

*Nie wieder Auschwitz!* Die Entstehung eines Symbols und der Alltag einer Gedenkstätte 1945–1955, by Imke Hansen (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015; pp. 310. £23.96).

*Nie wieder Auschwitz!* (Never again Auschwitz!) is postulated by Imke Hansen as a *lieu de mémoire* intrinsically connected with, and symbolic of, the emergence of the former concentration camp complex of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a contested site of memory in the Polish physical, memorial and political landscape after the end of the Second World War. Hansen draws on the multifarious developments in the field of memory studies in recent years, coupled with the worldwide recognition of ‘Auschwitz’ as a metonym for the crimes of National Socialism in general and the Holocaust in particular, to present this detailed *Gedenkstätten-geschichte* (‘history of a memorial site’, p. 24). Thereby Hansen offers a novel approach to ‘Auschwitz’ as both a physical site and a conceptual construct of memory, examining the interplay of agencies in the instrumentalisation of the site in the first ten years after the end of the war, in the context of the re-establishment of the Polish state and its political history in the early years of socialism. Through her meticulous analysis of eclectic documentary sources, Hansen unpacks the construction of various, and often conflicted, narratives of memory at Auschwitz-Birkenau, focusing especially on the contestation of memory between Polish political elites and Jewish survivors of the Shoah, among others, that have shaped the site into the present day.

Chapter One offers an overview of current trends in memory studies and a mission statement for the analysis of Auschwitz, while Chapter Two covers the broad political history of Poland in the first decade after the war, charting the constellation of agents involved in memorial debates at the site, both local and tied to the Polish state, and the resulting plethora of historical narratives which emerged as a result. Hansen thus illuminates the conflicts of power between local, regional and national organisations, reflecting communist and other political leanings, complicated especially by the conflicted post-war relationship between Poland’s surviving Jews and the state. From this emerged a matrix of narratives drawing on religious, nationalist and/or socialist ideologies, articulated in nevertheless strikingly similar motifs such as martyrdom, resistance and heroism. The continuity, despite conflicts, in these narratives was conditioned in part by their increasing sublimation in a hegemonic socialist political culture, especially in the heyday of Stalinism from 1950 to 1953.

Chapter Three covers the early years after the end of the war, the interplay of neglect and preservation of the former camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the increasing monopolisation of the site to serve a Polish national narrative of suffering under, and victory over, the German occupiers. Hansen demonstrates that the earliest *ad hoc* exhibitions and memorials were to shape the memorial culture of the site into the present day, including the focus on the scale of the crimes committed through the exhibition of masses of personal items, as well as the contentious appropriation of the site by Polish Catholics through Christian symbolism. Hansen thus demonstrates not only the chronological continuities at the site, but also the ideological congruence of Polish religious, nationalist and socialist narratives—though often at the expense of the site’s relevance to Jewish memory and the memory of the Shoah.

Chapter Four examines the increased centralisation of control over memorial sites in Poland under the aegis of communist institutions, and the consequent recalibration of narratives through anti-imperialist, anti-German and anti-American rhetoric. Chapter Five examines the rupture of the Stalinist years, and the manipulation of the memorial site to draw ostensible connections between the Nazis' war of extermination in Eastern Europe and American foreign policy. As Hansen demonstrates, these years represented a low point in the memorial culture of the site as it was almost completely subverted to suit communist political propaganda and Soviet policy. Remarkably, however, these years also witnessed the continuity, and therefore survival, of previous religious and national narratives of Poland's survival and resurrection.

Chapter Six examines the final years during which the memorial site at Auschwitz-Birkenau became fully institutionalised, from 1953 to 1955. Although still dominated by communist ideology and serving anti-imperialist propaganda, these years witnessed the 'internationalisation' which has become characteristic of the site, albeit under the continuing control, and therefore influence, of the Polish state. These years also witnessed the ossification of Auschwitz, both physically and symbolically, as Poland's central memorial site of persecution and survival. In the final chapter, Hansen wraps up her analysis, pointing to the complexity of agency involved in the creation of this site of memory and its consequent polysemy, wherein the slogan *Nie wieder Auschwitz!* has served the persistent evolution of future-oriented meanings associated with the site.

Hansen's work is without doubt a sophisticated and detailed contribution to the history of the memorial site of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as to the history of post-war memory in socialist Poland. As a sustained case-study of a particular site of memory, it exemplifies and justifies Hansen's own claim that the analysis of memory yields the most results when applied to a specific case within the framework of precise research questions (pp. 14–16). If a criticism can be made of her work, it is thus not one of approach but merely of presentation: while Hansen succeeds admirably in extrapolating the manifest complexity of agency and narratives surrounding the early years of this memorial site, her work at times runs the danger of descending into a cacophony of names and details which, particularly for readers not versed in the Polish language or post-war Polish political history, can be confusing and arduous. This detail could perhaps have been relegated to the footnotes, allowing for her sophisticated analysis of tropes and strategies of memory to come closer to the fore. That being said, students of Auschwitz, the Holocaust and memory will undoubtedly find this a seminal resource, and Hansen's work is commendable for offering complex new insights into a perennial site of interest and a powerful exercise in applying, and thereby advancing, the methods and concepts of memory studies.

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