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## FORMER POLISH FORCED WORKERS IN TODAY'S MEMORY LANDSCAPE: ALMOST FORGOTTEN

Poland's political and social transformations of 1989–1990 enabled the creation of a public communication space in which open discussion was finally possible. There were numerous civic initiatives to popularise historical knowledge, and supra-regional associations were formed with the aim of researching, documenting and commemorating the past.<sup>1</sup> Without doubt we are experiencing a boom not only in the field of memory, but also in monuments. At both national and local level, many points of reference to the past have been created. Public memory – comprising “various forms of commemoration of the past in the public sphere, such as place and street names, monuments, plaques, and personal names appearing in the names of streets, public organisations and institutions”<sup>2</sup> – has become a common good of different social groups. Particular events and historical experiences have not only found a response here, but by their presence have also contributed to creating the memory landscape. Surveying this landscape for references to the Second World War, one may notice clear asymmetries, and indeed significant deficiencies. Although there are many commemorations of experienced acts of violence and of acts of bravery and heroism, there are relatively few monuments and plaques referring to everyday life under German occupation. In particular, it can be quickly realised that there exist very few memorials dedicated to forced labour. Considering the extent and reach of the terror that Poles experienced while doing forced work, today's memory about the subject is insufficient. Most of the initiatives commemorating forced workers as victims of the German occupation in Poland occurred only in the last few years, about 70 years after the war ended. Many former forced labourers did not live to witness this late act of acknowledgement of their fate.

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<sup>1</sup> The entities mentioned here and their actions are the subject of research in “applied history” or, in a wider context, “public history”. For more on these concepts see R. Traba, *Historia stosowana jako subdyscyplina akademicka. Konteksty i propozycje*, in: E. Domańska, R. Stobiecki, T. Wiślicz (eds.), *Historia – dziś. Teoretyczne problemy wiedzy o przeszłości*, Kraków 2014.

<sup>2</sup> P. T. Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji*, Warsaw 2008, p. 315.

For almost two decades the central category of accounts of World War II events in Western historiographies has been the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Polish historians focus their attention mostly on the Soviet occupation of their country, which was a taboo topic in communist times due to the imposed friendship with the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> Currently there are relatively few works about the German occupation, which means that many of its aspects are overlooked.<sup>5</sup> The German occupation, and the system of direct and indirect terror mechanisms functioning thereunder, caused the deconstruction of social structures and determined the life experiences of individuals. One of these experiences was forced labour, which has hitherto not been a subject of significant interest in Polish historiography, particularly in the field of social history.

In the Polish historiography of the communist period there were numerous historical studies on forced labour – examples include works by Władysław Rusiński,<sup>6</sup> Czesław Madajczyk<sup>7</sup> and Czesław Łuczak.<sup>8</sup> These were chiefly analyses of the mechanisms of recruitment of Poles, based on German documents found in Polish archives. Several memoirs were also published,<sup>9</sup> and the subject was taken up in scholarly journals.<sup>10</sup> After the political watershed of 1989–1990, interest in researching the German occupation, including the topic of forced labour, took a downturn, and few relevant publications appeared. Predominant now are publications of autobiographical memoirs<sup>11</sup> rather than empirical studies of event history, based on thorough examination of sources. There is a shortage of works on such topics as the living conditions of people moved to the Reich by force, their everyday life, survival mechanisms and experience horizons. There are also few studies concerning the fates of particular ethnic or national groups. A pioneering work, helping to fill both of these gaps, is a book written

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. P. Longerich, *Wannseekonferenz: Der Weg zur "Endlösung"*, Munich 2016; D. Cesarani, *Final Solution. The Fate of the Jews 1933–49*, London 2016; T. Snyder, *Black Earth. The Holocaust as History and Warning*, London 2015; P. Weindling, *Victims and Survivors of Nazi Human Experiments. Science and Suffering in the Holocaust*, London 2015.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. P. Chmielowiec (ed.), *Okupacja sowiecka ziem polskich 1939–1941*, Rzeszów–Warsaw 2005; S. Ciesielski, G. Hryciuk, A. Srebrakowski (eds.), *Masowe deportacje ludności w Związku Radzieckim*, Toruń 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Traba, *O potrzebie nowych badań nad niemiecką okupacją Polski w czasie II wojny światowej*, in: idem, K. Woniak, A. Wolff-Powęska (eds.), „Fikcyjna rzeczywistość”. *Codziennosc, swiaty przezywane i pamiec niemieckiej okupacji w Polsce*, Warsaw–Berlin 2016, pp. 17–54.

<sup>6</sup> W. Rusiński, *Polozenie robotnikow polskich w czasie wojny 1939–1945 na terenie Rzeszy i „Obszarow wcielonych”*, Poznań 1949 (part I) and Poznań 1955 (part II).

<sup>7</sup> C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, vol. I, Warsaw 1970.

<sup>8</sup> C. Łuczak, *Polscy robotnicy przymusowi w Trzeciej Rzeszy podczas II wojny swiatowej*, Poznań 1974.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Z. Bigorajska, W. Pietruczuk-Kurkiewiczowa (eds.), *Gdy byliśmy literą P. Wspomnienia wywiezionych na przymusowe roboty do III Rzeszy*, Warsaw 1968.

<sup>10</sup> S. Badowska, B. Koziełło-Poklewski, *Praca przymusowa w Prusach Wschodnich w latach II wojny swiatowej (w swietle wspomnień)*, *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie* 1/1974 (123), pp. 37–84.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. *Berlin. Wspomnienia Polakow z robót przymusowych w stolicy III Rzeszy w latach 1939–1945*, Warsaw 2012; J. Bartosz, *Zapomniani ludzie ze znakiem P. Polscy robotnicy przymusowi na Dolnym Slasku w latach 1939–1945*, Warsaw 2014.

in German by Valentina Maria Stefanski, *Zwangsarbeit in Leverkusen. Polnische Jugendliche im I.G. Farbenwerk*.<sup>12</sup> Another important publication on the most important aspects of forced labour is the documentation, dated 2007, for the exhibition "Preserve the Memory" prepared by the Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of this topic can be illustrated quantitatively. During World War II the Germans used 20 million forced workers. In the Reich itself almost 13 million foreigners were put to work. The estimated number of Poles transported to the Reich for work is 2.8 million.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately we are not able to give even an approximate number of Poles employed forcibly by the occupying power in Poland. This concerns not only people taken into the so-called construction service (*Baudienst*), in which forced labour was the norm. The work of millions of Poles at plants that had been taken over by Germans should also be categorised as forced labour. Similar was the situation of farmers, who were forced to give up agricultural quotas. Certainly these groups did not experience deportation to work, accommodation in huts, or the obligation to wear stigmatising badges with the letter P on their clothes, as was the case in the Reich, but the nature and conditions of work were similar. Poles under occupation also lived in an atmosphere of coercion. Resistance to physical exploitation would condemn them either to hunger, as they would not receive food stamps, or to deportation for forced labour or to a concentration camp. Simply the absence of alternatives is evidence of the element of compulsion in the situation of many Poles under occupation. Unfortunately, neither in scholarly discourse nor in public consciousness has there been an adequate extension of the definition of a forced worker, a term which continues to be associated only with deportations. While this is not an error in itself, it significantly narrows our understanding of the realities of those times.

The definition of forced workers (*Zwangsarbeiter*) encompasses civilians, prisoners-of-war, and prisoners of concentration camps and penal camps, who worked subject to coercion. The common image of forced labourers relates mostly to work in industry in major industrial centres. There is a lack of understanding, in both academic research and in collective memory, that forced work occurred in all branches of the economy and in sight of the inhabitants of nearly all German villages and towns. For example, forced work in domestic help, at municipal plants, and especially in agriculture, still receives insufficient attention. In today's Germany there are many sites remembering the victims of forced industrial labour, but there is an absence of commemorations of people compelled to work on farms (for a *Bauer*). It should be noted that the mere recognition of forced workers as war victims took place in Germany as

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<sup>12</sup> Osnabrück 2000.

<sup>13</sup> *Zachować pamięć: praca przymusowa i niewolnicza obywateli polskich na rzecz Trzeciej Rzeszy w latach 1939-1945*, Warsaw 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. K. Ruchniewicz, *Ludzie jako wojenne łupy. Polscy robotnicy przymusowi w gospodarce Rzeszy*, in: *Praca przymusowa. Niemcy, robotnicy przymusowi i wojna: katalog towarzyszący wystawie*, ed. Fundacja Miejsca Pamięci Buchenwald i Mittelbau-Dora, Weimar 2013, pp. 202–216, here: 208.

late as the 1990s, as a by-product of the debate about compensation.<sup>15</sup> However, it is primarily factory workers who have been commemorated. Polish people employed during wartime on the fields of a German *Bauer* have been viewed, often absurdly, as representing a continuation of the voluntary pre-war practice whereby Poles regularly travelled to Germany (“*na saksy*”) for seasonal work.

In observing the insufficient presence of forced labour in the Polish memory landscape today, it should be asked why Poles’ forced labour has not come to be placed among the central events of World War II. It is worthwhile to take a closer look at existing monuments and plaques referring to forced labour and to analyse the context of their creation. In what places, and by the efforts of what social groups, were these monuments established?

We are concerned here with commemorations of Polish forced workers in the memory landscape of today’s Poland. They will be discussed in chronological order, from the earliest to the most recent projects, together with indication of the period of and reasons for their creation. Reference will be made to monuments and commemorative plaques in Skarżysko-Kamienna, Słupsk, Wrocław, Warsaw, Białystok, Mosty, Szczecin and Koczarki. These were selected in view of their geographical distribution, as well as chronological aspects. Because Poles from all parts of the country’s pre-war territory could experience forced labour, it is worth investigating whether memory of the experience varies depending on region. Moreover, it is important to indicate the time at which monuments and plaques were founded, in order to consider their political and social determinants. The analysis below does not aim to include all forms of commemoration of forced labour, nor does it seek to present a complete picture of the remembrance of former forced workers. Its goal is to provide a synthetic review of selected commemorations and to indicate how they differ in terms of content, time and region. The present article does not exhaust the topic; on the contrary, it seeks to underline the problem and to encourage further analyses.

The primary goal of this text is to draw attention to selected memorials to forced labour and to place them in a sociopolitical context. Considerations of these objects’ visual and artistic aspects do not therefore lie in the centre of interest. Similarly, the aim will not be to examine their social role and meaning for specific social groups, as that would require resorting to methods from the sociology of memory, analysing for instance the receptions accorded to the commemorations. The methodological starting point will be a historic and cultural analysis of chosen places of memory, in this case monuments and commemorative plaques. It is helpful here to make use of the concept of places of memory, as well as the theory of memory cultures. Behind both of these categories is an extremely rich source literature, which for reasons of space cannot be presented extensively here. For the purposes of the present analysis I will reference the results of a project conducted by the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) Centre

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<sup>15</sup> There are many works in the German literature on the debate about compensation for forced labour, e.g. S. Eizenstat, *Unvollkommene Gerechtigkeit: der Streit um die Entschädigung der Opfer von Zwangsarbeit und Enteignung*, Munich 2003.

for Historical Research in Berlin, titled "Polish-German Places of Memory", published in nine volumes by Robert Traba and Hans Henning Hahn.<sup>16</sup> These authors not only pointed out the differences between symbolic and topographic places of memory, but also acknowledged their political and social potential. Taking the experiences of this project to a local level, it may be noticed that there exist both divided and shared places of memory. Moreover, it can be seen that these places are not closed chapters, but in their continual evaluation receive new values. The culture of memory, which usually encompasses all forms of representation of history in the public space, has a similarly fluid character.<sup>17</sup> It is also important to reference communicative memory, which is the living memory passed down by the witnesses of history; and cultural memory, which replaces communicated recollections with material artefacts and institutional actions.<sup>18</sup> Both concepts, proposed by the German researchers Jan and Aleida Assmann, may be referred to the memory of forced labour. To do this, it is important not only to pay attention to the chronological context of commemorations, but also to analyse the groups and societies which brought about the establishment of these places of memory. The final methodological inspiration comes from the theory of local memory – the so-called *genius loci*, which emphasises the connection of particular social groups with a specific defined territory.<sup>19</sup> It is precisely in the local environment that a particular need emerges to create a bond between people and the territory that they inhabit. This bond becomes a fundamental element of local identity. Therefore it is also useful to consider to what extent the foundation of monuments and plaques commemorating the experience of forced labour is a result of the discovery and documentation of local history.

The earliest monument to forced labour which I have identified is the monument to Polish forced workers in Skarżysko-Kamienna, founded by the local community in May 1965. From November 1939 until the plant's closure in June 1944, Poles were employed at an ammunition factory which had been taken over by the Germans, and which was controlled by the firm *Hasag* (Hugo Schneider) of Leipzig.<sup>20</sup> From 1941 onwards the camp was swelled by Jewish forced workers from the local ghetto, while groups of Poles were sent to work at the central ordnance factory in Leipzig. The catastrophic conditions at the labour camp, the onerous physical work, and the terror directly instigated by the German bosses led to the deaths of large numbers of workers.<sup>21</sup> The unveiling of the monument on the twentieth anniversary of the end of World

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<sup>16</sup> H. Henning Hahn, R. Traba (eds.), with M. Górny, K. Kończal, *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, vols. I-IV, Warsaw 2013–2015.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. Saryusz-Wolska, R. Traba (eds.), with J. Kalicka, *Modi memorandi: leksykon kultury pamięci*, Warsaw 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. A. Assmann, *Między historią a pamięcią*, ed. M. Saryusz-Wolska, Warsaw 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. K. Woniak, *Pamięć lokalna*, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska, R. Traba (eds.), with J. Kalicka, *Modi...*, pp. 339–341.

<sup>20</sup> For more about the company see H. Worm, *Die Hugo Schneider A.-G.*, Leipzig 2007. Since 2001, on the site of the former Hasag plant in Leipzig there has been a museum commemorating forced labour.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. K. Gibaszewski, *Fabryka śmierci, Karta* 70/2012, pp. 68–70; J. Wijaczka, G. Miernik, *Żydowscy robotnicy przymusowi w zakładach zbrojeniowych HASAG w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*

War II was linked to a desire to commemorate the almost 35,000 fatal victims of the German forced labour camp in Skarżysko. This fact was reflected in the wording of a plaque, in place until 2015, which read:

To the memory of 35,000 murdered in the German forced labour camp (of the *Hasag* company) in Skarżysko-Kamienna during the years 1940-1944. Members of the resistance movement, inhabitants of the city and prisoners-of-war, who gave their lives so others might live.

By a resolution of the city council dated 3 September 2015, immediately following the main celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the war, that plaque was replaced with the following inscription:

To the memory of thousands of Jews and Poles tormented and murdered during the years of the Second World War in the German forced labour camp – the ammunition factory.<sup>22</sup>

The new wording no longer gives the estimated number of victims or mentions prisoners-of-war. The monument stands in the immediate vicinity of the former production plant. It is composed of two tall pillars connected with the iron figures “1939–1945”, which indicate the wider purpose of the monument – to commemorate the whole period of World War II. Integrating the crime of forced labour into the entirety of war events provides it with a historical context. In this way the monument serves as a local place of memory of Polish people’s wartime experiences.

The next place that we shall consider is a memorial in Słupsk. In 1974, in the area on the edge of the town known as Lasek Południowy (South Wood), a monument was unveiled to 24 Polish and Soviet forced labourers and prisoners-of-war. They were victims of a mass execution committed by the retreating Germans on 7 March 1945. It was decided to build the monument at the site of the execution, thus alluding directly to that event. The victims were prisoners at a sub-camp of Stutthof concentration camp (*Aussenlager Schliepgrund 2*) located in Słupsk.<sup>23</sup> The bodies were exhumed in autumn 1945. At that time there was built a makeshift monument with graves, although the dead were then believed to have been fighters in the Warsaw Uprising. In the 1950s this mistake was corrected with the establishment of a new monument to the Polish and Soviet execution victims. In 1974 it received its current form. The monument comprises a round granite plaque and a candle, surrounded by 24 obelisks of differing heights and widths, on which are engraved

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w czasie II wojny światowej, in: idem (ed.), *Z przeszłości Żydów polskich. Polityka – gospodarka – kultura – społeczeństwo*, Kraków 2005, pp. 181-203.

<sup>22</sup> Resolution no. XIII/110/2015 of Skarżysko-Kamienna Town Council, [http://www.umskarzysko.bip.doc.pl/upload/doc/11449\\_20150908\\_101856.pdf](http://www.umskarzysko.bip.doc.pl/upload/doc/11449_20150908_101856.pdf) (accessed 25 January 2017).

<sup>23</sup> This type of execution of prisoners and workers took place in many places in the final months of the war. A characteristic example was the massacre of 819 prisoners of the penal camp in Sonnenburg (now Słońsk) on 30 January 1945. Cf. H. Coppi, K. Majchrzak (eds.), *Obóz koncentracyjny i więzienie w Sonnenburgu (Słońsku) 1933-1945*, Berlin 2015.

triangles with the letter P.<sup>24</sup> Annually, on 7 March, at the foot of the monument, ceremonies take place to commemorate the execution. Although initially both nationalities were mentioned, the inscription now refers to “the murder of 24 Polish forced labourers”.<sup>25</sup> Despite the monument's location on the town's outskirts, it is present in the public consciousness. This is proved by, among other things, the e-mail petitions sent by some residents demanding the monument's renovation.<sup>26</sup> Additional acknowledgement of the victims was provided by a historical re-enactment staged on the crime's 70th anniversary, presenting “the last march of the forced labourers” before they were shot by Germans. This was organised by a local re-enactment group with support from the Słupsk Association of Victims of the Third Reich.<sup>27</sup> This is not the only place of memory devoted to forced labour in Słupsk. On the old municipal cemetery there is an imposing monument to Belgian, Dutch, French and Soviet prisoners-of-war, who were “victims of forced labour in Nazi captivity”, as the inscription tells us. The object is further decorated with the words “For our freedom and yours” in large lettering. (The use of the term “Nazi captivity” – *“hitlerowska niewola”* – reflects the fact that the monument was built in communist Poland, when the term *hitlerowski* was introduced to replace “German” in such contexts, due to political considerations connected to the relationship with East Germany.)

Another monument alluding to the place of wartime events is one in Wrocław, dedicated to murdered members of the Olimp organisation. It was founded in 1989 by the local “Club of People with the P Sign”. The Olimp group was created in summer 1941 at the initiative of Poles transported for forced labour to the then-German Breslau and activists among Polish immigrant communities abroad. It aimed to bring help to Polish forced workers and to collect information about the situation in occupied Poland. Moreover, it supported sabotage in industrial plants and organised underground activity.<sup>28</sup> In June 1942 the Gestapo broke up the formation, arresting over 50 of its members; the most prominent among them would be murdered at the Gross-Rosen and Auschwitz concentration camps. The monument was erected close to one of the former meeting places. It consists of three obelisks. On the central, tallest stone is a plaque with the Polish national emblem and an inscription. The two remain-

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<sup>24</sup> The letter P refers to compulsory badges for Polish workers in the Reich introduced by a decree of 8 March 1940, which served to enable the German authorities to control and humiliate the Poles. This sign has become a central element of memory about forced labour, seen also in other forms, from book titles to monuments.

<sup>25</sup> *69. rocznica mordu na polskich robotnikach przymusowych*: <http://slupsk.naszemiasto.pl/artykul/69-rocznica-mordu-na-polskich-robotnikach-przymusowych-foto,2189146,artgal,t,id,tm.html> (accessed 18 October 2016).

<sup>26</sup> *Wstyd dla miasta – zaniedbany teren przy pomniku pomordowanych robotników przymusowych przy ul. Arciszewskiego*: <http://forum.gp24.pl/wstyd-dla-miasta-zaniedbany-teren-przy-pomniku-pomordowanych-robotnikow-przymusowych-przy-ul-arciszewskiego-t100782/> (accessed 18 October 2016).

<sup>27</sup> *Ostatni marsz 22 robotników przymusowych obozu Stutthof*: <http://gryf24.pl/2015/03/07/ostatni-marsz-22-robotnikow-przymusowych-obozu-stutthof-film-zdjecia/> (accessed 14 December 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. Bartosz, *Zapomniani ludzie...*

ing obelisks display the Rodło emblem (the sign of the Union of Poles in Germany) and the letter P, the mark of Polish forced labourers. The monument has become the site of an annual commemorative ceremony, although on a much smaller scale than in Słupsk. Due to the efforts of the Club of People with the P Sign, the memorial was renovated in 2005. The inscription reads:

In the years 1941-1942 Polish OLIMP resistance movement members held secret meetings in the house. For a Polish Wrocław, Poles loyal to the Rodło sign and Poles marked with the letter P – transported for forced labour – gave their lives. Friends, the sacrifice of your life was not in vain. Wrocław forever Polish.

In this inscription a clear connection is made between the memory of workers and references to the Poles' national struggle. Phrases such as "For a Polish Wrocław [they] gave their lives" and "Wrocław forever Polish" resemble the rhetoric associated with the myth of the return of the so-called Recovered Territories to the Motherland.<sup>29</sup> The victims' descendants and Club members conduct educational classes for young people, raising awareness of the role of the Wrocław resistance movement during World War II. This further helps the memorial to enter the local memory landscape.<sup>30</sup>

The next commemoration to be analysed is a monument in Warsaw's Powązki war cemetery, unveiled in May 1996 by the Association of Polish Victims of the Third Reich. The monument shows a labourer holding a cogwheel, sitting under a tall column and lifting a hand towards the crowned Polish eagle that sits on top. On the plinth is a plaque with the inscription "To the memory of Polish women and men deported for slave labour in the Third Reich in the years 1939-1945."<sup>31</sup> Near the memorial are many graves of former labourers who have been honoured by the Association. The absence of any regional reference in the inscription or in the form suggests that the monument is intended as a central, nationwide place of memory related to the experience of forced labour. Other places of memory concerning war events and experiences are situated in close proximity. This assists the understanding of forced labour as one of many elements of German terror against the Polish people during World War II.

A memorial not to forced labour itself, but to events that led to deportations for work, is a commemorative plaque in central Białystok. It was founded in 1996 by a local branch of the Association of Polish Victims of the Third Reich, in the place where the German Labour Office (*Arbeitsamt*) was located in 1941-1944 (the building currently houses the provincial public library). The plaque reads: "In this place, in 1941-1944 the German Labour Office *Arbeitsamt* was located. To the memory of those deported for forced labour in the Third Reich." It is worth emphasising the presence

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Górny, Po co nam ten mit? *Ziemie Odzyskane, Przegląd Polityczny* no. 65/2004, pp. 121-125.

<sup>30</sup> J. Bartosz, *Zapomniani ludzie...*, p. 145.

<sup>31</sup> The term "slave labour" used in the inscription reflects the spirit of the times when the monument was built, when that term was used to convey the nature of work performed for the enemy. It is now usually used to refer to work done in concentration camps.



in this inscription of the office's German name, which might evoke memories of the terror of deportation in those who witnessed the events. Labour offices were among the primary institutions of German administration in occupied Poland, and were successively established as new areas were taken over by the *Wehrmacht*. Because of the compulsory reporting to the offices, the conditions there and the deportations to Germany, these institutions became an embodiment of direct terror. Their task was to recruit Poles to work in the Reich. Although at first this recruitment was voluntary, the lack of Polish volunteers meant that it very soon changed into an instrument of mental and physical violence. The display of a plaque referencing an authentic place of exploitation and deportation of Poles is a well-chosen means of making the memory of forced workers a part of public memory in Białystok. The plaque is decorated, like other memorials, with a sign with the letter P, symbolising Polish forced labourers.

The village of Mosty currently lies in Poland's West Pomeranian Province, near the town of Goleniów. During World War II the village, then known in German as Speck, was the site of an ammunition plant (*Luftwaffe Haupt Munition Anstalt Speck*), which produced and stored ammunition and bombs for the Luftwaffe, as well as parts for V-1 flying bombs. A nuclear weapon research laboratory was also situated there. At times of the most intense arms production, about 2500 forced labourers from Poland, France, Belgium worked at the plant. Nowadays the site of the former factory and the remains of bunkers and weapon testing facilities belong to a military unit based in Mosty, and are partly used for military training. In 2007, a commemorative stone was placed close to the former factory. This initiative was part of a "Traces of the Past" programme carried out by the town of Goleniów, supported financially by the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation. The inscription, in Polish, German, English and Russian, reads: "To the memory of forced workers at the former Nazi labour camp."<sup>32</sup> The fact of the multilingual inscription is notable, as it lends the memorial an international character. It is also significant that the inscription does not mention the workers' country of origin. This open formula, relating to all labourers, helps make the reader aware that forced labour also encompassed other nationalities. Apart from founding this place of memory, the Goleniów Local History Documentation Centre has also published an information booklet about the ammunition factory in Mosty, in which much attention is paid to the experiences of the workers, confirmed by the recollections of witnesses to the events.<sup>33</sup>

Also in 2007, another form of commemoration of forced labour was instituted in the same region. In Szczecin a grassroots initiative in the form of the Civitas Christiana Association, together with the Pomorzany Neighbourhood Council and the City Hall, founded a monument to the forced labourers who had worked during World War II at German labour camps in what is now the Pomorzany neighbourhood of

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<sup>32</sup> *Pomnik pamięci robotników przymusowych fabryki amunicji Luftwaffe – Mosty (zachodniopomorskie)*: <http://www.eksploratorzy.com.pl/viewtopic.php?f=25&t=23544> (accessed 18 October 2016).

<sup>33</sup> J. Kazaniecki, *Fabryka amunicji w Mostach*, Goleniów 2012.

Szczecin.<sup>34</sup> A tall stone bears an extensive engraved text with information about the many “German forced labour camps [...] in which people of various nationalities were imprisoned, including Poles, Yugoslavians and Russians”, noting that “Many of them died.” The inscription states that the plinth serves as both a commemoration and a warning. The monument’s unveiling was attended by a witness of history – a forced labourer who had spent 15 months at one of the Pomorzany labour camps. The former German province of Pommern (Pomerania) contained many forced labour camps. Poles from occupied parts of Poland were employed in large numbers at the Stettin (Szczecin) shipyard and on the farms of the German aristocracy. Their history is a subject of study by local archives and museums, for example in Szczecin and Stargard Szczeciński. Research projects are currently being conducted in co-operation with German institutions in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, including the National Archive and the Pomeranian Museum in Greifswald.<sup>35</sup> It is estimated that in Szczecin alone there were 200 labour camps, the toughest being in Pomorzany. However, it is still not known how many Poles were forced to work in the city, not to mention the numbers who died.

The last example again relates to forced labour on former territories of the Reich that are now in Poland. In 2014, in the village of Koczarki in Masuria, a whole memorial complex was built to the forced labourers of that region. Masuria has a unique memory landscape. Polish, German and local symbolic figures have accumulated, creating a characteristic borderland palimpsest. Historically the region played a significant role in the forced labour complex, as it was the first reservoir for the exploitation of Poles. As early as September 1939 about 200,000 Polish prisoners-of-war were sent there, and in November and December their numbers were swelled by recruited or captured Polish civilians.<sup>36</sup> Germany treated East Prussia as a granary. As a result of mass conscription of the rural population, there was a shortage of people to work on the land. For this reason, from the start of the war until the arrival of the Red Army, huge numbers of Poles and other nationalities were sent to work in East Prussia. Forced labour in what are now the Polish regions of Warmia and Masuria became a subject of academic and public interest from the 1960s to the 1980s. A two-volume collection of memoirs was published under the title *When We Were the Letter P*.<sup>37</sup> That publication was followed by a long break, until in 2010 the Foundation for Polish-

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<sup>34</sup> *Uczczono przymusowych robotników obozów pracy*: <http://www.gs24.pl/wiadomosci/szczecin/art/5276720,uczczono-przymusowych-robotnikow-obozow-pracy-fotogaleria,id,t.html> (accessed 18 October 2016).

<sup>35</sup> A result of this cooperation is the Polish–German publication: P. Gut, U. Kiel, J. Macholak (eds.), *Praca przymusowa na Pomorzu w latach 1939–1950. Stan i perspektywy badań naukowych oraz edukacji historycznej w Polsce i Niemczech*, Szczecin–Greifswald 2014.

<sup>36</sup> B. Koziełło-Poklewski, *Zagraniczni robotnicy przymusowi w Prusach Zachodnich w latach II wojny światowej*, Warsaw 1977.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. B. Koziełło-Poklewski (ed.), *Ze znakiem „P”: relacje i wspomnienia robotników przymusowych i jeńców wojennych w Prusach Wschodnich*, Olsztyn 1977; B. Koziełło-Poklewski (ed.), *Ze znakiem „P”: relacje i wspomnienia z robót przymusowych w Prusach Wschodnich w latach II wojny światowej*, Olsztyn 1985.

German Reconciliation, which deals with such matters as compensation payments, published a volume of memoirs of Polish labourers from East Prussia.<sup>38</sup> At the same time an oral history project was carried out among former labourers from the region.<sup>39</sup> There are places in the memory landscape of this region commemorating prisoners of the transit camps and prisoner-of-war camps in Działdowo and Olsztynek, as well as their sub-camps such as that in Snopki, where a commemorative stone is dedicated to POWs. Little attention has been paid, however, to the Polish civilians who worked on German farms. Their total number is unknown. For many Poles East Prussia was the first place of deportation for work; often after a few months they were transported again, deeper into the Reich. From both scholarly research and memoirs we know that German farmers treated Poles in very different ways: some better and some worse. A common feature was that the workers were prohibited from leaving their employer, and were subject to uniformly discriminatory and degrading police restrictions.

In 2014 the local population of the village of Koczarki in the county of Kętrzyn (called in German Kotzargen, and from 1929 Eichhöhe) founded a stone commemorating victims of the sub-camp *Stalag I A in Preussisch-Eylau* (in today's Russian town of Bagrationovsk).<sup>40</sup> Forced labourers drafted into agricultural work squads were also interned there. It is not known how many of them died of exhaustion. The commemoration initiative had its origins in an accidental discovery by local residents of numerous mass graves in the village cemetery. In a reference to the village's wartime past, 13 anonymous, symbolic graves of prisoners-of-war and labourers were constructed. Each grave carries a birch cross with a plaque reading "Unknown forced labourer. Died in 1944." In the middle is a memorial stone with an inscription in Polish: "To the memory of prisoners-of-war and forced labourers from the Stalag I A sub-camp in Koczarki. On the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the camp. The community of Kętrzyn municipality." This memorial fills what had been a gap in the commemoration of Polish civilian forced workers in the Masuria region.

## CONCLUSION

Forced labourers have relatively seldom been the subject of commemoration in Poland. They have been too large and too general a group to make their mark in Poles' collective memory.<sup>41</sup> In almost every family there was someone who was sent

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<sup>38</sup> *Ostpreussen. Wspomnienia Polaków wywiezionych na roboty przymusowe do Prus Wschodnich w latach 1939-1945*, Warsaw 2010.

<sup>39</sup> W. Brenda, B. J. Trupacz (eds.), *Mazury zapamiętane. Relacje i wspomnienia mieszkańców Ziemi Piskiej*, Orzysz 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Upamiętniono ofiary niemieckiego obozu jenieckiego w Stablawkach*: <http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/upamietniono-ofiary-niemieckiego-obozu-jenieckiego-w-stablawkach> (accessed 18 October 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. P. Filipkowski, *Biographische Narrative polnischer Zwangsarbeiter und KZ-Häftlinge. Eine Lektüre im Kontext des Entschädigungsdiskurses*, in: *Die Entschädigung von NS-Zwangsarbeit am Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 158-214.

to work. The centre of Polish wartime memory has been occupied by other victims, especially concentration camp prisoners and members of the resistance movement. The situation changed only at the end of the 1980s, when regional and local Associations of Polish Victims of the Third Reich began to appear. Such structures were formed in towns and villages, chiefly with the aim of gaining for their members pensions, subsidies for medicines and compensation from the German government. This change also resulted in an intensification of initiatives to commemorate forced workers.

After many years of absence in the Polish memory landscape, the topic of forced labour has returned through individual projects commemorating forced workers as victims of World War II and the German occupation. Memorials have been established mostly in specific locations relating to those events, such as forced labour camps, factories or execution sites. However, they commemorate primarily people who died as forced labourers. The places of memory discussed above are not dedicated solely to forced labour. What is essential is the fact that they place it within the context of the fate of Poland under German occupation in 1939-1945, thereby creating a local reference to the history of the war. Objects such as the monument in Skarżysko-Kamienna and the commemoration plaque in Białystok are given additional significance by the fact that they directly reference an authentic site connected to forced labour, since they then allude to the experiences of locals living under occupation, their physical exploitation at factories, or their defencelessness against the German labour offices. In essence these monuments tell the story of forced labour as part of the everyday life of the society of that time.

Today's inhabitants of the former German provinces are discovering a Polish aspect of their history, namely the fact that in 1939-1945 Poles were exploited in those regions on a massive scale. When the war ended, forced labourers in many cases were among the first inhabitants of the territories taken over by Polish administration, and actively joined in the process of building local structures. Most labourers returned to their homelands, however, rarely speaking about the exploitation that they had experienced. Might this be because of the fear that, compared with the people who had lived directly under occupation and were not deported to the Reich, they had endured the time of the war more easily? In the words of Kazimierz Wyka, former forced labourer did not have "the habits and contaminations of occupation".<sup>42</sup>

Today, more than 70 years after the war, after the difficult years of the post-war period and following the payment of compensation by Germany, it is useful to look at forced labour as a whole and not to exclude forced labourers deported to the Reich from the German occupation complex. Quite the contrary, both groups should be seen as victims of physical and mental exploitation, committed by the German occupier. Through forced labour for the occupying power, Poles became a crucial link in the war – without them, Germany could not have gone on fighting for so long. The mass exploitation of Poles as a labour force still has an inadequate

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<sup>42</sup> K. Wyka, *Życie na niby*, Kraków 2011, p. 311.

presence in the Polish memory landscape. Moreover, such commemoration as exists came too late, as many victims had passed away before they could appreciate these valuable initiatives.

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#### ABSTRACT

*The article analyses the scale, form and scope of memory about forced labourers in the Polish symbolic landscape, with emphasis on monuments and plaques dedicated to former forced labourers. In the communist period, these Polish workers were a group of victims of World War II too widespread to be given a special place in the nation's collective memory. Only the creation of the Association of Polish Victims of the Third Reich at the end of the 1980s opened up a space for the symbolic commemoration of the deportation of Poles to Germany for forced labour. An opportunity to incorporate forced labour into the memory of World War II came with the debate about compensation from the German government at the beginning of the 21st century. In today's Poland there are not many sites dedicated to the nearly 3 million people who make up this particular group of victims of the German occupation. A relatively large number of such sites have been established in the last few years, mainly as a consequence of grassroots initiatives aimed at discovering the local history of particular areas. However, forced labour is still insufficiently present in the Polish memory of World War II.*

