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# Identity after Death

I dedicated my doctoral thesis to the problem of urban necropolises. Focusing on the cemeteries of Katowice I tried to describe their contemporary roles and significance. If one is to give some thought as to why among many other problems I chose this particular one, the answer does not seem complicated at all. Since my childhood years cemeteries, mainly those situated in the city centre, were a place of my daily walks. Involved with them are numerous memories, however this is neither the time, nor the place to write about them. Nevertheless, I would like to bring back one thread – the issue that caught my attention already in my childhood. Among the more or less cared for tombstones, although in fact they were extremely similar to one another, one could find old, usually very lavish tombs on which barely visible were the blurred remains of ancient inscriptions. Even in the eyes of a child there was no doubt that the old inscriptions had been deliberately removed. At the time, it was explained to me that these were the traces of postwar retaliation, that in the act of revenge Poles (with the tacit, and even implied consent from the authorities) damaged all traces of the Germans who lived in Katowice before World War I and II. Ideological and political matters were less important to me at the time, nevertheless, I do remember that the vision of the project of cemetery devastation – a place so strongly associated with the city's past and its inhabitants – seemed extremely incomprehensible to me, today I would even say, uncalled for.

Looking at this issue from psychological as well as sociological point of view, one clearly sees the analogies to the concepts associated with identification and identity (both in the individual as well as collective dimension). "Homeland is land and graves. Nations, losing their memory, lose their lives," says the famous phrase attributed to Marshall F. Foch, which is basically the exemplification of the concept of biographical identity of Erik Erikson (2005). The latter assumes that group identity is built on the basis of reference to the past, it "[…] is formed through collective memory, history and tradition. Em-

phasis is placed on elements of continuity and constancy, on being the same subject all the time, maintaining certain group features, customs and lifestyle – despite the passing of time" (Budyta-Budzińska 2010: 96). Remembering one's ancestors, including the veneration of their graves, becomes an obvious element in maintaining the continuity of identity. It turns out that in this approach, the space of a necropolis is a kind of anchor connecting the living with their collective past. Józef Tischner writes: "To build a cemetery and graves means to take up a legacy" (Tischner 1982: 16), but at the same time it means to contribute to it, as the necropolis connecting the here and now with what was and what will be, becomes an extension of that legacy. Thus, cemetery gives rise to the feeling of stability. Philip Aries emphasizes that from the beginning of the 19th century: "the public cemetery focuses on itself all the love and reverence for the dead" (Aries 1993: 513) transforming itself into a "cultural or religious institution" (Aries 1993: 513). Indeed, such assumptions guided the founders of modern necropolises that had just started being established at the beginning of the 19th century. The founders wanted cemetery to function as an identity binder between generations, since: "It should serve the highest aims of religion and humanity. It is to be a lesson that no one can refuse, that every man should learn. It is a school […] of philosophy" (Aries 1993: 521). After all, meetings are held, interactions take place, and the continuity between generations is maintained in this area.

I have made reference to these issues in the book *Necropolises. Sociological Study of the Cemeteries of Katowice* (Lewicka 2017). However, the topic had not been subjected to synthetic analysis. Passages relating to the problems of constructing or maintaining identity based on memories of the past, expressed through practices of veneration of the dead, represent rather the subplots of the said publication. In this article, I shall try to expand on them, using the material gathered for the purpose of earlier interpretations.

## Identity of Space

Writing about social memory relationships with the development of collective consciousness, Barbara Szacka emphasizes that "in the image of each country, its two dimensions – spatial and temporal – seem to occupy a special place. It is hard to disagree with the idea that a common territory and a common past are the two most important identity elements of human groups" (Szacka 2006: 111). One cannot help but get the impression that cemeteries are the link joining the said categories of the territory and the past. They express the memory of the time gone by, being at the same time spaces that exist at present. They combine the order of time and space – the world of those living here and now with the world of our ancestors.

The sense of identity is oriented towards the past, the present, and the future. After all, nothing that happens today remains disconnected from the past (and the future) of a specific place in space. The development of human space turns out to be a palimpsest – a multilevel recording of overlapping layers (Rewers 2005: 303), and a careful reading of this particular text allows one to decipher the meanings hidden beneath the successive levels of historical periods. The appearance of urbanized areas is a cumulative process during which nothing happens overnight. Contemporary cities are therefore the consequence of their geographical position, history, and the nature of communities building them over the years. All these elements are reflected in cultural artifacts present in the urban structure. And cemeteries belong to them as well.

Space and people form a specific, non-indifferent relationship defined by Paweł Rybicki as "territorial collectivities" (Rybicki 1972: 15), which are "something more than the phenomenon of location; […] attitude towards territory is the basis of social concentration and an essential factor" (Rybicki 1972: 15). What is more, urban space is a subject to complex divisions, and different areas (both the larger ones as well as those quite small) fulfil specific roles. For certain reasons some gain special values. A functionally heterogeneous space turns out to be multi-faceted when it becomes significant. Bohdan Jałowiecki pointed this out repeatedly: "Urban space is not determined exclusively by its shape and the architectural forms of its buildings, but most of all, by the social charge already present in the process of developing space" (Jałowiecki 1989:36), in other words, historical, social, cultural, but also emotional considerations.

Places accumulating human activity, events, experience are being formed within the cities. As Hanna Libura points out: "All of these are important only within the context of specific places which also have their impact on them" (Libura 1980: 69). In fact, nothing happens in isolation from a given space which, with the passing of time, gains (or loses) yet another meaning. In parallel with that kind of contact developed with a place, the sense of identity is built over time on the basis of relations and experience collected by generations. In turn, as Kevin Lynch says, the specific character of a place is its certain individuality which allows people to distinguish one place from another similar place (Lynch 1960). Moreover, one should add that the relationship between a man and a city, or its specific areas, is not insignificant. Different urban areas accumulate different emotions which are expressed, among other things, by the attitude of the inhabitants to specific spaces, represented by a sense of individual and collective bond between human beings and their surroundings.

And thus, space deprived of a broader sense evolves – becomes filled with values – or as Maciej Chmielewski says: "it is transformed into a place within the scope of meanings and terms that are attributed to it" (Chmielewski 2005: 22), a place of particular significance, I shall add. Because human nature tends to build organized, defined forms, not devoid of values, it inclines one to fill

the space with certain points, due to which it becomes not only legible, but also significant. The presence of these notable points – among other things, objects relating to events in the past – has an impact on developing a sense of belonging, and at the same time on building one's identity based on spatial and biographical context. Referring to the theory of Marc Auge, one can define them as places of anthropological nature which should be defined after the French researcher as: "creating identity, relational and historical" (Auge 2010: 54). In opposition to such places, Auge locates the so called non-places, that is to say spaces "which can be defined neither as possessing identity, nor as being relational or historical" (Auge 2010: 54), in other words standardized, homogeneous creations (e.g., airport halls, hotels, high-rise buildings) detached from a broader context. I am quoting this popular concept because it allows me to make legible reference to the issue of identity comprehension of areas made by man. On the one hand, the present day produces universal culturally separated anti-places, yet on the other hand, there are still points in urbanized areas, with specific weight and significance. The first ones can be characterized as not accumulating memories, not designing the future, not functioning in relation to the context of the place and fate of the community (Auge 2010: 51–80), that is, bearing no significance. Marta Smagacz writes: "Non-places from the sociological point of view are a phenomenon that accompanies the globalization of economy and culture. […] The lack of 'place' leads to eradication of the individual, the appearance of identity dilemmas, and questions: 'Who am I?,' 'Where do I come from?'" (Smagacz 2008: 37). Anthropological places, being conglomerates of meanings, identity anchors, may give answers to these questions. Necropolises – spaces marked religiously, culturally, socially, and most of all, historically, being at the same time full of identity, turn out to be obvious examples. As independent areas, but also as fields of practices typical of a given community, they are permanently rooted in traditions which should be defined as "founding social fabric" (Auge 2010: 64).

## Graveyard as a Symbolic Space

From this point of view, cemetery is one of the urban areas of specific nature. Like no other, it seems to have not only direct funerary connotations – closing the process of dying – but also far deeper ones, referring to the sense of belonging, building identity both on the individual as well as on the collective level. Jacek Kolbuszewski emphasizes: "Cemeteries being the space of death owe their permanence to the strength of emotional relationships that make the living remember about the dead" (Kolbuszewski 1996: 314). And the relationship between the living and their ancestors is permanent, that is why cemetery plays a significant role in the process of building and maintaining the continuity of identity.

At this point, one can refer to the results of studies which confirm that the residents of Katowice (with high degree of certainty, it can be said that also the residents of other Polish cities) treat the space of necropolises this way. Apart from the obvious role of a place of burial, the cemetery is perceived as an important place of retaining memories, not only of one's own ancestors, but also of heroes and the city's history. It is significant that the city dwellers feel the need to show the necropolis to the youngest ones. Only under ten per cent of the respondents failed to agree with the sentence: "It is important to show the graves of ancestors to children" (5.2 per cent – said they rather disagree, and 3.6 per cent – said that they definitely do not agree). In this context, visiting cemeteries with children should be a popular phenomenon and in fact, the author's observation seems to confirm that. In the cemeteries of Katowice, one can encounter parents or grandparents who come here not only to honor the memory of the deceased loved ones or go for a walk, but also to show to the youngest the tombs of important people, chapels, crosses. Conveying history of the local community through visits to a cemetery, thereby building a symbolic connection with earlier generations, is a fact[1] (Lewicka 2017: 95). In this sense, and this is one of the definitional roles of cemeteries, a necropolis is a space where civic awareness is developed, forming a "sense of historical continuity, a community of social roots" (Aries 1993: 521). Between the graves of both heroes and members of the former community unknown to the public, collective group memory is being reproduced and rebuilt. On the individual level, the necropolis gives one a "sense of perpetual home" (Aries 1993: 521), because the burial site of the deceased loved ones, irrespective of its form and shape, forever remains in the memory of the living. This is a way of expressing individual memory of the ancestors, supported by practices connected with preserving the tradition of visiting graves, or handing down knowledge of the deceased members of the family to the youngest. Thereby, cemeteries combine the dimensions of *collective* and *individual memory*. Their space is meaningful, and at the same time marked emotionally, because the necropolis is also a place where public feelings are expressed.

Cemeteries turn out to be kind of common spaces, treated as a symbolic property of the community and of private persons, reduced to the relations with the closest relatives or partners buried within its grounds. Belonging to a particular community of the living almost always guarantees a place in the community of its deceased persons. No one will be deprived of the possibility of being buried, if he/she has not broken any current taboo. In this sense, the necropolis is completely inclusive, as only the infringement of rules governing

the community can lead to the prevention of burial, or marginalization of the deceased by placing the grave in usually low-valued places of the cemetery – next to the cemetery wall, next to a ditch, etc. (Vidutis and Lowe 1980: 106). At the same time, there are no norms prohibiting anyone from visiting cemeteries, as these are spaces which are completely open (with the exception of night hours, when the majority of urban cemeteries are closed).

## The Quantitative Approach

Once again one should refer here to the results of quantitative studies showing not only the statistical frequency of visits to cemeteries, but also the motives making one decide about visiting the necropolises, as well as the purpose of these visits. Over 90 per cent of residents of Katowice feel the need to visit burial grounds, primarily, but not exclusively, to sustain the symbolic bonds with the deceased. At least 98 per cent of the respondents come to the cemetery at least once a year (usually during All Saints' Day, but also because of other holidays and anniversaries connected with the buried loved ones). Among the main purposes of the visits, visiting the graves of the deceased loved ones (67.9 per cent) are most frequently mentioned. A significant percentage of the indications concerned: the need to pray for the dead (16.1 per cent), and the wish to express remembrance by lighting a candle (5 per cent). This shows that, above all, the cemetery fulfils the role of a space for expressing memory, bringing to mind those who have passed away, whereas the act of visiting the necropolis itself is an important and maintained tradition.

The studies show that only 3.4 per cent of the inhabitants of Katowice declared that they do not visit cemeteries with the purpose of visiting graves of the deceased family members or friends. Not surprisingly, for the dominant majority – nearly 90 per cent of the city's residents – the most important objective is to visit graves, mainly those belonging to the deceased members of their families. This is a much more frequent practice than the participation in funerals,[2] and this means that the necropolis fulfils much broader functions than those connected exclusively with the physical burial of bodies of the deceased. This same study showed that more than a quarter of the residents of Katowice pointed to the graves of their grandparents as those usually visited during their presence at the cemetery, and one-fifth indicated the graves of their parents. Slightly more seldom were visited the graves of other family members (in total: 14.7 per cent, this including 6.2 per cent visiting the graves of their great grandparents), and

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[2] During the in-depth interviews conducted with the residents of Katowice, many of them emphasized that they didn't like to participate in funerals and tried not to take part in them. Some of them, even though during the year they visited cemeteries more than a dozen times, do not participate in burial ceremonies – with the exception of funerals of the closest family members.

friends (13.5 per cent). Some of the inhabitants of Katowice pointed out that, whilst visiting the space of the dead, they directed their steps not only to the graves of their loved ones but also to the graves of people known to the public, or to forgotten tombstones.

Referring to the limited pieces of information presented above, one may say that remembering family members – particularly parents and grandparents – plays a special role to the inhabitants of Katowice. Similar observations were made by Sławomir Sikora on the basis of his own studies where he says that usually "[o]ne talks about visiting graves of the father, mother, at most of the grandfather, grandmother but not earlier ancestors. It is therefore a two-generation memory at the most" (Sikora 1996: 64). In Katowice, this phenomenon can have at least several sources, starting from the lack of knowledge of family history and ending with the foreign element of the community building the city during earlier years of the Polish People's Republic. Another reason is a small number of graves retained in the cemeteries of Katowice, which came into being before World War II. The majority of today's tombstones were built after 1945,[3] they are therefore primarily the burial place of the generation of parents, grandparents, and possibly, in fewer cases, great grandparents of the inhabitants of the city living today.

Visiting the graves of people that belonged to earlier generations is, in the case of most residents of Katowice, physically impossible. Nevertheless, the study results suggest that even if it was possible, memories of earlier generations would be of limited nature. Statements made by the city's inhabitants confirm that, even if the remains of the personally unknown great grandparents were in a common grave with the grandparents or parents, visits to the grave would, above all, be connected with the memories of the latter. This information is worth comparing with the study results of CBOS (Public Opinion Research Centre) on the knowledge of family history, the past, and traditions: "Nearly two fifths of the respondents (39%) admits that their knowledge of the fate of their family includes the time of youth of their grandparents. Nearly one third (32%) declares that they only know the facts from their parents' lives. Every ninth respondent (11%) says that he knows how his great grandparents had lived, and only a few (3%) know the fate of still further ancestors" (CBOS 2014). This confirms the thesis that family memory covers two generations. The knowledge of Poles does

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[3] Most of the tombstones located in the Katowice cemeteries were created not earlier than before World War I, whereas only a small number of the oldest graves survived in the cemeteries which had been established still in the 19th century. On the one hand, this was the result of political actions (deliberate devastation of German graves) and, on the other hand, concordantly with the typical development pattern of necropolises, old graves were being replaced by new ones. Falęcki writes: "The rapid growth of urban population in the post-war period caused a severe shortage of burial grounds. The Katowice cemeteries were being dug over faster and faster. 'Generations' of the deceased changed every twenty years" (Falęcki 1997: 7).

not reach beyond the history of their grandparents. In the vast majority of cases, reflections on visiting the graves of the closest family members are limited to remembering the grandparents, therefore, in fact, one can in most cases say after Sikora that "memory embraces two generations at the most" (Sikora 1996: 64). Yet, it is worth adding that the increasing life expectancy of the residents of Katowice, and of Poles in general, translating into the possibility of producing bonds between great grandparents and great grandchildren may in the future result in revering the memory of three generations.

One can at this point lament over the lack of interest of Poles in their own family history, or wonder if the mentioned individual memory of two generations is sufficient to build a sense of belonging or identity basing on the continuity of experiences from the past. Instead, I would like to emphasize once more that, although perhaps the relationship with the ancestors does not go back very far on the individual level, the memory of the fate of older communities is sustained. This is manifested in taking special care of tombstones of the closest family members (individual level), and in the practice of visiting the graves of people who rendered great service to the community history, and last but not least, in the declarations of getting children acquainted with the fate of the city during the walks to the cemetery (collective level). Between these activities there develops, not always in a conscious and planned way, a sense of belonging on the individual and collective level. It is also important to emphasize that the way of perceiving places such as cemeteries depends on personal experience, one's attitude towards the past, etc.: "Naturally, memorial sites represent history, however, it is a mistake to treat them as a natural expression of the past. They are also a reflection of contemporary events, problems and social tensions" (Gnieciak 2013: 80). Nevertheless, the sense of being deeply rooted in the past has its source in possessing the graves of ancestors in the direct proximity to the place of residence. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* Gabriel Garcia Márquez writes that "[a] person does not belong to a place until there is someone dead under the ground" (Marquez 1974: 18–19), and this does not only apply to the contemporary times.

## The Tombstone as a Mark of Identity

In the exciting, first episode of a BBC documentary series "Meet the Romans with Mary Beard: All Roads Lead to Rome," a British professor analyses the impact of existence of the Roman Empire on the functioning of its capital. As the production distributor emphasizes: Mary Beard is particularly interested in everyday life (http://www.teleman.pl/tv/Starozytni-Rzymianie-Wszystkie-DrogiProwadza-Do-Rzymu-1-1341162). Life… and death – one should add. The narrator starts her journey to the ancient world by visiting the tombs situated

in Via Appia, also called the Street of the Dead. Moreover, the following scenes are accompanied by funerary themes because, in spite of the fact that the ancient burial grounds were located outside the cities, they played a significant role in the life of those who in the future were to find their final destination within their limits. In this context, the theory according to which ancient Rome became a cosmopolitan city in the contemporary meaning of the word, by attracting new inhabitants from distant lands of the Empire, is particularly interesting. The city was a place of huge concentration of the incoming, essentially anonymous people, cut off from the places of their origin. As pointed out by psychologists and sociologists, this lack of roots in a place evokes the need for building new identification. Historians say that the new identity of the citizens of Rome developed on the grounds of professional affiliation, and was not based on the fact of belonging to an ethnic or religious group. Therefore, Beard asks the question: "In a world without identity cards, without passports, without birth certificates […] how do you know who you are?" and she finds an obvious answer: "You know that because of the job" (BBC 2012). "If you were to ask a Greek or Egyptian who he is, he would give his father's name or the name of his family location. If you asked an average Roman the same question he would answer how he makes his living and would certainly have this carved on his tombstone" (BBC 2012). The last part of the statement seems to be significant – the need for belonging had become so strong that it was meaningful not only during the lifetime but also after death, not only to those living during a given period but also as an identity base for future generations. The recently found inscriptions on ancient tombstones which, in their significant majority, beside the name contain this most important message about the profession of the buried person, that is, the source of their new identity, may serve as proof. It should be mentioned that in the Roman tradition, there were no anonymous graves, and tombstones were filled with information about the deceased person – beside the professional affiliation, they contained forenames, surnames, dates of birth and death, the age, and marital status. Many of the graves of that period have epitaphs – poems, requests to be remembered. Moreover, the graves have effigies of the deceased – family monuments, busts, bas-reliefs (Aries 1993: 202). After all: "The grave is simultaneously to give information as to where the body is resting, who was the deceased person and finally remind of his appearance and personality features" (Aries 1993: 202).[4] This was a clear message for the future generations: "We were

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[4] Nevertheless, John D. Durand emphasizes that, above all, this concerned all the gravestones of the middle and upper class representatives, graves of the less wealthy only had information relating to the age of the deceased (Durand 1960: 46). One should bear in mind that the possession of a grave was directly connected with the possession of civil rights – slaves, people living on the margin of the society, but also the poorest citizens, were buried in mass graves without a chance of being commemorated with even the smallest plaque. Lidia Winniczuk writes: "Beliefs and tradition did not cover the funeral costs of the poor, so after death fate dealt with them in the

here before you, and because of that, you are in fact the beneficiaries of our work" (Sławek 2012). One should add to this context, the beneficiaries of what we were in the private sense, but also, which group had been formed by us – from whom we are descended.

By mentioning this thread associated with antiquity, I would like to note that it was only in the 19th century that we returned to the tradition, still maintained today, of the universal marking of graves with information about the deceased. For hundreds of years most tombstones in Western culture were as nameless as they were perishable. Only did the changes in people's mentality after the French Revolution lead to the renewal of the concept of building private graves. The inscriptions which can be found on them were to indicate directly the qualities of the deceased persons. Thus, the sense of group or individual belonging once again started developing on the basis of reference to the past – the roots of the community and its members alike.

If one were to contemplate which information upholding the image of the dead could be found on today's tombstones, it would be possible to distinguish several elements. In the cemeteries of Katowice and of other Polish cities, nearly every tombstone has the forename and surname of the deceased person. The majority of monuments have the date of death and usually, although not always, the date of birth. Some graves have references to the profession performed by the deceased person during his or her lifetime, especially if it was considered a prestigious profession such as a doctor, lawyer, conductor, teacher. On the tombstones, one can also come across information on the person's achievements: scientific titles received during his or her lifetime, membership in different organizations and institutions, as well as awards and distinctions. As in ancient Rome, the function of these entries is to highlight the individual identification of the deceased person, and to maintain his or her relationship with the surviving members of the closest family and local community. Garry S. Foster and Darren Hendrickson state: "To be named at birth or shortly after, a cultural universal, is to be. Conferring a name upon a person bestows individuality and endows (an emerging) identity" (Foster and Hendrickson 2006: 272). And further on: "Burials without clear indicators – name, sex, age, date of birth […] – are a denial to acknowledge identity […]. [M]emory of those buried […] anonymously will last only as long as their last friends remain alive" (Foster and Hendrickson 2006: 273). That is why anonymous burials are but a few and concern the unidentified dead. Place of their eternal rest is marked by a cross and a number is entered in the cemetery records. Tombstones of other occupied graves never remain intentionally empty in the cemeteries of Katowice, although it is impossible to read information on some of them (though less and less numerous) due to various kinds of damages.

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same cruel way as it did during their lifetime: a night funeral, without any coffin because it was too costly and finally throwing into a mass grave" (Winniczuk 1988: 476).

On the other hand, even without looking through the eyes of a researcher at the necropolises of Katowice, one can notice different types of historical traces of the region. Here, similarly as in the whole Europe: "[a]n increase in the number of unidentified bodies of people killed [after both World Wars – B.L.] had an impact on the appearance of a new form of commemoration of a soldier's death […]" (Tanaś 2008: 71) in the form of marked, often only symbolic, mass graves of heroes – soldiers, scouts, insurgents. The inscription on one of the tombstones reads: *Passer-by, please tell Poland that we died for a good cause. Here lie the ashes of 105 insurgents of Silesia, boy and girl scouts murdered by the Nazi thugs in the streets of Katowice and Panewniki Forest.* This refers to the history of September 1939 when, entering the city, the Germans murdered and buried in the forest a group of the city's defenders in retaliation for the resistance put up by a large part of the inhabitants. Tomasz Falęcki points out that "the secrecy of the operation was caused by the wish to create a myth about the enthusiastic welcome given to the 'liberators' by the people of Upper Silesia" (Falęcki 1997: 43). The presence of this and other similar inscriptions allows the nameless heroes to recover the features developing a permanent bond with the community of which they were part. To honor and remember them is to act in defiance of the will of the murderers whose aim was to strip the victims of their dignity by depriving them of their identity.

## Conclusion

The same objective – breaking of identity ties and revision of history – prompted the intentional devastation activities conducted after World War II in the area of cemeteries. Post-war years became a period of retaliation for the harm caused by the occupants. In the region of Silesia all remnants of the Germans who once lived here were destroyed with a sense of conviction. The action of restoring the Polish national identity resulted not only in the necessity of changing German-sounding names and forenames of Poles. In 1947, by an administrative decision, an order was given to remove German inscriptions from the cemetery areas. Inscriptions written in Gothic were hacked off the tombstones in the entire region, erasing German words. The traces of this action are still visible on the damaged tombstones of the Katowice cemeteries, where only a small group of graves with German inscriptions survived. The attempt to erase the memory of the past resulted in a complete devastation of numerous tombs during the early years of the Polish People's Republic. In the late 40s and in the early 50s, the old Protestant cemetery in Graniczna Street was razed to the ground, and the tombstones bearing the memory of the first inhabitants of Katowice were destroyed. Reminiscent of those events is a plaque unveiled only in 2002. Almost completely destroyed was the Protestant cemetery in Szopienice. Today,

in that cemetery one can hardly find more than a dozen monuments, mostly damaged, scattered in a chaotic way, which escaped destruction only by chance. The necropolis is overgrown with grass, and finding old alleys and graves that once were situated alongside these alleys seems impossible. On the supporters' website of the Szopienice Protestant cemetery, one can find the following words: "Today, we will not see there (at the Protestant Cemetery – B.L.) any beautiful gravestones and cast iron spans, which had once been mounted in the cemetery wall. In the early years of the Polish People's Republic, as a certain inhabitant of Kocura Street says, the cemetery was the biggest 'quarry' in Szopienice. Stolen or damaged were over three quarters of the tombstones, many monuments made of precious materials were stolen, numerous metal elements had also disappeared" (http://www/szopienice.luteranie.pl/?page_id=20).[5] Despite the passing of time, expression of this specific programmed vandalism, manifesting itself in the planned interference in the structure of monuments, is still visible today in the Katowice cemeteries. The tombstones with letters erased or hacked out can be found not only in Protestant cemeteries but also in the Catholic necropolises in Francuska Street, in Bogucie, Janów, and Ligota.

I consciously raise this issue at the beginning and at the end of this article. I would like to strongly emphasize that the interference with cemetery structure – a place that strictly establishes the identity of a group of people whose ancestors are resting there – is a specific kind of violence stripping those people of a sense of belonging. "To possess an ancestor's grave is to be," as identity in the biographical sense has its source in the much earlier time than the date of birth of an individual.

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[5] Among the necropolises of Katowice only the Jewish cemetery was saved from the symbolic devastation, where no inscriptions neither in Yiddish, nor in German Gothic were ever removed from the tombstones.

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