

## EMPLACING VERNACULAR MEMORY: LOOKING FOR THE UNCONSCIOUS AND AFFECTIVE ASPECTS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

MARTA DUCH-DYNGOSZ

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“Sometimes, when I was in Iwonicz I was told about Russian prisoners, but I did not see them. Now, when I remember Rymanów, I recall the massive columns of prisoners who passed through in the first days of our stay there. Thousands, thousands of prisoners, it made a terrible impression on me, even today I can’t forget it.” This is an entry from the diary of Fela Fischbein,<sup>1</sup> who on 26 June 1942 had to leave Iwonicz with her daughter Dora and go to the nearby Rymanów ghetto. “They were shadows of men, tired, emaciated, ragged; the weaker and older ones drove in broken carriages, pulled by a wretched nag. How my heart tugged, how I wept, I was so sorry, after all, they were people, and among them were Jews too, so I thought. I did not know that in the future, they and we would share the same fate!” Fischbein remembered. In this passage, the author compared the fates of two different groups of victims, drawing attention to the multiplicity and complexity of factors in social phenomena, in this case, collective violence, discernible from the perspective of physical space. Stanisław Hanus,<sup>2</sup> a resident

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MARTA DUCH-DYNGOSZ – independent researcher, adjunct. E-mail: [martaa.duch@gmail.com](mailto:martaa.duch@gmail.com). ORCID 0000-0002-9469-5901.

<sup>1</sup> Yad Vashem Archive, 03/3785, *Fela Fischbein’s Diary*. The diary comprises a retrospective journal and daily notes made from 13 August 1942. For more on the diary and Fischbein’s fate, see Engelking 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Stanisław Hanus, born in 1934, conducted in 2019 by Marta Duch-Dyngosz.

of Posada Dolna,<sup>3</sup> today part of Rymanów<sup>4</sup>, recalled how in the war and immediately afterward, masses of people would pass along the road running through the village. At first, the Soviet prisoners, taken by the Nazi Germans in 1941 from the railway station in Wróblík Szlachecki to the prisoner-of-war camp built in Rymanów, were probably later all died. Then, on 13 August 1942, the Germans marched Jews along the same road, but in the opposite direction, from the displaced Rymanów ghetto.<sup>5</sup> The Jews were taken from the station in Wróblík Szlachecki to the extermination camp in Bełżec, where they were all murdered. After the war, from 1945 onwards, the Ukrainian community residing in the nearby villages, including Deszno, Królik Polski, and Wołuszowa, traveled through Posada after being displaced with their possessions, first as part of the “voluntary” evacuation of the population owing to the changed post-war borders,<sup>6</sup> and later as part of “Operation Vistula.”<sup>7</sup> Stanisław Hanus recalled displaced families being attacked by so-called local gangs. He recounted that in Wróblík Szlachecki, in the former Orthodox church, adopted as a Catholic church immediately after the war, participants of those gangs met up for the “actions” and then stored and divided up the spoils. The local parish priest, Hanus’s cousin, was one of the Poles repatriated from Eastern Galicia. It is difficult to say how much of

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<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of Posada Dolna’s residents were Catholics. According to data from the 1921 census, there were 183 residential buildings in the village. It had 998 residents, most of whom declared themselves Roman Catholics, two indicated that they were Greek Catholics, and 19 adherents of the Mosaic faith (Judaism) (*Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* 1924, 43–44). I am aware that data from pre-war censuses contain errors and does not convey the complexity of ethnic or national identity, reduced to faith or native language in censuses. However, this data indicates the character of the place in ethnic terms.

<sup>4</sup> Today a small town in Subcarpathia Province in Poland with a few thousand inhabitants.

<sup>5</sup> During the war, Rymanów was in the Krakow district of the General Government within the borders of Krosno county. The ghetto in Rymanów was not physically fenced off; it was open, and the majority of the local Jews did not have to move to another part of the town. The ghetto encompassed the part where they had been living previously. They were joined by Jews from nearby places and other refugees. From 1942, the Jewish residents could not leave the designated territory on pain of death. See *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933–1945*, 564–565.

<sup>6</sup> Poles repatriated from the pre-war Eastern provinces of the Second Republic, described as “easterners” by local people, were travelling in the opposite direction. They settled in the Ukrainian villages abandoned by the population.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the Polish-Ukrainian conflict, see Motyka 2011. In the monthly situation report for September 1945, the Sanok mayor describes the evacuation of the Ukrainian population as chaotic. He writes that the displaced population had to wait a long time for transport at railway stations and that the abandoned villages remained untended since few people wanted to settle there as they feared that the villages would be set on fire by Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) gangs; APROS, Starostwo Powiatowe Sanockie, collection 70. sign. 13.

this was the memory of a young boy and to what extent it was assembled later from vernacular memory shaped through mnemonic practices of local residents.<sup>8</sup> The more interesting question is that of the advantages of acknowledging the role of a place in shaping memory. What impact does the experience of certain events in a particular location, including observing them at close hand, have on what is remembered about these events and how? Which factors cause it to become a “place memory” (Connerton 2009), even despite the absence of commemoration? Do the emotions that come with remembrance make recollections accessible to others, including the next generations, and social researchers too? In this article, I reflect on the meaning of place in studying vernacular memory as a phenomenon that is both the “carrier” of social actors’ memory (Kula 2002) and a product of the narrative, the meanings, values, and emotions that the actors attribute to place and the actions they take in response. I will also consider in what way and to what extent reflection on the active role of place in talking about the past discloses the affective part of memory, what remains unconscious and not included in the discourse, related to “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi 1997). Furthermore, I would like to show that fieldwork consisting of personal interviews and observations, supplemented by analysis of documents, is “tailor-made to unpack space and place” (Given 2008, 629) in the aspects indicated above.

#### METHODOLOGY

I will use Rymanów and its neighboring villages<sup>9</sup> as a case study. These places can be characterized, following Anna Wylegała (2020), as “void communities.”

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<sup>8</sup> I refer to Bodnar’s (1992) distinction between official and vernacular cultural expressions. According to the author, the latter represents views of the past received from first-hand experience in small-scale communities, grounded in the interests of small structures and associations that ordinary people had known, felt, or experienced directly. Assmann’s category of “communicative memory” adds to this understanding of vernacular memory. The former is conceived as including “those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communication” (1995: 126). In my understanding, vernacular memory characterizes small communities, represents the perception of the past of ordinary people, including those who experience something directly and is shaped in everyday mnemonic practices. This is often local memory. In the article, I will use those two terms, namely local memory and vernacular memory interchangeably.

<sup>9</sup> Before the war Rymanów lay within the boundaries of Lwów Province (Voivodeship) and is now in Subcarpathia Province, Rymanów town (Sanok county), according to the census conducted in 1921, had 3,546 residents (2,052 gave their religion as Roman Catholic, 78 Greek Catholic, and Jewish 1,412); 3,063 gave their nationality as Polish, 60 as Rusyn, and 420 as Jewish. The town contained 425 buildings for residence purposes. Deszno, a nearby village, had 79 residential buildings, its total population was 422 (155 Roman Catholic, 243 Greek Catholic, 21 Jewish), there were 279 people with Polish nationality and

As a result of the war and post-war period, they lost various groups of Others, defined in ethnic, national, or class terms, who formed a large part of the local population. The Holocaust caused the local Jewish community to cease to exist, almost entirely murdered by the Germans, their allies, and helpers.<sup>10</sup> Maria Dyląg described pre-war Rymanów as a “Jewish town,”<sup>11</sup> as, although Jews comprised around half of the town’s population, to a large extent, they formed its social and economic elite. Most of the non-Jewish residents were their clients and employees. Rymanów was, therefore, a shtetl, defined by a network of economic and social relations with the nearby small towns, the larger provincial town, and the local villages (Katz 2007; Orla-Bukowska 2004). These villages had few Jewish residents. They were, however, home to a sizable Ukrainian population, which was then forced by Operation Vistula to leave the land after 1945 and later. Only those who converted to Roman Catholicism or were in mixed marriages had a chance to remain. In the end, the landed gentry ceased to exist as a social class. In Rymanów the Potocki family was the owner of the nearby health resort and the surrounding villages, including vast tracts of fields. Andrzej Lorenc, an inhabitant of the area, in a diary submitted for a competition in 1955, recalled: “Next to our village is Rymanów Zdrój [Spa], which in those times was poorly developed, and the owner of the resort was Count Jan Potocki, whose units of laborers worked for him for measly pay. He also had a garden where the rural women worked, even my mother worked for him, and I remember as a small boy how the count went into those workshops and would tell them what he had read in the newspaper, and that in the world the machine had been invented so that they would play something abroad and we would hear it, but the women working there were surprised and didn’t believe that would be possible, and after he left they talked about it how must be the work of the devil”.<sup>12</sup> The post-war agricultural reform<sup>13</sup> meant that the dispossessed Potockis

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143 Rusyn. Posada Górna had 259 buildings and a population of 1,301 (1,205 Roman Catholic, 94 Greek Catholic, 2 Jewish), of whom 1,257 had Polish nationality and 44 Rusyn. Wróbliek Szlachecki had 154 buildings and 749 residents (71 Roman Catholic, 616 Greek Catholic, 52 Mosaic), 53 with Polish nationality, 974 Rusyn, and 4 Jewish (*Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* 1924, 43–44).

<sup>10</sup> After the war, few Jewish survivors returned to Rymanów. They looked for their families, came back for their possessions, and made efforts to regain their property. But the lack of a Jewish community, the unstable and dangerous situation in the region, and the weakness of state institutions meant that many survivors left Rymanów soon afterwards.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Maria Dyląg, born in 1923, conducted in 2018 by AW.

<sup>12</sup> Archive of the Historical Institution of the Peasant Movement, New Peasants’ Diaries, (381) Andrzej Lorenc, 2.

<sup>13</sup> According to the agricultural reform conducted in Poland by a decree issued by the

were forced to leave the lands. The various groups of Others were connected by the fact that living in a specific geographical space for centuries and fulfilling particular social and professional roles, and they were forced to leave behind not only empty houses, shops, or land but also social positions, creating an enormous breach in the social structure. Certain places, abandoned by their previous inhabitants, ceased to exist.<sup>14</sup> As Wylegała notes, “The post-war void not only was physical, but it had various aspects and time frames; on some levels, it ended after a few days, while on others it lasts until today.” In an essay on the sociology of space, Georg Simmel pointed to the significance of physical space for a traditional community, “To the extent to which a social formation is amalgamated with or is, as it were, united with a specific extension of land, then it possesses a character of uniqueness or exclusivity that is not similarly attainable in other ways” (1997, 138–139). The post-war “void communities” gained access and the chance to transform the places that had previously been outside of their control. Arguably the unfilled void and the inherent historical social (including ethnic) boundaries and emotions associated with traumatic experiences sustained the vernacular memory about the Others. The presence of representatives of the groups of Others after the war also played a role (although it is hard to see to what extent one can speak of self-identification). An example is Jewish survivors, who had either converted to Catholicism themselves or their ancestors had. Despite formally entering the community of ethnic Poles, however, in the social consciousness, they remained Jews. This was the case with Czesław Dworzański, born in 1942. The small boy survived the war thanks to his father, who hid him in neighboring villages. Maria Bobik, the boy’s mother, was murdered by the Germans. Before the war, she had been baptized and married her neighbor Jan Dworzański, a Catholic. In the church in Rymanów, during Mass, she would sit in the place reserved for converts. During the German occupation, according to the Nuremberg Laws, she was a Jew, and therefore she had to hide after the liquidation of the ghetto. Informants often recalled her story. One day, dressed as a peasant woman, she came out of hiding with a sickle in her hand. The local community knew who she was. Somebody must have reported her, and she was caught by the Germans. According to the transmission of vernacular memory, during the night, her loud prayers could be heard coming from the prison where she was held, close to the market square. Her son, who

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Polish Committee of National Liberation on 6 September 1944 large private estates above 50 ha were expropriated. Polish landowners had to leave the county in which they lived and in the 1944–1946 period, many of them left Poland for good.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the Lemko village Wołuszowa, whose inhabitants were displaced in 1945, and which was later burnt down by UPA units, was not resettled.

survived the war, Czesław Dworzański, left Rymanów at a young age.<sup>15</sup> He returned years later to take part in the Days of Memory of the Jewish Community of Rymanów.<sup>16</sup> I cite this story as the presence of Maria Bobik's son in Rymanów could have been a factor that affected the memory of the family's tragic fate. As sociologist Margaret Archer (1996, 118) noted, the action of the agency is not always connected to the activity of social actors: in certain situations, their presence in a given place and time is sufficient. Therefore, it is worth analyzing the extent to which the popular memory of "void communities" was formed in the peculiar tension between the active aspect of materiality and the actions of social actors that shaped the place, often contributing to silence and collective forgetting (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Tegger 2010; Connerton 2008) about the Others who once lived in the place.<sup>17</sup>

The main sources upon which this article is based are materials from fieldwork conducted in 2017–2019<sup>18</sup> by Polish and Ukrainian researchers. Biographical interviews were conducted with the oldest residents of small towns in the former Eastern Galicia and the General Government.<sup>19</sup> In the case of Rymanów, the interlocutors were people born in the town or nearby villages who had spent most of their lives there. The oldest interviewee was born in 1921, and therefore already an adult when war broke out. The vast majority were children at the time, which would allow them to see and witness things often inaccessible to

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<sup>15</sup> Interview conducted in 2014 with two representatives of local remembrance leaders by MDD.

<sup>16</sup> Initiative commemorating the Jewish community, held since 2008 in mid-August to commemorate the liquidation of the Rymanów ghetto, organised by groups including the "Encounter Rymanów" Association for the Protection of the Rymanów Land's Cultural Heritage.

<sup>17</sup> One example of that kind of tension might be the recollection of the impressive rabbinical palace, which was located above the synagogue, its elevation facing towards the town's main transport route. Rymanów was one of the pre-war Hassidic centres. The palace was built by Tzadik Tzvi Hirsch in the first half of the nineteenth century. A yeshivah founded by Tzadik Menachem Mendel later operated there. After the war, the local population, including the town's first mayor, treated the palace as a source of building materials, and it was demolished. Today there is a market square there, and part of the palace's foundations also remains. The palace was often mentioned and pointed out in the town space by the interviewees.

<sup>18</sup> Research conducted as part of Anna Wylegała's project "*Social Anthropology of the Void: Poland and Ukraine after World War II*", financed by the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities", no. 0101/ NPRH3/H12/82/2014.

<sup>19</sup> The subject matter included the interlocutors' everyday lives, social roles, specific objects, location of buildings, institutions, ethnic borders – before, during and after the war – their experiences of turning points such as the outbreak of war, the beginning of the occupation, the moving of the war front and the end of the war and emergence of a new social order.

adults. The second important resource was personal documents – diaries, memoirs, accounts, oral history collections – both Polish and Jewish and produced at the time or later. Furthermore, the fieldwork in Rymanów was research revisit in my case. In 2014–2015 I conducted research there on remembrance of the Jewish communities in former shtetls in the context of the changes in memory of Jews and the Holocaust in contemporary Poland. Rymanów was one of my three case studies,<sup>20</sup> focusing at the time on contemporary mnemonic practices (Olick 2008) concerning the local Jewish heritage. In the case of Rymanów, my interlocutors were people born after the war, not necessarily in the region, and with links to the town through their mnemonic practices. During the research revisit, therefore, I knew the town’s topography and the main characteristics of the local memory of the Jewish community. Thus I was able to concentrate more on material and affective aspects, a source of knowledge which, in the context of other data, allows us to understand a certain area of human activity better (O’Toole and Were 2008, 620–621) – in this case, collective memory.

#### PLACE, SPACE, MEMORY

I will begin with an analytical distinction between the two categories of “space” and “place” – although we should also note that they are connected and not mutually exclusive. For the former category, we can speak of physical as well as social space, while for the latter, “It is simply location. It is where people do things” (Rodman 1992, 640). Simmel notes that “for our practical use, space is divided into pieces which are considered units and are framed by boundaries both as a cause and an effect of the division” (1997, 141). The networks of relations between humans and the physical environment transform a space into a place (O’Toole and Were 2007). Place, therefore, is “space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations” (Gieryn 2000, 465). We can speak of place when three conditions are fulfilled: 1) it possesses geographical coordinates, and therefore divides the physical space into “here” and “there,” into the near and the far; 2) it assumes a material form; 3) it is assigned meanings and values that are dependent on humans, and therefore variable in time and subject to contestation (Gieryn 2000, 464–465). In other words, it combines two

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<sup>20</sup> I researched as part of the grant *Commemorating Pre-war Jewish Communities in Contemporary Poland as a Manifestation of Cultural Trauma of the Holocaust*, funded by the National Science Centre of Poland (no. 013/09/N/HS6/00422, PRELUDIUM V). I described the results in my unpublished PhD dissertation, “Remembering Jewish Communities in the Former Shtetls in Poland. ‘Working through the Past’ or ‘Misusing of the Past?’ The Example of Selected Towns in the Former Galicia”.

domains that are both autonomous and dependent on one another: the material domain and narratives. Places are “always part of spatial dynamics,” while spatial practices “are not devoid of real materiality and take place in specific local settings and geographical surroundings” (Brauch, Lipphardt, and Nocke 2008, 4). Anthony Giddens used the concept of “locale” to describe this relationship, noting that “the advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from the place by fostering relations between ‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction” (Giddens 1990, 18–19). Locales, therefore, partly become phantasmagorical, shaped by distant subjects. Sławomir Kapralski uses the concept of “landscape of memory,” referring to the terminology of William H. Sewell, and characterizes them as “a place of concentrated cultural work”; a place equipped in meaning, on the one hand, a field of expression of identity, and on the other a field of struggle for power (Kapralski 2008, 28). At the same time, Kapralski considers the role of materiality, which complicates the action of mechanisms of symbolic rule over a territory. This issue has been discussed in the Polish subject literature by Bohdan Jałowiecki (1985) and Lech M. Nijakowski (2006). Nijakowski coined the term “symbolic domain,” meaning “a territory over which a given group [...] has symbolic dominion”. This, he claims, “demands construction of material group signs such as [...] monuments, signs, objects of worship of the ethnic religion of a given group. Dominion over things “thereby permits dominion in a strict sense.” It is not always and not entirely possible, however, to construct the given domain in accordance with the group’s intentions. The reason is materiality, understood in a non-discursive sense, which, as Kapralski puts it, “often provides resistance, while signs and symbols may be interpreted diversely, often contrary to the intentions of the ‘controllers’” (2008, 29).

In reflecting on the dynamic of memory, I adopt a perspective that takes the role of this non-discursive aspect of materiality into account. Firstly, by considering the spatial, material dimension, we discern voices that are less privileged in shaping a concrete memory landscape (O’Toole and Were 2008). Secondly, the perspective of the place reveals the plurality and diversity of the subjects engaged in forming it (Hodder 2017), which often comes from many different histories that happened in a given space at the same time. As Kapralski rightly points out, an analysis must “maintain the balance between the abstract, ‘dematerialized’ character of contemporary places, in which we construct our memory and play out our identity, and their resistant materiality, connected with both the physical territory and the material objects within it that are carriers of memory” (Kapralski 2008, 36). The place is not only a background for action but an essential component of it, which “stabilizes and gives durability to social structural categories, differences, and hierarchies, arranges patterns of face-to-



face interaction [...]” and “embodies and secures otherwise intangible cultural norms, identities, memories and values [...]” (Gieryn 2000, 473). Paul Conner-ton (2009) writes of “place memory,” dependent upon the topography, distinguishing “‘memorial’-type memory, a specific form of remembering the past, from the ‘locus’ type.” According to Maria Lewicka’s interpretation, it is the locus type, including an original street grid, staircase, or surviving pump next to a building, that is “an inextricable part of the way of experiencing a place” (Lewicka 2012, 434–435); a live setting that remains accessible and cognizable to the senses (Pink 2009). To clarify what is meant by “material,” I refer to the findings of the so-called “material turn” (Latour 2011; Olsen 2013). First, in this perspective, materiality gains agency, becoming independent from the human world in the spirit of the tradition of the Durkheimian social fact. In other words, the agency of materiality can be understood as the capacity to influence individuals. The influence can be perceived in two ways: first, as tacit knowledge, interacting with the habitual knowledge of acting individuals (Preda 1999, 360–361). Second, the role of agency of materiality can be seen in the process of achieving and confirming a social order – material things join society together, as well as contributing to establishing social asymmetry and social divisions (Arbiszewski 2008). *Sui generis* power comes not so much from powerful individuals or collective entities operating in a given place as from geographical locations, spatial order, or historical symbolic meanings (Gieryn 2000, 475), such as social borders. Third, materiality acts as storage and makes the past current, yet not in a linear form, but in that of a palimpsest (Huysen 2004, 7; Olsen 2013, 198). This affects the nature of habitual knowledge as it links past emotions to a concrete place. As a result, materiality has the potential for counter-memory, meaning that it does not allow us to forget an uncomfortable and traumatic collective past that has been consigned to oblivion and silence (Olsen 2013, 169).

I analyze the dynamic of collective memory, referring to Giddens’s (1979) structuration theory and Archer’s (2013) theory of agency. Duality of memory is manifested in the varied mutual influence of active social actors and the structural conditions that define the resources and rules of potential mnemonic practices = of social actors. From this point of view, space, place, and things can be seen as both the sources and the results of the resources and rules of mnemonic practices. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng note that “thinking with space also draws attention to the bodies that inhabit and traverse it, and the mnemonic force it exerts on them – just as bodies shape, in turn, the spaces around them” (2015, 5). A similar understanding of this dynamic is developing in critical place inquiry (Tuck and McKenzie 2015). According to Rodman, “places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and

multiple constructions” (1994, 641). In the next step, I will refer to a specific case study to demonstrate the complexity of the connections between place and memory and its consequences regarding fieldwork.

#### CONVEYING PARTICULAR PLACE MEMORY THROUGH ONE’S EMOTIONS

Biographical experiences accumulate in a place, forming the locus type of memory, where a particular perspective of involvement in a past event, the emotions felt, and the body’s reactions interweave with the interpretations, meanings, and values attached to their later life. For people with living memory of specific events, one can refer to the formation of a particular mnemonic place, which embodies the personal history, harnessing the interlocutor’s emotions and body to it. The place then assigns geographical coordinates to the memories in a literal sense. The interlocutors relate what happened in the past from the point of physical space from which they participated in the events at the time. This is even more the case if the experiences were accompanied by strong emotions involving awareness of a threat to one’s own life. When the interviewees remember, they move around their own personal, particular topography. An example is a story told by Zofia Tomkiewicz,<sup>21</sup> a woman from a village adjoining Rymanów who, during the research, was living a few kilometers away in Rymanów Zdrój (Spa). When war broke out, she was 18 years old. During the interview, she said little about Jews. But an exception was the story of Regina Pinkas, a Jewish friend she had gone to school with before the war and who went into hiding after the liquidation of the Rymanów ghetto. Zofia recalled that Regina’s father, who worked as a glazier in the town, was imprisoned in Bereza Kartuska before the war for belonging to the communist party: “because he was doing a revolution a bit already. He didn’t agree with one or the other belief. He was already like it is now,” she explains. Unfortunately, somebody gave away Regina’s hiding place – the cellar in a townhouse. Tomkiewicz remembered that she was at her grandmother’s house on Kolejowa Street in Posada Dolna at the time when somebody ran over to tell them that the Germans had caught Regina Pinkas and were taking her to the Jewish cemetery where they carried out executions. “Grandma didn’t shut me in – ‘run’, she said, pushing me out,” Tomkiewicz recalled. “‘Go, go, you’ll see what’s happening.’ I went. And I hurry along, by the school... it’s still there, the school in Rymanów... that road... even today I could take you there. I follow the Pinkas girl and those... So they went ahead,

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Zofia Tomkiewicz, born in 1921, conducted in Rymanów-Zdrój in 2019 by MZ and MŁ.

and me, quite a way, I don't think anyone noticed me. Since I'd come running and I stood there, at the side, and she walked. They stripped her naked, completely. And what did she have on? She had stockings. She had a beautiful belt, gorgeous, one that attached the halters they had then. They used to put them on. And she was wearing that and... One of them, son of a bitch, took that belt off her, put it in his pocket, put it away." After these words comes a depiction of the point in the town space from which the woman observed the tragic events as she describes the person who was watching with her, trying to warn her using gestures that Tomkiewicz attempted to recall, not to go any closer. "They stood there a moment longer, took a look, shot the girl, and that was it. She fell into the grave and... The Pinkas girl. Whether there's... there's any trace... I don't know." As she said these words, probably returning to her emotions from the time in her memory, she was visibly moved.<sup>22</sup> In such a case, it is challenging for the researcher to find oneself in this unique topography of memory, summoned not so much with words as gestures, glances, facial expressions, and even timbre of voice. In such a situation, the researcher must endeavor to come close to the way the interlocutor experiences, remembers, and imagines this place (Pink 2009). At the same time, as the interlocutor shares her experiences and the researcher tries to understand them, they negotiate the meanings of a certain commonplace (Pink 2000, 82) in which they move, making the experiences of the interviewee intersubjectively accessible. Among these carriers of meanings are the emotions expressed in the interview, which become a chance to understand the memory in question when there is no language available because the subject is not included in the narrative. Furthermore, emotions often provide the generic nature of particular experiences. The researcher faces the challenge of capturing these emotions, interpreting them convincingly, and doing so in the context of reflection on her or his emotional reaction to the interlocutor's story. Zofia Tomkiewicz does not give a name to her experiences of watching as her schoolmate is murdered. It is possible that she does not recognize them because they were not part of the transmission of vernacular memory. Analyzing the whole interview, one could say that, at best, she was indifferent to the fate of the murdered Jews. Yet when she recalled the death of her Jewish schoolmate, for a moment, she revealed her past experiences, which went far beyond indifference. Emotions are often ambiguous and could be misinterpreted. For this reason, they shed light on the complexity of the phenomenon, easily missed while taking into

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<sup>22</sup> I was not present during the interview. Researchers who conducted it described their impressions and observations during a discussion on the fieldwork, and then included all the information into field notes. The transcript of an interview often does not provide a researcher with this kind of material.

account only its discursive aspect. What stands out in the cited passage is how her memory of the harrowing event concentrated on specific objects, such as the beautiful belt despoiled from Regina at the moment of her tragic death. The latter is a similar case with Maria Dworżańska's<sup>23</sup> recollection of the Wehrmacht attacking Rymanów in 1939. The woman remembered what she was wearing that day: "And my mum let me wear that dress when the war broke out. She said, 'Wear the best one, because maybe...'. Yes, they were bombing Rymanów. We watched from Łazy [a village located above Rymanów]. Dad and I were watching from the loft, from the window, when they bombed the Rymanów church. Everyone here was saying, 'Oh dear, maybe they'll displace us, maybe... the best dress'. My mum let me wear it because it was new." One can imagine what emotions the outbreak of war brought: fear, uncertainty, and also the sense that this was a special, even ceremonial moment. The emotions attributed to particular objects enhanced a recollection of the traumatic events.

#### GRASPING THE UNCONSCIOUS

During the interviews, the interlocutors located their story through such references as "not far from here," "next to the church," "on this side of the village," leading the researcher's gaze through the experiences they recalled. Hints, nods of the head, and gestures often allude to the resources of local habitual knowledge. This is visible in the way in which the teacher Stanisław Krukar, born in Deszno,<sup>24</sup> discussed a painful event from the war. I will quote a lengthy passage from his statement to depict the way he refers to a challenging experience, picturing its particular topography. It was 1943 when he saw a Jewish girl being led by two Germans. Krukar recalled: "I remember exactly on 6 May, but it wasn't in 1942, my mum gave me 10 zloty to buy cakes, sweets, some orangeades at the spa [...] And I was coming back from the resort with this bundle and I walked across the bridge [...]. There was a road, then later a ... and pavement. And after the pavement, it was just a forest. There were birch trees, aspen, alder, forest all the way to the river. And when I went in out of that bend, it was a straight road all the way to Krzysiek [his present colleague]. I noticed that from the Deszno side there were two Germans coming along with rifles, and in front of them there was a girl, so because I didn't want to meet them, I quickly, probably even before their eyes, I hid in the forest 30 or 40

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Maria Dworżańska, born in 1928, conducted in 2019 by MDD.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Stanisław Krukar, born in 1933, conducted in Rymanów in 2018 by MŁ.

meters from the road, I went into the bushes and hid and waited. And those Germans stood almost across from me, and I saw that one of them took out a sweet, I think, from his pocket and threw it out and told the girl to get it... And the poor thing went out; one of them pulled his rifle and shot at her. So for me, it was something... [interlocutor paused]" Krukar described the impression the event made on him. "I came home all tearful, crying, and I went to my brother, of course, Jasiek, and told him about it, and I found out that it had been a Jewish girl, she'd been taken from Deszno, but I don't know if she hadn't gone to the ghetto in Rymanów or if she'd been picked up on the way."

This is an example of locus-type memory. There is a certain-of-factness (Connerton 2009, 32–34). Thus, reading the transcript of the interview, one gets the impression that the narrator is not mentioning something. Yet, it is possible that he was unable to express his intuitions, did not have all the knowledge about the facts, or simply assumed that he was talking to somebody familiar with the vernacular memory and that there is no need to explain everything in detail. If it was 1943, then the Jewish girl must have been in hiding in the village. Somebody likely informed on her whereabouts, which could cast a shadow on the members of the local community. It could be an example of unspoken truth. In such a situation, the researcher must deal with information that needs to be deduced from the context, from the unsaid, and which at the analysis stage requires a cautious, very considered approach to the material (O'Toole and Were 2008, 631). The customary nature of the physical space and material culture also means that other sources are needed to allow the researcher to form a credible interpretation. At the same time, the researcher must be aware that it is sometimes impossible to fully explain the non-discursive. In this context, it is worth mentioning the category of non-memory, the concept of which was developed by Roma Sendyka (2016) in reference to Lech Mróz and Sławomir Kaprański's work on the Romani-Sinti genocide (Porajmos). Sendyka described non-memory as performative, affective, irrational, and full of suppressions, avoidances, and omissions. Non-memory refers to something that one knows but does not want to think about. It is communal and characterizes small communities, resulting from a "conspiracy of silence" (Zerubavel 2006) within communities. I would say, however, that all which remains unspoken, broken off in half-sentences, and seems chaotic, is the reverse of the existing narrative about the past or commemorative actions – a component of memory, its affective, embodied part, connected to tacit knowledge – the complex memory inherent to place memory.

## DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF PLACE MEMORY

It seems that the transmission of vernacular memory, regarding the specific events, people, or places, and the way they are discussed could be differentiated even within one community. The content of vernacular memory may depend on geographical location, where something was experienced, and the number of people involved, but also on emotions associated with the event and the degree of their dissemination. An example of a place with a weak presence in the local memory, lacking any material commemoration, was the German company Kirchhof, which was connected to the fate of the Jewish residents. During the war, it operated in the assembly building in Posada Dolna, a village located below the town. After the displacement of the Jews from Rymanów in mid-August 1942, around a hundred Jewish men worked at Kirchhof, and they were sent by the Germans to do various building work in the town. At a certain point, some of them were sent away to Plaszow concentration camp (located in Krakow), and others to the ghetto in Rzeszów. Surviving Rymanów Jews, the brothers Jakub, Nachum, and Zvi Weinberger,<sup>25</sup> found themselves in a group of 16 craftsmen sent first to Krosno and then to Plaszow. Stanisław Hanus,<sup>26</sup> who lived in Posada Dolna near Kirchhof, indicated the location of the company as follows: “Over the river, there [...] On the stream, it’s there by the bridge...”. The fact that he was close to the events allowed him to learn details (not heard of during other interviews) that he alludes to in the interview. “One supervisor here was, I remember, Sapala was his name. He was not from here, but I think he married here. But I’m not 100 percent sure. I know that the Germans... Those Jews would sing, I remember the verse: *Sapala’s coming, putting them away, dum dum dum, and Walter’s coming and cursing, dum dum dum...* Walter was a boss. [...] Or they sang that: *Śmigły-Rydz taught us zilch, golden Hitler taught us to work*”. The proximity to the events enabled the interviewee to add some facts to a Jewish relation regarding the place and inattentively shed light on an underprivileged and collectively forgotten narrative. The interlocutor described the fate of the Jews from the perspective of a place he knew, without being able to say much about what had happened to the Jewish residents in the town that bordered his village. In this case, the sense of place has influenced recollections by serving as a historically specific container (Rodman 1994, 641).

On the opposite side of the spectrum, one may indicate a widely known story within the community, that of the murder of the Szponder brothers at the hands of two Poles. Several factors may have influenced the widespread familiarity with this story among members of the community. After the war, the men were

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<sup>25</sup> Yad Vashem Archive O.3/2283.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Stanisław Hanus.

sentenced to a trial conducted by the so-called August decree.<sup>27</sup> It could be said that this trial objectified the crime – the interlocutors shared the personal details of the perpetrators much more frequently than was the case with other murders or cases of Jews in hiding being given up to the Germans, justifying this by the fact that the men were convicted. Legal proceedings became crucial structural factors that caused to include localized recollections into local memory. After an exhumation, a trailer carrying the bodies drove into the center of Rymanów, where many people could see them.<sup>28</sup> Some residents took part in the trial. The case must have stirred collective emotions, given the role members of the local community played in it. Interestingly, the interlocutors referred to the events themselves in various ways, depending on the locus of their experiences. They also differed in their moral evaluation of the killing. The recognition of the crime led to various mnemonic practices and collective emotions regarding the tragic events. The Szponder brothers worked as tailors before the war. “The townhouse is still there too,” said Zofia Tomkiewicz, “Here the flat, that was it. In the edge, on the corner.”<sup>29</sup> In photographs of the pre-war market square, the sign “Józef Szponder. Tailor” can be made out in the elevation of one of the townhouses. Tomkiewicz remembered him as a good craftsman, noting that “[...] you know, he wasn’t kind of Jewish-looking, old Jewish, just rather, well, as it was then”. The brothers were hidden by a Polish journeyman from the nearby village of Łazy, at first in Nowa Wieś (today a street in Rymanów). Maria Dworzańska, whose family home in Łazy adjoined the journeyman’s house, recalled her father saying that somebody must have informed on the hiding Szponders. The men were visited by the Blue (Polish) police. Only one of them managed to escape. Dworzańska related what happened next. “And he [the journeyman] transported this wounded Jew, in the night so that nobody would see... The journeyman had a lean-to there, and every two weeks, he’d take food to the forest. It was a big secret. No one knew about it. But as I say, my dad, in the neighborhood, was a military man in his youth... And he’d watch and became curious because he saw that the man was often going to the forest, taking something there. And, you know what happened... Then... He got a friend and they decided they would finish off the Jew”. The woman mentioned that some residents agreed on the perpetrators’ conduct, admitting: “They were heroes because the Jew had gangrene because he was wounded in the leg and taken unconscious to the forest...

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<sup>27</sup> A decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation from 31 August 1944 on punishment for the fascist-Hitlerite criminals responsible for murders and cruelty to the civilian population and prisoners as well as traitors to the Polish Nation, and later amendments.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Janusz Konieczny, born in 1942, conducted in 2019 by MDD.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Zofia Tomkiewicz.

the Jew suffered terribly, and he couldn't bear the suffering. And the Jew wanted to come out of the hiding place so the Germans would shoot him". The perpetrators left prison as part of an amnesty. One man soon died, which was explained in a town because he was no longer able to get over the experiences. But the other perpetrator, the Szponder brothers' former journeyman, started a family in Rymanów. His wife was a teacher in the local school. Zofia Tomkiewicz recalled: "half of Rymanów, so to speak, disowned him, didn't want to sit at the same table as him [...] When the Christmas wafer was shared afterward, they... because he married the teacher... None of the people from here sat at the table. Because you killed a man; killed a Jew. He was like a leper here. And others defended him. What was he supposed to do?"<sup>30</sup> A different version of the same killing was presented by an interviewee born after the war whose father was called as an expert witness during the trial, saying that just before the Russians invaded, the men shot one of those in hiding and finished the other off with an axe. One of the perpetrators, the Szponders' journeyman, later defended himself by saying that he had been acting on the orders of the National Armed Forces (according to others, he told the Home Army), by eliminating communist Jews. This interlocutor mentioned that "[...] my father didn't believe this version, my father believed that, as they were wealthy tailors, that they simply paid for safekeeping throughout the war, and then as the Russians were approaching, those who had been taking money from them were scared that they would demand its return, and that was their solution". The perpetrator believed that the sentence was unjust and that he and his family did not deserve public ostracism. Even today, this history still has currency in Rymanów, and the man's relatives are seeking rehabilitation of his act. The place is imbricated in moral judgments and deviant practices as well (Gieryn 2000).

One of the great theoreticians of the sociology of memory, Maurice Halbwachs, showed that place stabilizes collective memory (Halbwachs 1980). The interviewees often referred to past social boundaries, dividing physical space into "landowner's,"<sup>31</sup> "Jewish," or "Rusyn." Place stabilizes social structural categories, differences, and hierarchies. This is connected to the issue of seized property, which often remains unregulated, meaning that it is still a current concern and may result in disquiet and fear about revisiting the past (Stola 2007). Simmel wrote that a "special sociological significance of fixing in space could be designated by the symbolic expression "pivotpoint." The spatial immovability of an object of interest creates certain forms of relationships that group around it. [...] A not uninteresting variation of this may be observed in that relationship

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Zofia Tomkiewicz.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Janina Ziajka, born in 1928, conducted in 2019 by MDD.



of economic individuals which is manifested in the mortgage. The reason why mortgages tend to be connected almost exclusively to immovable assets is a combination of the stationary character and the indestructibility of these assets, which can be considered as the correlate of the exclusivity [...] (1997, 146). In the case of “void communities,” the circumstances in which ethnic Poles assumed power over a given space mean that this exclusivity might be questioned. Therefore the case of property still triggers social emotions. Moreover, houses can be seen as loci of memory as they go back into the past, and at the same time, draw that past into the present (Connerton 2009, 21).

Another manifestation of the tragic past in the city space was the memory of the German camp for Russian prisoners of war,<sup>32</sup> which was on the former Potocki family land on the edges of Rymanów. It is estimated that 10,000 soldiers may have died there. Interestingly, Jews worked on both the construction of the barracks and observation towers in 1941 and the demolition of the buildings in 1943; elements of the barracks were probably transported to places including Plaszow by the Germans.<sup>33</sup> The interviewees remembered the sight of bodies lying in the mud. Most of the prisoners lived in the open air, with only a few living in barracks. The camp was characterized by terrible conditions. Prisoners died from hunger, emaciation, and a typhus epidemic. The disease was spread by fleas in the clothes of the prisoners. The half-sister and neighbor of one of the interlocutors died of typhus fever.<sup>34</sup> Maria Dworzańska’s father was appointed by the Germans to carry bodies: “And again they carried them away, they took these corpses, [...] And Dad said that some of them were still breathing, or even moving an arm or a leg,” she recalled. The victims were buried in a mass grave on a nearby hill, where the Soviet prisoner-of-war cemetery can be found. In the place where the camp once stood, there are now family homes. There is no commemoration and no remnants of the camp. Yet, even today, this area is known as “the barracks.” The memories about the prisoner-of-war camp proved to be among the most distinct and widespread from the time of the Second World War. The proximity and visibility of the mass death of the people imprisoned there had a role to play in this. The camp could be memorable also because it brought a new structural element to the area and formed a tangible boundary between prisoners and inhabitants.

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<sup>32</sup> IPN (Institute of National Remembrance) Rz 191/497, pp. 2–3. *Ankiety Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce. Represje na ludności innych narodowości. Powiat Sanok.*

<sup>33</sup> Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute 301/3194, Account of the Weinberger brothers, O.3/2283.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Janina Ziajka.

The last issue to consider is the relationship between vernacular memory and public memory shaped by historical policy. The interlocutors who had living memory of certain events to which they link strong emotions stuck to their own or popular interpretations of the past, unconvinced of the promoted cultural or political representations. By this, I particularly mean two topoi of contemporary Polish politics of memory – the Polish Righteous among the Nations of the World, treated as a symbol of Poles' attitude to the Jews during the Holocaust, and the so-called “cursed soldiers,” the anti-communist underground pro-independence movement embodying Polish resistance to the communist rule imposed on the Polish nation after the war. In the first case, the interviewees did not use the category of the Righteous or people who saved Jews (*ratujący Żydów*). When alluding to the fact of people hiding, they mostly referred to the danger caused by these actions, not so much for those who decided to help them as for the entire community where they lived. For instance, Zofia Tomkiewicz also pointed out that those who hid Jews did so for money because of poverty or their difficult living conditions. In her view, this was the case of Maria Bolanowska and her son Piotr. These residents of Posada Górna gave shelter to Ajzik Bobik and were murdered by the Germans as a result.<sup>35</sup> Tomkiewicz expressed a similar view about the Ulma family:<sup>36</sup> Everything was for money. Because there was poverty, the poverty was terrible as the Ulmas had so many children, the poor things. She, I don't know, probably would have put the devil up to feed those children [...] A poor, backward woman, and that's it... Because another would've said no, we're eating potato soup, not grabbing [...], I feel I could die. Because a bullet in the head, a moment,” Tomkiewicz says. The “cursed soldiers” topos encountered similar difficulties in Rymanów and the surrounding villages, where a common theme of vernacular memory is the post-war local gangs that left a very negative mark in the residents' memory. Janusz Konieczny,<sup>37</sup> a regional historian, and politician admitted that this was a topic that he decided not to

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<sup>35</sup> Ajzik Bobik was the brother of Maria Bobik, mentioned in the introduction. Somebody noticed Ajzik walking in the fields. The Germans came for him. Then arrested family who helped him. Maria Bolanowska and her son Piotr were shot with Bobik at the site of the mass graves of the Soviet prisoners-of-war. They too were buried there. Władysława Potasiewicz, born in 1929 in Posada Górna, admitted in her interview that nobody took their remains away after the war. A plaque commemorating Maria Bolanowska, Piotr Bolanowski and Ajzik Bobik was unveiled in the vestibule of the Rymanów church in 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Józef and Wiktoria Ulma, together with their six children and the seven Jews (five men, two women, and a girl from Goldman family) and whom they sheltered in the village of Markowa, were murdered by the Germans in the former Lwów Province, now Subcarpathian Province. In contemporary Polish politics of memory, the Ulmas has become a symbol of saving the Jews in the Holocaust, and the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa was opened in recent years.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Janusz Konieczny conducted by MDD.

address in his articles on the region's post-war history. "I couldn't include it because there are families alive, maybe not very close, but close ones too, people who after the war simply stole, killed, looted, and afterward called themselves cursed soldiers, now they can be called that," he explained. Stanisław Hanus, meanwhile, recalled the post-war murders in Posada Dolna, including the execution of the wartime village mayor. Asked who the perpetrators were, he replied: "They can hardly be called partisans because... During the occupation, they weren't here at all, this activity. After the liberation, they somehow multiplied and... And it was the AK [*Armia Krajowa*, Home Army], except that... it was said to be the AK, meaning: and cows and horses ["A Krowy, A Konie"]." Asked to explain, he said: "Because they stole. They were AK. And cows, and horses, and hens ["A Kury"], and ducks ["A Kaczki"]<sup>38</sup>. That was what they said about our... supposed AK men back then". The so-called local gangs were, to a large extent, made up of residents, some of whom then left for the "western lands,"<sup>39</sup> but others stayed. The local community knew what crimes they had committed, as well as what remained unaccounted for in terms of the public discussion on the subject. That two cases show that a particular landscape of memory (Kapralski 2008) often remains particularly complex, exhibiting a power struggle, not only between a dominant group and various groups of Others but also between vernacular and national collective emotions meanings and identifications. This once again shows that mnemonic place is characterized by a particular dynamic of vernacular memory, and the existing structural conditions prevent shaping the memory landscape without taking the latter into account.

### CONCLUSIONS

The fieldwork consisting of personal interviews and observations, supplemented by analysis of documents, allows a researcher to acknowledge non-discursive aspects of collective memory better. Despite increasingly popular research methods – such as research walks – aimed at gaining a better understanding of place or space, a personal interview in situ conducted in one location, usually the respondents' home, continues to be a rich source of information about the relationship with the place (May and Lewis 2019). During one particular meeting between the researcher and interlocutors, information is provided not

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<sup>38</sup> The Polish words for "cow", "horse" and "hens" begin with the letter "k". The interviewee indicated that the local gangs were stealing people's livestock.

<sup>39</sup> Poland's border shifted after the Second World War. Territories of the former Free City of Danzig and pre-war Germany became part of Poland. These were subsequently called in Polish *Ziemie Zachodnie*, the Western Lands.

only by words but also by body language, gestures, facial expressions, or timbre of voice. Any such encounter is emplaced (Pink, 2009). Sitting opposite or close to one another is an experience that engages the body and senses. Interlocutors “invite us to engage not only with what they are saying but with the material and sensorial qualities of the things they describe or interact with,” observes Sarah Pink (2009, 86). People participating in the interview adopt a specific point of view from which the narrative takes place. This kind of conversation creates good conditions for developing long narratives, especially those concerning sensitive topics. The respondents can feel safe in an environment that they know well, and the researcher and interviewee have the chance to build a relationship based on trust, essential to be able to share even the most difficult experiences.

Furthermore, emphasizing place in research permits a focus on the interlocutors’ every day, individual experiences, the meanings they assign to them, the emotions they call forth, and their interpretations – on their sense of agency. The spatial arrangement, objects, and even the natural environment become an essential context for conducting research, encouraging researchers to pause and carefully analyze all kinds of details and individual life trajectories. The issues of place and space may lead to research on social distance, proximity, and co-occurrence of events, which are significant in understanding collective memory, including its affective part, associated with the unconscious and unspoken. Fieldwork emphasizing the active role of the place seems extremely useful for micro-historical or micro-sociological perspectives. It also leads to expand the scope of what we understand by the collective memory.

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EMPLACING VERNACULAR MEMORY:  
LOOKING FOR THE UNCONSCIOUS AND AFFECTIVE ASPECTS  
OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

SUMMARY

The article reflects on the meaning of place in studying vernacular memory as a phenomenon that is both the “carrier” of social actors’ memory and a product of the narrative, the meanings, values, and emotions that the actors attribute to place and the actions they take in response. The author used small town and their neighboring villages as a case study to demonstrate the complexity of the connections between place and memory and its consequences to conducting fieldwork. The main sources upon which the article is based are materials from research conducted by Polish and Ukrainian researchers in 2017–2019 on the memory of Poland and Ukraine after World War II. The study consisted of personal interviews and observations, supplemented by analysis of documents. The article reflects how biographical experiences accumulate in a place, forming the locus type of memory, where a particular perspective of involvement in a past event, the emotions felt, and the body’s reactions interweave with the interpretations, meanings, and meanings values attached to them in later life. It is challenging for the researcher to find oneself in this unique topography of memory, summoned not so much with words as gestures, glances, facial expressions, and even timbre of voice. In such a situation, the researcher must endeavor to come close to how the interlocutor experiences, remembers, and imagines this place. Among these meanings are the emotions expressed in the interview, which become a chance to understand the memory in question.

**Keywords:** vernacular memory, place memory, emotions, fieldwork