impact of the media was by all means much bigger. The

[17] The awareness of the five most recognized aspects of Auschwitz did not vary too much between (a) all respondents, (b) those who believed that "'Oświęcim' is above all the site of the martyrdom of the Polish nation," and (c) those who held that it is "above all the site of the annihilation of Jews": (1) "site of genocide": (a) 95.0 percent, (b) 94.1 percent, (c) 95.6 percent (the least difference); (2) "site of death of many Poles": (a) 94.2, (b) 96.9, (c) 91.8; (3) "symbol of martyrdom of the Polish nation during World War II": (a) 92.2, (b) 94.6, (c) 89.4; (4) "site of the annihilation of Jews": (a) 94.1, (b) 90.5, (c) 97.4 (the biggest difference); (5) "symbol of the Holocaust—annihilation of Jews": (a) 94.0, (b) 92.2, (c) 95.5.

media stressing the historical and symbolical importance of Auschwitz with respect to Jews contributed to the "Judaization" of the social consciousness of Auschwitz in Poland particularly through the coverage of the controversies over the Carmelite convent (1985–93), the church in Brzezinka (1994), the "supermarket" (1996), the "Christian religious symbols" (1996–97), the "pontifical cross" and the "War of the Crosses" (1998–99). They also enhanced the process when dealing with the changes and developments in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum that made the Jewish aspect of the camp's history more explicit, the anniversary ceremonies such as those in 2000 and 2005 that had a significant Jewish dimension, the Jewish events such as the "March of the Living" which has been organized biannually since 1988 and annually since 1996, and, lastly, the theft of, search for, and retrieval of the "Arbeit macht frei" sign in 2009–10. But the "Judaization" of the Polish social consciousness of Auschwitz may also be seen as an aspect of the internationalization of Poland after the political changes in 1989 and accession to NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004. It may also be viewed as a facet of the parallel globalization of Poland's culture into the culture of which the Holocaust remembrance is part.

Second, although people in Poland are highly aware that many Poles lost their lives in Auschwitz and recognize it as a symbol of Polish martyrdom, the awareness that Auschwitz was a camp for Polish prisoners is, surprisingly and sadly, relatively low. Also, the perception of "Oświęcim" as above all a Polish symbol is no longer dominant, as it was until 2005. One may then say that there has occurred a "de-Polonization" (to borrow another term from Zubrzycki) of the social consciousness of Auschwitz in Poland. These changes were, to some degree, a relative effect of the "Judaization" process. There seems, however, to be some other factors that contributed to this "de-Polonization." The first was the "de-Catholization" of Auschwitz, that is the decline in the perceived importance of the religious variety of the Polish symbolism of Auschwitz as a result of the Convent controversy and the "War of the Crosses." This process began after the Polish pope had ordered the Polish nuns to leave the contested building in 1993 and after the Polish state authorities had delegalized the "defense of the cross" movement and removed the crosses from the contested location at Auschwitz in 1999. The second factor of the "de-Polonization" of the social consciousness of Auschwitz was the absence of a policy or even activity by the Polish state, that, paradoxically, regained its sovereignty in 1989, to re-establish a new national-state symbolism of Auschwitz after 1989. The Polish politics of memory of the early 1990s and 2000s focused on the facts and events that had been under the "politics of forgetting" during Communism—the Soviet aggression against Poland on 17 September 1939, the Katyń massacre of 1940, and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Shortly before the latest survey was done, Polish politics of memory concentrated on World War II in general and its beginning—the German aggression on 1 September 1939, in particular. Thus, one may argue that the "de-Polonization" of Auschwitz in the social consciousness of the Poles was catalyzed by the "de-nationalization" of Auschwitz by the Polish state.

Third, in the Polish social consciousness, there is no conflict between the Polish and Jewish meanings of Auschwitz. For nearly all Poles, Auschwitz means at the same

time universalist genocide, the Jewish Holocaust, and the Polish martyrdom. It is a multivocal symbol that means different things to the same people, to paraphrase in reverse Webber's and Zubrzycki's opinion that Auschwitz means different things to different people. Although there remains a large group of Poles for whom "Oświęcim" means above all the martyrdom of the Polish nation rather than the annihilation of the Jews, the vast majority of them also realize that Auschwitz is the symbol of the Holocaust. If a Polish-Jewish conflict still existed over the meanings of Auschwitz, the function of Auschwitz in the annihilation of Jews and its being the symbol of the Holocaust would not be universally acknowledged in Poland, and those saying that "Oświęcim" is above all a symbol of the Polish martyrdom would not admit that it is also a symbol of the annihilation of the Jews. The available survey data allow us to say that there has not been a Polish-Jewish conflict over Auschwitz the symbol at the social consciousness level since 2000, when a vast majority of those asked about the various functions and symbolisms of Auschwitz acknowledged its genocidal, Polish and Jewish aspects at the same time, and when there was an even split between two groups of Poles, one saying that "Oświęcim" is Polish rather than Jewish, and the other claiming it is Jewish rather than Polish. This was only several months after the end of the "War of the Crosses" that, as Zubrzycki showed, was the height of the Polish-Jewish symbolical conflict over the former camp. The "War of the Crosses" was also the last of the series of the conflicts of the kind to date. However, as it proved, it was not the last Polish-Jewish conflict over the meaning of the past. Following the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross' books *Sąsiedzi* [*Neighbors*] (2000), *Fear* (2006), its Polish edition *Strach* (2008) and, with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote żniwa* [*Golden Harvest*] (2011), which, particularly the first one, stirred up heated public debates in Poland, the Polish-Jewish symbolical conflict that had concerned Auschwitz in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s moved to new areas—the role of the Poles in the annihilation of the Jews and the attitudes of the Poles to Jews during and after the Holocaust. The new conflicts did not, however, suppress the Polish-Jewish conflicts over Auschwitz. Auschwitz ceased to be a matter of conflict, not only at the factual level but also at the level of people's opinions and beliefs.

Fourth, for Poles, the Jewish and Polish meaning of Auschwitz (as well as other meanings) are aspects of its universalist meaning, as the mass murder of Jews and the deaths of many Poles in the camp (as well as the extermination of other groups) constituted the genocide that was perpetrated there. It is no longer "Polish-national martyrological idiom" (Huener) or the idiom of "martyrdom of the Polish Nation and Other Nations" (Act 1947) that determine the universalist meaning of Auschwitz in Poland. Nor is it the universalist meaning that covers the Jewish meaning. The universalist meaning of Auschwitz now seems grounded in the genuine acknowledgement by Poles of the various functions of the camp and its various meanings for different groups. The survey results show that in Poland, Auschwitz has been becoming, as it is in the world, a universally recognized symbol of the Holocaust that was a case—the most notorious case—of genocide. In this regard, Poles may differ from those in the world for whom Auschwitz is universalist because (and only because) of the universalist significance of the Jewish Holocaust. In Poland, Auschwitz has a universalist

significance and meaning because of the Holocaust but also because of the extermination of (non-Jewish) Poles, Gypsies/Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, and others.

The above case study of Auschwitz in the perception of Poles carries out broader theoretical consequences for our understanding of the nature and dynamics of social memory, particularly at the social perceptions or social consciousness level.

First, the case demonstrates that changes in historiography (revision of the number of Auschwitz victims, stressing that their majority was Jewish), followed by changes in mnemonic objects (new plaques at the Birkenau monument, changes to the museum's exhibition) and mnemonic practices (explicitly commemorating Jewish victims), and communicating the factual and symbolical aspects of the changes through the media and education increase the social awareness of historical facts and symbolical meanings. This change in the social consciousness level of memory, however, is very slow, occurring years after the changes of mnemonic objects and practices. The change of objects and practices does not necessarily change social consciousness entirely. Nor does the awareness of facts necessarily bring about changes in the perception of symbolic meanings. It seems that the complete change of social consciousness seems impossible, at least within one generation's life span.

Second, even the most complex and complicated historical facts (such as Auschwitz) may be socially remembered in their multifacetedness, although some aspects will be remembered better, or, by more people, than others.

Third, symbolic conflicts or conflicts of memory, even those deeply rooted in history and reinforced by state power and religion (like the Jewish-Polish and Jewish-Catholic conflicts over Auschwitz), do not last forever. The "old" memory eventually gives way to the "new" memory, also at the social consciousness level.

Fourth, the change of "old" memory to "new" memory is primarily a generational issue: the young acquire the "new" memory first and faster than the old. A higher socio-economic status and a higher educational level contribute to the pace of changes, particularly at the later stage.

Fifth, even once much politicized and religionized memory may eventually turn apolitical and areligious, and become, by and large, a matter of national consensus.

Last, even once very national memory, bearing hardly any similarities to the memories of the same object elsewhere, may become a memory of that object like everywhere in the wider world, without losing its national characteristics.

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