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# ‘At the Crossroads’: Jedwabne and Polish Historiography of the Holocaust

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## Introduction

In 2009, the eminent Polish historian Jerzy Jedlicki used the word ‘powerlessness’ (*bezradność*)<sup>1</sup> to describe how difficult it is to disseminate historical accounts of the uncomfortable and dark aspects of Polish–Jewish relations during the Holocaust to broader segments of Polish society. At the same time, he viewed the process of self-critical assessment of the Polish national past on the part of public intellectuals, including professional historians, as a form of cultural renewal. The Jedwabne debate, which took place between 2000 and 2002<sup>2</sup> and was triggered by the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross’s book *Neighbors* in May 2000,<sup>3</sup> facilitated this renewal.

Gross’s *Neighbors* set out a definite counter-memory to all narratives of the accepted old and biased hegemonic historical canon of Polish–Jewish relations and Polish society during World War II. Said canon spoke about the solidarity of the majority of Poles with Jews and minimized the issue of blackmailing and any other wrongdoings committed against Jewish fugitives to a small group of individuals defined as outside the healthy fabric of Polish society. Different versions of the canon had developed, including those tinted by overt antisemitic tropes of ‘ungrateful Jew’ in the postwar period. Prior to the peaceful political transformation of the Polish state of 1989, both the Communist authorities in the country and the right-wing nationalistic circles among Polish émigrés had promulgated it,<sup>4</sup> regardless of their ideological differences.

Today, in the post-debate era (2002 to the present), the Jedwabne massacre of Jews at the hands of their Polish neighbors on 10 July 1941 does not simply function as a single, painful, and shameful historical fact.<sup>5</sup> Rather, it has become a symbol of all the dark

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<sup>1</sup>Jerzy Jedlicki, “Bezradność,” March 31, 2013, accessed June 7, 2017. <http://www.otwarta.org/jerzy-jedlicki-bezradnosc/>.

<sup>2</sup>Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, (eds.), *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup>Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>On similar attitudes toward antisemitism in Poland and the Polish diaspora during the Communist era, see Joanna B. Michlic, “Antisemitism in Contemporary Poland. Does It Matter? And for Whom Does It Matter?” in Robert Cherry and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, (eds.), *Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), pp. 155–156.

<sup>5</sup>On the memory of the Holocaust in Communist Poland and between 2006 and 2010, see Joanna B. Michlic and Małgorzata Melchior, “The Memory of the Holocaust in Post-1989 Poland: Renewal – Its Accomplishments and Its Powerlessness,” in John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic, (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light in Postcommunist Europe* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Joanna B. Michlic, “The Path to Bringing the Dark to Light: Memory of the Holocaust

aspects of Polish–Jewish relations during the Holocaust and in its aftermath, and even of Polish–Jewish relations during the Holocaust as a whole, as noted by the distinguished Polish sociologist Antoni Sulek.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Jedwabne has become the key symbol of the counter-memory of the old, hegemonic, biased narratives of the Holocaust promulgated between 1945 and 1990s, and as such demands both full-scale archeology and integration of all the events that represent the difficult and painful past in Polish–Jewish relations before, during, and after the Holocaust into the historical narratives of twentieth-century Polish social history and the Holocaust of Polish Jewry.

### Polish critical history-writing of the Holocaust

Thanks to the emergence of the field of critical history-writing in Poland during the last decade and a half, many aspects of the behavior of Poles toward Jews during and after the Holocaust, especially concerning local and regional histories, have been uncovered, analyzed, and brought to public attention. The emergence, since 2000, of new Holocaust centers and research projects and serious publications of varying quality represents a major shift in Polish historiography of the Holocaust and twentieth-century social history: a shift from a ‘monumental’ historiography, which portrayed the (ethno-national) collective as exclusively heroic and suffering, to critical historiography, which is not afraid of portraying members of Polish society under the wartime German occupation as perpetrators responsible for the deaths of Jewish fugitives who were trying to escape extermination by the Germans. That shift in historiography is underpinned by critical patriotism and nostalgia for the lost multi-ethnic heritage that emerged in the fully sovereign Poland after 1989. Adherents of this shift are characterized by empathetic attitudes toward Jews, who were historically perceived as the key internal ‘threatening Other’<sup>7</sup> on the political, cultural, social, and economic levels. They also perceive themselves as a community engaged in performing the necessary, solemn spectacle of recovering uncomfortable historical past and shameful memories. Given the limitations of the scope of this essay, I can only discuss the critical history of the field of Holocaust studies briefly and point to major developments.<sup>8</sup>

In July 2003, Professor Henryk Domański, director of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) in Warsaw, established the Polish Center for Holocaust Research. The main goal of the center is to create an interdisciplinary environment for researchers working in the field of Holocaust studies. On its website, the center posts records of its monthly scientific seminars and online Warsaw Ghetto database. It also publishes individual and collective essays written by members of its multidisciplinary research team. In 2005, the center began to publish a high-quality scholarly yearbook, *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i Materiały*, edited by Dariusz Libionka and his editorial team. Among the most important articles in the first issue, which dealt with the problem of

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in Postcommunist Europe,” in Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, (eds.), *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), pp. 115–130.

<sup>6</sup>Antoni Sulek, “Pamięć Polaków o zbrodni w Jedwabnem,” *Nauka*, 3 (2011), pp. 39–49. See also Jowita Wiśniewska, “Opinie na temat mordu w Jedwabnem. Społeczne reperkusje książki Jana Tomasza Grossa ‘Śąsiedzi,’” in Ireneusz Krzemiński, (ed.), *Żydzi – problem prawdziwego Polaka* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa UW, 2015), pp. 95–122.

<sup>7</sup>Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup>See also Katrin Stoll, “Conceptualizations of the Holocaust Within Polish Historical Discourse,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, 44 (2016), pp. 147–172.

current memory of the Holocaust, is a work by the late Robert Kuwałek (1966–2014), the historian of the state-sponsored museum in the Bełżec death camp.<sup>9</sup> The museum, which was established in January 2004, was one of the most neglected German death-camp sites in postwar Poland, though approximately half a million Polish Jews perished there. In his article, Kuwałek discusses the history and aims of the museum, both as a commemorative site and as a place of historical documentation, and boldly examines the problematic reception of the museum by the local population. He convincingly argues that some local residents have not accepted the museum as an important part of local history, but rather have interpreted it as a ‘Jewish museum’ and thus ‘not our concern.’<sup>10</sup> He concludes that some of the negative reactions to the museum may stem from the close relationships fostered between members of the older generations of Bełżec and the neighboring towns and the German staff of the death camp while it was functioning.

The center has published 12 volumes of *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i Materiały* in Polish thus far. In its 11th volume, Karolina Panz,<sup>11</sup> a doctoral student under Professor Małgorzata Melchior, a member of the center, published an important article about the killing of Jewish survivors by underground military units of the so-called cursed soldiers in Podhale, in southern Poland. Panz’s carefully documented, emotionally disturbing account of physical attacks on Jewish child survivors in Jewish children’s homes in Rabka and Zakopane by local Polish youth and their teachers belonging to local underground right-wing military units of *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army) struck a nerve with the Podhale community and was published in the local press.<sup>12</sup> Over the past decade, Barbara Engelking<sup>13</sup> and Jan Grabowski,<sup>14</sup> two key members of the center, have published salient monographs revealing the killing of Jewish fugitives by Polish peasants and members of the Polish police (*Granatowa policja*, the Blue Police) between late 1942 and early 1945 in the countryside. Like other Holocaust centers, the center publishes unknown wartime diaries and memoirs of Jewish fugitives and survivors as well.

Other historians associated with the center and Institute of National Memory (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN) under the chairmanship of Leon Kieres (2000–2005), such as Andrzej Żbikowski,<sup>15</sup> Paweł Machcewicz, and Krzysztof Persak,<sup>16</sup> have also written important studies and published primary sources revealing the scale and dynamics of the anti-Jewish pogroms that took place in the summer of 1941 in the northeastern part of Poland.

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, an ethnographer and the head of the Ethnographic Archive of the PAN, which has been based at PAN’s Institute of Slavic Studies since 2010, is the author of major works on anti-Jewish violence in Poland throughout the twentieth century. Tokarska-Bakir is also the founder and editor-in-chief of an online academic

<sup>9</sup>Robert Kuwałek, “Muzeum-Miejsce Pamięci w Bełżcu po roku działalności,” *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały*, 1 (2005), pp. 349–358.

<sup>10</sup>Kuwałek, “Muzeum-Miejsce Pamięci,” p. 352.

<sup>11</sup>Karolina Panz, “Dlaczego oni, którzy tyle przecierpieli i przetrzymali, musieli zginąć: Żydowskie ofiary zbrojnej przemocy na Podhalu w latach 1945–1947,” *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i Materiały*, 11 (2015), pp. 30–89.

<sup>12</sup>Karolina Panz, “Śmierć Żydom,” *Tygodnik Podhalański*, (April 22, 2016), p. 33.

<sup>13</sup>Barbara Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień. Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).

<sup>14</sup>Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup>Andrzej Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego: Żydzi na kresach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej, wrzesień 1939–lipiec 1941* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2006).

<sup>16</sup>Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, (eds.), *Wokół Jedwabnego*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002).

annual, *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, which has been published since October 2012 and in which she and other representatives of critical history-writing of the Holocaust, such as cultural scholars Elżbieta Janicka<sup>17</sup> and Tomasz Żukowski, often present their research and commentary.

In January 2008, the new Center for Holocaust Studies was founded in Kraków, hosted by the Institute of European Studies at Jagiellonian University and with the sociologist Jolanta Ambroziewicz-Jacobs as its head.<sup>18</sup> So far, most of its efforts have focused on educational aspects of the Holocaust and the challenges of integrating the difficult past into the history curriculum.

The field of critical history has also borne its first small fruits in the teaching of history. According to a 2007 study by Hanna Węgrzynek, history textbooks have become more diverse over the past decade.<sup>19</sup> There are now textbooks for both the primary and high school levels that present the Holocaust and the history of Jews during the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939) in a historically reliable manner. Some of these new textbooks are excellent and contain separate chapters on the Holocaust. However, there are still many history textbooks in use that delineate the Holocaust only selectively or mention it only sporadically in the context of discussing Nazism.

### Launching a ‘total war’ against critical history-writing

Since the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) won both the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015, we have observed a process that aims to oppose and erase critical history-writing about Polish society during the Holocaust. According to the politicians, historians, and journalists representing PiS’s ideological position, Jedwabne and other events that cast a negative light on Polish national identity must be revisited and retold for both Poles and the West. In their eyes, Jedwabne is a key sign of ‘all the lies voiced against the Polish nation,’ and is understood as the ‘central attack’ on Polishness, Polish values and traditions, and Polish identity (understood in an ethnic sense). In an interview on 26 September 2016 in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the new chairman of the IPN, Jarosław Szarek, announced the release of a new publication in English about Jedwabne to counteract the work of Jan Gross.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, another right-wing historian, Piotr Gontarczyk, asked for a new historical and forensic investigation of the Jedwabne pogrom.<sup>21</sup> These calls for a new history of Jedwabne are part and parcel of what is officially known as the so-called *polityka historyczna* (historical policy) enforced first in late 2005<sup>22</sup> by the right-wing conservative

<sup>17</sup>Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski, *Przemoc filosemicka? Nowe polskie narracje o Żydach po roku 2000* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2016).

<sup>18</sup>Its predecessor was the Holocaust Research Workshop at the Institute of European Studies at Jagiellonian University.

<sup>19</sup>Hanna Węgrzynek, “Co polskie podręczniki historii mówiły i mówią o Zagładzie w latach 1945–2007?” (unpublished manuscript). The author would like to thank Dr Węgrzynek for sharing this study; also, Hanna Węgrzynek, *Prezentacja Holokaustu i dziejów Żydów w aktualnych podręcznikach historii*, in Andrzej Żbikowski, *Nauczanie o Holokauście* (Łódź: Akademia Humanistyczna im. A. Gieysztor, 2006); see also the first Holocaust textbooks for teachers: Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański, *Holocaust: Program nauczania o historii i zagładzie Żydów na lekcjach przedmiotów humanistycznych w szkołach ponadpodstawowych* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN, 2000); and Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański, *Holocaust: zrozumieć dlaczego* (Warsaw: Dom Wydawniczy Bellona, 2003).

<sup>20</sup>Jarosław Szarek, “Nie umywamy rąk,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, September 26, 2016, accessed June 7, 2017, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/nie-umywamy-rak-35832>.

<sup>21</sup>Piotr Gontarczyk, “Co dalej z Jedwabnem?,” *WSieci*, 27 (2016), pp. 18–21.

<sup>22</sup>For critical studies of the first phase of *polityka historyczna* and its impact on the Polish state and Polish historical culture, see Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Nędz polityki historycznej” and Aleksander Smolar, “Władza i geografia pamięci,” in Piotr Kosiewski, (ed.), *Pamięć jako przedmiot władzy* (Warsaw: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2008), pp. 27–30, 49–74;

government of the twin brothers Lech Kaczyński (who died tragically in the Smolensk plane catastrophe on 10 April 2010) and Jarosław Kaczyński and again with full force in the fall of 2015 by the current PiS government and the president of Poland, Andrzej Duda.<sup>23</sup> Though the adherents of *polityka historyczna* are preoccupied with more than the Jedwabne debate, the critical history-writing about Jedwabne and other dark aspects of Polish history has raised fears and counteroffensive actions that aim to erase the field of critical history with regard to the Holocaust and its public and educational significance. The key idea underpinning the historical policy is the condemnation of critical patriotism and pedagogy of shame (*pedagogika wstydy*) as unpatriotic. These aspects of historical policy are also manifested in the production of ‘patriotic’ T-shirts printed with the word ‘Jedwabne’ and the image of eagle, the symbol of the Polish state. These T-shirts can be purchased on Amazon (see the following figure).



According to PiS's historical policy, two major historical narratives defined as ‘true and patriotic’ are utilized to oppose Gross and Anna Bikont's<sup>24</sup> accounts of the Jedwabne pogrom and its long aftermath, as well as other dark aspects of Polish–Jewish relations during and after the Holocaust. The first is the heroic history of the suffering of Polish

Paweł Machcewicz, “Debata o stosunku III RP do przeszłości. Dwa mity ideologów polityki historycznej IV RP,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 29, 2008, accessed September 5, 2008, [http://wyborcza.pl/2029020,75515,5637705.html?sms\\_code](http://wyborcza.pl/2029020,75515,5637705.html?sms_code). On current historical policy, see an important critical analysis by Jan Kubik, “Polityka historyczna nie zadziała,” *Kultura Liberalna*, 394 (July 26, 2016), accessed June 4, 2017, <http://kulturaliberalna.pl/2016/07/26/jan-kubik-wywiad-adam-puchejda-polityka-historyczna/>.

<sup>23</sup>See, for example, Andrzej Duda's speech about historical policy, “Andrzej Duda inauguruje prace nad powstaniem Strategii Polskiej Polityki Historycznej. ‘Pytanie, jak to robić?’ [Przemówienie Prezydenta], *W Polityce*, November 17, 2015, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/272108-andrzej-duda-inauguruje-prace-nad-powstaniem-strategii-polskiej-polityki-historycznej-pytanie-jak-to-robic-przemowienie-prezydenta>; Narodowa Rada, “Rozwoju o polityce historycznej. Prezydent Duda: ‘Nie zbuduje się młodych pokoleń przywiązanych do swojej Ojczyzny, jeżeli nie będą dumni ze swojej tradycji,’” *W Polityce*, February 16, 2016, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/281877-narodowa-rada-rozwoju-o-polityce-historycznej-prezydent-duda-nie-zbuduje-sie-mlodych-pokolen-przywiazanych-do-swojej-ojczyzny-jezeli-nie-beda-dumni-ze-swojej-tradycji>; <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/281877-narodowa-rada-rozwoju-o-polityce-historycznej-prezydent-duda-nie-zbuduje-sie-mlodych-pokolen-przywiazanych-do-swojej-ojczyzny-jezeli-nie-beda-dumni-ze-swojej-tradycji>.

<sup>24</sup>Anna Bikont, *The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), originally published in Polish as *My z Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka SA, 2004).

anti-Communist military units between 1945 and 1963, the so-called accursed soldiers (*Żołnierze wyklęci*),<sup>25</sup> who have become a central part of the contemporary ethno-nationalistic mythology propagated by right-wing historians and are openly supported by the current government.<sup>26</sup>

The second is the history of Poles who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. In pre-1989 Communist Poland, the subject of rescuers was a marginal topic in public memories and commemorations of wartime heroism and was skewed in history-writing. In that historiography, the three dominant tendencies were: first, to underscore the large number of rescuers; second, to downplay or ignore the low level of societal approval of rescue activities; and third, not to differentiate among the various categories of rescuers, protectors, and helpers and their motivation. Throughout the entire Communist period, the subject of rescuers was usually brought up not because of its intrinsic intellectual and moral merits, but predominantly to defend the good name of Poles and to silence any commentary depicting Poles in a bad light. By the 1960s and 1970s, both Communist elites in the country and anti-Communist elites abroad had reached a peculiar agreement. Today, adherents of the current PiS's historical policy apply similar strategies and tropes in the discussions about the history of Polish rescuers.

Historians practicing *polityka historyczna* often cite the number of Polish rescuers of Jews honored to date by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem – some 6700 – as a tool to ‘normalize’ the dark past. By employing these data, they claim that antisemitism and exclusive ethno-nationalism did not have much of a damaging influence on Polish–Jewish relations. They tend to focus on a description of the histories of individual rescuers, such as the heroic Józef and Wiktoria Ulm family, which today serves as a powerful symbol of ‘sacrifice and martyrdom’ of Polish peasants rescuing Jews under the German occupation. Yad Vashem investigated the case of the Ulm family in the first half of 1990s and posthumously bestowed on them the title of the Righteous Among the Gentiles on 13 September 1995, whereas in Poland right-wing political circles and right-wing historians ‘discovered’ the Ulm family in the early 2000s, in the midst of the Jedwabne debate. Józef Ulm was an educated peasant, known as a librarian and amateur photographer in the village of Markowa. He and his wife Wiktoria had a large family consisting of six young children and lived in the house on the outskirts of Markowa. In early 1944, Wiktoria was expecting their seventh child. Despite being aware that helping Jewish fugitives was punishable by death sentence, the Ulm couple provided long-term shelter to eight members of two Jewish families, the Shall and Goldman families. On 24 March 1944, the German gendarmerie shot all the hidden Jews and the entire Ulm family on their property as a result of denunciation by a member of *granatowa policja* (the blue police).<sup>27</sup> What the

<sup>25</sup>On the new uncritical and ideologically driven historical writings about ‘accursed soldiers,’ see the works of Rafał Wnuk, one of leading historians of the underground anti-Communist military: Rafał Wnuk, “Wokół mitu ‘żołnierzy wyklętych,’” *Przegląd Polityczny*, 136 (July 21, 2016), <http://przegladpolityczny.pl/2016/10/08/wokol-mitu-zolnierzy-wykletych-rafal-wnuk/> (no longer available online); and Robert Jurszo, *Żołnierzy wyklętych” wymyślono w 1993 r.* OKO.press, March 1, 2017, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://oko.press/zolnierzy-wykletych-wymyslono-1993-r-oko-press-przedstawia-historie-politycznego-mitu/>.

<sup>26</sup>For an official endorsement of the heroic and uncritical accounts of ‘cursed soldiers’ in current historical educational programs, see Bartłomiej Kuraś, “Ministerstwo organizuje wakacje z ‘wyklętymi’ dla dzieci rolników. Na wyraźne życzenie prezesa Kaczyńskiego,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 20, 2016, accessed June 8, 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,20105697,ministerstwo-organizuje-wakacje-z-wyklętymi-dla-dzieci-rolnikow.html#ixzz49VbZf1p6>.

<sup>27</sup>See, for example, Jarosław Szarek, *Sprawiedliwi wśród narodów świata: Przejmująca historia polskiej rodziny, która poświęciła swoje życie ratując Żydów*, 2nd ed. (Kraków: Dom Wydawniczy Rafael, 2004) and Mateusz Szpytma, *The Risk of Survival*:

writings of right-wing historians investigating rescuers such as the Ulm family lack is a more nuanced historical context<sup>28</sup> and a discussion of society's hostility toward both the Jewish fugitives and their rescuers. They avoid discussing abuse and betrayal of rescuers by their fellow Poles, their neighbors, and acquaintances, including cases of emotional threats and rape of Polish women rescuers as punishment for the rescue of Jews by some members of right-wing Polish underground military units, today celebrated as the 'accursed soldiers.'<sup>29</sup>

All these topics still await a full investigation, as do other aspects of rescue such as the effect of gender, love, and intimate relationships between rescuers and Jewish charges and a variety of forms of rescue and help in everyday life under Nazi occupation. The Warsaw-based sociologist Antony Sułek is perhaps the most sophisticated scholar of rescue in contemporary Poland whose works do not subscribe to the model of current historical policy. He is not a member of the Warsaw-based Polish Center for Holocaust Research either. Sułek's analyses of individual cases of rescue in the village of Kurów, in the Lublin voivodeship, are rich in detail and nuanced in his portrayal of rescuers of Jews and in showing the local historical context and the challenging psycho-social trajectories of the recovery of the silenced past.<sup>30</sup>

The confrontation with the difficult past – the battle of the official PiS's counter-historical memory against the counter-historical memory put forth by Gross and other scholars representing critical history-writing – goes back to the time of the publication of *Neighbors*. Each of Gross's subsequent publications since *Neighbors* met with the same reaction on the part of right-wing ethno-nationalistic historians and politicians: highly emotive and sinister attempts to counterbalance the 'dark history' by underscoring the 'feel-good, light history.' For example, Gross's *Golden Harvest*,<sup>31</sup> written in collaboration with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, in which the authors discuss the brutal seizure of Jewish assets by ordinary Poles during and after the Holocaust was opposed by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz's counterwork, *Heart of Gold or a Golden Harvest?*,<sup>32</sup> in which he, a leading right-wing historian, rejected Gross's arguments entirely. Similarly, in September 2016, Paweł Lisicki, the editor-in-chief of the conservative weekly *Do Rzeczy* (published since January 2013), announced the release of his new book *Krew na naszych rękach?* (Blood on our hands?),<sup>33</sup> which represents a critical response to Gross's short, controversial interview published in the German newspaper *Die Welt* 'about Poles killing more Jews than Germans

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*The Rescue of the Jews by the Poles and the Tragic Consequences for the Ulma Family from Markowa* (Warsaw: Kraków, IPN, 2009).

<sup>28</sup>Some contemporary memoirs of young Christian Polish eyewitnesses shed light on the complex historical context. See, for example, Tadeusz Markiel, "Zagłada domu Trinczerów," *Znak*, 4 (2008), pp. 119–146 with a postscript by Dariusz Libionka, "Zagłada Domu Trinczerów – refleksje historyka." See also Tadeusz Markiel, "Zagłada domu Trinczerów," Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.holocaustresearch.pl/index.php?show=462>.

<sup>29</sup>Joanna B. Michlic, "Gender Perspectives on the Rescue of Jews in Poland. Preliminary Observations," *Polin*, 30 (forthcoming, January, 2018), pp. 407–426.

<sup>30</sup>Antony Sułek, "Szewc nad szewcami, 'obrońca narodu żydowskiego.' O Antonim Kordowskim z Kurowa," *Więź*, 4 (2015), pp. 64–75; Antony Sułek, "Pięciu Sprawiedliwych i trzy pytania," *Laboratorium WIĘZI*, May 31, 2017, accessed July 20, 2017, <http://laboratorium.wiez.pl/2017/05/31/pieciu-sprawiedliwych-i-trzy-pytania/>; Antony Sułek's public lecture, "Badacz – świadek – opowiadacz. Ratowanie lokalnej pamięci zagłady Żydów," POLIN Museum, April 20, 2017, accessed July 20, 2017, <http://www.polin.pl/pl/wydarzenie/badacz-swiadek-opowiadacz-sekrety-lokalnej-pamieci-o-zagladzie>.

<sup>31</sup>Published in Polish as *Złote serca czy złote żniwa* (Kraków: Znak, 2011).

<sup>32</sup>Published in Polish as *Złote serca czy złote żniwa* (Warsaw: De Facto, 2011).

<sup>33</sup>Paweł Lisicki, *Krew na naszych rękach* (Warsaw: Fabryka Słów, 2016), accessed June 7, 2017, <http://dorzeczy.pl/id,10276/Krew-na-naszyc-rekach-premiera-nowej-ksiazki-Pawla-Lisickiego.html>.



during World War II.<sup>34</sup> Unlike Gross, Lisicki claims that it was only a small group, outside the healthy fabric of Polish society that was involved in killing Jewish fugitives.

In the same article, Lisicki launches an attack on what he calls ‘the Holocaust religion,’ which, according to him, is the dominant model of remembering the Holocaust in the West, including Christian churches. Lisicki claims that ‘the Holocaust religion’ consists of four dogmas and represents a total distortion of the history of Poles and other European nations during World War II, and that the dogmas have led to the unjust collective accusation of Poles for the crimes of the Holocaust. According to Lisicki, the first dogma is of the unique nature of the European destruction of Jews, which, in his view, undermines the suffering of other victims; the second dogma is about the innocence of Jews, which assumes that other victims of totalitarian systems were not equal with Jews; the third dogma relates to the participation of all of humanity in the process; and the fourth dogma argues that the religious Christian roots of antisemitism are both unjust and false.

Lisicki’s article and his book are part of ‘a sinister, total ideological war’ against Gross’s *Neighbors* and other studies revealing the dark aspects of Polish past, as well as against the Western understanding of the Holocaust in the context of twentieth-century European history. This war is conducted in a variety of ways, with history treated as a central battlefield and the right-wing interpretation promulgated: first, new practices of history-writing have been introduced, in addition to the dissemination of ‘monumental and uncritical’ patriotism in state institutions, such as the IPN under the new chairmanship of Szarek<sup>35</sup> and by individual historians representing a right-wing ethno-nationalistic vision of the collective past<sup>36</sup> in the press.<sup>37</sup>

Second, academic conferences, seminars, and public events have been organized, such as the International Congress dedicated to the Polish Righteous Among the Nations and the glorious pages of Polish history, held on 27 October 2016. The congress took place at the College of Social Culture and Media in Toruń, an institute of higher education founded by Father Tadeusz Rydzik of *Radio Maryja* and *TV Trwam*. Its key participants were Rev. Prof. Waldemar Chrostowski; Szarek of the IPN; Rev. Dr Paweł Rytel-Andrianik, a representative of the Episcopate; and Beata Kempa, a representative of the Polish government. The aim of the congress was to ‘recover the memory’ of the heroism of the Polish Righteous. In his keynote address, Chrostowski stressed that ‘the Holocaust was organized in Poland in order to destroy the good name of Poland.’<sup>38</sup>

The congress was also accompanied by the creation of the Chapel of Memory of Rescuers at the Sanktuarium NMP Gwiazdy Nowej Ewangelii i św. Jana Pawła II (Sanctuary of Our Lady Star of the New Evangelization and St. John Paul) in Toruń. One of goals of the

<sup>34</sup>Jan Tomasz Gross, “Welche Schuld könnte die Polen treffen?” *Die Welt*, September 14, 2015.

<sup>35</sup>For a critical analysis of the changes in IPN, see the historian Andrzej Friszke’s article, “Nadchodzi IPN Szmaciaków,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 4, 2016, accessed June 8, 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19861842,prof-friszke-nadchodzi-ipn-szmaciakow.html>, and Adam Leszczyński, “Nowy IPN – ministerstwo prawdy i policja historyczna,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 25, 2016, accessed June 8, 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19820231,nowy-ipn-ministerstwo-prawdy-i-policja-historyczna.html>.

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, Dariusz Walusiak’s work, *Winni. Holocaust i fałszowanie historii* (Wydawnictwo: Rafael, 2016), accessed June 7, 2017, <http://lubimyczytac.pl/ksiazka/302937/winni-holokaust-i-falszowanie-historii>.

<sup>37</sup>See, for example, *Do Rzeczy*, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://dorzeczy.pl/straznik-pamieci/>, and the monthlies *Historia doRzeczy*, *Uwazam ze*, *Wsieci*, and *Frona*.

<sup>38</sup>Video of Waldemar Chrostowski’s keynote lecture, accessed March 3, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76\\_w96hEW9g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76_w96hEW9g).

founders of the chapel is to create an archive documenting the great deeds of Polish rescuers; 1059 names of Righteous Gentiles have already been collected and are listed in the chapel. This chapel is another initiative showcasing the ‘good and honorable history’ of Polish society during the Holocaust, regrettably without addressing the ‘gray zone’ issues related to rescue: rescuers for profit, rescuer–abusers, and rescuers who turned into perpetrators, and without a professional historical verification of the oral testimonies. This chapel is a follow-up initiative to the Ulm Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa, which was inaugurated by the president of Poland, Andrzej Duda, on 17 March 2016.<sup>39</sup> The Ulm Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in Markowa developed organically in the region in the early 2000s, where the memory of the Ulm family is still alive. This museum, which is small in size, is important for the history of Polish–Jewish relations during the Holocaust, and its idea, presence, and status as a future state museum of Polish rescuers should not necessarily itself raise controversies and be questioned. However, what should be questioned are any attempts to politicize the Ulm Family Museum and its use in ideological battles against the dark past by the right-wing conservative pundits and historians. The idea of creating a similar local center to honor rescuers in Oświęcim, in the vicinity of Auschwitz–Birkenau, indicates that such initiatives may mushroom throughout Poland. If the origins and aims of these initiatives are political and not historically nuanced and accurate, they may turn into a right-wing ethno-nationalistic source for manipulation of the historical truth, which is alarming.<sup>40</sup>

Third, various new historical museums<sup>41</sup> and foundations<sup>42</sup> have been established with the goal of ‘defending Poland’s good name,’ such as the Foundation of Janusz Kurtyka (Fundacja Janusza Kurtyki), who, as a chairman of IPN, promoted the works of Jan Marek Chodakiewicz to counterbalance Gross’s works. The foundation was designed to serve as an academic and advisory center, with a library and publishing house. On 17 October 2016, the heads of the foundation held a conference at the official residence of the president of Poland, Belweder, dedicated to praising the historical policy endorsed by the PiS government.<sup>43</sup> The key participants in the conference were the minister of Polish culture, Piotr Gliński, and right-wing scholars Wojciech Roszkowski (known as Andrzej Albert) and Zdzisław Krasnodębski.

<sup>39</sup> Andrzej Duda, “Wystąpienie na uroczystości otwarcia Muzeum Polaków Ratujących Żydów im. Rodziny Ulmów w Markowej,” March 17, 2016, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/art,33,wystapienie-na-uroczystosci-otwarcia-muzeum-polakow-ratujacych-zydow-im-rodziny-ulmow-w-markowej.html>.

<sup>40</sup> On the Oświęcim initiative, see Michał Wilgocki, “Usprawiedliwić się Sprawiedliwymi. Jak upamiętnić pomagających ofiarom Zagłady?,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 9, 2017, accessed June 9, 2017, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,21935517,usprawiedliwic-sie-sprawiedliwymi-jak-upamietniac-pomagajacych.html>.

<sup>41</sup> One such museum is Muzeum Żołnierzy Wyklętych i Więźniów PRL (Museum of Accursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of Communist Poland), which has branches in Ostrołęka and Warsaw. The museum promotes the cult of ‘accursed soldiers’ without critically investigating histories of particular military units and individuals. See, for example, the Sova song with the participation of a radical right-wing popular historian Leszek Żebrowki: Witold, “Sova – Modlitwa Żołnierzy Wyklętych,” Muzeum Żołnierzy Wyklętych w Ostrołęce, October 19, 2016, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://muzeumzolnierzywyklętych.pl/sova-modlitwa-zolnierzy-wyklętych/>.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Fundacja ŁĄCZKA (The Foundation of Cursed Soldiers), <http://www.fundacjalaczka.pl/>, and Reduta Dobrego Imienia-Polskiej Ligi przeciw Zniesławieniom (Polish League Against Defamation, a non-governmental organization), under the chairmanship of Maciej Świrski, <https://ewastankiewicz.wordpress.com/reduta-obrony-dobrego-imienia-polski/>. Most recently, the latter condemned the writings of Jan Grabowski as anti-Polish.

<sup>43</sup> “W Warszawie odbyła się konferencja nt. polskiej polityki historycznej,” *Dzieje.pl* – Portal historyczny, October 17, 2016, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/w-warszawie-odbyla-sie-konferencja-nt-polskiej-polityki-historycznej>.

Fourth, legal means such as the governmental bill of 16 August 2016<sup>44</sup> introduced by the Ministry of Justice aim at silencing scholars uncovering the unsavory aspects of Polish–Jewish relations during the Holocaust. The bill would make it a criminal offense, punishable by up to three years in prison, for anyone to implicate Poland, or the Polish people, in the crimes of the German Third Reich.

### History as the battlefield over national identity

Paul Connerton<sup>45</sup> identifies seven types of forgetting: repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, forgetting as a constitutive in the formation of a new identity, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment, forgetting as planned obsolescence, and forgetting as humiliated silence. In the case of the current, official historical memory politics in Poland, from 2015 to 2017, one can pinpoint not one, but a mixture of different types of forgetting in use. Two types relate to Connerton's typology, namely repressive erasure and prescriptive forgetting. Radical agents within the PiS government and its guardian institution of national memory, IPN, advocate for repressive erasure of the field of critical history with regard to the Holocaust by implementing legal measures and denying funding to academic institutions and individuals who conduct research on Poland's dark past. Prescriptive forgetting of Jedwabne and other dark aspects of Polish–Jewish relations before, during, and after the Holocaust is presented as a necessary measure in the interest of the entire Polish collective; therefore, it is acknowledged publicly as a historical policy to serve the Polish nation.

The third type of amnesia that is related to the above is what I call a constitutive element in the rebuilding and maintenance of an 'ethno-nationalistic national identity.' This type of amnesia is utilized in a creative way to suit the current needs of society. It prevents the development of a more complex and nuanced image of the collective in different colors from 'light' through 'gray' and 'dark.' Instead, it feeds solely on the glorious and martyrological aspects of the collective past, understood in an ethnic sense. At present, the PiS government and its various institutions and organizations have launched a 'total war' against critical history-writing of the Holocaust, employing these three types of amnesia. Thus, in the current official portrayal of Polish–Jewish relations, there is only room for soothing historical narratives of martyrdom and heroism of ethnic Poles. That is the core accepted and acceptable official version of the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Poland. What is excluded and minimalized are narratives concerning uncomfortable historical truths about greed, racial and ethnic prejudice, betrayal, murder, and denunciations of Jewish fugitives and their dedicated Polish rescuers by their neighbors and acquaintances.

According to PiS's historical policy, the historian can only be a servant of the state who remakes and reshapes history according to the orders of the state. This is the gravest danger to the historical profession and to democracy in Poland and elsewhere. There is no doubt that in the future the biggest challenge for professional historians in Poland and in other countries of post-Communist Eastern Europe will be integrating and synthesizing the soothing pages of the history of relations with Jews with the dark aspects of these

<sup>44</sup>For commentary on the August 16, 2016 bill from Jan Grabowski, one of the leading historians of the Holocaust, who deals with the participation of members of the wartime Polish police in German-occupied Poland (*granatowa policja*) in the murder of Jewish fugitives, see Don Snyder, "Poland Is Poised to Put 'Bad' Historians of the Holocaust in Prison," *The Forward*, September 2, 2016, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://forward.com/news/world/349179/poland-is-poised-to-put-bad-historians-of-the-holocaust-in-prison/>.

<sup>45</sup>Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," *Memory Studies*, 1:1 (2008), pp. 59–71.

relations before, during, and after the Holocaust. To achieve this, not only will historians have to permit different voices and interpretations, but also to reject current discursive schema of 'black and white' history about the collective past and the treatment of history as an ideological weapon.

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