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Between *Kan* and *Sham*: Commemorative Materiality of the Łopuchowo Forest

Abstract

The article considers the ambiguous dynamics of the Łopuchowo Forest, a significant location of Holocaust commemoration among Israeli groups, as the location of the massacre of Tykocin Jews. Its site includes not only marked mass graves and a central monument(s), but also numerous smaller vehicles of memory placed there by Israeli visitors. The collection of lesser artefacts, affected over time by the acting materiality of an organic environment, contributes to the meaning of this forest memorial space. Following these material remnants through autoethnography, the Łopuchowo Forest is approached in terms of different connotations that forest evokes in the Polish and Israeli memory cultures. Considering the dichotomous notions of here (*kan*) and there (*sham*) at play in the Polish-Israeli imaginary, the article addresses the role of the Łopuchowo Forest as an Israeli traumascape.

Keywords: forest, materiality of memory, Israel, Poland, Holocaust memory, autoethnography.

Every culture develops its own notion of forest as a site of memory. In the Polish cultural imaginary, the "top soil" of local forest memory belongs to the Polish heroism of the partition period and World War II

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partisans, and, especially in recent years, post-war anti-communist militias (Sawicka-Mierzyńska, 2020). Polish forests therefore communicate in situ memories of past events occurring on their grounds. Due to the dominant partisan tropes, forest belongs to the national martyrdom narrative, ethnically understood in a rather exclusive, Polish-Roman Catholic way (Konczal, 2017, pp. 37–88). However, certain shifts in the Polish forest narrative have been occurring in the past decade: "along with the growing wave of works and discussions concerning the so-called peripheries of the Holocaust, the forest … is more and more clearly associated with images of the Holocaust" (Kaczmarek, 2017, p. 225). This unfolding inclusion reflects the history of Eastern Europe, where most Jews perished not in camps but on the outskirts of towns, in fields or forests – sites of hiding, mass killings, and unmarked burials (Cole, 2016, pp. 45–68). Despite the resulting omnipresence of the Holocaust in the Polish periphery, forest is a fairly new trace of the Holocaust in the popular Polish imaginary[1] – a trace that is subversive, potentially threatening in character. Not only does it challenge the notion of the exceptionality of Polish forest martyrdom but also, by shifting the focus to local cases of violence, it sheds more light on the questionable figure of the Polish bystander (Duffy, 2025, pp. 122–130; Kaczmarek, 2017, pp. 227–238). Moreover, it spreads the uncomfortable awareness of the existence of a large number of graves scattered in contemporary forests, relating to the already existing forest-cemetery connection that evokes strong and complex meanings within the Polish post-war memory (Jarzyńska & Muchowski, 2020, p. 160).

Such a spectral, haunting character of Eastern European natural spaces, where at first glance "we see nothing that could testify that this is a place of horror. The landscape viewed is calm and friendly – seemingly innocent", has led to their conceptualisation as *contaminated landscapes* (Pollack, 2014, p. 79). As such, Eastern European forests play a powerful role in the Jewish memory and post-memory[2] as traumascapes: concrete and material spaces "constituted through experienced and imagined repetitions of trauma"

[1] It should be noted that alongside forest mass graves in Poland that remain non-sites of memory (Sendyka, 2021), certain burial sites of the dispersed Holocaust were commemorated in the post-war period (though their communist phrasing omitted the ethnicity of the victims) and during the late 1980s, in the twilight years of communism and the resulting opening of borders to the descendants of Polish Jews. In contemporary Poland, the task of commemorating unmarked Holocaust graves is most commonly undertaken by local activists with the involvement of the Polish Jewish community (Janus, 2020).

[2] Nonetheless, at times forests hold simultaneous connotations of nostalgic memory of the lost diasporic world (Ronen, 2007, pp. 237–279). For an overview of the ambiguous motif of European forest in contemporary Israeli visual arts, see Stiassny (2022, p. 1114).

(Tumarkin, 2019, p. 9). In the words of the author of this term, Maria Tumarkin:

> traumascapes are haunted and haunting places, where visible and invisible, past and present, physical and metaphysical come to coexist and share a common space. These are places that get to us, that affect us at the very core, that make us feel everything from awe to unease, from fear to epiphany, from a burst of involuntary memories to a sense of deep, all-powerful transformation. (Tumarkin, 2019, p. 5)

The traumatic connotations of forest at play in the general Jewish image of Poland directly contribute to the topos of Poland as a Jewish necropolis. As Jagoda Budzik observes, "describing Poland as a Jewish cemetery has also become a cultural cliché that rules common associations and affects narratives of pathos", particularly in the implied "contrast between Poland as a land of death and Israel as a country of the revival and life of the Jewish nation" (Budzik, 2018, pp. 381–382). In the light of the above-mentioned topos, the large number of unmarked Holocaust graves allows Jewish visitors to suspect that any encountered Polish forest could have been a site of the Holocaust; just as the semantic boundaries between the term "Poland" and "Auschwitz" are blurred, so are the boundaries between the term "forest" and "cemetery".

Polish forest serves a particular commemorative role in the Jewish-Israeli memory culture – not only as an overarching topos, but as a specific and defined space. The institutional framework of *masa le-polin* (journey to Poland), set up by the Israeli Ministry of Education in 1988, brought thousands of Jewish-Israeli highschoolers on week-long tours focused on Holocaust history. By emphasising the victimisation of the diaspora and the need for a powerful Jewish state to survive, their design followed the governmental narrative model aimed at bolstering the Zionist identity in the coming-of-age participants (Feldman, 2008, pp. 56–92). Despite ongoing controversies regarding their ideological role in Israeli civic education (Soen & Davidovitch, 2011, pp. 14–23), organised journeys to Poland have continued steadily over the decades, and are likewise commonly taken by non-school groups that bring together youth or adults of a shared familial, professional or regional background. Over time, the widespread adoption of the format has led to possible variations in the focus and objectives of particular tours, depending on their organisers (e.g. youth movements, religious institutions) – though their itinerary remains largely standardised. Apart from the main centres of Holocaust memory, groups regularly visit sites of mass graves located outside of the camps and former ghettos. Two forests most commonly visited in this framework, in accordance with the overall trip itinerary, are the Buczyna Forest in Zbylitkow-

ska Góra as the execution site of Tarnów Jews, and the Łopuchowo Forest as the execution site of Tykocin Jews. Participants usually hold a *yizkor* ceremony on the forest grounds, including songs, poems and excerpts from survivors' testimonies, as well as laying down small objects brought with them on the trip from Israel (Uri Meisselman, personal communication, 2021). As Jackie Feldman notes, "the ceremony ends, as almost all voyage ceremonies do, with the communal singing of *Hatikvah*" (Feldman, 2008, p. 119), highlighting the Zionist motif of *mi-shoah li-tkuma*, from Holocaust to revival in the state of Israel. In the analysis below I focus on the Łopuchowo Forest memorial site, exploring the meanings it conveys nowadays as an Israeli traumascape.

Methodological Remarks

It has been noted that a memorial's agency manifests itself not only in its primary social role as a narrative space, but also in its materiality. A memorial's substance, its physical form taken in a particular space, is what observers primarily face, often beyond the political context:

> The monument, by its very physical existence, forces us to take a stance toward it, creating a relationship between the observed object and its observer. The very thing, located beyond the symbolic level, contains a great potential of influence. (Praczyk, 2020, p. 46)

Following this reflection on the role of materiality in memorial spaces, I am thus interested in the material experience of the Łopuchowo memorial site. Highlighting this focus, I have conducted fieldwork at times of either no Israeli visits to the site (due to the COVID-19 mobility restrictions, in August 2021) or a significant reduction of their frequency (due to the Israel-Gaza War, in May 2024). In both cases, I was therefore expecting to encounter Jewish-Israeli "afterimages" – material remains of past memorial practices. I see this as corresponding with Erica Lehrer's observations on the importance of materiality in recent Polish research on Holocaust landscapes (Lehrer, 2022, pp. 240–241).

Throughout the article, I have decided to include autoethnographic excerpts in order to not only address the material experience of the site, but, more importantly, to acknowledge my positionality during the fieldwork. I visited the Łopuchowo Forest simultaneously as an academic researching Israeli memory culture in local forest spaces, a practitioner with experiences in Polish-Jewish memory work, and a non-Jewish Pole. This combination influences my being in site – how I act in the space, what I pay attention to, and how I react to the encountered objects. I consider this self-reflection as cru-

cial in research conducted in traumascapes.[3] As Tumarkin summarises her 20 years of research related to this concept:

> To write about other people's precarious and traumatised lives requires every researcher to keep asking themselves what is at stake for them in their research, why they are doing what they are doing, in the name of what, driven by what. The autoethnographic framework both enables and supports this continuous interrogation of one's positionality, history, privileges, biases, blind spots, agendas, and motivations. (Tumarkin, 2019, p. 6)

At the same time, writing autoethnography is a method of inquiry beyond a particular experience in space and time. Among the approaches to autoethnography, I engage with layered accounts which "focus on the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature", and in which "data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 278). Personal observations from the site are therefore a beginning for the emerging study, emphasising "the procedural nature of research" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 279), and are continuously discussed in the context of relevant literature and Hebrew sources.

The Łopuchowo Forest: Afterimages of Memory

> The bus then makes its way to the death pits. … After about fifteen minutes' ride along narrow roads, the bus stops by a sparse forest, and students walk ten minutes among the trees to the mass death pits, where the Jews of Tykocin were executed. Naomi tells the students that there are no birds in the forest – a sure sign of the presence of death. (Feldman, 2008, pp. 118–119)

Unlike the image painted by Feldman in his anthropological monograph *Above the Death Pits, Beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity*, my visits to the Łopuchowo Forest were filled with sounds: constant rustling of branches in the wind, birds hopping through the sparse undergrowth, and even a woodpecker relentlessly tapping a pine trunk. The perceived deathly silence seems to be a repeated element of the Łopuchowo visit narrative, as it can be found in another personal account from a 2024 organised adult visit, almost three decades after Feldman's fieldwork: "Dense forest, thin trees move in the wind from side to side, as if to say 'we are witnesses of what happened here', and *there is no chirping of birds* in the Łopuchowo forest" (Rozenberg, 2024).

[3] Not coincidentally, two academic articles that refer to the Łopuchowo Forest use the autoethnographic method (Auerbach, 2024; Nelson, 2024).



Figure 1. Central memorial site in the Łopuchowo Forest. The fenced area delimits the location of the largest mass grave. Photo by the author, August 2021.

There is a path leaving the sandy car park located at the side of a narrow regional road, marked with the sign "The mass grave of Tykocin Jews, victims of the Holocaust" in Hebrew and Polish. Leading through a pine forest,[4] it ends in a clearing with green railings delimiting three inconspicuous areas from the rest of the forest. These are the mass graves: three pits in which Jews from Tykocin were executed and buried in August 1941[5] (*Sefer Tiktin*, 1959, pp. 431–440). While the railings facilitate spatial orientation on the grounds and indicate the *sacred* spaces for memorial practices, they seem "to not only stimulate memory, but to limit the influence of the contaminated landscape"

[4] Compared to the first fieldwork in 2021, the 2024 visit surprised me with a large loss of forest tissue. The path between the car park and the memorial now leads through an empty area full of tree stumps and regrowing low vegetation, previously filled with trees. Charred fragments of branches could suggest a fire, though traces of heavy machinery and perfectly rectangular boundaries clearly show that the site was brought to order by local foresters. To my surprise, I noticed candles and stones on some of the felled tree stumps, giving an unusual impression of a memorial for the missing vegetation.

[5] While the massacre of Tykocin Jews was committed by German troops, testimonies of the lone Jewish survivors highlight the rampant hostility of the Polish neighbours, which resulted in a situation of no possible escape.

(Grzybowska, 2020, pp. 425–426) – as if to restrict the forest traumascape to the marked rectangles. My impression of this *delineation of the sacred* was soon challenged upon noticing small commemorative vehicles with Hebrew inscriptions left in the middle of the fenced central grave – stones, a plaque, and a vial of dirt. As the Hebrew inscription inside states: "You did not arrive at the soil of the Land of Israel, that is why the soil of the Land of Israel is coming to you", reflecting the Jewish custom in exile to be buried with earth from the Land of Israel. At first I was certain they must have been thrown behind the fence from afar. Yet their regularity suggested that they had been placed there carefully by someone who had deliberately stepped onto the grave site. Indeed, among the railings there is a small gate which I opened with difficulty, as if it had not been opened for a long time.

The central memorial site is located in front of the largest fenced-off grave. The depiction by Feldman, who accompanied Israeli youth groups on their trips to Poland and visits to the Łopuchowo Forest in the mid-1990s, lists four monuments to be found at the site (Feldman, 2008, p. 118). Among them, he distinguished the first permanent commemoration[6] in the form of a worn-out boulder with common communist-time phrasing in Polish, refraining from the use of the word *Jewish*: "Here are buried 3,000 Polish citizens brutally murdered in 1941–1943 by the Hitlerite thugs. Glory to their memory". In 2021 the site comprised many more monuments as well as more or less permanent plaques attached to the green railings, "giving the visitors a confusing feeling of anachrony whilst decoding different signs from varying times" (Borowicz, 2024). The recent additions are no longer in Polish or English, but in Hebrew – among them those raised in memory of particular Tykocin families, as well as three monuments from military groups. The presence of the latter (including a monument with a large logo of Rafael, the leading supplier of military technologies to the Israeli army), serves as a direct reification of the state narrative framework, demonstrating contemporary strength in contrast to the past weakness. Upon my 2024 visit I noticed how one of them, placed there by an army commanders' delegation in 2017, was severely weathered by dirt and the elements – which brings to mind the slow power of material organic processes over the fleeting expressions of human strength. Recognition of a new Polish plaque at the site (as I found out later, unveiled in

[6] Menachem Tamir (Turek), a survivor from Tykocin and chairman of the Jewish Historical Commission in post-war Bialystok, notes in the Tykocin memorial book that the mass graves were already fenced and marked with commemorative plaques in Polish and Hebrew in 1944, by a group of Jewish survivors who visited the site on the third anniversary of the massacre (*Sefer Tiktin*, 1959, pp. 586–587).

August 2023 on the anniversary of the massacre) disrupted this thought; attached to the railings of the central mass grave, it contains an elaborate quote from Pope John Paul II addressing the shared Polish-Jewish character of "our land", which due to the Jewish suffering "has become a holy relic". It is signed by "Memory House – To the Elder Brothers in the Faith" (*Dom Pamięci – Starszym Braciom w Wierze*) – a community of Polish Christians holding regular prayers for the Jewish victims in Treblinka and other Holocaust sites.

More importantly, the site includes a variety of objects missing from Feldman's description. They are clearly present in the autoethnographic recollections of Joanna Auerbach, who, upon participating in a 2017 trip to Poland organised by the Sydney Jewish Museum, noted her impressions of Łopuchowo:

> we walked a path through the mesmerising, pale green trees of the Lopuchowo Forest to come upon the massacre site and graveyard of Tykocin's Jews, who were murdered there by the Nazis in 1941. We were clearly not the first to visit, for we found the space strewn with impromptu commemoratives – small stones (a traditional Jewish bereavement practice), hand-made plaques, and Israeli flags. To me, *it resembled a garbage site* [emphasis mine – MPB]. (Auerbach, 2024, p. 35)

The *garbage site*, later mediated in Auerbach's article as "the messy evidence of visitation" that reflects "the ways in which tourists personalise their experiences at such sites" (Auerbach, 2024, p. 35), is in fact a collection of lesser commemorative vehicles: Israeli flags in all shapes and sizes, small stones and ceramic plaques with Hebrew inscriptions and hand-painted white and blue ornaments (some of them illegible or covered by moss), sheets of paper with names of the victims – some printed and some handwritten, some laminated and some not (those already show signs of water damage), endless remains of tealights and yizkor candles bearing commemorative slogans and symbols, and even seashells and Israeli shekel coins – all covered with dry pine needles. They are found all around the memorial space – stacked on the monuments located in its central part, placed around them on the ground, on the railings of the graves, and even pinned to the surrounding trees.

Their unrestrained multiplicity at the site bears similarity to temporary memorials typical for traumascapes, i.e. "ephemeral memorials made of flowers, candles, balloons, hand-penned letters, sympathy cards, and stuffed animals that precipitate after unexpected, and generally highly-publicised, traumas, often on the site where those traumas have occurred" (Doss, 2008, p. 6), rather than to a memorial site of a paradigmatical historical event. Yet their overwhelming visual and material incompatibility resembles another specific site: the Rzuchów Forest clearings, the site of mass graves of the Chełmno extermination camp. As a result of the activities of various circles related to





Figures 2 and 3. Memorial remnants in the Łopuchowo Forest. Photos by the author, May 2024.

commemoration, and in a situation of a lack of a proper central monument, the Rzuchów clearings "gradually became an assemblage of subsequent commemorations, chaotically composed in the reviving vegetation in their area" (Smykowski, 2020, p. 497; see also Borowicz, 2024). Leaving aside the conventional spatial order of memorial sites in Polish memory culture, I came to

the realisation that such a collection of subsequently added commemorative vehicles (albeit more standardised) would seem appropriate in Israeli forests, frequently functioning as spaces of remembrance – a condition that Israeli foresters at times call *zihum ha-ya'ar*, pollution of the forest. I recognised from that point on that from the perspective of its commemorative materiality, Łopuchowo is an Israeli space.

Between *Kan* and *Sham*

This impression was confirmed when I noticed metal plaques by the smaller mass graves – already slightly corroded, scattered in unordered locations (they were additionally relocated between 2021 and 2024). The four plaques were identical, bearing the Hebrew inscription: "This tree was planted in memory of the Tykocin Jews who were annihilated during the Holocaust". The act of tree planting, an active form of commemoration typical for the Jewish-Israeli memory culture, thus seems to have been directly *transplanted* into a Polish forest. The plaques are signed by the 2017 delegation of "Witnesses in Uniform" (*Edim be-madim*), an educational project of the Israeli Defence Forces that brings army commanders on Holocaust trips to Poland. According to the official IDF account of the trip, the 2017 delegation "tried to create an active memory and act to commemorate the approximately 2,500 victims who were massacred: they painted the fences around the firing pits, planted saplings and flowers, cleaned and cultivated the area" (Rothbaum, 2017).

On the plaque in front of me I noticed a green mark, deliberately covering something with paint that matched the colour of the railings surrounding the graves. At first I suspected someone had vandalised it, out of antisemitism or boredom, but each of the plaques had the same mark in the same spot. Upon closer examination, an obscured Hebrew word emerged from beneath the paint – *zayt*, meaning "olive". The plaques, which appear to have been prepared in advance in Israel, had expected the delegation to plant memorial trees of local Israeli significance, namely olive trees. I wondered what had happened between the initial plans and the added green layer. Was it the incompatibility of the species with Polish forest conditions, or difficulty with purchasing olive tree saplings in Polish garden centres? I am not sure if any trees were actually planted in site. I saw a spruce sprouting from the grave on the left – yet since spruces grow naturally in site, it is impossible to assess if this one was planted deliberately. However, in front of the grave on the right I eventually noticed two other evergreens – ones that could not have been a part of spontaneous vegetation in a Polish forest. There were two thuja shrubs growing in front of the mass grave – a foreign decorative species commonly used in Polish



Figure 4. Metal plaque found at the site, moved to a different location over time. Photo by the author, May 2024.

back gardens. The incompatibility of the ornamental thuja in a natural forest environment is compelling. I could not help but think about the ecological controversies surrounding species planted in Israeli forests; surrounded by a pine forest, I almost involuntarily thought of Israeli pines.

The surprising juxtaposition of Polish and Israeli forests serving as spaces of commemoration in the same Jewish-Israeli memory culture comes in very different historical and emotional contexts. A mnemonic function is generally attributed to Israeli forests in an *ex situ* manner, planted as commemorations or receiving subsequent monuments within their perimeter in locations unrelated to the honoured person or event – much less unsettling compared to the tragic *in situ* memories of Polish forests. A student quoted by Feldman notes upon their visit to Łopuchowo: "I had the sense of someone hiding behind the trees and watching me all the time, like the eyes of their spirits were upon me. I was afraid" (Feldman, 2008, p. 119). Similar feelings of distress can be found in Yishai Sarid's novel *The Memory Monster* (*Mifletzet ha-zikaron*), whose narrator – a young Israeli historian who guides Holocaust tours to Poland – meets an Israeli archaeologist at the Sobibór site and is soon left alone in the middle of a forest:

> Now it was just me and the forest and the memory. … Soon, an SS car would drive by, a Mercedes or an Opel, stopping me and asking to see my papers, sending me

> back there. I should have asked the archaeologist to wait for me. It's bad news, being in this forest alone. Only when I reached the paved road again and saw the sign that read *Lublin* did I begin breathing normally again. But I still didn't feel safe. Not at all. (Sarid, 2021, p. 25)

Returning here is the topos of Poland as a Jewish necropolis which embodies "Israel's tangled relationship with diasporic spatiality – a complex relationship that plays a significant role in Israeli Jewish identity" (Stiassny, 2022, p. 1106). The dichotomous notions of the Israeli-here (*kan*) and the diasporic-there (*sham*) at play in the Polish-Israeli imaginary (Ronen, 2007, pp. 237–279) becomes crystallised in the motif of *mi-shoah li-tkuma*, from Holocaust to revival, and makes Poland the ultimate *eretz sham* ("the country over there") – the antinomy of Israel (Budzik, 2023, pp. 41–105). In a similar manner, Feldman's study underlines how one of the goals of standardised trips to Poland is to "manifest strength and survival through massive common presence on Polish soil" (Feldman, 2008, p. 72) while keeping the two separate through "the corporeal performance of mass 'togetherness'" that isolates "the voyagers from their contemporary Polish surroundings" (Stiassny, 2022, p. 1108).

The distinctiveness of the two worlds is reproduced in the commemorative materiality of Łopuchowo. On each anniversary of the massacre, an official ceremony is held at the site by the local Polish authorities and community members, sometimes also with Israeli participation, during which flower wreaths and grave lanterns are laid by the participants. By acknowledging this site through a ritual established for martyrdom sites in the Polish memory culture, Łopuchowo is therefore officially included in the local memorial topography. Yet while the site includes objects from both Israeli (the great majority) and Polish visitors, they remain bounded in their own languages and commemorative repertoires, providing meanings to their respective members without the goal of a transnational exchange of practices. Despite shared space and at times mutual ceremonies, there is no "wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms and practices of memory" or "ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders" (Erll, 2011, p. 11); memorial practices typical for the *kan* do not translate into those of the *sham*, and vice versa.

Even so, the Israeli material remnants are not tools of collective *reclaiming* or *appropriating* the diasporic space, but attempts at taming its unsettling character – emerging not from a strong collective stance, but rather from a more fragile individual one. Building on Noga Stiassny's discussion on "multiple manifestations of here and there, both within and outside Is-

rael" (Stiassny, 2022, p. 1110), I see Łopuchowo's materiality as constituting a paradoxical Israeli-*here* inside the Polish-*there* – an exterritorial pocket of the *kan*, a reassuring Israeli presence among the overwhelming *sham*, the threatening diasporic spatiality. Karina Jarzyńska and Jakub Muchowski note how peripheral post-Holocaust spaces are locally facilitated by the work of Polish memory activists who produce objects and practices that allow those spaces' unsettling qualities to be processed (Jarzyńska & Muchowski, 2020, p. 160). Similarly, the enduring material remnants of Israeli practices, conveying unambiguously Israeli cultural codes[7] articulated exclusively in Hebrew, continue to mitigate the disturbing, retraumatising character of Łopuchowo in preparation for future Israeli visitors – almost as "a form of graffiti that enables a 'conversation between visitors over time'" (Auerbach, 2024, p. 35).

Between Then and Now

Analysing the literary manifestations and subversions of the *kan–sham* dichotomy in contemporary Hebrew literature, Budzik observes how

> in the phantasmagorical space of Poland everything is happening that would not have the right to happen – or at least not with such intensity – in the home-space of the protagonists, or that would threaten to shake the national structure that constitutes it. (Budzik, 2023, p. 100)

Against the perceived unchangeability of this topos, today the "impermeable boundaries between Israel and Exile, power and helplessness, life and death, 'us' and 'them'" (Feldman, 2008, p. 6) seem to be more porous than ever. Examples of this faltering dichotomy can be found in recent social media content, regularly uploaded by Israelis participating in trips to Poland. In a January 2025 Instagram post a young Israeli describes his Łopuchowo Forest experience as follows:

> And then the ceremony came. The ceremony itself was quite beautiful, but that was not the main point. Mainly because during the ceremony, as a flag bearer proudly holding the flag of our country, the only Jewish country, the country that was established to protect us from these events and to keep them from happening again, *and then they happened again* [emphasis mine – MPB], even if to a much smaller extent, in our country with our army where we are supposed to be as safe as possible… (Drutman, 2025)

[7] At times they reflect contemporary inner-Israeli issues, as can be seen in the 2016 controversy over an Israeli flag found in Łopuchowo with the Hebrew slogan "Let's continue death to the leftists" (Reinstein, 2016).

Already during my May 2024 visit I stumbled upon recent traces of Israeli presence in site – a sign of trips to Poland continuing despite the ongoing war. Among the objects, I noticed a fresh-looking sticker commemorating a fallen Givati Brigade soldier with the Hebrew slogan "Do good, you will receive good". Based on the medium, I initially assumed that it was a 7 October commemoration; over the last year, stickers carrying a name, an uplifting slogan and a picture of a young person became ubiquitous in the Israeli public space as a private commemoration of the murdered civilians and fallen soldiers. Later I realised I was wrong: the soldier from the sticker was killed in 2022 in the northern West Bank, serving by the Israeli settlement of Shavei Shomron. Still, the fallen soldier-related content found in site evoked tones different from the aforementioned monuments from military representatives – not of a firm collective response to the past tragedy, but of an individual loss brought upon by the present condition and policy of the Jewish state. An even more direct example of this collective-to-individual and then-to-now shift is brought by an account of a September 2024 trip to Poland titled *Tikvah be-Ya'ar Lopuhovah* ("Hope in the Łopuchowo Forest"). More than a hundred highschoolers from Meitar gathered in the Łopuchowo Forest for a ceremony unlike the previous ones. In the video, the students stand together singing *Hatikvah* and holding pictures of the 101 Israeli hostages remaining in Gaza at the time, among them a picture of a Meitar police officer – a 7 October victim whose body was abducted into the Strip. As the article states, the group members prayed every morning of the trip for the return of the hostages (Baler, 2024).

A journey to Poland in this case no longer means leaving the safe *kan* in favour of the dangerous *eretz sham*, but mixing the two orders. It reflects how the Shoah has become "a central analogy for Israelis regarding the traumatic 7 October events, giving immediate linguistic expression to feelings of terror, abandonment and helplessness" (Goldberg, 2024, p. 116). This parallel ruptures the very core of the *mi-shoah li-tkuma* motif, and as such has deep implications for the dominant national narrative, as reflected in the recent shifts of meanings found in the Łopuchowa Forest by Israeli visitors. However, Amos Goldberg warns that this blurring of linguistic time between past and present in the Shoah analogy, as much as it expresses the intensity of personal and collective trauma (especially for those who experienced the event directly), at the governmental level acts as a dangerous simplification leading to the justification of violence, destruction and war crimes in the asymmetric war in Gaza (Goldberg, 2024, pp. 117–120; see also Rothberg, 2024). This kind of extreme decontextualisation of the Holocaust can pose a critical challenge for diasporic memorial sites such as Łopuchowo, which constantly navigate

between retelling historical catastrophes *in situ* and reinterpreting them for the augmentation of contemporary stances.

* * *

Following an initial aversion to the site's material state, Auerbach concludes: "despite my discontent with the aesthetic at Lopuchowo, I am reminded that a memorial is meaningless if not visited, and that meaning in such spaces is made and re-made through the active process of visitation" (Auerbach, 2024, p. 35). Indeed, the Łopuchowo Forest memorial is not a finished object, but a material and social process – a feature sought after in contemporary reflections on commemorations (Tumarkin, 2019, pp. 9–10). Through the presence of this ever-changing Hebrew memorial assemblage, the Łopuchowo Forest therefore perpetually confirms its status as an Israeli traumascape, "deeply implicated in individual and collective processes of grieving, remembering, and meaning-making" (Tumarkin, 2019, p. 4). As a local Israeli website summarises: "Today Łopuchowo Forest serves as an important memorial site … The place provides a quiet and dignified space to remember, but also to express hope for a better future" (Baler, 2024). In this light, Łopuchowo as an Israeli traumascape gains new current meanings in which the distinction between the distant past and recent events is blurred, becoming a link between the tragic yesterday and the unsettled tomorrow.

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Między *kan* i *szam*. Materialność upamiętnień Lasu Łopuchowskiego

Artykuł analizuje ambiwalentną dynamikę Lasu Łopuchowskiego – miejsca masowych grobów Żydów tykocińskich, często odwiedzanego przez grupy z Izraela. Ten przykład upamiętnienia rozproszonej Zagłady wyróżnia nie tyle samo oznaczenie grobów z dominującym centralnym pomnikiem, co liczne pomniejsze, mniej typowe nośniki pamięci o różnych rozmiarach i kształtach, sukcesywnie umieszczane w lesie przez członków izraelskich grup jako namacalny wyraz ich pamięci w miejscu i czasie. Kolekcja pomniejszych artefaktów wchodzących w interakcję z czasem i z materialnością leśnego środowiska przyczynia się do nadania znaczenia tej przestrzeni ulokowanej na styku kultur pamięci. Artykuł analizuje funkcję Lasu Łopuchowskiego jako izraelskiego miejsca pamięci w kontekście dychotomicznych kategorii „tu" (*kan*) i „tam" (*szam*) w polsko-izraelskim imaginarium.

Słowa kluczowe: las, materialność pamięci, Izrael, Polska, pamięć Zagłady, autoetnografia.

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