

Help delivered to Jews during World War II and Transnational Memory in the Making

Already at the turn of the millennium, in their renowned book *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (2006) Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider propounded the emergence of a new globalized, “cosmopolitan” memory of the Holocaust. Since then other scholars have not only confirmed but also honed this theory. Developing concepts such as “transnational” (Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney), “transcultural” (Barbara Törnquist-Plewa), “travelling” (Astrid Erll) or “multidirectional” (Michael Rothberg) memory they have also broadened the scope of their research applying their ideas to other historical events and phenomena beyond the Holocaust. However, **what is still missing is an empirical, in depth analysis of how this transnationalization process actually takes place. The aim of the proposed project is to narrow this research gap by examining how transnational memory is construed locally. I want to identify the local, national and transnational memory agents driving this process and to describe their agendas and modes of action. As case-studies, I will explore local and national Righteous narratives and their museum representations** and assess how they are influenced by international developments.

In the last two decades, the topic of help given Jews during the World War II has experienced an extraordinary boom in Europe and beyond. This interest has been triggered by the mass media and most prominently by Steven Spielberg’s film *Schindler’s List* (1993). Another factor that has brought this issue to public attention has been the politics of remembrance led by various state and civil society actors. In recent years, a number of European states have created museums and monuments, and established holidays in honor of the “Righteous”. The topic is also promoted by transnational and inter-governmental organizations and networks, such as the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) or Gariwo – Garden of the Righteous Worldwide. Thus, the memory and commemoration of support provided to Jews during World War II can be seen as an example of the Europeanization or even globalization of remembrance *par excellence*. However, this process has not led to a uniformization of local narratives. On the contrary, the uses and misuses of the rescue stories vary and in some cases the confrontation with transnational discourses results in a strengthening of particularistic and even nationalistic visions of the past.

To capture this interplay between the remembrance policy of the European Union, other transnational memory agents and national or local institutions, the project will examine twelve museums in eight European countries dedicated specifically to those who aided Jews during the Holocaust. Ten of these museums were built or were completely refurbished post 2000, two are still under construction. The case-studies include: 1) Sugihara House, Kaunas/Lithuania (2001), 2) The Dimiter Peshev Museum, Kyustendil/Bulgaria (2003, refurbished 2013), 3) Museum Otto Weidt’s Workshop for the Blind, Berlin/Germany (2006), 4) Silent Heroes Memorial Centre, Berlin/Germany (2008, last refurbishment 2020), 5) The Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Vilnius/Lithuania (permanent exhibition: Rescued Lithuanian Jewish Child Tells about the Shoah, 2009), 6) The Žanis Lipke Memorial, Riga/Latvia (2012/13), 7) Lieu de Mémoire au Chambon-sur-Lignon/France (2013), 8) The Eagle Pharmacy, Krakow/Poland (1983, last refurbishment 2013), 9) The Żabińskis Villa, Warsaw/Poland (2015), 10) The Ulma Museum of Poles Saving Jews during World War II, Markowa/Poland (2016), 11) In front of Villa Emma. A place for the memory of Jewish children saved in Nonantola: 1942-43 /Italy (under construction), 12) Memorial of the Shoah and Oskar Schindler, Brněň/Czech Republic (under construction). Focusing the research on newly created museums and exhibitions dealing with a common topic, strongly present within European public discourse and promoted by transnational memory agents, will allow me to draw broader conclusions on the way local institutions adjust to globalization and Europeanization processes. Are we dealing here with a top-down flow of resources and ideas or rather with a multi-directional trafficking, in which global actors inspire and shape local practices and policies and the other way round?

Apart from a close reading of the examined displays, I will analyze the history of their creation. I will seek to identify the museum stakeholders and other memory agents who have influenced the shape of these institutions and reconstruct the process of negotiating the content and form of their permanent exhibitions. I will also identify the transnational memory agents engaged in promoting the remembrance of the Righteous in Europe and beyond. I intend to describe their agendas, motivations and modes of action and explore the interactions between these individuals and institutions and the case-study museums. Through audience research at selected Polish and German museums I want to learn what message and input, both local and international tourists take away from the museum visits. The project will result in an English-language monograph and at least three articles submitted to respected scientific journals.