

Navigating the Religious Landscape of Majdanek

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Memo

Name:

Title of Memo: Navigating the Religious Landscape at Majdanek

Client: Majdanek Concentration Camp

Summary of Case

The chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the religious issues and conflict pertaining to the memorization of individuals. In particular, the chapter is an ethnographic study that was conducted to examine the gendered representation of victims of holocausts at Eastern Europe's sites of commemoration (Jacobs, 2016). The study is situated at the intersection of Jewish memory and ethnic extermination a sit provides a comprehensive discussion of gender representation at Majdanek, a memorial site (Jacobs, 2016). Located in the Southern part of Poland, Majdanek offered a perfect commemoration site where the objectification of women is particularly pronounced. This is partly due to the fact that the site remains virtually unchanged ever since the Nazis abandoned the camp at the end of the war. The site offers a pervasive and overwhelming reality of genocide and the memorization of death. History and memory converge in the preservation of not only the victim's artifacts, but also their ashes (Jacobs, 2016).

The photos, mountains of ashes, bodily artifact, and clothing all represent both the history and the memory of the Jewish lives and loss as Jewish prisoners were murdered at the site soon after arrival making them the majority of those who were exterminated at Majdanek (Jacobs, 2016). However, a problem lies in the manner in which some of the victims of the holocaust are represented. In particular, while both men and women were imprisoned and victimized at the camp, the way in which the female body has been represented only serves to highlight the

objectification and dehumanization of both the female and the Jew through images that stress Jewish desecration and subjugation.

The photographs at the Majdanek sites are artifacts that have been collected from genocidal sites all across Poland and includes both images of the female victims as well as the portraits of the women who perpetrated the Nazi crimes (Jacobs, 2016). The author notes that such representation is problematic because the holocaust memory is an important avenue through which Jewishness is constructed and understood in modern day East and Central European societies (Jacobs, 2016). Therefore, such an objectified and dehumanized representation only serves to reinforce notions of the subjugation of the Jewish people and attest to their complicity and passivity in their own destruction thereby further enhancing their stigmatization within historical narratives. The creation of such a cultural memory of ethnic genocide that dehumanizes and feminizes the victims is important to the enhancement of public memorialization. Therefore, instead of solely commemorating the terrible events that took place at such camps, memorization that reinforces the marginalization of victims instead justifies the justification of the victims.

Statement of Client's Problem

Museums and memorial sites anywhere across the globe have the responsibility and commitment to not only collect, document, and conserve artifacts and other material documents, but to also make it accessible to the public and ensuring that such artifacts promote the true reality of history. Through the selection of what to collect, what to present, and how to present it, museums such as the Majdanek concentration camp and Museum greatly impact on, define, and shape what is considered history and what is not. Through the preservation of the various historical collections perpetually, they act as a permanent memory store while the manner in

which such material evidences and artifacts are displayed and interpreted aids, to a large part, in the construction and transmission of meaning. It is therefore important that the museums and commemoration sites take extreme care to ensure that representations are true and accurate.

In contemporary museum settings and displays, such as the Majdanek Museum, there continues to be wide debates and conflicts that pits the construction of meanings that authorize and facilitate official collective memories and the ambition to promote inclusion and pluralism in ways that gives a voice to those who have been silenced, oppressed, or disenfranchised. In addition, there is also the issue of museum visitors not being passive recipients but rather active participants who engage with the collections as well as other interpretive meanings attached to the displays thereby constructing their own meanings by adding new content to their existing knowledge and comprehension of the events that are being depicted. Therefore, museums and other commemoration sites such as the Majdanek Museum play a vital role in the collection, construction, and transmission of how people perceive and understand the past.

The exact problem that the museum at Majdanek faces is that it that the photos that have been displayed at the museum's walls don not really serve the purpose of commemorating those who died in the holocaust. Instead, the gendered objectification of women through the portrayal of photos and bodily artifacts only serve to objectify the women and only enhances the plight and stigmatization of the marginalized group. Given the important role that the museum plays in the construction of meaning and the representation of historical events, such a portrayal serves to be a bit misleading and can result in a fake representation of history. This can cause bad publicity and reductions in tourism if visitors detect the imbalance that exists between the real history and how it is being portrayed within the museum walls.

Policy Recommendations

Holocaust memory is always poised between the painful acknowledgement of past destructions and misdoings and the affirmatively pursuit of present-day regeneration (Aharony, & Rosenfeld, 2016). The representation of victims of holocausts and other victimized groups within the museums and other sites of commemoration at Majdanek is an issue that touches on a variety of questions that borders on political and important policy issues. The manner and extent to which holocaust memorials and museums in Majdanek present and depict the victims is a very sensitive issues that should be sufficiently considered and addressed. The objectification of women is an important policy issue. As pointed out by Zurbriggen (2014), objectification plays a profound role in permeating negative societal changes and contribute to the construction of structures that less overtly harm certain groups of people and trample their human and civil rights. Adherence to the following policy recommendations will do away with issues of gendered dehumanization and objectification of women for Majdanek Museum.

- a. The first important policy recommendation is that the museum should ban all repetitions or unnecessary displays of photos of atrocities that are imbued with the fetishization of the artifacts of the victims. Priority should be given to ensure that the depiction of the artifacts regarding the holocaust victims promotes indignation and empathy rather than further reinforcing the marginalization of the targeted groups. Doing this will ensure that there is an accurate portrayal of history and proper memorization of the victims
- b. Another key policy recommendation is for the museum to start looking outwards and beyond its walls by partnering with the localities that it serves and other partners to encourage the local communities to encourage the active exploration and investigation of the past, a sharing of experiences. This will promote a sharing of experiences and provide

an important avenue and self-correction mechanism for the museum as such contributions will provide valuable information and data that will inform necessary improvements and adjustments

- c. An important policy recommendation is the development of proper mechanisms that ensure that a perfect balance has been established between exploitation and truth with regard to the representation of the memory and reality of the suffering of ethnic victims as well as the victims of gender objectification.

Anticipated Outcomes and Conclusion

The museum at Majdanek is one of the most important commemoration sites where the victims of the Holocaust are remembered and honored. Although both Jews and non-Jews were held within the camp, and there were many Jewish men as women, there is an over-representation of women in the museum walls. The problem is that the images displayed at the historic site do not do justice to the victims of the National Socialist Crimes. The problem is that there is an objectification of the women victims of the holocaust in the manner in which their images and bodily artifacts have been represented. This is a major problem for the site as it could potentially result in bad publicity. Therefore, the museum should urgently consider the policy recommendations provided as this will result in the proper representation of the memory and reality of the victims thereby resulting in a positive construction of meaning and better outcomes for the site.

References

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