Postscriptum: Symbolic Space

In researching attitudes towards the past, it is important not only to analyze the statements made by interviewees, but also to take into close consideration the space in which they are living and how they relate to that space. A brief description of how the symbolic landscapes of Krzyż and Zhovkva have changed since the 1990s was provided in the first chapter of this book. The chapters devoted to the memory of the vanished communities – the Germans, Poles and Jews – included examinations of respondents' attitudes towards the material heritage left by those groups, as well as issues related to their commemoration. Here, I would like to conclude this thread on symbolic space by considering respondents' attitudes to the changes that occurred as a result of shifts in the official canons of memory at the national and local levels. Above all, I am interested in attitudes to the removal of old monuments and the establishment of new ones, as well as changes in local toponyms.[351]

Despite the clear differences between local memories in the two towns, the two sets of residents had in common a fairly indifferent attitude to their symbolic spaces. Their statements in relation to this topic were rarely emotional. Especially in Zhovkva, it was possible to observe a significant contrast to the heated era of spontaneous transformation of the early 1990s. Then, the Lenin monument in the town center was enthusiastically dismantled. Today, respondents of all generations – except those with very patriotic views – were unconvinced that removing the statue had been the best thing to do. As expected, members of the post-Soviet memory group spoke in this way – for these people, the monument had been a symbol of a reality that they had fully accepted. More surprisingly, however, younger people, including people who did not express a pro-Soviet attitude at all, also held such an opinion. None of them defended Lenin as a symbol of the communist system; rather, most argued that the statue had been a part of the town's history, and that this history should be remembered, even if people were not necessarily positively inclined towards that past.

> Here, all of those statues were destroyed, they knocked it all down… Maybe there really was no need to have so many Lenins here. […] I think that, I don't know, but I for example would have collected all the monuments together and made some kind of

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351 This chapter does not consider the period after 2014, i.e. the so-called Leninfall [*Leninopad*] in Ukraine – in which Soviet monuments were pulled down *en masse* – and the decommunization laws being enacted since 2016 in Poland.

> culture park, or memory park, or something like that. Despite everything, they were ours… Despite everything, they were part of the history that we are learning, after all. We can't just run away from it (Z15Df).

In Krzyż, not a single monument was erected after the war that sought to legitimize the new post-war system, and so there was nothing to demolish after 1989. Nonetheless, echoes of similar attitudes can be heard in statements concerning the dismantling of German monuments in the 1950s and the removal of Red Army monuments in neighboring areas in the 1990s.

> There, between the oaks, there was a German memorial. That was destroyed too. I didn't like that, they made an empty space. They were nice trees! […] They made an ugly job of it. [But why did they do that? Because it was German?] Probably because German things have to be evil. […] [You didn't have anything against a German memorial being there?] Nothing at all. [Why not?] For me, it's better if there is something there, rather than nothing. Let it be. In Trzcianka [a small town nearby] as well, a [Soviet] tank was taken down for no reason. They could have left it (K9Bm).

In many statements by members of the middle generations in both towns, a subconscious desire to prevent the time of their youth from being labeled as a lost or evil era became mixed with a prosaic indifference to the symbolic meanings contained in the monuments that were demolished. For the above speaker, the tank was nothing more than an object on which local children could climb, and the old trees that had surrounded the German memorial were what he missed most. Such statements can be interpreted as evidence of a successful absorption or pacification of the past symbolized by those monuments. Many respondents argued that one cannot run away from the past, but these words showed above all that they themselves had no need to run away from it; they felt sufficiently secure in relation to the previous "owners" of their towns – whether the Soviets or Germans – that they could calmly agree to leave traces of their presence in public space. Undoubtedly, the large temporal distance here is an important factor – the fact that those monuments were demolished demonstrates that the attitudes to the Germans in the 1950s, and to the Soviets in the 1990s, were different. However, a similar indifference was noted in relation to new monuments erected in both towns after the transition. Other than people who were directly involved in their creation (then-representatives of the town authorities and social activists), the majority of interviewees did not know to whom those monuments were dedicated, only identifying them as sites where flowers are laid on national holidays. As one respondent in Krzyż put it, in relation to the memorial to the region's return to the Polish motherland that stands in front of the town hall: "Well, there are always some holidays

or other, people always go there, right? With flowers. It's some kind of memorial to commemorate something like that, right?" (K3Bf). The great majority of interviewees declared that they had no interest whatsoever in the topic of monuments, suggesting that this was an issue for people who are directly involved. This division into "activists" and "ordinary people," who need not be concerned, is shown clearly in the following statement by a respondent in Zhovkva:

> [When did the monument to the victims of the NKVD appear in front of the town hall? Also during that time, at the beginning of the 1990? Whose initiative was it?] That was recent. There are people who are involved in that kind of thing. But I was never curious about who those people are (Z32Af).

Besides the people who built them, also people who don't like them notice the new monuments for a variety of reasons. In Zhovkva, a typical example would be the residents who reject, more or less openly, the notion that the NKVD was responsible for mass murders. In Krzyż, the text written on the monument in front of the town hall was known almost exclusively by people who disagreed with the idea contained therein. Interestingly, these were above all interviewees from the middle generation – their parents had come to Krzyż from neighboring villages and had clearly never hidden from their children that the pre-war town could not be considered Polish.

> For the liberation of Krzyż, its return to the motherland, it says something like that. But what is that all about? I read it and thought, what? The return of Krzyż to the motherland? Are you being serious? It wasn't Polish before, but OK, that is what they dedicated it to, that is what they wrote on it, and now we have to lay wreaths, simple (K31Bm).

The above statement is notable for its near-comical sense of fatalism, that "now we have to lay wreaths" – as if the ritual of laying flowers had become completely detached in its meaning from the actual reason for such commemoration. In such situations I always asked respondents whether in their opinion, there were any monuments still missing, i.e. whether there was anyone else to whom a memorial should be erected. Responses were usually negative; speakers tended to answer that no one came to mind. In Zhovkva, some people suggested a statue of the poet Taras Shevchenko, Ukrainian poet considered "a father of the Ukrainian nation," more often, however, I was told that there were no locally important figures who would be worth commemorating.

> Who should we build a monument to? Hmm, well, who? I mean, we're not going to put up a memorial to any Poles, we're Ukrainian after all, right? A monument to that Konovalets [an activist for Ukrainian independence and leader of the OUN] is already standing. Can I think of anyone else? No idea, really (Z23Af).

In the context of a town with a rich and colorful history, in which many iconic figures were born, this statement is symptomatic, showing lack of appreciation for local history as well as an elementary ignorance of the past. Everything the respondent had to say was that no monument to a Pole could be built. In addition to this specific indifference, another surprising fact was that many people were happy for monuments with mutually contradictory meanings to stand together in the urban space. A clear majority of residents – again, with the most radically inclined members of the patriotic and post-Soviet memory groups as the exceptions – had no problem with the Red Army and the UPA being commemorated simultaneously: "[If there was a plan to put up a monument to UPA soldiers, would you be for or against?] Why would I be against? Let them do it. Whoever fought here – they can all have a monument. Why would I have a problem with a monument?" (Z8Cf).

This statement captures in a nutshell the striking contradictions that, for the majority of residents in Zhovkva, pose no difficulty at all. Lack of coherence in the local symbolic landscape does not provoke any protest; rather, it is taken for granted. As Andrii Portnov argues, this situation is typical for Ukraine, where different memory discourses have coexisted since the fall of communism and each one has, to varying degrees, been represented through symbolic gestures in public space.[352] Portnov rightly points out that in Ukraine after 1991, no acts of vandalism against, or full demolitions of, Red Army monuments took place; at most, they were adapted, with Christian symbolism supplanting Soviet signs (in Slavske in southwestern Ukraine, a Red Army monument had a figure of Mary added to it) or with the rituals being changed (in Zhovkva, the traditional ceremonies to commemorate Victory Day were enhanced with a religious element). Such forced coexistence of symbolic domains can, on the one hand, be considered a mechanism that enables localities to avoid conflict; on the other hand, it may be a consequence of the respect for the heroism of ordinary soldiers that was deeply ingrained into most people in Zhovkva. Whilst removing a Lenin statue may be an expression of disapproval of the despised old system, the destruction of the graves of Soviet soldiers would be simply unthinkable.

Interestingly, similar incongruence was also observable in Krzyż. In various ceremonies organized by the boulder memorial that was erected in 1995 with a plaque to commemorate the return of the Krzyż lands to the Polish motherland, one can note both typical rhetoric of the communist era (the anti-German

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352 Portnow, "'Wielka Wojna Ojczyźniana.'"

song *The Oath* [*Rota*], the term "Recovered Territories") and an abundance of tributes to the "European idea" and the town's openness to the so-called West. The interviewees saw nothing unusual in this mixture. Asked about potential new monuments, most just shrugged their shoulders. Whilst in Zhovkva, such attitudes appeared more to be a consequence of ignorance, in Krzyż they seemed to have reasoned argument as their basis – respondents argued logically that there was no one connected to Krzyż to whom they would like to see a memorial built, whilst the memorialization of national Polish figures (other than the likes of Pope John Paul II) was not of great interest to them: "I don't think there is anyone from Krzyż who stands out, anyone who would deserve a statue or anything like that" (K33Df).

Sometimes, statements contained a tinge of regret that there was no pantheon of great figures connected to the town – some people believed that this was because the Germans had formed the town's cultural landscape for the last few centuries. Whereas most residents of Zhovkva did not want to commemorate Poles connected to the town's history, a small number of interviewees in Krzyż would happily commemorate German historical figures if only they had greater knowledge of them, reasoning that the town owed them its existence. One respondent, who was born after the war (K22Bm), admitted wholeheartedly that the Germans had built the town of his birth, but he proposed a monument to the Polish soldiers who died in the fight for the town's liberation. During an interview with a collector of German postcards from Krzyż (K42Dm), however, I was told that any new monument in Krzyż should honor the people who built the town, i.e. German architects and railway workers.

In the context of this symbolic void, i.e. the unavailability of a distinctive collective or individual hero, the surprising inscription on the boulder monument in front of the town hall in Krzyż is easier to understand. After the restrictions on public expressions of memory had been lifted and free construction of symbolic space had become possible, it suddenly transpired that the town was rather short of ideas about how to make use of this newfound freedom. There were no local heroes, because for today's residents of Krzyż the town's common history effectively began in 1945; German heroes were unfamiliar and above all, too foreign, whilst the bonds that connected people to their old homelands were by now too weak to reach back into that period of the past (not to mention the fact that there were too many of those old homelands). The desire to formally mark the town's integrity as a community was, however strong enough for an overture to be made to the only known and available discourse, the myth of the "Recovered Territories." The final text was a result of a compromise (in the original version, it was to commemorate

the return of the town to the motherland, but after a councillor intervened, the term "town" was replaced by the "land;") the most important thing, however, is that the people behind the initiative continued to this day to emphasize the monument's role in the organization of space rather than its actual contents. To borrow a phrase from the respondent cited below, an employee of the town administration, the monument's role in Krzyż was to "honor state holidays:"

> "In Krzyż there was no real place where we could honor the holidays, the state holidays, ceremonies and celebrations, you know? Now there is that place. There was no proper place, and now I think this is a good place, it's well displayed" (K36Bm).

The fact that many residents (especially young people) were indifferent to new monuments that, in both towns, had been put up only slightly more than a decade ago, suggests that the very function of the monument as a carrier of meaning is gradually in decline.[353] This trend was captured poignantly by a respondent in Zhovkva, in response to my question about how young people engage with the past.

> Young people aren't going to gather by the Konovalets [monument]. They're more likely to join some Google group on "Ukrainian nationalism" or something like that. But that is also a way of engaging in a mass phenomenon; just in this case it has a different nature… Not on the streets, not an outdoor meeting by a monument, but a form of integration in cyberspace or just through online communication (Z41Dm).

Observers of public space in Krzyż made statements in a similar vein. One education worker with a personal interest in the town history said: "I think, at the moment young people have no need or desire to celebrate things or to get involved in overt performances" (K39Cm). Meanwhile, a history teacher confirmed my observation that many people had no knowledge of the text on the monument by the town hall: "I think that if it was about the Trojan War, no one would notice" (K43Dm). These trends noted by the respondents themselves dovetail with conclusions reached by sociologists about contemporary attitudes to symbolic space. As Lech M. Nijakowski argues, monuments are undergoing a

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353 Volodymyr Kulyk has drawn attention to the growing importance of the Internet in cultural memory, especially for young people, who see new media as a much more powerful carrier of meaning than material substances, see: Volodymyr Kulyk, "War of memories in the Ukrainian media: diversity of identities, political transformation and production technologies," in: *Memory, Conflict and New Media. Web Wars in Post-socialist States*, ed. Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor and Vera Zvereva (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 63–81.

process of desacralization and symbolic devaluation, as a result of the development of new technologies: as carriers of meaning, monuments and other physical manifestations of memory in space are losing their ability to affect people.[354] As examples of this phenomenon, Nijakowski suggests acts of vandalism against monuments and the general "quotidienization" of sites of memory, such as statues being adorned with Santa Claus hats or parents allowing their children to climb on monuments. This decline of the monument as a carrier of memory and its ceding of its role to the Internet, as the interviewee in Zhovkva noted, can explain why the simultaneous existence of conflicting monuments is not perceived by residents as a problem.

A related and complementary issue to monuments and memorial plaques is the renaming of streets. The general situation here was similar: few responses on this topic were emotionally engaged. The only highly passionate statement came from an individual who had been actively involved in the renaming of streets in Zhovkva in the early 1990s (Z29Af), who spoke in a typically "militant" manner – the elderly woman remembered her activism fondly, finishing with a flourish: "And we changed Lenin to Bandera!" This woman was not the only one of my interviewees who had been involved in these activities. However, others showed less pride; rather, they were disenchanted and disappointed, as if their enthusiasm at the time had been irreversibly dispersed by the intervening two decades of life in independent Ukraine.

> The streets? What was needed to make sure the economy was in order, that everything worked, and then think about the streets. What good came of it that we changed the street names? Those new signs were just a waste of money, nothing more. Nothing more! And now it's just gone with the wind (Z27Bm).

This pragmatic attitude appears to stem from a general disappointment in post-Soviet reality, not a loss of conviction in the correctness of people's actions at the time. Asked if he would like to be living on Great October Revolution Street, the same respondent answered that there were of course limits – the people who destroyed the Ukrainian nation should not be commemorated. Most interviewees, however, spoke of the street name changes critically or with indifference – more so than in the case of the demolition of old monuments. Some were expressing their disapproval of the new master narrative of history and their disagreement with the sweeping assessment of everything connected to the old system as evil – both in Zhovkva and in Krzyż. Others – and this

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354 Nijakowski, *Domeny symboliczne.*

group was undoubtedly larger – were outwardly indifferent to the changes and stated that they simply didn't care about the name of the street they lived on. Two statements by young women from the two towns illustrate that these names genuinely do not carry significance; both were asked to identify the person after which their street is named. The Zhovkva resident lived on Oleksy Hasyn Street, named after a colonel in the UPA; it had previously been named after Illia Dovhanyk, a local communist activist who died in the 1940s (according to the official version of events, he was killed by the UPA). The interviewee in Krzyż lived on Julian Marchlewski Street, which had retained this name since the 1950s (Marchlewski was a prominent Polish communist; earlier the street was named after Adam Sapieha, a Polish cardinal active in the early post-war years).

> Well, as for Hasyn I have absolutely no idea who he was [laughter]. And Dovhanyk… The name sounds familiar, but where I heard it… As for Hasyn, I remember when one of my classmates landed in hospital he told them he lived on Dovhanyk Street, and the hospital staff spent ages looking for it because there was no such street already. That was about the time they changed it (Z10Df).

> I read it in school sometime, but now, if I had to answer, I don't remember [who Marchlewski was]. It doesn't really make a difference to me. I hear quite a few people want to change the name of their street, I hear about it in the town. But to me it makes no difference. It's been so many years, this street has had the same name for all my life and to have it changed now? And get used to a new name? No, I'd rather it stayed the same (K34Df).

These statements prompt two observations. First, it is clear that for young people in both towns, the names that exist in urban space, whether connected to the old master ideology or the new one, are essentially opaque. It can additionally be noted that a similar situation applies to the older generations as well. They recognize the best-known historical figures, such as Bandera, Lenin, Pushkin or Bierut; but not Hasyn, Dovhanyk and Marchlewski. It is therefore clearly visible that the residents of Krzyż and Zhovkva never properly internalized the minor details of the old memory narrative, whilst the new ideology still remains (or has already become?) insignificant. Second, neither interviewee was in any way embarrassed to admit that they did not know who the patron of their street was; they did not feel that they should know. In part at least, this is certainly specific to the individuals concerned – neither respondent was generally interested in history. Yet at the same time, these statements can be seen as symptomatic of a wider trend. In both fragments, the practical aspect of the speaker's opinion is noteworthy – name changes (including potential future ones) are seen negatively because they bring inconvenience: people have to get used to new names, unexpected troubles

result, and moreover, they are expensive. The question of cost was emphasized even by respondents who had sharply defined views on the past and who were far from ignorant of local history, unlike the two women cited above.

The one change from the last twenty years that all respondents identified with positively was the decision to restore Zhovkva's old, pre-Soviet name. Even the most ardent apologists of the old system were happy that the town had ceased to be called Nesterov. They also underlined that it was not a problem that the old/new name referred to the figure of the historical Polish hetman. Perhaps, deep down, they were also happy that the local authorities had not followed the general procedure for the renaming of streets and changed Nesterov to, say, "Banderov." "I'm all in favor of Zhovkva. It wouldn't make a difference if Żółkiewski was a Turk or a Hindu. He founded this town and it should be named after its founder. [Even if he was a Polish lord?] So what? You didn't build Zhovkva, the Soviets didn't do it, he did" (Z20Cm).

Respondents whose views were more in line with the patriotic memory group spared no words of praise for the reinstatement of the pre-Soviet name; they considered the name Nesterov as a stain on the town and a symbol of difficult times. Statements by older people suggest that the Soviet name for the town was never treated completely seriously, that for most locals Zhovkva had always remained Zhovkva. In this context, the post-Soviet name change appears as a symbolic reinstatement of an order that had been unjustly violated by the Soviets.

> "Why did they touch Zhovkva, which had its roots, even the name had its historical connections – Zhovkva castle, the name Żółkiewski, it all belonged to him. It was just the Soviet Union and its ideology. If you ask me, they should never have changed anything" (Z15Df).

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The indifferent and disinterested relation of respondents to the symbolic space of their town leads one to a number of conclusions. This indifference is not a result of a lack of opinions about the past – the previous chapters showed clearly that most residents of Zhovkva and Krzyż had distinct views on their towns' collective heroes and villains. What emerges from these observations, however, is an overt divide between people's "theoretical" views (or even, in the case of older respondents, accounts of their own experiences) and practical action. In other words, opinions about the past do not necessarily translate into support for specific acts of commemoration. Second, as already argued, a process is under way whereby the equation of symbolic space with physical space is gradually being challenged, especially among young people. Representatives of the younger generation are not indifferent to history – but undoubtedly, once they do begin to make these decisions themselves, they choose to commemorate

in ways other than those that have been hitherto dominant.[355] The third conclusion is, in fact, rather a hypothesis. It appears that people's indifference to public space is also conditioned by the fact that an overwhelming majority of residents of both towns is comprised of migrants and their descendants. Despite respondents' claims that they felt completely at home in Krzyż and Zhovkva, there were few signs in both towns of a widely shared sense of responsibility for the common or social good – with very few exceptions. The residents of Krzyż and Zhovkva feel at ease in their towns, but their sense of home in any practical sense only stretches to the gate of their own front yard.

A key element of this attitude is one's relationship to the commemoration of ethnic others, analyzed in earlier chapters: people spoke with feeling that "the authorities should do something," but it did not even cross their mind that they themselves could take the initiative. In the case of Zhovkva it is difficult to test this hypothesis using concrete examples; for Krzyż, there are comparative studies available that show that localities in the "Recovered Territories" exhibit a lower level of social activity, and that the weaker embedment in local history correlates to a weaker connection to the space as well as weaker social ties on the local level.[356] In both Krzyż and Zhovkva, only time will show whether young people's relationships to symbolic space – like their views on macro-scale history, local memory and family history – will continue to be determined by the fact that their grandparents were born elsewhere.

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355 Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind argue that public memory is still mostly analyzed through physical commemoration, but new technologies "have largely deterritorialized cultural memory," see: Blacker and Etkind, "Introduction," in: *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 5. In the case of local commemorations, physical manifestations still have a dominant position, but this is slowly changing.

356 Cf. Małgorzata Melchior, "Przeszłość jako czynnik zróżnicowań kulturowych dzisiaj – przypadek dwóch sąsiadujących wsi," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo,* Vol. 4 (1996), pp. 109–118.