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**KORTAU AND KORTOWO
“PURGATORY” AND CAMPUS –
THE NARRATION OF NON-MEMORY
AND NON-PLACE IN AN AREA**

OLSZTYN – “A CITY WITH AN AMPUTATED HISTORY”?

In September of 2009 the prominent Polish historian Marcin Kula took part in the ceremony of unveiling, by, among others, President Lech Kaczyński, of a Memorial Stone in honour of the Polish officers killed at Katyń.¹ The ceremony took place in the Warmia region of Poland, in Olsztyn’s Kortowo neighbourhood, which is the location of the campus of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (UWM). Along the Victims of Katyń Avenue, named in honour of the occasion, oaks were planted in memory of those killed who were “graduates of institutions of higher education connected to Olsztyn” as the granite inscription reads. From among the 20 thousand victims, in a city that was 872 kilometres away from Katyń, 26 names were chosen. Their living relatives are at present important figures in the social life of Olsztyn who graduated from one of the schools that preceded UWM.² This was a remembrance of the Soviet mass-murder of citizens of the Second Polish Republic carried out during WWII.³

At the same time, about a half a kilometre further, in the area known as old Kortowo, one cast iron cross and several tombstones make up a lapidarium dedicated rather tersely to “All those buried in Kortowo”.⁴ A plaque with a quoted verse of Adam Asnyk that reads “Ale nie deptajcie przeszłości ołtarzy...” [Tread not on altars of the past...] does not explain who the buried actually are. No information board on

¹ M. Kula, *No to sięgnijmy do źródeł... a potem spójrzmy na współczesność*, in: *Naród, historia i... dużo kłopotów*, Kraków 2011, pp. 386-387.

² Compare M. Wojciechowski, *Kortowo pamięta o Katyniu*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4.09.2009. Article available online: http://olsztyn.gazeta.pl/olsztyn/1,35189,7004235,Kortowo_pamieta_o_Katyniu.html#ixzz3ZM0BbOJS [accessed 14.04.2015]. For example, Father J. Żołnierkiewicz, whose uncle is memorialised on the monument, completed seminary studies at “Hosianum”, the predecessor of the current Faculty of Theology at UWM.

³ The city of Olsztyn (German *Allenstein*) belonged to the Kingdom of Prussia (*Königreich Preußen*) and then the German state (*Deutsches Reich*) from 1772 until the end of WWII. In 1945, as a result of border adjustments made at the Potsdam Conference, it became part of Poland.

⁴ The cross was placed in 1997 on the initiative of the Kortowo branch of “Solidarity”.

the campus of the university speaks either of the almost four thousand people buried in the old non-denominational cemetery in the years 1880-1945 or of the anonymous mass graves in which about 400 people were buried after being killed by Red Army soldiers during the night from January 21 to 22, 1945. This local Soviet war crime carried out against Germans (“possibly also against Warmians”) as noted by the Rector of UWM, Prof. Józef Górniewicz⁵, received no further remembrance.

The Warsaw historian evaluated the initiative by UWM to create the Victims of Katyń Avenue as an example of the creation of a local identity which is at the same time connected to national history:

The stone and the avenue is a very interesting example of how an institution (community) creates its own identity by referring to history and at the same time includes itself in the nation's history. In the case of Olsztyn such action simultaneously strengthens the continuation of national history through a society of displaced people and makes them a part of the national community; it also strengthens their national roots after their transplantation to a new place. This last goal was served when the President mentioned that we were on the territory of the First Polish Republic.⁶

This strictly positive interpretation of the Kortowo initiative does not, however, convince everyone. In internet discussions among comments on the unveiling of the new memorial it was possible to find voices that were critical of the university administration's idea and which pointed to the silence about the remembrance of local events:

As far as I know no Polish officer was killed or buried in Kortowo. It is however full of victims and patients of the psychiatric hospital which Kortowo/Kortau once was. That's our local history which should be maintained. This is needed because Olsztyn is a city with an amputated past, just as many cities and towns in the so-called regained lands. [...] Katyń has as much to do with Kortowo as the Warsaw Uprising has to do with Olsztyn.⁷

The events described and the voices and opinions presented are a point of departure for this study of local ways that memory and (non)memory as well as the creation of spaces and (non)spaces of memory are maintained in Kortowo, a neighbourhood in Olsztyn, the capital city of the Warmian-Mazurian voivodeship. At the level of terminology, this study will be based on the classic, broad definition of memory space – *lieu de mémoire* – in accordance with the considerations of Pierre Nora as a place that is essential for the formation of collective memory as well as identity.⁸ In turn, the label

⁵ M. Kula, *op. cit.*

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ Comment by “robac” on the article by M. Wojciechowski, *Kortowo nie pamięta o Kortau*, 6.09.2009: http://olsztyn.gazeta.pl/olsztyn/1,35189,7004235,Kortowo_pamieta_o_Katyniu.html#ixzz3ZM0BBoJS [accessed 3.08.2015].

⁸ “A place in the literal sense of the word, in which a certain society, be it nation, ethnic group or party, places its memories or regards them as an inseparable part of its personality”. P. Nora, *Mémoire collective*, [in:] *Faire de l'histoire*, sous la dir. de J. Le Goff, P. Nora, Gallimard, Paris 1974, p. 401. Cited from: A. Szpociński, *Miejsca pamięci (lieux de mémoire)*, Teksty Drugie, 2008, 4, p. 12.

non-place (*non-lieu*) – counter to its original usage by Marc Augé⁹ – will refer to a potential place, filled with meaning which, however, does not fill such a role in a given community – it becomes therefore a place whose non-memory may be decreed from above, by propaganda or may result from the needs of a given community. This study will concentrate on questions related to points of departure utilizing methods such as the analysis of historical sources and essays as narrative material (or narrativity as described by H. White¹⁰) followed by a search for voices, opinions and also contemporary gossip and urban legends in modern forms of media as well as an analysis of the formation of public (non)memory space. The analysis of available material makes it possible to look for preliminary answers to the open research questions. The first question will be the relation emerging between the historical facts regarding the past of Kortowo, described as “dark” and tragic (Kortau, the hospital for the mentally ill, a place of suspected and confirmed Nazi and Soviet crimes) and the modern function of this place related to values with positive connotations (a contemporary and vital university campus in a natural environment). Does the contradiction in values related to the past and present exert an influence on the non-memory of local history? Another question concerns the relations arising between the narrative of Olsztyn’s local past and the narrative of the general Polish national past. To what degree are local and national narratives felt to ‘belong’ or ‘be foreign’, to be local in nature or ‘brought in’ from outside? In this context it is important to separate the historiographic (factographic) layer from the mythological (narrative) layer which manifests itself in the creation of stories, gossip and urban legends. The final question is the problem of creating new meanings in the space of the cultural landscape of memory and non-memory places in the area of Kortowo and more broadly Olsztyn.

KORTAU IN HISTORIOGRAPHY. THE STATE OF RESEARCH

The earliest, as is natural given the location of Olsztyn in the historic area of East Prussia – mention of the district of Kortau¹¹ appears in German essays. The basic information on the subject of the district can be found in the thrice published monograph of the city *Geschichte der Stadt Allenstein von 1348 bis 1943* by Anton Funk.¹² The

⁹ Cf. Marc Augé, *Non-Lieux, introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Le Seuil, Paris 1992 [Polish translation: *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*, trans. R. Chymkowski, Introduction. W. Burszta, Warsaw 2010, p. 20].

¹⁰ H. White, *The Historical Text as Literary Artifact*, *Clio*, June 1974, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 277-303. [Polish translation: *Tekst historiograficzny jako artefakt literacki*, trans. M. Wilczyński, [in:] idem, *Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego*, E. Domańska, M. Wilczyński (eds.), second revised edition, Kraków 2010, pp. 78-109].

¹¹ The name Kortau will be used to refer to the East Prussian facility for the mentally ill in the years 1880-1945 as well as the district in which it was located. The name Kortowo will be used to refer to the district in the post-war Polish city of Olsztyn.

¹² A. Funk (1867-1956) – German teacher, historian, political and union activist in pre-war Olsztyn. A colleague of the Olsztyn historian Hugo Bonk. His most well-known work *Die Geschichte der*

section concerning Kortau is part of Chapter IX on hospitals and clinics in Olsztyn and contains factographic information on Kortau estates from the second half of the 14th century to “the great troubles of today” (the author certainly has in mind the year 1943 when the work finishes). Because the information therein is cited later by most Polish post-war authors (usually without giving the source) I will summarize Funk’s data:

The estates of Kortau basically took up 4.5 *lan* (about 80 hectares) which the Warmian cathedral chapter gave to the town on May 4, 1378. In the 19th century the area was owned by Mayor Jakub Rarkowski (who ran the city from 1836-1865). In 1880 the province of East Prussia began the process of buying about 150 hectares of Kortau near Olsztyn in order to build a second provincial institution for the care and treatment of the mentally ill. When it was sold, Kortau belonged to Anton Fischer. After the purchase of the estate by the provincial authorities, construction of buildings and the layout of a park was begun. By 1886, buildings for patients and personnel along with maintenance buildings and stables were completed. A chapel was also built in which Evangelical and Catholic services alternated. The institution was opened on June 2, 1886. The first 200 patients were housed in the institution in October of 1886 and two hundred more were housed by November 1. Most of the patients were transferred from the institution in Allenberg. In the years 1888, 1889, 1897, 1900 and 1907 new buildings were erected mainly for the needs of officials and medical personnel. According to Funk, the institution practiced “rational agriculture” on the grounds which occupied the patients’ time in a restful manner. The town expanded to the west and south by, for example, the building of many private homes and also new barracks¹³ for two regiments of motorized cavalry. During the Great War¹⁴ as well as “the great troubles of today” the institution served partly as a field hospital.¹⁵ In 1940, after the opening of trolleybus lines, a separate line from the train station to Kortau was opened.¹⁶

In post-war editions Funk closed out his description of the town’s history before the end of WWII, not elaborating on the fate of the institutions in Kortau in January of 1945. An indirect account on that topic appeared only once in a brochure he authored in 1947¹⁷ (it was not, however, included in the monograph of Olsztyn published in 1955, 1979 and 1992). Funk left Olsztyn on January 20, 1945, one day before the

Stadt Allenstein von 1348 bis 1943 was published in 1955, 1979 and in 1992 in Germany. Cf. http://leksykonkultury.ceik.eu/index.php/Anton_Funk [accessed 2.08.2015].

¹³ The Cavalry barracks appeared in 1938/1939. Cited in: A. Funk, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Allenstein von 1348 bis 1943*, K. Maeder (ed.), Leer 1955, p. 132.

¹⁴ A term referring to WWI.

¹⁵ A. Funk, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Allenstein von 1348 bis 1943*..., p. 289.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

¹⁷ A. Funk, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Allenstein 1348-1948*, P. Kewitsch (ed.), Wewelsburg 1947. A 32-page brochure was published by the author in the conviction that the materials collected by him for a monograph on Allenstein [Polish: Olsztyn] had been lost. (“It seemed that the city did not send this chronicle to the Reich and therefore I prepared a short presentation of the history of the two together with a report on the loss of the city.” From the introduction, author’s translation).

arrival of the Russians, which is why, as he himself admits, his descriptions are not based on direct observation, but on the accounts of those who reached Germany a few months later¹⁸, including that of superintendent Rządtki.¹⁹ The mention of the happenings in Kortau comes against the background of the fate of other Olsztyn hospitals.

In various hospitals, that is in the Marien Hospital, the Hindenburg Hospital as well as in Kortau the conquerors behaved like animals. The nurses and support staff were either raped or killed. In Kortau the entire personnel and doctors were hanged in the attic and soldiers were killed.²⁰

In the documentation on the fate of exiled Germans²¹ printed in West Germany, although there is a description of the conditions in the city at both stations in a time of panic before the encroaching Red Army, there is no mention of the events in Kortau.²² Lev Kopelev, then a major in the ranks of the Red Army taking Olsztyn, writes in his memoirs on the complete shock of the inhabitants at the Cossacks of General Oslikovskii (Polish: Oślikowski), but he does not mention the fate of the district far from the centre.²³ Neither can this information be found in propaganda material of the Red Army²⁴ that is available in Western Europe or in confidential daily reports by the leadership of the Wehrmacht²⁵.

The primary Polish source for the pre-war and wartime history of Kortau is a non-fiction work published in 1993 in Olsztyn and written by Stanisław Piechocki entitled *Czyściec zwany Kortau. Nieznana historia* [The Purgatory called Kortau. The Untold Story]²⁶. Piechocki (1955-2005) was educated as a lawyer whose very successful avocation was the history of his home town, Olsztyn. Piechocki's main contribution was the description of the history of Kortowo, which was silenced during the

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 30-31.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 25. Author's translation.

²¹ *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. Bd. I/1: *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, bearb. von T. Schieder, Gross-Denkte/Wolfenbüttel 1955, p. 88ff.

²² This refers to a report written by a former resident of Allenstein / Olsztyn, Hildegard Aminde, written May 02, 1950.

²³ "In the evening we arrived in Olsztyn. The city fell into our hands almost without a fight. It was such a big shock for everyone that even after General Oslikovskii's cossacks took the station, trains continued to arrive according to schedule for an hour and a half to two hours from Königsburg, Johannisburg and Lötzen: military transports, freight trains and passenger trains full of refugees." L. Kopelev, *Aufbewahren für alle Zeit!*, mit einem Nachwort von H. Böll, München 1981, p. 112 [author's translation].

²⁴ *Frontnachrichten* 22.01.1945 – Information and propaganda leaflet from the Red Army for German soldiers. The 22.01.1945 edition relates the acquisition by the Red Army of the following cities in East Prussia: Allenstein [Olsztyn], Osterode [Ostróda], Deutsch Eylau [Hawa]. From the collection of the *Staatsbibliothek Berlin*.

²⁵ Cf. *Die geheimen Tagesberichte der deutschen Wehrmachtführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939-1945*, K. Mehner, Bd. 12: *I. Januar 1945 – 9. Mai 1945*, Osnabrück 1984.

²⁶ In 1999 the text was translated into German by B. Chłosta and H. Malewski as *Das Fegefeuer genannt Kortau*. The translation was awarded the Silver Needle of Merit by the *Landmannschaft Ostpreussen*. Compare *Das Ostpreußenblatt* 18.09.1999, p. 16.

communist period, as was the topic of the last days of the German city of Allenstein (now Olsztyn). In this work, the author focuses on two problems. The first is the criminal euthanasia carried out against disabled and mentally ill persons during WWII in numerous healthcare institutions of the Reich, including, probably, in Kortau (such as operation "T-4"). The second question concerns the massacre carried out by Red Army units, which entered the city on the night from January 21 to 22, 1945 and killed several hundred people staying in the buildings of the institution at the time. While the subject of forced euthanasia carried out during the Third Reich could be openly written about in the post-war communist People's Republic of Poland (PRL), as shown by the works of Ewa Korc and Antoni Sołoma²⁷, the topic of war crimes committed in 1945 by the "liberating" Red Army, for political reasons, was taboo and could be officially undertaken no earlier than 1989.

In Germany much has been written on the forced euthanasia during the time of the Third Reich mainly thanks to numerous local initiatives, often connected with the memorializing specific memory spaces²⁸ where the sick were killed. Works regarded as foundational are those by, among others, Götz Aly²⁹ and Ernst Klee³⁰. Numerous works devoted to the particular aspects of the euthanasia, for example the starving of patients³¹ or local centres in which "liquidations"³² were carried out. The topic of the institution in Kortau was only marginally examined against the broad background of research of the euthanasia and that above all within the context of psychiatric therapy in the area of the former East Prussia and occupied Poland.³³

The work that can, at present, be regarded as the most in-depth study on the question of the forced euthanasia in East Prussia is an article by Sascha Topp et al.³⁴,

²⁷ E. Korc, A. Sołoma, *Z badań nad hitlerowską eutanazją w Prusach Wschodnich* (Einige Bemerkungen zur Geschichte der NS-Euthanasie in Ostpreußen), *Studia nad Faszyzmem i Zbrodniami Hitlerowskimi*, XII, 1987, pp. 189-199.

²⁸ For example: S. Westermann, R. Kühl, T. Ohnhäuser (eds.), *NS-"Euthanasie" und Erinnerung. Vergangenheits-aufarbeitung – Gedenkformen – Betroffenenperspektiven*, Berlin 2011.

²⁹ G. Aly, *Aktion T 4: 1939-1945: Die "Euthanasie"-Zentrale in der Tiergartenstrasse 4*, Berlin 1987; idem, *Die Belasteten: »Euthanasie« 1939-1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main 2013.

³⁰ E. Klee, *»Euthanasie« im Dritten Reich. Die »Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens«*, Fischer S. Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1983; idem (ed.), *Dokumente zur "Euthanasie"*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2007; idem, *Auschwitz, die NS-Medizin und ihre Opfer*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1997 [Polish translation: *Auschwitz: medycyna III Rzeszy i jej ofiary*, trans. E. Kalinowska-Styczeń, Kraków 2012].

³¹ For example: H. Faulstich, *Hungersterben in der Psychiatrie 1914-1949. Mit einer Topographie der NS-Psychiatrie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1998.

³² For example: T. Matzek, *Das Mordschloss. Auf den Spuren von NS-Verbrechen im Schloss Hartheim*, Kremayr & Scheriau, Vienna 2002 [Polish translation: *Zamek śmierci Hartheim. Eutanazja w III Rzeszy*, trans. E. Borg, Warsaw 2004].

³³ Also in the Polish-German work: *Zagłada chorych psychicznie w Polsce 1939-1945 / Die Ermordung der Geisteskranken in Polen 1939-1945*, a collective work edited by Z. Jaroszewski, Warsaw 1993. Mention of the facility in Kortau-Allenstein was made only in the context of information on the transport of the mentally ill to Kocborowo/Conradstein, p. 60.

³⁴ S. Topp, P. Fuchs, G. Hohendorf, P. Richter, M. Rotzoll, *Die Provinz Ostpreußen und die nationalsozialistische "Euthanasie": SS-"Aktion Lange" und "Aktion T4" / The province of East*

based on an analysis of confidential patient documents found after the unification of Germany in the archives of the former Minister of the Interior of the German Democratic Republic – an inheritance of the documentation of the secret organisation “T-4”. Of the 30 thousand files, the authors analysed 1,061 patient files from East Prussia³⁵, studying the shared responsibility of doctors, provincial government and the organisers of the forced euthanasia “T-4” in killing patients.

When WWII broke out, there were about 6,100 patients of psychiatric institutions in East Prussia³⁶ concentrated in three institutions which were owned by the province (Allenburg bei Wehlau, Kortau bei Allenstein and Tapiau³⁷), two institutions owned by the Evangelical Internal Mission (Angerburg, Carlshof³⁸), and one Catholic institution (Wormditt³⁹). Besides these there were also smaller private institutions, clinics and care homes in the region from Königsberg to Prabuty. The oldest public institution (from 1852) was that of Allenburg (Wehlau), for patients from the northern part of East Prussia while the institution in Kortau was for patients from the southern part of the province.

As the authors of the article point out, patients from East Prussia underwent three phases of “elimination”. The first was in May and June of 1940 in mass executions, conducted “from the bottom up” on the initiative of the SS special command Lange (*Aktion Lange*, Operation Lange). The second was carried out in July and August of 1941 by the incorporation into the centrally organized “*Aktion T-4*”, coordinated in secret from Berlin by Hitler’s chancellery. The third took place in February of 1942 through the deportation of patients to distant “treatment” facilities (turned into places of extermination) during the second, so-called regional (decentralized) phase of the “euthanasia” programme after August of 1941 (after Hitler’s order ending the centralized *Aktion “T-4”*). During all three phases, victims included patients of the facility in Kortau.

For the first “bottom up” phase of the liquidation of patients carried out in 1940 in Operation Lange, the fate of the oldest facility in Allenberg (near Wehlau, now Znamensk) is typical. In 1936, the institution had 1,400 beds. After the deportation and mass execution of patients, in June of 1940 the provincial administration leased the entirety of the facility to the Reich for the annual sum of 200,000 marks in order to create barracks for 1,500 soldiers of the *Waffen-SS*.⁴⁰ The documents of the executed patients (821 files connected with Operation Lange were selected from the preserved

Prussia and “euthanasia” during National Socialism: the SS-“Aktion Lange” and “Aktion T4”, *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, Bd. 43, H. 1 (2008), pp. 20-55.

³⁵ *Bundesarchiv Berlin*, collection R 179.

³⁶ Data from the final report of the commission of Dr. Becker and Trieb 13.10.1942, *Bundesarchiv*. Similar data is given by the *Statistisches Handbuch* from 1938. Cited in: S. Topp, P. Fuchs, G. Hohendorf, P. Richter a. M. Rotzoll, *Die Provinz Ostpreußen...*, fn. 12, p. 24.

³⁷ Allenberg, Tapiau: places located in the current Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation.

³⁸ Angerburg: now Węgorzewo, Carlshof (Carlshöfer Anstalten): now Karolewo.

³⁹ Wormditt; now Orneta.

⁴⁰ Provinzialverband Ostpreußen, Königsberg 1941, p. 6. Cited in: S. Topp, P. Fuchs, G. Hohendorf, P. Richter, M. Rotzoll, *Die Provinz Ostpreußen...*, fn. 17, p. 25.

resources) do not give a clear picture of the situation due to the secrecy of the action and the concealment of its exact aim under euphemisms of the type “transferred to...”. Despite this, it turns out from the documents that patients were sent to the concentration camp Soldau [Polish: Działdowo]. There, the executioners from the SS special command Lange gassed them in chambers in trucks remodelled for this purpose.⁴¹ In May of 1940, a total of 207 patients were dispatched from Allenberg, 203 from Tapiau and 301 from Kortau. Such a large number of victims from provincial facilities points to the official cooperation of local government personnel with units from the *Waffen-SS*. What is more, the provincial administrative personnel boasted in official reports of the resulting savings:

In the area of institutional care of the ill there has been a decrease in expenses due to the fact that it was possible to transfer 1,200 patients outside the borders of the province. Thanks to this, in May of 1940, it was possible to eliminate the clinic in Allenberg and in February of 1941 the clinic in Carlshof, transferring the remaining patients to two East Prussian facilities in Kortau and Tapiau. [...] after the transfer of patients there was a reduction in social spending on the needy by the provincial authorities, by a substantial sum (378, 487.99 marks) in 1940.⁴²

The number of patients transported to the concentration camp in Soldau in May of 1940 and killed there by members of the special command Lange is estimated at 1,558. Among them there were also 250-300 patients transferred from facilities in occupied Poland. This number can be determined, for example, on the basis of correspondence between the leaders of the SS and provincial authorities (Wilhelm Koppe, Wilhelm Redieß, Erich Koch), in which the SS demands the payment of the “agreed upon” fee of 10 marks for each patient killed (a total of 15,580 marks) while the provincial authorities maintain that the compensation for the efforts of the SS men was to be the transfer of the emptied buildings of the Allenberg facility to the *Waffen-SS*.⁴³

Operation Lange was not an initiative carried out on the orders of the central “T-4” in Berlin. One of its effects was to cause a complicated legal and information crisis among the anxious population of East Prussia (through an increasing number of complaints from families, carers and family courts unsettled by the lack of information concerning the “transferred” patients). The result was that the documentation and further management of “euthanasia” was taken over by the central “T-4” authority, secretly supported by the Führer’s chancellery. The appropriate organizational unit (the so-called “XY” department) took over, among other duties, the production of false death certificates giving false reasons, dates and places of death for patients.

⁴¹ Cf. E. Klee, »*Euthanasie*« im Dritten Reich..., p. 170. The author states that the award for the liquidation of patients (referred to in SS correspondence as “evacuation”) was an amber box, a present from Gauleiter Koch and a vacation in the Netherlands.

⁴² Provinzialverband Ostpreußen, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴³ E. Klee, »*Euthanasie*« im Dritten Reich..., pp. 170-172.

This was intended to calm the families of patients and dismiss complaints from their legal guardians.

Within the framework of the “*Aktion T-4*”, psychiatric hospitals in Germany were included in the so-called registration action (*Meldebogenaktion*) on the basis of which the selection of patients and their deportation to several “treatment” facilities within the Reich was made. These had been turned into extermination facilities by gassing and poisoning patients (the main facility being the Sonnenstein/Prina facility in Saxony). The patients most in danger of losing their lives as a result of “transfer” were those evaluated as burdensome, with no chance for recovery, unfit for work and confined to the facility for over five years. Among the files studied, 77 forms were found for patients from Kortau in September and October of 1940 (on July 8, 1941, 78 patients were transferred from Kortau directly to the extermination facility in Sonnenstein). In addition, in order to cover their tracks, transport was organised to intermediary facilities (on July 8-9, 1941 a total of 272 patients were transported from Kortau to Großschweidnitz, 112 to Zschadraß, about 12 to Arnsdorf).

At this time Kortau became a collection point for transports from all East Prussia. A few weeks after the beginning of the war between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, on August 24, 1941 on Hitler’s orders the central “euthanasia” programme “T-4” was ended. Then the third, regional stage of the liquidation of patients took place. This was the difficult to prove process of killing patients in psychiatric facilities through malnutrition, overwork and either non-delivery or overdosing of medicines.

According to the current state of knowledge, in the years 1940-1942 over four thousand patients were “evacuated” from East Prussia to other facilities in the Reich, which is the equivalent of two thirds of the occupancy rate of facilities when war broke out.⁴⁴ The facility of primary interest here, in Kortau in 1936, had 1,400 patient beds as well as a developed base for family care. In 1942, there were only 520 places for the mentally ill and 1,350 places for wounded soldiers in the reserve field hospital. On the basis of the documentation preserved, and also the degree of destruction and falsification of same by the central Aktion “T-4”, it is not possible now to draw credible conclusions on whether the facility in Kortau was “only” a transfer station for patients destined for liquidation or if the medical personnel of Kortau actively took part in the “euthanasia” programme. The murder of the remaining personnel by soldiers of the Red Army during the night between January 21 and 22, 1945 made it impossible to ask the appropriate questions of the right people, leaving the question open to imagination, gossip, stories and silence. From here the next step will be the investigation of how this topic, neglected by historians and somehow, despite propaganda efforts, was never quite erased from the local collective memory and became the material of legend.

⁴⁴ S. Topp et al., *op. cit.*, p. 40.

KORTAU – A MODERN URBAN LEGEND?

The peripheral location of Kortau in relation to the centre of Allenstein played a role both in the scale of the drama that played out there during WWII and in the ways that the history of this place was related by the inhabitants of Olsztyn. To begin with what, it would seem, would be an obvious observation, the isolation of the mental hospital built on the edge of town was caused not just for technical reasons, but on the symbolic plane reflected the self-image of 19th century society as a collective of healthy individuals, which displaced the ill to the periphery, far from the centre, thus distancing itself from illness. Michael Foucault brought attention to the marginalization of the so-called insane stating that from the 18th century, European culture “was torn, a whole series of re-imaginings turned the madman from a marginal creature into one that was totally excluded. This transformation created a system based on police methods such as imprisonment and forced labour”.⁴⁵ Therefore in many cities, facilities for the mentally ill and hospitals are well outside the city centre. They are connected to the city but are located at its edges in a marginalized position vis a vis the centre.

The peripheral nature of the Kortau facility, and the related self-sufficiency of the district is clear, for example in tourist literature (city guides) which paint a desirable image of the city for arrivals from outside. Thus, Kortau is described in the pre-war guide by the Polish travel writer Mieczysław Orłowicz in the following manner⁴⁶: “it’s as if it were a separate town with its own water and power supply” while “the road to the city is a beautiful avenue”. Orłowicz’s opinion does not differ from German guides published in the same period in which Kortau is described as “an independent, small, nicely built town”⁴⁷. In point of fact in the first half of the 20th century Kortau was made up of 45 buildings creating an autonomous town with its own water supply, sewer system, refuse collection and power supply.⁴⁸ Its only connection to Allenstein was the gas and telephone network and from 1940 a trolleybus line. The spatial separation of Kortau from Allenstein might have been one of the reasons for which the (probable) Nazi programme of euthanasia was carried out as well as the (confirmed by exhumation) Soviet killing of wounded soldiers and civilians during the liberation of Allenstein/Olsztyn in January of 1945. Another effect of the isolation of the district

⁴⁵ M. Foucault, *Folie, littérature, société* in: *Dits et Écrits I*, Paris 2001 [Polish translation: *Szaleństwo, literatura, społeczeństwo*, trans. M. Kwietniewska, in: idem, *Powiedziane, napisane. Szaleństwo i literatura*, T. Komendant (ed.), Aletheia, Warsaw 1999, p. 242].

⁴⁶ M. Orłowicz, *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Mazurach Pruskich i Warmii*, Olsztyn 1991 [reprint of the first edition from 1923], p. 163.

⁴⁷ “Eine eigene kleine hübsch gebaute Stadt” – after *Neuer Führer durch Allenstein*, 1914. Cited in: K. Preiwuß, *Ortsnamen in Zeit, Raum und Kultur. Die Städte Allenstein/Olsztyn und Breslau/Wrocław*, Berlin 2012, p. 228.

⁴⁸ S. Achremczyk, *Kortowo – od folwarku do uniwersyteckiego miasteczka*, [in:] *Olsztyn uniwersytecki. Historia – wspomnienia – refleksje*, A. Faruga (ed.), Olsztyn 2013, pp. 45-46. This same text was printed again a year later [sic!] in the volume: *Mikrohistoria Kortowa. Konteksty – refleksje – narracje*, J. M. Garbula (ed.), Olsztyn 2014, pp. 59-75.

might be the non-appearance of these tragedies in the stories of German exiles. In turn, among the new, incoming Polish population the truth about Kortau, for political and nationalistic reasons had to be kept silent. The topic of Soviet war crimes was all second hand while the German nationality of the victims might result in indifference among the Polish inhabitants of Olsztyn. And so historical facts became the stuff of stories, gossip and urban legends about Kortau.

The person who after the fall of communism was to unmask the propaganda legends was the aforementioned Stanisław Piechocki. His book⁴⁹ has been called “a classic in terms of knowledge of our city, put straight after years of obligatory dogmatic propaganda during the communist period”⁵⁰. Since then, despite the important role that the work played in describing the history of that district for the collective memory of the inhabitants of Olsztyn, it is today practically useless as a source of information. The author does not cite sources or present a bibliography and uses periphrases of the type “in one German hospital archive in Saxony”⁵¹, he does not give precise information on his informants (“the daughter of one of the doctors in the Kortau facility”⁵²) nor does he give information on the interviews conducted. In his fervour to unmask the “crime of euthanasia” that reportedly took place in Kortau he misrepresents the contents of source documents, an example of which may be the following passage:

It is only in the book by Ernst Klee published in Frankfurt am Main and entitled *Euthanasia in the Nazi state* (Euthanasie im NS-Staat) that we can find any documented information concerning the killing of the patients in Kortau by Nazis during WWII. In this book there are also reminiscences of a medical inspector investigating psychiatric facilities in East Prussia during the war. He was in Kortau on June 30, 1944 [...]. He had the distinct impression that the psychiatrists working there were committing euthanasia.⁵³

It is difficult to say what Piechocki draws such far-reaching conclusions from because it certainly could not have been from the letter by Curd Runckel to his superior Prof. Paul Hermann Nitsche of June 30, 1944⁵⁴. This letter is so unusual in its sincerity and desire for conducting “therapy” in psychiatric facilities (which is how the killer behind the desk refers to electro-shock therapy and euthanasia), that a longer excerpt is worth citing:

⁴⁹ S. Piechocki, *Czyściec zwany Kortau. Nieznana historia*, 2nd edition, Olsztyn 2014.

⁵⁰ W. Kowalewski, “Olsztyn – portret miasta”. *W 10. rocznicę śmierci Stanisława Piechowskiego*. Radiowy felieton literacki, published 9.04.2015. Source: <http://ro.com.pl/olsztyn-portret-miasta-w-10-rocznice-smierci-stanislaw-piechowskiego/01200102> [accessed: 2.09.2015].

⁵¹ S. Piechocki, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁴ The letter is part of the so-called “*Heidelberger Dokumente*” from the legacy of P. H. Nitsche, Bl. 127926 and following, Archiv US-Army Headquarters, War Crimes-Branch (now in the procedural files of the Prosecutor General in Frankfurt am Main). Abbreviated version printed in: E. Klee, »*Euthanasie im Dritten Reich. Die »Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens«*«, Frankfurt am Main 2010, p. 710, fn. 404. Reprinted in its entirety in: H. Faulstich, *Hungersterben in der Psychiatrie 1914-1949. Mit einer Topographie der NS-Psychiatrie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1998, pp. 651-652.

I think that the attitude of many clinic directors to treatment and to the problems brought up by the Reich Commission⁵⁵ is regrettable. And so, for example, in the facility in Haina I saw two children, who apart from suffering from a severe physical problem were also complete morons, and yet they were being fed despite the difficult local and personnel conditions, similar to the way that in many very different facilities I experience that all efforts possible are being made to preserve the lives of those submerged in the fog of the chronically mentally ill. This is an attitude that is very difficult to understand in times of war! Everywhere, in every clinic I ask medical directors about therapy and the question of euthanasia and until now, apart from facilities that we work with, I have not found any desire to actively take steps in this direction, neither in Haina nor in Merxhausen or Marburg as far as Hesse is concerned. In East Prussia – in Tapiau and Kortau – they respond in the same way to the question of euthanasia, if not disapprovingly then absolutely passively. [...] It's enough to mention the topic and people fall silent. It goes so far that I notice a clear change of mood when people begin to suspect they are somehow connected to the State Labour Community⁵⁶, which is known everywhere here due to the transfer of patients. [...] From the directors of these facilities that I have so far visited, the only ones who react positively to the question of euthanasia are the directors of the facilities in Ansbach, in Tiegenhof⁵⁷ (Dr. Ratka⁵⁸) and those facilities which already have Reich Commission offices.⁵⁹

This private letter of one of the organisers of the killing, whose task was to encourage doctors to use “euthanasia” (this after the mass executions and deportation of patients in the years 1939-1942) paints a very different picture than the one painted by Piechocki. In the most recent German research Piechocki's book is cited only with warnings precisely due to its unreliable treatment of source materials, and the way it conceals or distorts them.⁶⁰ For these same reasons it is hard to assess the historiographic value of the facts and stories related by Piechocki concerning the second act of the tragedy that took place in Kortau, that is the attack by a unit of the Red Army on the night from January 21 to the 22, 1945 which killed the people there. It is certain that this is a pioneering work in terms of both Polish and German historiography (omitting the contribution by Funk described earlier). The decision by the publisher to make it a general market book is to be regretted since serious researchers exploring the subject must approach Piechocki's work cautiously and return to primary sources. Therefore for the purposes of the present analysis it is necessary to regard the book *Purgatory named Kortau* as a fictionalized narrative – a type of urban horror story

⁵⁵ Reichsausschuß zur wissenschaftlichen Erfassung von erb- und anlagebedingten schweren Leiden [Reich Committee for Research on Hereditary and Constitutional Susceptibility to Severe Diseases].

⁵⁶ RAG – Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft Heil- und Pflege Anstalten [Reich Association of Healthcare Institutions]. Cf. A. J. Katolo, *Eugenika i eutanazja. Doświadczenia hitlerowskie*, Warsaw 2012, p. 76.

⁵⁷ The “Dziekanka” Hospital in Gniezno.

⁵⁸ Wiktor Ratka (1895-1966), psychiatrist, from 1928. Medical director in the hospital in Lubliniec, from 1934 director of the psychiatric hospital “Dziekanka” in Gniezno. After the German invasion of Poland he collaborated with the occupying forces.

⁵⁹ Author's translation after the edition: H. Faulstich, *Hungersterben in der Psychiatrie 1914-1949. Mit einer Topographie der NS-Psychiatrie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1998, pp. 651-652.

⁶⁰ Cf. S. Topp et al., *Die Provinz Ostpreußen und die nationalsozialistische “Euthanasie”*..., p. 35, fn. 43: “The data given by Piechocki are not sourced”.

styled as an academic work. In the next part of this article I will follow this lead in tracing the origin of urban legends.

A feature of urban legends is action located in the near past. It is a “true” or at least highly probable story, which is confirmed by the teller who cites stories told by friends or relatives. The story is transmitted from mouth to mouth and modified by new hearers who become tellers. Its power comes from the strong emotional content which results from a feeling of horror and the macabre and also from a strong morality – urban legends “warn against the terrible results of actions that go against the rules operating in a given community, and confirm the fears of ever present lurking evil”⁶¹. Most of the features of urban legends can be found in Piechocki’s work, whose foundation was to be truth, unmasking communist propaganda from the PRL.

During the time of the PRL there was an attempt from above to spread a propagandized version of the events in Kortau, which could not be hidden from the local residents of Olsztyn due to the discovery in the 1950s of mass, anonymous graves. According to the propaganda version, the several hundred unearthed bodies were the remains of patients shot in 1945 by *Wehrmacht* units retreating from the city.⁶² In turn, the medical personnel from the Kortau facility whose hung remains were found in the so-called hangman’s house by Warszawska Street 107, supposedly met with “just punishment for the crime of euthanasia”⁶³, carried out by soldiers of the liberating Red Army. This was the beginning of a propaganda narrative by the government which in the 1990s was debunked by Piechocki’s publications. Although popular, if stylized in an academic fashion, the lack of further research on the facility in Kortau based on reputable sources by the Olsztyn academic community led to the appearance of more urban legends, repeated in popular publications. An example in the “spacerownik” from 2011, a city guide intended primarily for students of UWM, the following information can be found on the no longer existent cemetery in Kortowo:

During WWII, mostly in 1941, about 7,000 thousand [sic!] inmates of the facility were executed. The methods were scopolamine or chlorine injection and another 500 were shot in the neighbouring forests. The exhumation and forensic analysis of the remains made it possible to precisely determine the time and cause of death.⁶⁴

This citation, taken by the author of the chapter in the guide from Piechocki’s book, is quite erroneous since the original text does in fact mention such happenings – taking place at a “facility similar to the one in Kortau”⁶⁵, that is in Obrawalde/Meseritz [Obrzyce/Międzyrzecz] in Wielkopolska.

⁶¹ Web page: <http://atrapa.nt/legendy> [accessed 4.08.2015].

⁶² S. Piechocki, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

⁶⁴ E. Białowicz, *Zarys historii Kortowa do 1945 roku*, in: *Spacerkiem po Kortowie – dzielnicy uniwersyteckiej Olsztyna*, ed. by A. Faruga, Olsztyn 2011, p. 10.

⁶⁵ S. Piechocki, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

The dissemination of urban legends in a technically attractive, modern form serves not only popular guide books but above all new media. An example of this might be the short horror film “Kortau ’44”⁶⁶, made in 2014 by a student group in a found footage mockumentary style. It features a story of the exploration of underground corridors, and members of an excursion who perish one by one, colour “prepints” from the past and scenes of euthanasia in Kortau. An important role in this student film is played by Piechocki’s book, which in a “magic” way falls from a shelf and becomes a source of “truth” told by a “knowledgeable” person to previously unaware listeners. Learning the “truth” motivates the students to journey into the dark underground of one of the campus buildings, and simultaneously – to the dark past of Kortau. As the film expert Magdalena Kamińska writes:

During the filmmaking, the students experience an increasing wave of attacks from demonic forces. The use of a POV camera in narrating the events helps to build dramatic tension by the illegibility of the picture and sound as well as limiting the size of the frame. In fact, viewers are not sure what exactly they perceive and rely primarily on the reactions of the heroes suggesting panicky fear which increases their own terror. The next to the final shot of the film (the picture from a camera falling to the ground; the camera operator apparently has been killed) is a copy of the final shot of *The Blair Witch Project*.⁶⁷

It was not only the students of UWM who treated the story of Kortau as material appropriate to the creation of a film plot.⁶⁸ In this way local memory of the traumatic events is made to fit into the patterns and structures disseminated in mass culture thanks to the horror genre.

THE CAMPUS IN KORTOWO – REMEMBRANCE AND SILENCE IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

An analysis of the available historical sources shows in what way the topic of possible and real war crimes committed in Kortau during WWII became fodder for gossip and urban legends, disseminated also thanks to the technical possibilities offered by new media. The next phase of analysis will be the presentation of memorial material from the Olsztyn landscape after the diametric change in the functioning of Kortau/Kortowo in the years 1945 to 1950 from the location of a psychiatric hospital to a complex of higher learning. Memorials and plaques as material carriers of collective memory point to node points essential for the construction of a given local community’s own image of its identity. The question has been posed whether the pre-war past of Kortau is reflected in memorial material and if not, then that raises the question of how it is possible to justify silencing it in the modern cultural landscape of the city.

⁶⁶ Available on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZPOZjryP1k> [accessed 6.11.2015].

⁶⁷ From correspondence with Magdalena Kamińska (Adam Mickiewicz University) 8.08.2015.

⁶⁸ Cf. <http://www.uwm.edu.pl/egu/news/8/czytaj/117/walijczyk-kreci-film-w-kortowie.html> [accessed 5.05.2015].

Thanks to numerous anniversary works, the post-war history of Kortowo as an academic district of Polish Olsztyn is widely documented.⁶⁹ Due to a decision by the Council of Ministers in 1950, the Academies of Rural Economy in Cieszyn and Łódź were moved to Olsztyn and the Academy of Agriculture and Technology was founded there.⁷⁰ Within two months in the summer of 1950, almost a thousand people were resettled from Silesian Cieszyn to the former Kortau, now Kortowo.⁷¹ The arrivals were confronted with the reality of a burned out and abandoned area of town. Of the previous 45 buildings, only 27 remained and 23 of these were in need of refurbishment.⁷² The cleanup work was carried out both by employees and students. Rudolf Juranek from Cieszyn wrote: “Classes took place until noon with lectures and exercises, then in the afternoon there was work in tearing down old burned out buildings.”⁷³ The student Helena Cieñciałówna from Bystrzyca in Zaolzie remembered: “Every moment away from classes was designated by us, the students, as ‘social actions’. Our task was to put the area of Kortowo in order, tearing down burned out buildings, constructing dormitories [...]”⁷⁴

During the cleanup work and in the search for a location to build a complex, the remains of those buried in a non-denominational cemetery that had been active since the beginning of the facility in Kortau were discovered and exhumed. By the end of 1953, a total of 3,625 exhumations had been carried out⁷⁵, probably not completely since in memoirs of the residents of Olsztyn there are stories of children ‘playing’ in the Kortau cemetery: “[...] as children we played with German shinbones and tombstones that had fallen in the Kortowo park. And this wasn’t just right after the war but not long ago at all.”⁷⁶ Apart from older skeletal remains of burials, another discovery, outside the area of the cemetery, were anonymous mass graves with well preserved remains.⁷⁷ The bodies, most often in uniform, showed traces of violent deaths through hanging or stabbing.⁷⁸ The largest exhumation was performed in June, 1955 after the dissemination in Olsztyn of the account by the local man Jędrzej Józef (Joseph) from

⁶⁹ Cf. *Olsztyn uniwersytecki. Historia – wspomnienia – refleksje*, edited by A. Faruga, Olsztyn 2013.

⁷⁰ Decree of the Council of Ministers from May 31, 1950 r., signed by J. Cyrankiewicz.

⁷¹ Those resettled from Cieszyn included 27 professors and their deputies, 11 lecturers, 67 assistants and about 600 students. Classes in the new location began in October of 1950 with 1,200 students. Cf. G. Michna, A. Faruga, *Od Cieszyna do Olsztyna. Z przeszłości rolnictwa Ziemi Cieszyńskiej i Wyższego Szkolnictwa Rolniczego Warmii i Mazur (XIX i XX wiek)*, Olsztyn 2006.

⁷² S. Achremczyk, *Kortowo – od folwarku do uniwersyteckiego miasteczka...*, p. 48.

⁷³ R. Juranek, *Wspomnienia*. Special Collection Section, W. Kętrzyński Scientific Research Center in Olsztyn [ref. no. R-808/I].

⁷⁴ *Przez zieloną granicę do Kortowa. Wspomnienia dr Heleny Cieñciała-Nowak WSGW Cieszyn – WSR Olsztyn 1949-1953*, prepared for publication by Z. Jurczyk, Olsztyn 2010 [self-published, 50 copies].

⁷⁵ S. Achremczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁷⁶ R. Bętkowski, *Olsztyn, jakiego nie znacie*, Olsztyn 2010.

⁷⁷ J. Chłosta, *Trzy osobliwe tajemnice dawnego Kortowa*, in: *Mikrohistoria Kortowa. Konteksty – refleksje – narracje*, J. M. Garbula (ed.), Olsztyn 2014, p. 86.

⁷⁸ S. Piechocki, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-12.

Nowa Kaletka⁷⁹, who was said to have heard from one surviving witness of the story of the murders committed in Kortau by soldiers of the Red Army. In the place pointed out, where the current cafeteria is located, the remains of 227 men, women and children were dug up.⁸⁰ A general estimate of the number of those killed in Kortau in January of 1945 is about 400.

The non-denominational cemetery of the Kortau facility had to wait for its memorial in material form, a modest lapidarium with a cast iron cross in the centre that was not installed until 1997 on the initiative of the Kortowo chapter of Solidarity. The lapidarium is located near the current headquarters of the Inland Fisheries Institute, built in the post-war period on the old cemetery grounds whose characteristic arrangement of alleys has been preserved till modern times. As shown in the introduction, this memorial does not fill an informational function about the past of the Kortau facility, but rather serves religious commemorative purposes based on universal principles of respect towards a former place of burial. This modest memorial of Kortau's past as a German psychiatric facility is in stark contrast to a plethora of memorials in the form of plaques and stones stressing the post-war role of Kortowo as a campus. Apart from street names (which also comprise a form of material memory of the past) and the numerous decorative sculptures (for example, memorials to students, fishermen, goldfish or cormorants) in Kortowo the following monuments can be found: the memorial (a boulder with a plaque) to Professor M. Oczapowski as a pioneer in the agricultural sciences in Poland; a commemorative plaque devoted to those from Cieszyn as "The Creators of the Kortowo University"; a boulder in honour of Professor D. Wanic, one of the founders of the university in Kortowo; a boulder with the plaque "50 years of the Faculty of Animal Bioengineering"; a boulder commemorating the planting of a tree on the 50th anniversary of the Polish Association for Hydrobiology in Olsztyn and a boulder with a plaque commemorating the naming of the university stadium after Professor K. Sikorski. In 2009 the UWM Alumni Promenade was opened (which is also commemorated with a boulder and plaque).

From the Alumni Promenade stretches the so named Faculty Avenue, in which over 10 different memorial boulders have been placed in honour of additional faculties of UWM. Also in 2009, the earlier mentioned Victims of Katyń Avenue was opened, made up of a boulder with a plaque and 26 oaks planted for the occasion and naming victims of the Katyń massacre.

To sum up, at present in the area of Kortowo it is possible to distinguish three types of memorial depending on the semantics of 'place': 1) strictly local of a sepulchral nature invoking Christian values and the local past in a general way (the lapidarium); 2) strictly local of a commemorative nature, recalling the post-war history of the place and giving information about particular people, institutions and local events connected with Kortowo or, more generally, the tradition of agricultural science in Poland (several dozen boulders with plaques, the promenade and the avenue; 3) of

⁷⁹ Personal survey reprinted in: S. Piechocki, *op. cit.*, p. 125 (source: Archiwum ART., Olsztyn).

⁸⁰ S. Piechocki, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

a supralocal, national nature – an act of uniting with modern politics of memory at the state level, but through the choice of concrete names of chosen victims, which creates a symbolic tie between the new community of settlers in the so-called Regained Lands and the massacre in Katyń, a traumatic event for the Polish Second Republic (the avenue with oak trees and a boulder).⁸¹

Apart from official memorial spaces in the area of Kortowo, there are also places that function in private and family communicative memory⁸², connected with the events of 1945. Such a (non)place, referred to in urban legends as “the hangman’s house”, is a villa by the old Hohensteinerstraße (today Warszawska Street 107), in which the director of the facility lived along with the families of Doctors Arthur Powels and Johannes Berg. The hanged bodies of women and men were found in the attic of the house and buried in the yard. The new residents took care of the graves until they were exhumed and transferred to an unknown place in the 1960’s. In the 1980’s the daughter of the late doctor contacted the new resident of her former home (who arrived from Silesian Cieszyn) and the contact lasted until the death of both women. Thanks to this communication the memory survived in the family circle.⁸³

The question arises whether there is another way that the dead, the patients and personnel of the former psychiatric hospital in Kortau are remembered. The answer is ambiguous given the lack of documentation (regarding the exhumation and transfer of remains) from the 1950s and 1960s. Probably most remains transported from Kortowo are at present in mass graves between Baczewskiego Street and Sybiraków Avenue in the Jakubowo (Zatorze) district of Olsztyn. In the 1960s a monument was placed there “To the victims of Hitler’s terrorism” in memory of “4,670 victims of fascist terror, murdered, shot in camps, in hospitals in Olsztyn, Stare Jabłonki, Iława and Królikowo”. The plaque features a quote by Minister J. Wiczepek.⁸⁴ The monument, which is silent on the participation of the Red Army in murdering civilians, was unveiled at the end of the 1960’s, during the time of “legalized memory” (to quote Robert Traba)⁸⁵, characterized by the strengthening of the myth of Polish and Soviet brothers in arms as well as – in the Regained Lands – strengthening the idea of connection of Poland with the new territories through stressing the martyrdom of Polish people. In this same spirit, in the late 1960s and early 1970s two other monuments were erected: a memorial to “To the heroes of the struggle for National and Social

⁸¹ Cf. considerations on the dissemination of the form of Katyń monuments, characterised in the style of *land art*: A. Gębczyńska-Janowicz, *Przestrzenne nośniki polskiej pamięci zbiorowej po 1989 roku*, in: *Krajobraz kulturowy wolnej Polski. Zbiór studiów*, D. Czarnecka, J. Książek (eds.), Toruń 2013, pp. 63-82.

⁸² In the terminology of Jan and Aleida Assmann [*kommunikatives Gedächtnis*].

⁸³ Interview with Zofia Jurczyk, daughter of Helena Cieñciała-Nowak on 27.08.2015.

⁸⁴ Cf. Z. Dudzińska, *Walka, męczeństwo, cmentarze: przewodnik po miejscach pamięci narodowej Warmii i Mazur*, Olsztyn 1973. Also: E. Gładkowska, *Kortowo – szpital i pomnik*, source: <http://www.miejscapamieci.org/mapa-polski/mpc/Memorial/mpa/show/mp-place/kortowo-szpital-i-pomnik/> [accessed 2.09.2015].

⁸⁵ R. Traba, *Symbole pamięci: II wojna światowa w świadomości zbiorowej Polaków. Szkic do tematu*, Przegląd Zachodni, 2000, no 1, pp. 53-67.

Liberation of Warmia and Masuria” and also a monument honouring the soldiers of the Red Army taking part in the January 1945 attack on East Prussian Allenstein: General Nikolai Oslikovskii and “the heroic private” Pyotr Dernov. The latter, a 19 year old, was a hero of the government’s propaganda narrative of a self-sacrificing soldier, who throwing himself on a machine gun nest stopped the German gunfire and enabled the Red Army to enter Allenstein. Paradoxically, this last monument still exists, hidden in the forests on the Wadąg river in the village of Kieźliny near Olsztyn. The monument to Dernov’s commander, located in a central place in the city in front of the train station, did not survive the changes of the 1990s and found itself in the private collection of its creator.⁸⁶ The memory of Dernov’s legendary feats also underwent the PRL tendency to “touristify”⁸⁷ memory. The name of the Pyotr Dernov yellow tourist trail was not changed until 2015. It can be assumed that the creation of narrative propaganda about the famous Red Army soldier could have been an official answer of the communist government to the private silencing of local memory concerning events connected with the liberation of Olsztyn by the Red Army.

KORTAU – AN UNCOMFORTABLE HERITAGE?

The analysis of the events and imaginings concerning Kortau leads to the idea of an “uncomfortable heritage” (or dissonant heritage) that made up and still makes up the past of Kortau. I assume that in the PRL period, a dissonant element, which could not be officially remembered, was the act of killing the residents of the Kortau facility by a Red Army unit. An effort was therefore made to replace it by accenting Nazi terror, which certainly included the euthanasia programme, which could also be assumed to have taken place in Kortau. However, perhaps due to the lack of certain sources, this does not apply directly to either the Lange or T-4 operations, to which patients from Kortau fell victim. After the change of political system, a general remembrance of “all those buried” was able to take place – again without any concrete description of the events that led to some of their deaths. I imagine that the very generality of the newer remembrance results from another dissonant heritage with the image of modern Kortowo propagated by the university administration. Available publicity material shows UWM as a “magical place”, a modern university campus located amidst a living natural environment in which the instrumental values are youth (of students), science and future professional success. The narrative of a tragic past is not part of the official narrative but becomes a local urban legend all the faster for this. In turn, the atypical – in comparison with other universities in Poland – abundance of memorials connected to the founders of the university, researchers associated with agriculture,

⁸⁶ The bust of General Oslikovskii travelled from the pedestal to the ground. It currently stands in the courtyard of the Castle in Reszel (without a pedestal) among other sculptures by Bolesław Marszał, the longtime director of the art gallery in the castle. It functions as one of many decorative pieces that no longer fill any official propaganda role.

⁸⁷ R. Traba, *Symbole pamięci...*, p. 61.

and even particular faculties of UWM is fundamentally congruent not only with the marketing image of the Olsztyn university but also with the specific, and typical for Silesian Cieszyn (where most of the founders came from) work and research ethic.⁸⁸ The memorials to those from Cieszyn in Kortowo are reflected in the area of modern Cieszyn – a memorial plaque on the school building on Kraszewskiego Street there shows the “point of departure” for the resettled researchers while a plaque on Cieszyn Square in Kortowo shows the end point of their journey.

In this context, the question should be asked why the memorial to the Katyń massacre appeared to the university administration to be congruent with the cultural landscape of the university district. One clarification is “strengthening themselves as part of the national community” by a society of settlers. This was the interpretation mentioned by Marcin Kula in the introduction. In this context, it is more important for the local community – more important than strictly local history – would be joining in the political rituals of memory of the nation, which a given community belongs to. Local history (foreign to national history because it is connected to the former German residents of the city) – despite its spatial proximity is not regarded as its own, although as witnessed by the words of the Rector of UWM regarding Warmians quoted earlier – may be at some time regarded as such due to the supposed ethnic proximity of Poles and Warmians. This way, the memory and (non)memory space reflects the anthropological imagination on the belongingness and foreignness of a given group.

At the psychological level erecting Katyń-related monuments in cities such as Olsztyn can be regarded as an example of “chosen trauma”. The creator of the term, Vamik D. Volkan, writes “the term chosen trauma refers to the shared image of an event that causes a large group (i.e., ethnic group) to feel helpless, victimized and humiliated by another group”⁸⁹. A group selects certain traumatic events and experiences from the past, assigning selected events psychological meaning and mythologizing them as universal experiences for the entire group and transmitting them from generation to generation as important and meaningful.

The example analysed in this article of Kortau/Kortowo shows that in the cultural memory of the residents of Olsztyn events that are related to the martyrological Polish past are stressed while events connected to the German city of Allenstein undergo generalisation or are rendered taboo topics. Since, despite being marginalized, it is still part of the communicative memory and the specific local knowledge of the city’s residents, it becomes material for urban legends.

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⁸⁸ On this topic, G. Kubica, *Śląskość i protestantyzm. Antropologiczne studia o Śląsku Cieszyńskim, proza, fotografia*, Kraków 2011 is recommended.

⁸⁹ V.D. Volkan, *Bosnia-Herzegovina: Chosen trauma and its transgenerational transmission*. Source: <http://www.vamikvolkan.com/Bosnia-Herzegovina%3A-Chosen-Trauma-and-Its-Transgenerational-Transmission.php> [accessed 6.11.2015].

ABSTRACT

The topic of this article is the landscape of memory space and non-memory space in Kortowo, an academic district in the city of Olsztyn. Now the location of the campus of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (UWM), it was founded in 1880 as the location of the Kortau psychiatric hospital in the German province of East Prussia. During WWII patients destined for execution were transferred from the Kortau facility in the "Aktion Lange" (Operation Lange) and in the euthanasia programme "T-4". In 1945, the area was burned as a result of a Red Army attack. In 1950, the Academy of Agriculture and Technology was located there and from 1999 the university. The article brings up problems of contemporary narration connected with Kortowo as a) fictionalized history; b) urban legends and c) the current formation of memory and non-memory spaces in the cultural landscape of the city. The relationship between local (non)memory and national memory in the commemorative practices of the modern inhabitants of the so-called Regained Lands (Ziemie Odzyskane) remains open.