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Editors' Note

This volume reflects discussions during the Princeton University conference on Polish-Jewish Studies held on April 18–19, 2015. The contributions focus on the meaning of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, on Polish politics of memory, and on the renewal in research and teaching of Polish-Jewish subjects. They position Polish-Jewish Studies at the intersection of academia and public history, highlighting the field's ability to engage both intellectual and cultural production, history and contemporary politics. This vast potential for dialogue and cross-fertilization speaks to the dynamism and relevance of the field.

The opening report lists the conference participants and summarizes their interventions. Not all the papers delivered during the conference were presented for this publication, and none was submitted by the speakers professionally involved in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Most numerous are the papers that interpret the Museum and look at the cultural policies behind its creation, as well as those that address other cultural initiatives connected with Jewish memory and cultural revival funded by Polish state institutions.

The conference was sponsored by the Princeton University Departments of History and Slavic Languages and Literatures, Program in Judaic Studies, and Council of the Humanities, by the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, the University of Illinois at Chicago Fund for Polish-Jewish Studies, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw, the Polish Cultural Institute in New York, and the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Iwa Nawrocki

Geneviève Zubrzycki

Conference Report

The Second Polish-Jewish Workshop, which took place at Princeton University on April 18–19, 2015, was organized around five main panels, focusing on presenting the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, critical readings of the Museum, Polish-Jewish memory work and cultural diplomacy, cultural and philanthropic institutions in a changing scholarly landscape, and the Polish-Jewish Summer Institute and other pedagogical initiatives. Approximately forty scholars, non-profit professionals, and donors participated in the two-day event. Many more were in the audience: faculty and students from Princeton University and other academic institutions, as well as members of Polish and Jewish communities from the greater New York area.

The organizers, Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Jessie Labov, and Karen Underhill opened the Workshop and presented the premises and objectives of the broader Polish/Jewish initiative they put together in 2014. They stressed the specific juncture that makes Polish/Jewish studies both vibrant and pressing.

The first dimension is the opening in Warsaw of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews; the second is the political push in Poland for the politics of history; and the third is the scholarly and pedagogical need to research and teach about the region in a way that is inclusive of different points of view – to move beyond the national, and also beyond diasporic narratives. While this specific confluence of academic and political factors makes Polish/Jewish studies especially relevant, one question posed to all participants was whether the "Polish-Jewish debate" was exhausted; whether the opening of the Museum might serve as a form of "closure" to almost three decades of intense discussions of Polish-Jewish relations. Have the issues been exhausted? While the Museum could act to close a chapter, Karen Underhill stated that it could actually serve as a catalyst for an emerging field. Even the naming of that field is complicated: is it Polish-Jewish Studies? Jewish-Polish Studies or Polish/Jewish Studies? What do those names imply, in terms of focus and prevalence?

Rather than summarize each panel or panelists' respective presentations in detail, I discuss the political-normative, scholarly, and pedagogical-institutional themes that shaped the conversations, and the ways in which they intersected throughout the meeting. As one impetus for the Princeton Workshop was the recent inauguration of the core exhibit of the POLIN Museum of the History of

Polish Jews, which took place on October 27, 2014, discussions of the Museum's mission, its core exhibit, and future directions were at the center of the Workshop.

A first panel presented the Museum. Composed of the Museum's Director, Dariusz Stola, as well as Samuel Kassow and Marcin Wodziński, the panel discussed some of the key challenges scholars faced in preparing the core exhibit and how they resolved them. Marcin Wodziński stressed that the exhibit is mostly free of "Polish obsessions"; that it tells the story from a Jewish perspective, but also without "Jewish obsessions" – that is, it does not solely focus on the Holocaust, and does not tell the story of Jews in Poland following a Holocaust-centered, teleological narrative of "before-during-after-the Holocaust" which, he pointed out, is a major museological achievement in itself. Samuel Kassow mentioned how the interwar gallery also tells the story of different Jewish communities, political parties, and social movements "of the moment" – without writing the Holocaust into the narrative. The interwar period was "a laboratory of experiments" for collective life and for individuals as well. Kassow also insisted on the "de-centering" vision of the exhibit; how Poland, for example, is presented as part of the broader Jewish world. That work, which fits neatly into the "spatial turn," was relatively easy since, as he pointed out, the region was already "spatial."

Dariusz Stola emphasized the fact that as important as the core exhibition is, the Museum cannot be reduced to it: the Museum is a major cultural and pedagogical institution and has been active long before the opening of the exhibit, first through its "Virtual Shtetl" project, and then by offering a wide range of workshops and sponsoring public lectures, film screenings, and discussion forums on Polish-Jewish related themes as well as on diversity, multi-culturalism, and democracy more broadly. The exhibit, Stola stressed, was twenty years in the making, which gave its makers time to reflect on many recent controversies, such as those surrounding the publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* and the role of ethnic Poles in the Holocaust, and engage some difficult questions head-on. The making of the exhibit was a transnational undertaking involving scholars from several nation-states, with a wide range of expertise. The result, he argued, is a highly reflexive exhibit that aims to change mainstream understandings of Poland's Jewish past. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and her team of world-renowned experts worked diligently to render the complexity of history intelligible for diverse visitors without oversimplifying it.

The Museum, Stola concluded, is both an experiment and a model; it is not an academic or research institution, but a pedagogical one. The Museum administration has already been conducting "exit surveys" with visitors to learn about the

reception of the exhibit: what people have learned, what they did not know, and what surprised them.

Jan T. Gross, the panel's discussant, agreed with the characterization of the Museum as a cultural center rather than just a Museum. The space itself is used beyond the core exhibit and is certain to have a broad impact. Besides, the Museum's mandate is broader than Polish-Jewish history; it is transnational history, covering Germany and Ukraine, as well as North America and Israel, to a certain extent. Gross pointed out that it is impossible to visit the core exhibit without thinking of the Holocaust, that the Holocaust is present in the mind of any visitor. The important question to pose, then, is what place the Holocaust should have in the Museum's activities? The Holocaust remains the key issue that still needs to be addressed in the public sphere.

The discussion that ensued concerned the place of the Holocaust in the Museum and its activities. Jan Grabowski concurred with Jan Gross that there is a tendency in the exhibit to domesticate and tame the Holocaust. For example, the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto (by Germans) is marked, but massacres and pogroms (by ethnic Poles) "float under the radar." Shana Penn pointed out that the Museum's pedagogical activities are centered on issues of diversity and tolerance, that these are Holocaust-centric. For Bożena Shallcross, the very location of the Museum, on the grounds of the former Warsaw ghetto, compensates for the relatively scant attention to the Holocaust in the exhibit; the site itself is powerful enough to put visitors in the right mental location. Marcin Wodziński added, however, that the Museum should not only be read in relation to the Holocaust via its location: before being a ghetto, that space was a Jewish neighborhood and its history should not be reduced to its tragic destruction.

Other questions focused on the media chosen for the exhibit: without a collection, how were the materials chosen to tell the story? Samuel Kassow explained that without artifacts, emphasis is placed on texts but also on iconic spaces: the synagogue, the shtetl, and the street. Stola assured that the Museum is in the process – slow, difficult, and costly – of constituting a collection, and that some artifacts will be added as they become available.

Another thread in the discussion concerned how to update the exhibit: how to make sure the knowledge it is based on and that it imparts to the visitors does not remain static. Stola guaranteed that the Museum has planned for revisions, especially since the technology through which the narrative is told will be obsolete relatively soon.

The second panel, "Polish-Jewish Memory Work and Cultural Diplomacy," touched on several issues discussed in the first, most importantly the silences of

the Museum and the still problematic rapport of Poles to the Holocaust and their role in it. The recent politicization (and instrumentalization) of the Righteous is problematic: Jan Grabowski calls it the "Righteous Defense," a strategy to detract from crimes committed against Jews, allowing anti-Semitism to grow in several corners (and at the center) of Polish society. Geneviève Zubrzycki pointed to a blind spot in the current "Jewish turn," namely the fact that Jews and Jewish culture serve to build multiculturalism, but as such Jews must necessarily remain Other. She asked how Jews can be rediscovered without being exoticized, fetishized, and othered? One solution might be to work harder at problematizing the Catholicity of Polishness, so that Jews can be Jews in their own right, for their own sake, instead of being a proxy for the agenda of progressive Poles. Erica Lehrer discussed critical museology in Poland: its commitment to exposing conflicts, multiple narratives, and critical scholarship as well. She asked what kind of shrine POLIN might become, despite the efforts of its designers? Museums are sites of possibility, institutions of learning that may make social change possible. If that is the case of POLIN, what transformative impact might we expect to witness in Polish society? And in the ways in which foreign visitors apprehend Poland? That last question is at the heart of Nancy Sinkoff's pedagogical approach. Her goal is to get American Jews to understand the Polishness of Ashkenazi culture, and her point of entry into that problématique is usually her students' Holocaust consciousness. Her teaching therefore seeks to debunk widespread myths about Polish Jewry: persecution, passivity, piety, and poverty. The Museum, according to her, does a good job in the process of demystification since it shows the diversity of Jewish communities and experiences.

The third panel, "Reading the Museum," offered a critical reading of the Museum. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir questioned the very premise of the Museum: why construct a museum on the primacy of life on the site of death? Who is the Museum's imagined audience? The Museum is a revisionist institution that strips anti-Semitism away from its narrative. The Holocaust gallery therefore comes as a brief interlude, a historical event exported from the outside. The Museum thus becomes a site for the celebration of things to "love the Jews for." Elżbieta Janicka conducted a semiotic analysis of the Museum: its location (exterior), its shape and content (interior), and the cultural production of its self-representation. Janicka critically assessed the Museum's narrative, which according to her grossly indulges in mythology, omission, and censorship, obfuscating the context of the Holocaust in Poland. The result is, according to her, a problematic ideological project. Konrad Matyjaszek highlighted "missed opportunities" in the Museum, primarily related to the lack of integration of the actual historical site into the

narrative of the exhibit and the structure of the Museum. Piotr Forecki and Anna Zawadzka offered a critique of the Museum's core exhibit, which is an exemplar of a broader narrative structure they call "the rule of the golden mean." The rule of the golden mean is a structure that follows a principle of symmetry and emphasizes consensus and middle ground, as if the truth falls somewhere in the middle of contentious positions. This narrative structure applied to Polish-Jewish relations, they argue, is problematic because it whitewashes anti-Semitism. This was probably the most controversial panel of the Workshop because of its pointed critique of the Museum and its tone. It produced strong reactions among the authors of the Museum's exhibit and from the Museum director, who understood the critique as ideologically driven.

The second day of the conference focused on scholarly and pedagogical developments in Jewish Studies in Poland. Michael Steinlauf spoke of the Yiddish revival in Poland and contrasted the relative stagnation or even decline of Jewish Studies in North America with the impressive growth and dynamism of the field in Poland. Agi Legutko made two important statements: first, that Yiddish needs to be part of Polish Studies, and second, that Polish Studies must be part of Yiddish Studies since one cannot make sense of many Yiddish literary texts without knowing and understanding Polish literature. She observed that Yiddish Studies are marginalized both in the United States and in Poland and that it is important to build bridges between Polish and American Yiddishists to strengthen the field and increase its visibility. Karolina Szymaniak argued that Yiddish Studies are vibrant and successful in Poland, but obviously not as popular as Polish Studies. She pointed to the many junctures and contact zones between Polish and Yiddish cultures that remain to be explored and called for the normalization – de-exoticization and de-fetishization – of Jewish culture and Yiddish. Karen Underhill also emphasized the need for a pluralistic space of encounter between Polish and Yiddish Studies, but pointed to the difficulty in institutionalizing such a space. The discussion that ensued concerned the marginalization of Jewish Studies from several perspectives: Marcin Wodziński pointed out that Israeli scholarship is doubly marginalized: from Poland and the United States; Bożena Shallcross insisted that this is not specific to Jewish Studies, that Slavic Studies are also a marginal field within the Humanities. Jonathan Brent argued that this relative alienation of American Jews from Yiddish culture is problematic, as they are disconnected from their own history. The translation of major Yiddish works is therefore urgent, as it is crucial for the identity (and future) of American Jewry.

The second panel of the day, panel five, concerned the role of cultural and philanthropic institutions in a changing scholarly landscape. Agnieszka Rudzińska

discussed the Adam Mickiewicz Institute's attempt to help American students encounter Poland as a key place for American Jews. The Museum becomes a key institution in that endeavor as it was developed with pedagogical goals in mind; some of the making of the exhibit was itself a pedagogical exercise (for example, the making of the Gwoździec synagogue). Other institutions here in the United States, like the Polish Cultural Institute, work hard at engaging with difficult questions. Irene Pletka noted that to make Polish-Jewish relations as well as Polish-Jewish Studies enter the "mainstream," key opinion-makers needed to be reached. According to her, the relative marginality of Polish-Jewish issues and Polish/Jewish Studies is not a problem of action, but one of strategy. Shana Penn argued that part of that strategy should be the articulation of a concept statement, which would facilitate fundraising on two fronts: with the Polish government and with Jewish philanthropies.

A last panel was devoted to "Next Steps":

1. Creation of a listserv, a website, a collaborative bibliography, and an official consortium of institutions collaborating on academic and pedagogical projects.
2. Follow-up meetings: at the University of Chicago at Illinois in spring 2016 and at the University of Michigan in spring or fall 2017.

Part I: Politics of History

Jan Grabowski

The Holocaust as a Polish Problem

Rarely does an academic paper, such as this one, require an update between the time it is delivered and the time it goes to print. This, however, is one of these rare cases. At the same time – to the day – when this paper was being read (at the Polish-Jewish Studies Workshop held at Princeton University on April 18–19, 2015), James Comey, the director of the FBI, gave an important, moving speech at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Having visited the exhibition entitled "Some Were Neighbors," which focused on the attitudes of so-called "bystanders" during the Holocaust, Comey went on to say:

> Good people helped murder millions. And that's the most frightening lesson of all – that our very humanity made us capable of, even susceptible to, surrendering our individual moral authority to the group, where it can be hijacked by evil. Of being so cowed by those in power. Of convincing ourselves of nearly anything. In their minds, the murderers and accomplices of Germany, and Poland, and Hungary, and so many, many other places didn't do something evil. They convinced themselves it was the right thing to do, the thing they had to do. That's what people do. And that should truly frighten us.[1]

One would think that the director of the FBI spoke with empathy and wisdom. That one could hardly take issue with any of the points raised above. Wrong. Comey's words raised an immediate fury in Poland. Bronisław Komorowski, the President of Poland, declared on national television that Comey's words "were an insult to thousands of Poles who helped Jews"; Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz stated: "To those who are incapable of presenting the historic truth in an honest way, I want to say that Poland was not a perpetrator, but a victim of World War Two"; and Radosław Sikorski, the Speaker of the Parliament, requested an immediate apology.[2] A day later, the directors of the four largest historical museums in Poland published an open letter to James Comey, in which – in a condescending and dismissive tone – they lectured and berated the director of

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1 James B. Comey, "Holocaust Remembrance Week: Refusing to Let Evil Hold the Field" (speech, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Annual Dinner, Washington, D.C. April 19, 2014), accessed November 14, 2015, https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/holocaust-remembrance-week-refusing-to-let-evil-hold-the-field.

2 "Poland fury at Holocaust comment by FBI's James Comey," *BBC News*, April 19, 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32376463.

the FBI and (oozing irony) invited him to visit their respective establishments in order to improve his grasp of history. Unfortunately, even the directors of the Auschwitz Memorial Museum and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, who should have some knowledge of the issues at hand, decided to sign the embarrassing letter.[3]

The speech given by the director of the FBI simply reflects the historical truth. Indeed, masses of Europeans took part, in a variety of ways, in the implementation of the German project of the annihilation of European Jewry. Some did it out of greed, others were motivated by ideology, or by religion, or by the simple fact that hurting Jews had become a norm. We have to remember (and Comey did, in fact, mention this) that the entire project of extermination had been thought through, designed, and put in place by the Germans. But we also need to understand that among the otherwise "good" people who turned evil during the Holocaust we can find Germans, Hungarians, and Poles. We can also find Czechs, Belgians, the Dutch, the French, Ukrainians, Italians, Greeks, Byelorussians, Russians, and Slovaks. Obviously, James Comey could have expanded his list – but does this make his words any less poignant, any less true?

The article below will, hopefully, help place the furious reaction of Polish public opinion, Polish politicians, and the Polish media in its proper historical and social context.

Polish-Jewish Memory Work and Cultural Diplomacy

On January 27, 2015, the world celebrated the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. In Ottawa, where I live, a modest ceremony took place at the city hall. The event was low-key and dignified – with the exception of the speech by the Polish ambassador to Canada, who chose this occasion to talk not so much about the victims, but about the extraordinary sacrifices of Poles who saved the Jews during the Holocaust.[4] This self-serving, ill-timed and, above all, disingenuous speech left many perplexed, with a bitter aftertaste, and me, personally, with a feeling of embarrassment. Unfortunately, in recent years boastful and

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3 Łukasz Kamiński et al., "Letter to the FBI director James Comey – Warsaw, April 21, 2015," *Institute of National Remembrance*, accessed November 14, 2015, http://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/2015/letter-to-the-fbi-director-james-comey-warsaw,-april-21,-2015.

4 For the full text of the speech, see: Marcin Bosacki, "Speech by Ambassador of the Republic of Poland," (speech, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Ottawa, January 27, 2015), accessed November 14, 2015, http://ottawa.msz.gov.pl/resource/54c99c05-93da-4ee7-9f2d-3cd973665d1d:JCR.

triumphant discourse in the context of the Holocaust has become the rule rather than the exception among Polish officials – both at home and abroad. During the same anniversary, another Polish ambassador – this time in London – went even further. Stressing the elevated numbers of Polish Righteous Among the Nations, he decided to interfere with the BBC's plans to screen Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, accusing the director of arguably the most important and classic documentary about the Holocaust of an anti-Polish bias.[5] One can safely assume that the intellectual fireworks presented by the ambassadors in Ottawa and London were in line with the current interpretation of the Polish raison d'état.[6] Judging by the proclamations emanating from Polish official circles, the term "Holocaust" seems to trigger a quasi-automatic defensive reaction, which for the purposes of this text I will refer to as the "Righteous defense" or the "*Żegota* gambit." Of course, the diplomats were not getting creative all on their own: while poaching from the field of history, they read from a script prepared by their superiors. It is practically impossible nowadays to find any official declaration concerning the Shoah that does not make a specific reference to the number of "Polish olive trees at Yad Vashem" or some other form of the Righteous defense. The declarations, however, are but a small part of the relentless commemorative drive: the streets are re-baptized in honor of the Righteous, monuments (to be discussed later) are erected both in areas where Jews received help and where no help was offered. The Righteous defense has even imprinted its mark on stamps and coins, including the social-realistic and hideous example reproduced below, which can aptly be called *Notre Dame-au-petit-Juif*, that is, Our Lady of the Little Jew. At this stage one could ask: what is wrong with celebrating the Righteous? Unfortunately, everything depends on the context and the goals of the celebrations.

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5 Both ambassadors not only made these declarations, they even decided to place their elucubrations on the websites of their respective embassies.

6 The case in point is an attempt made by Ewa Juńczyk-Ziomecka, the Polish Consul-General in New York, who tried in 2010 to disrupt the proceedings of an academic conference held at Princeton University that collided with the vision of the Polish past espoused by her superiors. This particular case, which raised indignation among the scholars participating in the conference, has been described in detail in an academic journal. See: Benjamin Frommer, "The Holocaust in Occupied Poland, Then and Now," *East European Politics and Societies* 25: 3 (August 2011): 575–580.

The extermination of the Polish Jewry occupies a very special place in the collective memory of the Poles and in the policies of the Polish state. It can be compared to a thorn, lodged deeply in the collective consciousness and sub-consciousness. At first sight, nothing can be seen but, when probed, painful reactions testify to the fact that the discomfort is quite real. The Shoah is, at the same time, the only universal aspect of Polish history, one which has a meaning and importance on the international scene, which resonates in the hearts and minds of many. Most of all – and annoyingly – it is the only aspect of Polish history over which the Polish authorities have little or no control. Therefore, the frantic energy deployed to counter real or perceived threats to the national ethos and to founding national myths, although deplorable and misguided, is also – in a way – understandable, as is the relentless pressure of Polish officials to keep the historical tiller firmly in their hands. Historical policy has a two-fold purpose and two major dimensions: one, to influence the domestic audience; and two, to shape the image of Poland and Poles abroad. Both aspects require different tools and distinct fine-tuning of the message.

On the home front, the historical policy seems to work. If the objective is to leave the historical truth behind in order to expand the sphere of myths, then this goal has, to an extent, already been reached. In a public opinion poll taken in Poland, in 2005, 51% of respondents declared that the majority of the victims of Auschwitz were Jews, while 39% thought that there were more Polish victims or that the proportions were equal.[7] A similar poll, taken in 2010, revealed that

7 TNS OBOP, "Konzentrationslager Auschwitz 60 lat później," January 10, 2005, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.tnsglobal.pl/archiwumraportow/2005/01/10/konzentrationslager-auschwitz-60-lat-pozniej/.

the percentage of respondents who thought that the Jews formed the majority of Auschwitz's victims dropped to 47%, while 39% declared that the camp was, above all, the place of the martyrdom of the Polish nation.[8] The most recent poll, conducted in January 2015, demonstrated the accelerated pace of the "revisionist" perception of the past: currently only 33% of Polish respondents associate Auschwitz primarily with Jewish suffering, while a stunning 47% think that Auschwitz was, most of all, the place of Polish martyrdom.[9] Another poll observed the same revisionist trend: while in 1992 46% of respondents were still convinced that the Jews had suffered more than the Poles during the Holocaust and only 38% thought that Polish suffering was equal or greater to that of the Jews, twenty years later, in 2012, 61% of respondents were already convinced that Polish suffering at the time of the Shoah was at least equal, or greater than, that of the Jews.[10]

Bożena Keff of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw noted that: "historical policy is like an iron mask slapped onto the face of history: finally there are no wrinkles and there is no squint. But the act itself shows a profound dissatisfaction with one's own features, meaning with one's own past."[11] "Historical policy" can be defined as an attempt to shape the historical consciousness of the society in order to unify it around certain political goals and programs. The main features of Polish historical policy remain constant, despite changing political constellations. Regardless of whether the government in power belongs to a left- or right-leaning party, the principles of this often stated and sometimes unstated policy are largely immutable. There is no need for change because the current paradigm fits well the mood of the electorate and reflects a broad consensus within Polish society. It is based on a nationalistic and ethnic (as opposed to citizen-based) view of history. Its most prominent messages include: the glorification of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944; the concept of massive resistance to communist rule; the equivalence of Nazi and Soviet crimes; the defense of the "good name of the Polish nation"; competing victimology during WWII, with particular stress being placed on Aktion AB and the Katyń massacre. The two latter examples usher Polish historical policy into

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8 "TNS OBOP: dla 23 proc. Polaków Auschwitz symbolem II wojny światowej," *dzieje.pl*, January 26, 2010, accessed November 14, 2015, http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/tns-obop-dla-23-proc-polakow-auschwitz-symbolem-ii-wojny-swiatowej.

9 CBOS Centrum Badań Spolecznych, "Auschwitz-Birkenau w pamięci zbiorowej," *Komunikat z badań CBOS* 11/215 (January 2015): 1–9, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_011_15.PDF.

10 Ibid.

11 Bożena Keff, introduction to Elżbieta Janicka, *Festung Warschau: Raport z oblężonego miasta* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011), 9. Translation by the author.

the area of Holocaust equivalence: equating Stalinist crimes and German policies of terror with the Holocaust. According to one historian, "one of the most sophisticated types of postwar Holocaust equivalence is to present the victimization of people by communism in the same way as that of the Holocaust."[12] This kind of approach introduces the parallel (and equivalent) concepts of "Red and Black Holocausts," concepts which play well to domestic and foreign audiences.[13] In short, everybody suffered: Poles, Balts, Ukrainians, and Jews. The fact that the policies of total, national extermination targeted only the Jews, that many Balts, Ukrainians, Romanians, French, Dutch, Belgians, and Poles also took part in the implementation of the Final Solution and, finally, the fact that the war waged against the Jews has been largely won – is altogether forgotten in the heat of the "equivalence" debate.

Holocaust De-Judaization as the Byproduct of Polish Historical Policy

The most pervasive demonstration of Polish historical policy on the international arena is, however, the relentless application of the aforementioned Righteous defense. The constant reminders and celebrations of Polish sacrifice and Polish righteousness at the time of the Shoah are nowadays a trademark, a branding exercise of historical policy directed at foreign audiences. The underlying message – one which implies the universal character of the helping hand phenomenon – is a pernicious historical fallacy. Here, I will focus on this last aspect of historical revisionism served under the guise of state-sponsored Polish historical policy.

At the center of the Righteous defense project is an attempt to tame and to domesticate the Shoah, to transform it into a new national myth, agreeable to a home audience and palatable to foreigners. Since sympathy for the Jews in Polish society is, to put it mildly, in limited supply, incorporating the Holocaust into the national mythology involves its progressive de-Judaization. Indeed, immediately after the war, the communists decided that the number of ethnic Polish victims of the war had to be at least equal to the number of Polish Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Hence the number of 3 million Poles allegedly killed during the war – a

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12 Manfred Gerstenfeld, *The Abuse of Holocaust Memory* (Jerusalem: Center for Public Affairs, 2009), 93.

13 Elżbieta Janicka, "Zamiast negacjonizmu: Topografia symboliczna terenu dawnego getta warszawskiego a narracje o Zagładzie," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 10 (2014): 253–254.

number which Jakub Berman, one of the prominent members of the Politburo (in charge of the State Security apparatus) pulled out of a hat in 1945.[14]

The Righteous defense, in all its variations, allows for a gradual removal of Jewish victims to the periphery of the historical account and their systematic replacement with noble gentiles. De-Judaization of the Holocaust has been defined by historians as "an attempt to weaken their [the Jews'] perceived hold on the memory of this genocide so as to use the memory of the Holocaust for some other purpose."[15] The distortion of emptying the Holocaust of its Jewish content so as to universalize it is not only a historical falsification. It often also lays the infrastructure for distorted conclusions, including renewed anti-Semitism. The first step in the process of de-Judaization of the Holocaust places the Righteous Poles at the center of each and every account; no occasion can be missed to invoke the brave rescuers, or to introduce Żegota "the only organization created specifically to help the Jews in occupied Europe," or to present Jan Karski "who tried to warn the world" about the ongoing extermination, or to make a reference to Irena Sendler, who saved Jewish children. The results are, at least initially, very awkward. The Holocaust becomes a theatre that provides a stage upon which righteous gentiles can perform noble deeds on the largely undefined and obscure crowd of anonymous Jews in need. With time (and frequent repetition), however, the "national claim" over the Holocaust starts to sound more and more plausible. Given the near-monopoly of Polish state institutions in representing the country's history abroad, the expected results are only a question of time.

There is a number of travelling historical exhibitions, created by the educational branch of the Polish Institute for National Remembrance, which regularly tour American and Canadian cities. One of them, entitled "Poland: From War to Victory, 1939–1945," visited Ottawa last February. On thirty large posterboards, the authors placed more than 100 photographs depicting the fate of Poland from the outbreak of WWII to the fall of communism. The Polish underground, the Warsaw Uprising, the Polish government-in-exile, as well as the Katyń massacre unsurprisingly received full coverage. Visiting guests could learn that Poland was the early victim of two evil empires, that the Poles fought valiantly on all fronts in WWII, and that they were, in the end, sold out by the Allies in Yalta. Some students visiting the exhibition were even surprised to read boastful claims that: "in 1944

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14 Anna Sobór-Świderska, *Jakub Berman: Biografia komunisty* (Warsaw: Institute of National Remebrance, 2009). Most recently, Berman's numbers were repeated by: Tomasz Szarota and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Polska 1939–1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* (Warsaw: Institute of National Remebrance, 2009).

15 Gerstenfeld, *The Abuse of Holocaust Memory,* 79.

Polish forces liberated France, Belgium, and the Netherlands." But the exhibition is more significant in terms of what it does not present than what it does. In the entire exhibit, there is only one photograph and one sentence devoted to the Holocaust. This sole photograph depicts a Pole and a Jew hanging side by side from the gallows. The Pole had been hung by the Germans for having sheltered the Jew. The caption reads: "Due to the help of Poles, who very often risked their lives, a few Jews were able to escape the Holocaust. Poles constitute the biggest group among those individuals awarded medals and the status of 'Righteous Among the Nations,' given by Yad Vashem Authority in Jerusalem." In such a way, the history of Poland has been swiftly reduced to the history of Poles, with the suffering and deaths of 3 million Polish Jews being relegated not even to the margin of the official discourse, but beyond it. Making Holocaust *Judenrein* is a difficult but, as one can see, not impossible task. Quite clearly, the historical policy does not need to be subtle – it has to be effective.

As was mentioned before, the Polish discussions of the Shoah are unavoidably and systematically rerouted toward the Polish Righteous. The most recent – and most unfortunate – example of the Righteous defense can be observed in the immediate vicinity of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (now coyly described as the "Museum of Life" – should anyone doubt it[16]), which is being surrounded by a *sui generis* firewall of visible representations of Polish virtue. The proliferation of monuments devoted to the Polish Righteous resembles, as Jan T. Gross rightly put it: "a steeplechase through the former Warsaw ghetto" ["*bieg z przeszkodami przez warszawskie getto*"].[17] This kind of commemoration and celebration is one of the rare (if not the only) examples of unity; to paraphrase Jan Karski: "it is a narrow bridge" upon which militant anti-Semites, right-wing activists, followers of the National Democracy movement (Endecja) and National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo Radykalny, ONR) orphans, representatives of the Centre and of the Left, reach consensus with the highest officials of the state. Regardless of their motivations, the celebrations of the Righteous are not being performed in a

16 To add insult to injury, last year the Museum of the History of Polish Jews was branded "Polin," which in Hebrew means "here you shall rest." Although chosen by design and simple insouciance, one could hardly think of a more powerful evocation and reminder of the Holocaust. This point has been discussed in detail by Konrad Matyjaszek, "Polinizacja historii. O wystawie stałej Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Kultura liberalna* 324 (December 2015), accessed November 14, 2015, http://kultura liberalna.pl/2015/03/24/konrad-matyjaszek-mhzp-wystawa-stala-recenzja/.

17 Jan T. Gross (speech, "Memory and Responsibility" Conference, Warsaw University, Warsaw, November 6, 2014). See also his contribution in this volume.

social void and they become part and parcel of an ambitious revisionist project. A project that is a pernicious attempt to rewrite recent history and to obscure and obfuscate the historical realities of the Holocaust.

Symbolic gestures never occur outside of a broader social and political context. Their meaning and influence is always dictated from without. Left-leaners or right-leaners, Poles or Jews involved in the Righteous defense, all of them make – given the pervading political climate – an important contribution to the fundamental revision of the memory of the Holocaust in Poland. To an unprepared mind, the infusion of a feel-good narrative about the Righteous, combined with the exclusion of the broader historical context, will result in an opaque, myopic, and deeply skewed vision of the past. The home audience will rejoice, and most foreigners will leave satisfied that evil can be kept at bay by the virtuous masses. Who knows, perhaps in due course people will conclude that the walls surrounding the ghettos were erected by the Germans to keep out the Poles desirous of helping their Jewish co-citizens in their time of need?

In 1968, at the height of the anti-Semitic campaign, Irena Sendler, the head of the "children's section" of Żegota, and the person responsible for saving many Jewish lives, was asked by the authorities to talk about her wartime accomplishments. She flatly refused, judging that the time was not right and that the political context would distort and deflect her message, making her beholden to the very people, who – during the war – would have wished her ill. *Toutes proportions gardées*, the current context is not good, either. The triumphant nationalistic propaganda leaves no room for nuances. The relentless push for the recognition of the alleged universality of Polish sacrifice is a cynical attempt to use the actions of the few courageous and just people to excuse and to shield the actions and non-actions of the vast majority of Polish wartime society. A society which, by and large, steeped in anti-Semitic clichés and influenced by anti-Semitic clergy, found little sympathy for the dying Jews and for the few extraordinary people who dared to help them.

Once the history of the Holocaust – destined both for domestic and foreign consumption – has been sufficiently infused with the stories of noble gentiles and, at least partially, de-Judaized, the stage is ready for the transformation of the Righteous into a Polish norm, into a standard, into the expected, default behavior of the Polish masses under the occupation.

Over the last few decades, several European countries went through difficult debates concerning local attitudes towards the Jews during the war. In France, such a discussion started in the early 1980s and resulted in a deep transformation of the way in which average French people looked at their own past. The French state formed the Commission Matteoli, whose mandate was to investigate the extent

of "spoliation" or expropriation of Jewish property in occupied and Vichy France. Similar efforts have been undertaken in Belgium and Holland. Indeed, in Holland the question of the extent of Dutch complicity in the Holocaust is being hotly debated even today. Belgian, Dutch, French and other historians patiently waded through the available historical records, witnesses were heard from, educated and well-informed debates were held and, consequently, some of the national myths were put to rest.

In Poland, on the other hand, the national soul-searching has largely been limited to the Jedwabne affair. Although very significant in itself, the debate – as reflected in the recent polls of public opinion mentioned above – had a limited impact outside certain segments of the intelligentsia. Jedwabne was explained away as an aberration, a dramatic departure from the otherwise benign, if not cordial, relationship between mainstream society and the Jews. Not infrequently, the pogroms are being linked to the alleged "betrayal" of Polish national interests by Jews under the Soviet occupation. Perhaps these appalling events – argue the proponents of "innocent Poland" – could have happened in the remote *Podlasie* area but, surely, nothing similar would have been possible in more civilized parts of the country!

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Polish historian and sociologist Marcin Zaremba, in his review of *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, made the following observation:

> Let us assume that Jan and Irena Gross are right and that, indeed, the Poles killed with pitchforks, axes, or delivered to the Germans tens of thousands of Jews. This number would be much higher than the German losses during the September [1939] campaign and during the Warsaw Uprising [of 1944] combined. What does it all imply? No more and no less than that we all, or at least the peasant component of our society, were fighting on the wrong side during the war. That we managed to kill more Jews than Germans.[18]

One would think that such a dramatic declaration – supported by readily available archival evidence and confirmed by a growing volume of published historical research – should have triggered enormous interest and resulted in major research initiatives. But nothing of the kind has happened. Instead, the Polish state chose to fund two large historical research programs, both geared toward

18 Marcin Zaremba, "Biedni Polacy na żniwach – Recenzja 'Złotych Żniw,'" *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 17, 2011, accessed November 14, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8951226,Biedni_Polacy_na_zniwach__Recenzja__Zlotych_Zniw_.html?disableRedirects=true.

the needs of the historical policy. One, called "Index," which looks at Poles who were killed, or who were in any way persecuted, for helping the Jews. The second, much more ambitious state-funded historical research program, is called "The Losses of the Polish Nation under the German and Soviet occupation." The program's goals include the creation of a master-list of the victims: Polish citizens killed by the occupants during the 1939–1945 period. In the present climate, one can hardly hope for the "Index" program to explore the reasons that led to the arrest and/or execution of Polish rescuers. In the vast majority of cases the Germans, as we know today (and as people knew at the time) relied on information provided by locals, most often by the rescuers' own neighbors. And the "Losses" program is hardly designed to look at the losses of Polish Jews at the hands of their Polish co-citizens.

The results of decades of communist-era propaganda, combined with twenty-five years of a triumphant nationalist narrative have had a profound, pernicious, and hard-to-evaluate impact on Poles' national perceptions of their own past. Incidentally, as it has already been argued earlier, in matters of Polish-Jewish relations there is surprisingly little difference between the communist and nationalist narratives. As seen today in the vicinity of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, in the former Warsaw ghetto, political foes united in their shared belief in the Polish raison d'état reach an easy understanding. The efforts of small, independent groups of researchers and educators can in no way counter the powerful mechanism of "memory control" put in place by the Polish state. From a historian's point of view, the results could not be more alarming: the school curricula closely reflect the founding myths of the historical policy, perpetuating historical fallacies. In the universities, the situation is equally worrisome: more than seventy years after the extermination of the Polish Jewry not even one chair of Holocaust history has been created. And even if such a chair were to be created (an unlikely, though not impossible, scenario) there are practically no senior Polish historians – with one or two exceptions – qualified for the job! Even more strikingly, in the place where the Final Solution has been implemented, in the place where millions of Polish and European Jews were put to death, there is not even one museum devoted to the history of the Holocaust.

Jan T. Gross

Jews as a Polish Problem; and Why Not – as a Part of Polish History?

Jews have no longer been living in Poland for dozens of years now, and simply on account of this physical absence, our topic for today – Jews as a Polish problem – belongs to the spiritual realm. After the Second World War – and most certainly after the late 1940s, when almost all Shoah survivors emigrated from Poland – Jews did not constitute an economic, demographic, professional, or otherwise materially defined "problem" for the Poles. To ask about Jews as a Polish problem – Jews as a Polish *spiritual* problem – is but another way of posing the issue of Polish anti-Semitism. It is so because in the realm of Polish spirituality, broadly speaking, Jews exist only as an embodiment of evil.

In one sense, this is not a very original issue. Until Jews had been murdered in the Shoah, wherever Christian tradition predominated throughout Europe, anti-Semitism was the norm. It was widespread and articulated in all sorts of manners: in the programs of social movements and political parties; in the teachings of Churches; and in the discriminatory practices of various institutions including, beginning in the 1930s, many European states. State anti-Semitism, however, was a breach of an important component of European identity: the Enlightenment-inspired ideal of civic equality.

Of course, like any broad phenomenon, Anti-Semitism in Poland has its specificity, but it is not specific to Poland. Nonetheless, when we discuss mutual relations between Poles and Jews, we borrow terminology from the anti-Semitic lexicon, above all the term "Jewish problem." The transformation we are here concerned with – of the "Jewish problem" into a "Polish problem" – is but an attempt to understand in what ways and under what circumstances anti-Semitism evolved from a Polish norm into a Polish problem.

The Second World War constitutes a caesura in the social history of anti-Semitism. It was then that a view considered respectable and espoused by many revealed its nefarious potential and brought about a civilizational catastrophe. It turned out that European societies could not bring themselves to resist the Nazi policy of mass extermination of the Jews. And with the exception of the Danes and the Bulgarians, they were all complicit – in their own ways, of course – in the crime.

What must we bear in mind concerning the wartime experience of Polish anti-Semitism?

Firstly, we must remember that before the war more Jews lived in Poland than in any other European country: almost three and half million. They were dispersed all over the country, for the most part living in poverty, at the bottom of the social ladder. Well-to-do assimilated Jews and educated professionals were but a small fraction of Polish Jewry. The socio-economic make-up of Polish Jewry was thus different from the population of West European Jews, where a majority belonged to the assimilated bourgeoisie.

Even though national groups in Poland tended to not intermix – mixed marriages or religious conversions were infrequent – the sphere of interaction between Poles and Jews was enormous and involved, without exaggeration, millions of people. In particular, the bottom strata of Polish society had everyday contact with the Jews. Anti-Semitism was most intensely propagated in Poland by right-wing and peasant parties, university students and their organizations, and aggressively anti-Semitic Catholic clergy. No one living in Poland could fail to be exposed to anti-Semitism, which emanated from multiple sources that enjoyed respect and authority.

As time went on, the German occupation policy during the Second World War confronted the Poles with a dramatic question: how to behave in face of the ever more ruthless brutalities to which their fellow Jewish citizens were being subjected by the occupiers? The two most important institutions on which the Poles relied for guidance and succor during wartime offered no help in this matter.

Not only did the Pope, Pius XII, remain silent about the tragedy suffered by the Jews during the war, but the Polish Catholic clergy likewise left its flock without guidance in this matter. In the documentation on the attitudes and pronouncements of the highest Church authority in occupied Poland – Cracow's Metropolitan Adam Sapieha – as well as all the other hierarchs of the Polish Church (to quote the words of Father Stanisław Musiał), there is "nothing, there are no traces of any empathy or concern. This is frightening."[1] And the same goes for rank-and-file parish priests. Of course, there were exceptions to this rule. But these were exceptions. The most important were the female convents where several hundred, or perhaps even a few thousand, Jewish children survived the war.[2]

1 Witold Bereś and Krzysztof Burnetko, *Duchowy niepokorny: Rozmowy z księdzem Stanisławem Musiałem* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2006), 192. All translations from Polish are the author's.

2 Jerzy Kłoczowski, "The Religious Orders and the Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland," *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies* 3 (1988): 238–243.

The second norm-setting institution for the Poles during the war, which "washed its hands" and was uninterested in the fate of the Jews, was the Polish Underground State. Focusing its activities almost exclusively on the ethnically Polish population, the clandestine state discarded the civic ethos and de facto accepted the racial division of Polish society imposed by the occupier. The existence of Żegota (an underground unit dedicated to helping the Jews), which was established late and reluctantly and did not even meet the needs of the Jews halfway, makes no difference in this assessment. If the lexicon of the history of the occupation were to be critically revised, instead of the "Polish Underground State" one should rather use the term the "Underground State of the Poles."

The consequences of this combination of factors were noted since the beginning of the occupation:

> It hurts/ It hurts terribly/ When it isn't a foreign enemy/ But they-/ Poland's sons and daughters/ Whose land will some day/ Be ashamed of them,/ But who now chuckle, gasp with laughter/ Seeing down in the street/ How our common enemy/Ridicules the Jews/ strikes and torments the old/ then plunders them undisturbed/ cutting off the beards of Jews/ like they were slices of bread…/and they/ who are left like us/ without a land/ who feel now like us/ the crazed enemy's hand/ how they heckle, laugh, rejoice/ at such a time/ when Poland's pride and honor are so disgraced/ when Poland's white eagle/ is dragged on the ground/ between the beards/ the grey and black hair/ of Jewish beards –/ is this not eternal shame/ for all of them?/ isn't it like spitting/ right in their own faces?/ It hurts/ how terribly it hurts![3]

A Cracow poet and a bard of the Jewish street, Mordechai Gebirtig, wrote this poem, this song really, more or less at the same time as Jan Karski, the courier for the Polish Underground, presented the Polish government-in-exile (which resided in France at the time) a report on Polish society's attitudes toward the Jews. Later, he was ordered to falsify it so as not to compromise Poland in the eyes of the Allies. He described in it the attitudes towards the Jews "of a broad segment of Polish society" as

> usually harsh, often ruthless. To a large extent, they use the opportunities created by the new situation […], often they abuse them […]. To take a neutral attitude toward this state of affairs might bring the demoralization of Polish society (mostly of its lower strata) and all the dangers following from only a partial, but in many cases genuine *agreement* [Karski's emphasis] between the occupier and a large segment of Poles.[4]

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3 Gertrude Schneider, ed., *Mordechai Gebirtig and his Poetic and Musical Legacy,* multiple translators (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 76.

4 Jan Karski, "Zagadnienie żydowskie pod okupacjami," *Mówią Wieki* 11 (November 1992): 2–9.

Karski did not know how prophetic his intuition would prove to be, because the imagination of a European could not grasp "all the dangers following from […] an agreement between the occupier and a large segment of the Poles."[5] After all, he was writing at the beginning of the war, when not much had yet happened. But he was a very perceptive man, and he sensed that a crowd laughing at the sight of a Jew placed on a barrel and shorn of his beard (to recall an image from Hanna Krall's interview with Marek Edelman in *Shielding the Flame*) was a step toward the abyss of demoralization.[6] And indeed, it would soon be followed by a bon mot reverberating throughout all the strata of wartime Polish society: that Hitler deserved a monument for helping Poland get rid of the Jews.

Behavior sprouting from the soil of Polish anti-Semitism stood in direct contrast to attitudes inspired by the norm "for your freedom and ours" traditionally informing the national ethos of the Poles. The lack of pity and compassion for persecuted Jews; mass involvement in the German-instigated spoliation of Jewish material property; and, finally, participation in the tracking down and killing of Jews who tried to save their lives by hiding on the so-called Aryan side, – I am mentioning phenomena that were widespread across the country – all of this took place in the context of brave societal resistance against the German occupation. As a consequence, wartime behavior toward the Jews undermined fundamental precepts of the Poles' collective identity and contaminated the significance of a crucially important chapter of national history (according to the principle formulated by German historian Golo Mann when writing about the Second World War: "in this case, what was worse than the worst, most vile, determined the character of the whole.")[7]

In accordance with Karski's prediction, the Poles' widespread anti-Semitism, when combined with the madness of the Nazi policy of extermination of the Jews, led to the demoralization of Polish society. Even the greatest evildoers, who killed or denounced Jews to their killers, were only occasionally prosecuted after the war. What does it do to a people when whole swaths of society – particularly in small towns and villages, where all knew each other intimately – grow up and live their daily lives among murderers?

But what has happened cannot be undone. Generations born after the war must now ask themselves how to shake off the nightmare of anti-Semitic legacy.

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5 Ibid.

6 See: Hanna Krall, "The Jew and the Barrel," trans. Joanna Stasinska and Lawrence Weschler, *Moment Magazine* (June 1986), accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.momentmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/The-Jew-and-the-Barrel.pdf.

7 Golo Mann, *Niemieckie dzieje w XIX i XX wieku* (Olsztyn: Borussia, 2007), 517.

It is a well-worn truth that neither individual nor collective trauma can be dealt with effectively until the circumstances which have caused it are fully revealed. And so the only way to "work through" the tragic heritage compounded by our parents' and grand-parents' generations is to loudly speak out about our blemished past. There are several defensive arguments, most often pointing to "the full historical context" of what happened, or to the fact that no Polish governmental collaboration with the occupier existed. Also, that only in Poland were collective responsibility and the death penalty meted out for helping the Jews, both arguments beside the point, or that Jews collaborated with the Soviets and helped deport Poles into Siberia, also untrue. There is another argument: the activities of Żegota and the Righteous Among the Nations. Well, any such defensive strategy is, in the last instance – whether through avoidance or relativization – tantamount to the defense of an unspeakable crime. Besides, it will not succeed in hiding the unpleasant truth, because "the cat is out of the bag" already, and so euphemisms would only serve to solidify the unspoken sense of collective guilt. In addition, obfuscation would work against the Polish raison d'état of developing a strong and well-grounded sense of collective identity and occupying a respected place in the community of nations.

The alternative to the full disclosure of the truth about Polish-Jewish relations during the war would be to never free ourselves from the grip of the "Jewish problem" (already converted into a "Polish problem"). And, under the best of circumstances, as a community we would dwell in constant fear of someone, somewhere in the world – by mistake, out of ignorance or mischief, or due to all three – again writing about "Polish camps."

As far as the current situation is concerned, one must point out with a sense of pride that an honest, unvarnished, history of the Shoah in Poland is being written by Polish historians. Ever since the Center for the Study of the Holocaust of the Polish Jews was established at the Polish Academy of Science and its yearly publication *Holocaust of the Jews* (*Zagłada Żydów*) started appearing, along with monographs authored by scholars working at the Center and by other specialists in the humanities who entered into a creative dialogue with this milieu, a crucially important subject of modern Polish history has returned home, so to speak. In other fields, outside of scholarly research, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

Finally, I would like to add a few words to the recent discussion concerning raising a monument to the Righteous in the vicinity of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. In the media, the debate has focused exclusively on the localization of the projected monument, even though there is no consensus

in Polish society as to the role the Righteous played during the war. Without prior reflection what message the monument should convey, the initiative could be perceived as setting up an obstacle course – through Jan Karski's bench, Irena Sendler's path and, for the most ambitious, additionally through another monument to the Righteous planned by the nationalist milieu in front of the Church of All Saints in Grzybowski Square – to persuade visitors to the Museum, even before they enter the building, that Poles cared deeply for their Jewish fellow citizens during the war. And since Poland is under suspicion on this account, the effect risks conveying the opposite message, especially to foreign visitors.

I understood that the question of what message the monument ought to communicate has not been addressed when told by one of its supporters – who cited the following as a strong argument in favor of the initiative – that Poland will not have to spend a penny on the monument, as it will be financed entirely by Jewish funds. However praiseworthy such a concern for economizing on public spending may be, it also bespeaks a total confusion as to what issues are at stake here.

Ever since the establishment of Yad Vashem in 1953, Jews keep thanking and honoring the Poles who helped the Jews during the occupation by planting trees dedicated to the Righteous on the slopes of the Mount of Remembrance (Har Hazikaron) – not far from Theodor Herzl's grave, in a crucial *lieu de mémoire* for the Jewish state. In all this time, from the war's end until very recently, the best thing one can say about the attitude of the Polish state and society towards the Righteous is… that they were entirely forgotten. The Museum's vicinity offers an excellent opportunity for Polish society to honor the Righteous – after a delay of 70 years – in a deserving manner.

But the question of the Righteous – like everything else about Polish-Jewish relations during the war – is not a matter to be clarified between Jews and Poles, but rather a matter of internal concern to the Poles. And the practice of social pedagogy (putting up monuments, etc.) in a *lieu de mémoire* such as the very center of the Warsaw ghetto should be the province of the highest state authorities rather than of random private individuals, not least because this would demonstrate to the Poles that the Righteous deserve respect and recognition, and to foreigners visiting Warsaw, that the Poles are aware of this.

Because, truth be told, the Righteous are the "cursed soldiers" (*żołnierze wyklęci*) who, in defiance of the Germans and their own countrymen, saved not only Jews but also the honor and national dignity of the Poles during the war. A grateful Jewish survivor, when raising a monument paid with his own funds, could include an inscription reading more or less as follows:

> To Poles – who, risking their own deaths and that of their families at the hands of the Germans – brought help to their fellow human beings, Jews. Acting in isolation and facing the ostracism of their Polish milieu, they saved not only Jews, but also the honor of the Polish Nation. Signed: "Grateful Countrymen."

And it would be fitting if the inscription on the pedestal were to be signed: "The President, Sejm, and Senate of the Polish Republic."

It would be to the detriment of Polish national interest and to future generations of Polish youth – who will be visiting the *necropolis* of the Warsaw ghetto in order to learn about the history of their country – if such an inscription, in some variation, could nowhere be found in the vicinity of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. And when this truth will finally be expressed in a public space it will be a sign that Jews – who for a thousand years have co-inhabited these lands – are slowly ceasing to be a Polish problem and are finally becoming a part of Polish history.

Irena Grudzińska-Gross

Polishness in Practice

I live in the United States and frequently encounter the promotion of Poland by Polish state institutions – something along the lines of "Poland for foreigners." Since 1989, this promotion has been very intense; Polish diplomatic and cultural institutions have been intently changing Poland's "brand." The first stage of this campaign, spanning the years 1990–2004 approximately, was "transitological": Poland was "in transition," a "normal" country, just like any other European country, returning to its usual, pre-Soviet-dominance way of being, ready to join the European family as a full and rightful member. This stage began right after the legislative election of June 1989, and had as its objective Poland's entrance into the European Union and Atlantic institutions. "Normalcy" was the keyword.

Around 2004, when Poland became a member of NATO and major European bodies, the projected image of Poland started to change. This second stage turned the politics of normalcy into the politics of trauma. The Righteous Among the Nations – people involved in saving Jews during World War II – were projected as the face of Poland, with the life stories of Jan Karski and Irena Sendler being the most energetically promoted. Poland was not a country just like any other anymore; it became a country of suffering.

Two Kinds of History

In historical politics, select historical events are used as symbols of an unchangeable national identity. It is a simplified history, mythical and therefore ahistorical, because it does not contain unique facts, a complicated reality, nuance. It requires emotional acceptance, not analysis and revision. It is backed by a "we" of community, and that community must be identical with the nation.[1] National community has an aura of sacrum, so any criticism of that community seems to be an act of hostility. The nation is protected by a taboo-like deference.

What caused the change from transition to trauma, and what is the meaning of this change? Poland's access to the European scene involves active engagement and confrontation with a whole set of external opinions, some of them unfriendly. The history of World War II is particularly alive, perhaps because it is a history

1 Krzysztof Jaskułowski, "Mity narodowej żałoby," *Przegląd Polityczny* 100 (2010): 35.

that Poland shares with all its main international interlocutors. This history is now being revised in Europe and in Poland itself. World War II is the most contested historical battlefield.

At the time of the change from normalcy to trauma – the early 2000s – a new generation of historians established themselves: a generation unmarked by the personal experience of the war and the immediate postwar period. In relation to previous generations of historians, this one exhibits a certain change of sensibility, due to its temporal distance from the war as well as to a positivistic historical education, which gives it a sense of methodological reliability. For these historians, the writing of history is a matter of thorough, verifiable research; this history is also the material from which national identity is built. The role of this new generation of historians is difficult to overrate. They are a product of the new Poland – a country of one ethnicity, one language, and one religion. Because that monolithic Poland is a result of the unprecedented violence of the years 1938–1948, the historical work on Polish identity is both an expression of pride and aggressive insecurity.

Already in the communist period, the Polish state presented itself, with its typical presentism, as the fulfillment of the ancient ambitions of the Polish nation. According to that ideology, from the earliest times Poles have been continually fighting against the "German element" (Jasienica) to establish a homogenous state structure. Communist Poland was supposed to have been the first instance in which the nation was identical with the state. The state, however, was not independent. Today's Poland is a national state of ethnic Poles.

The radical severing of the history of ethnic Poles from the history of other Polish citizens happened, so to speak, on September 1, 1939. German occupation policy introduced a radical differentiation in the fates of the conquered populations according to their ethnicity. Though the Polish government in exile also spoke on behalf of Polish minorities, it primarily represented ethnic Poles.[2] In fact, in the Polish language, in contrast to English or French, nationality has nothing to do with citizenship. The adjective "Polish" refers to ethnic identity: this is why,

2 As an example of the history of World War II in Poland concerned only with ethnic Poles, see: Jan T. Gross, *Polish Society Under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). On the separation of WWII history into two strands: Polish and Jewish, see: Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*: *Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

I think, it is not understood in Poland that the expression "Polish concentration camps" means "concentration camps located on Polish territory."[3]

Of course, it makes sense to correct these expressions to help younger generations learn the history of World War II. But the alacrity with which these remarks are followed also plays an internal role: it is meant to convince Poles that they are unjustly accused of German war crimes. And since the extermination and disappearance of Polish and European Jews did happen in great part on the territory of the occupied Polish state, it is with the highest determination that the Polish authorities show the suffering of ethnic Poles.

One of the ways in which Polish historical politics deal with the above problem is to separate the history of World War II on the Polish territory into two histories: Polish and Jewish. It is as if there were two wars and two maps on which they were fought. The concentration camp that was until very recently called Oświęcim is now Auschwitz; the Łódź ghetto is now Litzmannstadt Ghetto, and it seems that the Warsaw ghetto is also going to undergo a name change. This duplication of the wartime map of Poland has to show clearly that it was not a Poland of the Poles. The wartime fate of Jews is further alienated from Polish war history: the map of Jewish suffering is now pronounced in German; Polish territory, German history.

This separation of Jewish and Polish war history allows for a clear narrative of Polish heroism and suffering. Yet, it is in conflict with the other part of Polish historical politics: underlining the heroic help given to persecuted Jews by the Polish Righteous. The narrative of the suffering and war trauma of Poles, to be fully comprehensible to the outside world, is made similar to the Jewish story – it is "holocausticized."[4] This approach, however, seems to be suggesting that Jews suffered much more, since (numerous) Poles were able to help them. The Polish nation is shown to be forcibly joined with "the Jew," because "our identity stands and falls with those we oppose."[5]

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3 During a conference organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012, professor Witold Kulesza from Łódź University delivered a paper on "Faulty Codes of Memory and the Lawless Infringement of Collective Memory as a Legal Value." Obviously, he took "Polish" in "Polish concentration camps" to mean as "organized by Poles."

4 I am here following Elżbieta Janicka, "Mroczny Przedmiot pożądanie. O 'Kindrszenen' raz jeszcze – inaczej," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2010): 61–86.

5 Terry Eagleton, "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, ed. Seamus Deane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 27.

"Karski" or Who Informed the West about the Holocaust

For the Western public, two exemplary figures already mentioned – Irena Sendler and Jan Karski – are the face of Polish heroism. Their biographies show the Poles opposing the Nazi (or, as it is said now, the German) barbaric occupation. In what follows, I do not want to undermine the nobility and bravery of these two exceptional individuals. Both were real heroes. Sendler was active in Żegota, the organization that helped Jews survive the war. Karski was an underground courier who risked his life innumerable times. But the story of their activities, now propelled by publications and movies funded by the state treasury and reduced to a set of repeated banalities, is imprecise at the very least. It is said that Irena Sendler saved 2,500 Jewish children, 400 of whom she personally carried out of the Warsaw ghetto! She herself has said about the recognition she received late in life, that "after Jedwabne there was a need for a hero."[6] Karski is the person who informed the West about the Holocaust and the West, of course, did nothing about it.

The story is certainly much more complicated. There were many people and organizations that conveyed information about the ongoing extermination of Jews to the West. Many Jewish organizations sent alarms at the very beginning of the German occupation of Poland. Usually, these alarms documented local events; it was difficult to glean from them the overall plan of the killing of all the Jews of Europe. The first document, it seems, that conveyed the news about the German decision to annihilate European Jewry was a telegram sent from Geneva to New York by the lawyer of the World Congress of Jews, Gerhart Riegner. The information in this document came from German sources. The telegram was sent on August 10, 1942, and conveyed to the Washington authorities on August 28.[7] The rapport prepared by the Polish government in exile based on the information provided by Karski was conveyed to the Allies three months later, on December 10, 1942. Karski personally met President Roosevelt a year after the Reigner telegram, on June 28, 1943.

Adam Puławski, a historian of World War II working at the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, writes that even before Karski's trip to the West in the fall of 1942, "the knowledge in London about the Shoah was quite substantial. The

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6 Anna Dybała, "Irena Sendlerowa (15.02.1910–12.05.2008). Biografia," *Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN: Polscy Sprawiedliwi*, accessed July 25, 2015, http://www.sprawiedliwi.org.pl/pl/cms/biografia-83/. All translations from Polish are the author's.

7 Walter Laqueur, "The Riegner Cable, On the Knowing Failure of the West to Act During the Shoah," *Tablet* VIII (2015): 10.

prime minister of the Polish government [in exile], Władysław Sikorski, in June of 1942 had already formulated a thesis that Hitler wanted to murder all Polish Jews." Before Karski's arrival, the government in exile was informed of the fate of the Jews by numerous couriers, by dispatches from the main commandant of the Home Army, Stefan Rowecki (for example, his dispatch dated August 19, 1942), and by Stefan Korboński.[8] Karski's mission was to inform the government on conflicts in the Polish Underground and the perils that the activities of Soviet partisans presented. The issue of the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto became a part of his mission quite accidentally, and it is rather unlikely that he brought the rapport about it himself, though it is now called "the Karski rapport."

Puławski declares that reducing Karski's mission to providing information to the West about the Holocaust is totally mistaken. "It is often repeated," he writes,

> that Karski was the first to convey to the West the information about the Shoah. This disregards the fact that the courier left for London when the Shoah had already been going on for a year and a half, and that after June 22, 1941 [a year and a half before his mission] the world was regularly informed about the extermination of Jews… Each of the couriers and emissaries knew what was going on in the Warsaw ghetto. The Shoah was happening there in front of the eyes of the inhabitants of the city.[9]

I am quoting Puławski's article at such great length because it did not reach Polish public opinion. It was blocked, so to speak, by two Polish defensive myths. One is the conviction that the extermination of Jews happened in some out of the way place, and that few Poles knew about it. This myth supports the division of the history of WWII into the history of ethnic Poles and the history of Jews. But the extermination of European Jews was happening mostly on Polish territory and in front of the eyes of Polish citizens – it was impossible not to notice it. One third of Warsaw was first walled off and then burned; across Poland Jews were expelled, assembled, transported, walked, and demonstratively humiliated before being murdered; tens of thousands escaped and tried to survive in cities, villages, and the countryside. The second myth that prevents people from critically appraising the "Karski" story is the conviction that Poles helped as much as they could, that they did everything possible though nothing could be done. The figure of a lonely Pole singlehandedly informing the uncaring, heartless world about the Holocaust is a

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8 Waldemar Kowalski (Polish Press Agency), interview with Adam Puławski, "Dr Adam Puławski: misja Karskiego była priorytetowa dla polskiego podziemia," *dzieje.pl*, April 5, 2015, accessed July 24, 2015, http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/dr-adam-pulawski-misja-karskiego-byla-priorytetowa-dla-polskiego-podziemia.

9 Ibid.

kind of reply/defense against "the anti-Polonism" of the world that does not accept the Polish story. "Karski" is used as a historical weapon, and a polemical hero.[10]

Polish Pride

The story of "Karski informing the world" is not only directed abroad, but is also designed for internal consumption. Poland is going through a period of intense use of historical language. History is exploited today just as much as coal mining was exploited in communist Poland. One of the signs of that exploitation is the construction of museums; since 1989, thirty-nine large, and about one hundred smaller museums have been opened.[11] In the last issue of the periodical *Krytyka Polityczna*, a series of conversations with the directors of some of these museums was published. These directors are often the representatives of the generation of historians I mentioned above. They openly describe their patriotic role.

Two conversations are particularly interesting: with historian Dariusz Stola, director of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews; and with the director of the Warsaw Rising Museum, Jan Ołdakowski, who is not a historian by education. Both directors declare that their institutions act as closures of the debates that had been raging around the issues their museums represent. Dariusz Stola said he would love for the people who saw the Museum's exhibit to feel "I am proud of Poland, of the Polish Jews [….] The past is one of the few things people possess. It is good to have a past that a person is proud of. And in an unequivocal way. Not: 'I am proud, but…' only 'I am proud,' that's all." In response to a question about the part of the exhibit that covers the war, in which "there will be some 'buts' as far as non-Jewish pride goes," professor Stola replied: "yes, these are painful topics, but I believe that we already have a language to talk about them. In Poland, we had several very important discussions about the Polish-Jewish past, also about its most painful themes. It seems that this list of topics has been exhausted." Moreover, he continued, "we are one of very few countries in Europe where such work has been done profoundly and sincerely. Not because we had more reasons than

10 Karski's activities on behalf of the Jews were noticed rather late, i.e. in 1984, thanks to Claude Lanzmann's movie *Shoah*.

11 Roman Pawłowski, "Muzea przyszłości albo mauzolea pamięci," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 19–20, 2013, accessed July 24, 2015, http://www.archiwum.wyborcza.pl/Archiwum/1,0,7802057,20131019RP-DGW,Muzea_przyszlosci_albo_mauzolea_pamieci,.html.

others to talk about it, but because we had enough people who wanted to do it and did it for many years."[12]

Jan Ołdakowski also declares that the Warsaw Rising Museum is "the summing up of Polish debate about the uprising,"[13] though Robert Kostro, director of the new Museum of Polish History thinks the opposite: according to him the Warsaw Uprising provokes very emotional reactions, and the museum "is a kind of monument, and not a clear analysis. And from a monument one cannot expect distance."[14] So "the summing up" that director Ołdakowski mentions is rather a "shutting down," and not the first one. Already in 2006, the achievement of such closure was declared by another historian, Jan Żaryn, then director of the Office of Public Education of the Institute of National Remembrance. He wrote:

> We are closing a certain stage of our research [….] Polish-Jewish relations in the XXth century is one of the most important topics. This is why in the coming years our Office will take on new issues. The topics that are awaiting our researchers are the systematic approach to the relations between Poles and Jews under the influence of both Soviet occupation in the years 1939–41 and after 1944, and the scale of repressions used by the Germans against Poles saving Jews [….] We will take care that these academic researches be free from present influences and external pressures, including those that are openly or covertly political.[15]

Żaryn went on to postulate closing off research about the suffering of the Jews, and enlarging the part about the suffering of non-Jewish Poles. And this has been systematically implemented.

But I would like to return to the words of director Ołdakowski:

> When we started to build the Warsaw Rising Museum, the Warsaw resident was diffident and standoffish. Today, he likes to use public spaces, ride his bike, go to a café.
> Question: And it was the Warsaw Rising Museum that provoked that change? Thanks to the stories about street battles?

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12 Zofia Waślicka and Artur Żmijewski, interview with Dariusz Stola, "Muzeum Tożsamości," *Krytyka Polityczna* 40–41 (2014): 284.

13 The issue of *Krytyka Polityczna* is devoted to "institutions that are critical" and to the criteria that make an institution critical of the reality around it. Artur Żmijewski, interview with Jan Ołdakowski, "Wolimy machać flagą," *Krytyka Polityczna* 40–41 (2014): 326.

14 Paweł Smoleński, "Dyrektor Muzeum Historii Polski: polityka pamięci to nie jest manipulacja," "*Magazyn świąteczny*" *Gazety Wyborczej*, July 25, 2015, accessed July 25, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,147225,18418203,polityka-pamieci-to-nie-jest-manipulacja.html.

15 Jan Żaryn, "Introduction," in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały,* ed. Andrzej Żbikowski (Warsaw: IPN, 2006), 12.

> Ołdakowski: Not about street battles, but about community. It was the pride that the Museum brought back to Warsaw.[16]

And he himself is proud that the Museum is proposing "a myth, a myth in the positive sense of the word, a myth that is bonding."[17]

Pedagogy of Pride

Two concepts are important here: pride and myth. The right-wing press and the leadership of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) party are critical of the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) party for what they are calling the pedagogy of shame. They reject any criticism of the Polish past, and aim at "restoring the pride of the Poles." As the above quotations show, that work is already well advanced, and it is further empowered by the "bonding" myths. A myth that bonds suspends historical uncertainties, as I already mentioned at the beginning of this paper, since in the methodology of history, myth is opposed to facts. Myths escape verification, are not to be challenged or discussed, and should be accepted emotionally rather than by argument. Such myths are playing a therapeutic role, if I properly understand the words of director Ołdakowski. And they are also used to mobilize people. In the same conversation, the questioner quoted the opinion of a politician, Paweł Kowal, that the Warsaw Rising Museum increased Poland's military defensive potential. It needs to be stressed that all Polish school students pay an obligatory visit to the Museum, which they seem to love; it seems that they come out of it convinced that the Uprising was victorious, if not militarily, then morally. Is the defensive potential of Poland enhanced by their possible future willingness to sacrifice their life just like the jolly, handsome young heroes shown on the photos in the Museum? The Warsaw Uprising is offered here as a kind of communitarian cult: a bonding myth, indeed.

Both directors – Stola and Ołdakowski – sound defensive and irritated (the person who asks questions in these conversations – Artur Żmijewski – is very provocative). Their attitude is shared by a large spectrum of Poles. The best example of this was the reaction to the words of James Comey, the head of the FBI. On April 15, 2015, he said that he would try to send all the people who work for him to Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum, so that they can learn that "in their minds, the murderers and accomplices of Germany, and Poland, and Hungary, and so many, many other places didn't do something evil. They convinced

16 Jan Ołdakowski quoted in "Wolimy machać flagą," 328.
17 Ibid., 327.

themselves it was the right thing to do, the thing they had to do."[18] In Poland, the universal outrage was expressed by the President, Prime Minister, the episcopate, the governing party, and the opposition. Six directors of Poland's largest historical museums joined in the attack on Comey, including the above-quoted directors Stola, Ołdakowski, and Kostro. They wrote an open letter to Mr. Comey, inviting him to Poland so that they could teach him Polish history. They wrote:

> It was Poland that was first to oppose the absolute evil embodied by the Third Reich led by Adolf Hitler. In the absence of military action on the part of its Western allies Poland was divided between the two most murderous totalitarian regimes in human history – German Nazism and Soviet Communism. It was Polish soldiers who fought "for our freedom and yours," being the only ones from the very first to the last day of the war. It was in Poland that hiding Jewish people led to the extermination of entire families. And yet the largest group of "Righteous Among the Nations" come from our country. Finally, it was Poland that the Western Allies left to Stalin after the war and, as a consequence, it was enveloped in the darkness of communism for the next 45 years.[19]

The letter, delivered to the Ambassador of the United States of America to Poland, precisely expressed a martyrological, traumatic version of Poland. That vision contains accusations aimed at the entire world responsible for inflicting or ignoring Poland's suffering.

It is difficult to combine a deep sense of victimhood (which is easily linked to humiliation) with a sense of pride. Perhaps this is why the signatories of this letter are so keen to avoid the "pedagogy of shame." They declare that Poles have been humiliated and need to "be raised up from their knees."[20] Was being abandoned by the Allies the reason for that sense of humiliation? Living under communism? Or the present situation of somewhat limited sovereignty due to a (very lucrative) membership in the European Union? Perhaps the sense of shame is due to the neoliberal economic reforms that, as the public opinion seems to be convinced in Poland, leave everyone to deal with their troubles alone? Or the new Russian danger? Or vivid criticisms from American Jews, most of them of Polish origin? Perhaps all of these reasons are partially responsible for the need for stronger

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18 James B. Comey, "Holocaust Remembrance Week: Refusing to Let Evil Hold the Field" (speech, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Annual Dinner, Washington, D.C. April 19, 2014), accessed April 19, 2015, https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/holocaust-remembrance-week-refusing-to-let-evil-hold-the-field.

19 Łukasz Kamiński et al., "Letter to the FBI director James Comey – Warsaw, April 21, 2015," *Institute of National Remembrance*, accessed April 19, 2015, http://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/2015/letter-to-the-fbi-director-james-comey-warsaw,-april-21,-2015.

20 Ibid.

national self-identification and the attachment to Polish history. All of "New Europe," to use the forgotten name given to the region by an almost forgotten Donald Rumsfeld, is suffering from a surge in nationalism. Feeling unable to control their fate, citizens of these countries feel put upon and reach for a historical model they know so well: war trauma. Poland is, with one hand, renovating cities and building roads, and with the other, wiping its tears. It is now strong and rich. But its success is tinted with bitterness, if not denied. Who knows where this will lead.

Part II: Reading the Museum

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir

Polin: "Ultimate Lost Object"

In "Objects of Ethnography," Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that in addition to exhibiting objects, every museum also exhibits the authors of the exhibitions.[1] To know the authors is to examine the conventions they have applied, analyze how they construct the subjectivity of the objects they choose to exhibit, and consider the "implications for those who see and those who are seen."[2] I will address Barbara Kirshenblatt's suggestion as it relates to the core exhibition of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, curated by Professor Kirshenblatt herself. Who are the authors of the works she has selected to exhibit? What can we say about them based on the decisions they have made about what to exhibit? Who is the imagined audience and counteraudience[3] of the POLIN Museum? I can only ask these questions and point toward answers, which have yet to be fully developed.

Narrative

I will begin with the essay "Categorically Jewish, Distinctly Polish" by Moshe Rosman – an outside consultant for the POLIN Museum.[4] Referring to the theories of Hayden White's equivalent and incommensurable metanarrative, Rosman extols the advantages of a distinctive museum narrative. Rosman argues that a clear thesis constitutes an "Archimedean point," which focuses discussion among the spectators. There is no need to prove the choice of one narration is right, he claims. The only thing that has to be done is to effectively present the narrative. Rosman

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1 Barbara Kirshenblat-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* eds. Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 434.

2 In Kirshenblat-Gimblett's words "the first order of business is therefore to examine critically the conventions guiding ethnographic display, to explicate how displays constitute subjects and with what implications for those who see and those who are seen.": Kirshenblat-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 434.

3 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

4 See: Moshe Rosman, "Categorically Jewish, Distinctly Polish: The Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the New Polish-Jewish Metahistory," *JSIJ Jewish Studies: An Internet Journal* 10 (2012): 5, accessed April 18, 2015, http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/10–2012/Rosman.pdf.

writes: "This means the museum will actively seek to do what scholars usually try to avoid: distill the metanarrative in such a way that makes it both apparent and convincing."[5] The author does not elaborate on a contradiction I deem critical for the entire strategy of the POLIN Museum: an apparent contradiction between that which belongs to the museum and that which is scholarly. Consequently, another apparent contradiction arises between the purported scholarly neutrality and the enthusiastic approach of some Polish scholars to the "distinctive narrative" offered by the Museum.

Rosman summarizes POLIN's narrative – that is, the history of Polish Jews itself – in short, as "a story of achievements, broken by episodes of crises and persecutions."[6] By no means is this a story about a persistently resurgent anti-Semitism. Hence, there is no gallery devoted to Polish anti-Semitism.[7] The essence of the project is to:

> present the relation between Poland and the Jews as an entire spectrum of behaviors and attitudes. […] Indeed, there had been several instances of hatred towards the Jews, however depending on the situation, there had also been tolerance, religious freedom and opportunities for economic activity.[8]

(Transferred into the reality of the Native American Museum in Washington, D.C., such a conciliatory narrative would probably rule out the exhibition "Nation to Nation," devoted to broken treaties). In the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the narrative rules out isolating a thread of anti-Jewish violence, including the pogroms, which became one of the main reasons why East-European Jews emigrated to America.

Just as the pogroms are apparently blamed on Russia, the Holocaust is univocally blamed on the Germans: "The Shoah was not the culmination of Jewish

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5 "This means that a museum will seek to do what the writing scholar at times appears to be trying to avoid: distill the metanarrative in a way that makes it both apparent and compelling": Rosman, "Categorically Jewish, Distinctly Polish," 4.

6 "[…] story of overall achievement punctuated by crisis and persecution": Ibid., 13.

7 "The Polish-Jewish nexus is not a story of unrelenting antisemitism. […] There is no gallery devoted to Polish antisemitism. Neither is it the running subtext to the Museum's story": Ibid., 16.

8 "The thrust of the new metahistory – and the Museum core exhibit – is that Poland's relationship to its Jews was expressed in a range of behaviors and attitudes. They were combined in a complex calculus of cause and effect, mixed motives and unintended consequences. Yes, there were many modes and examples of Jew-hartred, but there were also, in varying measures, tolerance, religious freedom and economic opportunity for Jews": Ibid., 17.

history in Poland. [...] Conceived, imposed and executed by the Germans [...] it does not constitute a typical instance of this history; neither was it that history's organic nor its logical conclusion. The Shoah was no conclusion at all."[9] The crucial fragment of the Museum's program concerns Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* and the book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* by Jan T. Gross, of which we read that they "contributed to another accusation being made against the Poles. While the Poles had never planned, nor implemented the Final Solution, there was at least a sizable number of Poles, who enthusiastically collaborated with the Germans in executing the Final Solution in Poland."[10] **The Museum has created a subtle and nuanced "Polish response" to this accusation.** First of all, while it does not hesitate to present anti-Semitism in its numerous manifestations, the Museum asserts that it had nothing to do with the Nazi Final Solution. The Holocaust belonged to a completely different order. Never, in any period of time, was genocide the goal of even the fiercest Polish anti-Semites. In the case of instances of murder perpetrated by Poles with no German participation in places such as Lviv or Jedwabne, the Museum classifies these as "local violence."[11]

Foreseeing that controversies would arise from the above-described issues, Rosman stresses that even though the Museum is run by an international team, arguing parties display a dichotomous identity. He writes that the "subtle and nuanced 'Polish response' to the accusations made by Jan Gross will not be liked by 'many Jews,' who might regard it as 'apologetic.'"[12] The thing is that the standpoints in this dispute do not run along cultural or national lines. Just as an apologetic vision of Poland's future will be contested not only by Jews, the group of apologists will not include only Poles; the best example being the apologists in the group of non-Poles, who co-founded the Museum.

9 Ibid., 19.

10 Ibid., 25

11 The entire fragment reads: "It is true that Poles neither planned nor implemented the Final Solution, but it is a fact that at least a fair number of Poles enthusiastically cooperated with the Nazis in its execution in Poland. The Museum has crafted a sophisticated, nuanced 'Polish response' to this charge. First of all, while not hesitating to show Polish antisemitism in its manifold manifestations, the Museum asserts that this had nothing to do with the German Nazi Final Solution. The Holocaust was of a whole different order. Genocide was not the objective of even the most rabid Polish antisemites, in any period. (...) with respect to cases of Poles killing Jews during the war independently of the Germans in places like Lwow and Jedwabne, the Museum classifies these as 'local violence'": Ibid., 24–25.

12 Ibid., 25.

A shortcoming of Rosman's argument is the fact that he completely fails to notice that the program of the Museum, thus formulated, constitutes an unexpected and incomprehensible backlash against the crucial historical debates taking place in Poland in the past fifteen years. By means of the tools at the Museum's disposal, POLIN's narrative makes yet another attempt to settle the dispute.[13]

Surrogacy

A culture that has survived a disaster recovers in the process of surrogacy, whereas a museum by its very nature is a collection of surrogates. "Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure […] survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates."[14]

In the case of POLIN, the process of surrogacy has had an exceptional dimension. This surrogacy is accentuated by the tensions arising between the Muranów *environments of memory* in which the Museum was erected and the *place of memory* constituted by the Museum itself. The building is located in the center of Muranów, a district raised out of the ruins and on the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. Based on multimedia, the Museum becomes a memorial by default devoid of artifact, which stands in opposition to the neighborhood, which in turn is itself an artifact.

A decision which proved to have similar repercussions was to subject the Jewish death on this spot to a rather vague life. "We are a museum of life," the founders emphasize.[15] The idea of life in the project designed by Rainer Mahlamäki is

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13 We can learn for what purpose Polish politicians use the "Polish answer" formulated by the POLIN Museum to the accusations made by Jan T. Gross, by looking at the words uttered by one of the advisors to the President of Poland, a professor of history, who managed to link a notice about the Museum to a comment on Roman Polański. The President's advisor said that as a "child of the Holocaust," the famous film director is safe in Poland where he came to witness the opening ceremony of the POLIN Museum, which "proves what a hospitable and safe land it [Poland] was for Jews.": "Pałac Prezydencki negocjował w sprawie Polańskiego? Nałęcz: To nieprawda," *Gazeta Wyborcza,* November 3, 2014, accessed April 18, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,16905362,Palac_Prezydencki_negocjowal_w_sprawie_Polanskiego_.html#ixzz3I0aGLnIp. All translations from Polish are the author's.

14 Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.

15 Paweł Smoleński, interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Opowiadamy o życiu," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 25, 2015, accessed April 18, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,141465,16854952,Kirshenblatt_Gimblet__Opowiadamy_o_zyciu.html.

expressed by a cavernous entrance hall opening onto both sides of Muranowski Square. While the spokeswoman for the Museum interprets the open space as a crack in the history of Polish Jews made by the Holocaust,[16] the shape of the hallway, "reminiscent of waves or dunes,"[17] acquired an interpretation that is a far better match for POLIN's message. If the entrance hall was to symbolize the crossing of the Red Sea by the Jews, then it was placed in an unfortunate location. The image of miraculous salvation seems to be rather out of place in Poland, a country which lost Jews in the Shoah, successive waves of emigration, and the expulsions of 1968.

The empty, white space at the end of the exhibition hall in the Shoah gallery was intended by the creators to serve as an attempt at emphasizing that the Shoah was not only an episode in history, but also the end of the history of Eastern European Jewry. According to Barbara Engelking, this aspect of the project had already received approval, although ultimately it was not implemented, allegedly for technical reasons.[18]

Based on the above premises – the obssession with life and erasure of death – one can get the impression that the authors of the POLIN Museum's metanarrative not only attempt to forcefully, and in Poland by far too early, close the mourning period after the Shoah, but also fit it into a sort of a new *grand récit* of the Red Sea: on life, salvation, and time that heals all wounds. Meanwhile, according to Dominick LaCapra, "some wounds of the past – both personal and historical – cannot be healed without leaving scars or remnants, which in a sense are archives of the present."[19] Designed by Maya Lin, the Vietnam Veterans' Monument in Washington, D.C. can exemplify the preservation of

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16 According to Nitzan Reisner from the Press Office of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews: "Curvlinear walls created a gap, a tear reflecting the tragic break in the 1000 year-long history of Polish Jews i.e. the Shoah.": Nitzan Reisner quoted in Tomasz Wojciechowski, "Na progu muzeum życia," *Nowy Dziennik,* October 27, 2014, accessed April 18, 2015, http://www.dziennik.com/publicystyka/artykul/na-progu-muzeum-zycia.

17 Roman Pawłowski, "Otwiera się interaktywne Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 27, 2014, accessed April 18, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,16869612,Otwiera_sie_interaktywne_Muzeum_Historii_Zydow_Polskich_.html.

18 "It turned out that in the place where it should be located there is an emergency corridor, which could not be blocked or isolated…": Barbara Engelking, letter to Jan T. Gross, March 5, 2015, shared with author by Jan T. Gross.

19 Dominick LaCapra, *Historia w okresie przejściowym,* trans. Katarzyna Bojarska (Cracow: Universitas, 2010), 137.

such archives in architecture through the form of the letter "V" laying on its side, which may stand both for "Vietnam" and "victory" as well as "violence." A similar method was followed by German architects who created the characteristic *counter-memorial architecture*, which according to James C. Young "could express the collapse of faith in civilization, instead of trying to fix it at once."[20] Indeed, their projects constitute social programs embedded in architecture, while the public debates that preceded their construction have profoundly transformed German society.

Is it not strange that the first Jewish museum to be built in a country where the Shoah took place does not display similar ambitions? Barbara Kirshenblatt says: "Jedwabne, Kielce and the discussion on the books by Jan Tomasz Gross, have in my opinion little to do with Polish-Jewish relations, but above all relate to Polish-Polish relations. [...] anti-Semitism is not a Polish-Jewish, but a Polish problem."[21] Effective as a counterargument to the cliché of the "Jewish question," which has never been Jewish, the above sentence contains a deep ambivalence, highlighted by a joke told by Dariusz Stola, Director of the Museum: "The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is not a museum of anti-Semitism. The anti-Semites have to build their own museum!"[22] Unfortunately, this is anything but a good joke considering Polish realities. This is precisely the reason why anti-Semitism in Poland is not a museum object, but rather a collection of active codes, as there is no museum here, which would like to tell its story.

What proved memorable about the comment made by Professor Kirshenblatt, who gave us a tour of the exhibition back in October 2014, was her description of the meticulously reconsctructed synagogue in Gwoździec. She called the synagogue the "ultimate lost object," and this wording aptly reflects the Poland we may see in POLIN. This Poland proves even better than the original one. Anti-Semitism disappears and what remains is nothing but kind-heartedness. This is an example of "rebranding Poland" – an operation which proves beneficial to all: the Polish authorities, who show what a hospitable country Poland is; American tourists, who share their heritage, whitewashed of anti-Semitic obscenity, with their grandchildren; and Israeli youth tours, which until recently

20 The two aforementioned examples are drawn from James E. Young, "The Stages of Memory: Berlin, New York, Oslo" (lecture, Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies, Princeton University, Princeton, September 2014).

21 "Kirshenblatt-Gimblet: Opowiadamy o życiu."

22 Tatiana Kolesnyczenko, interview with Dariusz Stola, "Muzeum żywych Żydów," *Wprost*, October 26, 2014, accessed April 18, 2015, http://www.wprost.pl/ar/475282/Muzeum-zywych-Zydow/.

traveled nowhere other than Auschwitz. I hypothesize that from the perspective of *local knowledge*, this rebranding is a self-colonizing operation that will lead to less self-reflection on Poland's past on the part of its citizens. Unlike some of the German museums, POLIN does not require the audience to reflect upon difficult issues. Instead of being thought-provoking, the Museum tells a self-complacement tale of a colorful past life and the pitiful and somewhat incomprehensible "disappearance" of Jews from Poland.

Reception

Sociologist Helena Datner was President of the Jewish Community of Warsaw between 2006 and 2014 and co-creator of the exhibition on the postwar era. Shortly before the opening of the Museum, she resigned in protest over corrections being made to the exhibition. She describes domestic reactions to the Museum as a need for an apology:

> […] an apology for Poland, which unlike other countries is free of anti-Semitism, a sign of which is the very fact the Museum had been opened. An apology for mutual relations of a thousand years, in which Poland, aside for brief moments, has been identified with Po-lin, "a place where you rest," a country for the Jews, a country better than other countries. Finally, an apology for the Museum itself, which unlike most Jewish museums in the world, is devoted to life, and not to martyrdom nor the Shoah. You could hear slogans about the "Museum of life" coming from everywhere.[23] I heard the thing was not to picture Jews as "eternal victims," because this is a stereotype, a very boring one as a matter of fact. That is a terribly stupid opinion. Once again we are witnessing a display of Jewish complexes and relieving those who persecuted Jews from taking responsibility. Of course, this is presenting Jewish life – however the question is where did the Shoah come from? Why have the Jews always occupied a "dangerous place" in the [Polish] society? What is the answer to these questions but a great, ongoing, educational, moral, and civilizational challenge? Does it contradict the importance and colorfulness of Jewish culture? [24]

According to Datner, the Museum's narrative, especially the most recent part of it, is devoid of "respect for difference": "everything in the narrative is a Polish story, boiled down to one single denominator, indicating that there is no place

23 "Kirshenblatt-Gimblet: Opowiadamy o życiu."

24 Leopold Sobel, interview with Helena Datner, "Helena Datner o MHŻP," accessed April 18, 2015, http://www.jewish.org.pl/index.php/pl/opinie-komentarze-main menu-62/6803-helena-datner-o-mhp.html. The interview was originally published in *Plotkies* 62 (December 29, 2014).

for otherness here."[25] The Museum exposes assimilated Jews, preferably famous ones, and at the same time it takes no notice of the much bigger segment of Jewish society, who wanted nothing but to remain themselves. "The point was that the exhibition [...] was supposed to present a more uplifting Jewish history, focusing on great things and the famous names of primarily those Jews who contributed to Polish culture." "The fundamental thought is: that both on the cognitive and educational level, it is worth dealing with those Jews who were doing precisely the same things we were. Jankiel fought for the independence of Poland, while yet another Jew formed the Polish Legions. This is something we may love the Jews for." "It is amazing that we still have to emphasize this, safeguard ourselves by stating that although something is Jewish, it is not anti-Polish."[26]

According to Datner, the construction of the Museum has been accompanied by "a fear of the [Polish] society" from the very beginning. "This was a fear of revealing the depth of anti-Jewish prejudices, which are as deep as a well. There was certainly a fear that the Museum would infuriate the society as to the fact that so much money had been spent on the Jews."[27] This fear resulted in the elimination from the exhibition of what Datner described as "the Jewish point of view," referring to the point of view of the historical actors in the examples she presented. A similar term, found in cultural anthropology, is the "native point of view." In the version introduced by Bronisław Malinowski, it has started the process of empowering the excluded, and it is precisely in this context that it is worth looking more closely at the reaction triggered by the aforementioned "Jewish point of view" at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. During one of the early presentations of the postwar exhibition, a representative of the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland said that "if she had assumed that such an expression would ever appear in the exhibition, she would never have supported the Museum." Another representative of the Museum Council declared that as a historian, he knows only one point of view – the scholarly one – and as a Pole, he added that "the Jewish point of view" excludes him from the dialogue. Yet another person made an appeal not to use such an expression, as "it turns the Museum into [something] essentially unreliable."[28]

25 Piotr Paziński, interview with Helena Datner, "Jankiel, chasydzi i Tuwim: O Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich z Heleną Datner rozmawia Piotr Paziński," *Midrasz* 1 (2015): 5–10.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Helena Datner, email to author, September 17, 2014.

The Museum Council's rejection of the "Jewish point of view" opened the door for reviewers to make corrections to the exhibition "Aftermath"[29] by demanding that Datner remove the expression "liberation" from her description of the coming of the Red Army. The correction, representative of the anti-communist point of view, blurs the specificity of the language and obscures the experiences of Jews in hiding, for whom the end of the war literally meant liberation from death. Analogous corrections were also demanded by a "historian [who] stated that you cannot use the expression 'a fair social system' even in the following sentence: 'many Jews who did not leave Poland right after the war hoped that the new system would be fair, meaning that it would bring about equal rights for Jews.'"[30] Another sign of disregard of the language spoken by Jews was calling a fragment of the main exhibition "Paradisus Judaeorum" – "the Jewish paradise." The expression was a 17th century polemical concept condemning the rampant prevalence of infidels. By embedding this satirical expression into the exhibition's title, one puts its words – by default – into the mouths of contented Jews.[31]

I would like to understand how an ethnographer as eminent as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimbeltt could agree to such a subjection of the Jewish language to the categories of the dominant majority. The only thing that might justify her consent would be a pragmatism grounded in recognition of whom this museum is actually intended for. Maybe we have failed to understand something after all? Maybe the POLIN Museum is not intended for the Jews, even though it concerns historical Jews? Maybe it is meant to be the first **non-national** museum in Polish history told from the carefully sanitized point of view of an extinct nation, which

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29 "Jankiel, chasydzi i Tuwim."

30 Ibid.

31 Stanisław Kot, "Polska rajem dla Żydów, piekłem dla chłopów, niebem dla szlachty," *Kultura i Nauka* (1937); Stanisław Kot, "Nationum Proprietates," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* VII (1957): 99–117. I have discovered a much earlier German *usus* of the ironic trope *Paradisus Judaeorum* in 14th century Austria: "There is an interesting, if somewhat questionable, record of a persecution [of Jews] in the Habsburg territories of Styria and Carinthia in 1397, which is said to have caused many Jews to flee to Vienna. According to the source, the Austrian duke prevented an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in the city of Vienna in exchange for a promise by the Jewish refugees to pay him 16.000 marks for their protection. 'Also ist Osterreich der Juden verhaissen und gesegnent land' ('thus Austria is the promised and blessed land of the Jews'), the source concludes somewhat indignantly": Irven M. Resnick, "Race, Anti-Jewish Polemic, Arnulf of Seéz, and the Contested Papal Election of Anaclet II (A.D. 1130)," in *Jews in Medieval Christendom: "Slay Them Not,"* eds. Kristine T. Utterback and Merrall Llewelyn Price, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, vol. 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 35.

used to live here? In such a case, Jews would constitute a mere pretext for Poles to speak about themselves again; however it would be thanks to Jews that something extremely important could be contributed to this story. The background perspective would deprive Polish history of grudges and martyrdom. Maybe the POLIN Museum **deemphasizes** Jewish martyrdom because it recognizes it as the twin of Polish martyrdom? Maybe the reason behind all this is the hope of reaching a non-martyrological **middle ground** and stepping beyond the **dyadic pattern of mimetic rivalry**?[32] This is something I would like to believe.

32 Roberto Farneti, *Mimetic Politics: Dyadic Patterns in Global Politics* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015).

Konrad Matyjaszek

Wall and Window: the Rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto as the Narrative Space of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Introducing the project of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in a 2011 lecture, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the director of the Museum's design team, declared while presenting an archival photographic image: "This is the site of the Warsaw ghetto after it was completely destroyed, and it is here that we are building this museum. What it means is that we don't have a great collection, we don't have historic buildings, we don't have the historical fabric of where Jews once lived. We are really, truly building on the rubble."[1]

This statement, pronounced while the process of constructing the Museum's building was still underway, establishes a point of departure for the Museum's design in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Its building certainly does stand directly on the crushed fabric of what was once the largest Jewish space in Europe, "the Jewish Metropolis," as it was recently proclaimed.[2] The modern glass surfaces of the Museum's facades contrast not only with the complete nonexistence of the prewar city's built environment, but even with the residential architecture of the postwar district of Muranów where it is located. "Building on the rubble" indeed constitutes an act of spatial and temporal separation. The emergence of this Museum was seen by its managers as a chance to mark a break from the metaphorical "rubble" left by the destruction, a chance to clear the discursive and visual remnants that define the semantics of Holocaust commemoration. Historian Dariusz Stola, the director of the Museum, has represented it as "a museum of life" – neither a museum of the Holocaust nor an institution

1 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Rising from the Rubble: Creating the Museum of the History of Polish Jews on the Site of the Warsaw Ghetto" (lecture, Indiana University, Bloomington, February 10, 2011), accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.indiana.edu/~jsp/lectures/bKirshenblattGimblett.shtml.

2 Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet, "Introduction," in *Warsaw. The Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, eds. Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet (Boston: Brill, 2015), 2–4.

preoccupied with a critical reflection on the history of antisemitism.[3] But does the materiality of the site – the rubble of Warsaw's Jewish district and ghetto – constitute merely a mute foundation for the spaces of today's "life," a commemorative annex to the landscape of contemporary Poland? Does the action of "building on the rubble," of necessity involving interaction with destroyed materiality, establish the rubble's quality of "a historical fabric," contrary to the words of its curator – and if so, how?

This essay offers a critical examination of the curatorial and architectural strategies assumed by the Museum's creators in the process of employing the urban location of the Museum in the narratives communicated by the building and its main exhibition. In this analysis, two key architectural interiors will be examined in detail in terms of their correspondence with the context of the site: the Museum's entrance lobby and the space of the "Jewish street," incorporated into the main exhibition's sub-galleries presenting the interwar period of Polish-Jewish history and the history of the Holocaust. In discussing the conceptual backgrounds of these two environments' design, I intend to raise questions on the role of urban and architectural space as a museum exhibit, and on the responsibilities arising from the decision to present a given history on the physical site where it took place.

3 In an interview given to the Polish Press Agency, Dariusz Stola commented: "It is very important that young people from Tel Aviv or Be'er Sheva learn about the entire history of their nation, which perhaps became hidden in the great, dark shadow of the Holocaust. It is also important for the Poles. I do not want my country to be associated by someone only with a cemetery and a gas chamber. Poland is a beautiful country, where for a thousand years Jews lived and created a unique culture, one that 70 years ago disappeared in a terrible way. But we cannot continuously talk only about this dramatic end. Life is no less important than death, and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the museum of life": Polska Agencja Prasowa, interview with Dariusz Stola, "Prof. Stola: Polska to nie tylko krematoria, to też 1000 lat historii Żydów," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 6, 2014, accessed November 14, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,91446,15581192,Prof__Stola__Polska_to_nie_tylko_krematoria__to_tez.html. In another interview he also declared, referring to the question of the presence of the subject of the Jedwabne massacre in the Museum's main exhibition: "We present it too. But I see that you are asking me about antisemitism, so I will say clearly: the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is not a museum of antisemitism. The antisemites would need to build one themselves!": Tatiana Kolesnyczenko, interview with Dariusz Stola, "Muzeum żywych Żydów," *Wprost* 43 (2014): 39. All translations from Polish are the author's.

The Ruin of Modernity[4]

Writing about the modern uses of ruinous environments, Andreas Huyssen named the rubble left by the catastrophes of the 20th century as "the ruin of modernity," and stated that while such environments differ significantly from the illustrative, "authentic" ruins invented and utilized by Western cultures to exemplify earlier struggles of building the modern world, the materiality of the rubble still contains these old ruins' political potential.[5] The ruin of modernity, as Huyssen argues, is not an innocent or impartial milieu. These shattered structures continue to radiate political potential, triggering "a nostalgia for an earlier age that had not yet lost its power to imagine other futures."[6] As he claims, "at stake is a nostalgia for modernity that dare not speak its name after acknowledging the catastrophes of the twentieth century."[7] This nostalgia, discursively encoded into the modern ruin, offers the promise to re-create and re-live collective dreams – of a social, political, and national nature – that were interrupted and cancelled by the destruction wrought by modernity itself.[8] In contrast to the "classic" ruin of early modernity, intended to embody the struggle between the imagined realms of "culture" and "nature" that preoccupied earlier imaginaries of progress, the nostalgia evoked by the rubble of modern cities is structured by the struggle against history and memory, namely against the memories of those historical events that stand between the nostalgic subject and "a promise that has vanished from our own age: the promise of an alternative future."[9]

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4 As Bruno Latour comments, the numerous definitions of modernity and modernization point to the passage of time: "The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern,' 'modernization,' or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns. 'Modern' is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished": Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10.

5 Andreas Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins," *Grey Room* 23 (2006): 7–8.

6 Huyssen's theory displays certain similarities to Svetlana Boym's concept of nostalgia as a twofold phenomenon, identifiable as a restorative or reflexive nostalgic feeling. See: Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49–51.

7 Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins," 7.

8 See: Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 85–88.

9 Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins," 8.

In the case of the Museum, what "stands between" and – in the eyes of its contemporary architects – appears to block the access to the interrupted political dream of prewar Polish modernity, is the rubble that remains on the site of the Museum and the memory of the catastrophe it carries: the Holocaust and, specifically, the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. During the postwar decades, historical knowledge of these events was – at best – segregated from Polish narratives of modernization or – more often – appropriated, universalized, or silenced; similarly, only isolated cases of historical debate allowed for a critical reflection on the consequences of this knowledge for visions of Polish postwar modernity and modernization and for Polish society's self-image. Despite the emergence of these debates, externally initiated in the1980s by the release of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and expanded by the publication of Jan Błoński's "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto" ("The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto"), the history of the Holocaust remains a "difficult subject" in Polish history, one that ceases to threaten the self-image of the Polish majority only if it is seen as a matter between Germans and Jews, and not as an event that is integral to the history of Poland, with all the consequences such an integration carries.[10] Reactivated in 2000 by the publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, the public debate on Polish-Jewish history and Polish complicity in the Holocaust to date has stopped short of reaching any substantial conclusions.[11] It is equally

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10 Elżbieta Janicka formulates the question whether "the history of the Holocaust as a crime committed against the Jews constitutes a threat to a martyrological-heroic narrative about the past, communicated by the contemporary Polish dominant majority? It does, and it does not. The narrative remains safe while the Holocaust is defined as a German state crime perpetrated on the occupied territories of Europe. It is threatened in a fundamental way once – following Jan T. Gross' thought – it is taken under consideration that the Holocaust was 'a mosaic composed of discrete episodes, improvised by local decision-makers, and hinging on unforced behavior, rooted in God-knows-what motivations, of all those who were near the murder scene at the time'": Elżbieta Janicka, "Zamiast negacjonizmu. Topografia symboliczna terenu dawnego getta warszawskiego a narracje o Zagładzie," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 10 (2014): 209–210; Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 125.

11 As Tomasz Żukowski writes, Polish debates on the Holocaust "invariably follow one scenario: a step forward – and immediately a step back, toward continually entrenching ourselves in defense of the Nation. When in 1987 Jan Błoński openly discussed the misbehaviors of the Polish Catholic majority towards the Jews during the war, he immediately closed the subject with the formula of 'indifference,' which prevented the articulation of any substantial conclusion. The publication of Jan T. Gross' *Neighbors*

far from permitting reflection on the hitherto untouched "difficult subject" of modernity's "dark side" – Polish visions of social and urban modernization grounded in ethnic segregation and supported by the ideology of political nationalism. The absence of a critical reflection on these visions, together with their increasing political usefulness, today allows for a revival of nostalgia rooted in idealized imageries of pre-Holocaust Polish history which, coupled with the urgency of creating post-communist Polish national identities, leaves the modern ruin, "the cipher for nostalgia,"[12] in an ambivalent and highly problematic position.

The interrupted dream of Polish modernity resurfaced shortly before the fall of communism, shrouded in a politicized aura and triggering a largely uncritical nostalgic revival. This revival carried with it an immediately useful historical narrative, which had a bearing on the narrative of the Museum. Moshe Rosman, a historian who participated in the creation of the Museum's exhibition, accurately captured its bearing in the following way:

> liberated at last from Communism, but still heirs (albeit reluctant ones) to its legacy, Polish historians searching for the historical roots of a non-Communist, liberal, independent, democratic, genuinely "Polish" Poland found them in the multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious Poland of the past. The early modern period[13] […] has come to be viewed as Poland's golden era.[14]

Such discursive idealization is by no means limited to the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. According to the Museum's creators, "the golden era" is an almost infinitely flexible term that can be extended from the 17th century to the interwar decades of the 20th century, a period labeled "'the second Golden Age' in the history of Polish Jews."[15] In light of the creation of these nostalgic imageries,

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was followed by a series of accusations of 'unjustified generalizations' and 'historical fiction,' categories that arrest the debate to this day.": Tomasz Żukowski, "Fantazmat 'Sprawiedliwych' i film 'W ciemności' Agnieszki Holland," *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 1 (2012): 1, https://ispan.waw.pl/journals/index.php/slh/article/view/slh.2012.005.

12 Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins," 7.

13 Rosman defines the early modern period of the history of Poland as the time "from the Union of Lublin in 1569, that officially created the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, until the period of the Partitions of Poland, 1772–1795": Moshe Rosman, "Categorically Jewish, Distinctly Polish: The Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the New Polish-Jewish Metahistory," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 10 (2013): 366, http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/10-2012/Rosman.pdf.

14 Ibid.

15 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, "On the Jewish Street (1918–1939)," accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.polin.pl/en/wystawy-wystawa-glowna-galerie/street; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum of the History of Polish Jews:

the "ruin of modernity" of the Museum's location, simultaneously materializing the lost Jewish district and the destroyed ghetto, receives a crucial but ambiguous discursive location. This ruinous space communicates at least two discursive images that continue to stand in opposition and contrast to each other in the context of the aforementioned nostalgic revival. First, the rubble of the ghetto remains a space of its own commemoration, a witness to the violent interruption of its existence; it also bears witness to the social and political factors that contributed to its destruction, including the political dreams of modernity, national unity, and progress – ideologies whose exclusivist and destructive characteristics were never fully confronted in Polish historical debates. Second, this space is increasingly being perceived today as a key to historical nostalgia, a "cipher" that contains the promise of materializing a "genuinely 'Polish' Poland," a modern and politically powerful state that, while remaining an heir of the mythical tolerance and

A Postwar, Post-Holocaust, Post-Communist Story," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland,* eds. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 268. As the Museum's website informs, "Due to the enormous wealth of Jewish life it witnessed, this period [the 1920s and 1930s] is also sometimes referred to as the second 'Golden Age' in the history of Polish Jews." The authors add that "the Second Republic, however, was not heaven on earth for Jews. New waves of pogroms, erupting already in November 1918, growing antisemitism and the economic crisis which went on for several years, forced many Jews to leave Poland in search of a better life"; the authors yet maintain that "the Golden Age" is an appropriate term: POLIN, "On the Jewish Street." This claim is supported by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who comments that "some historians view this short period as a 'second golden age,' despite economic hardship and rising antisemitism during the late 1930s": Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum of the History of Polish Jews," 268. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett does not mention the authors of this concept. It is possible that she is referring to Ezra Mendelsohn who, in commenting on anti-Jewish trade regulations introduced in Poland in the 1920s and on the subsequent reactions of Jewish leaders who accused the Polish government of "economic extermination," stated that "'extermination' was certainly far too strong a word to use, at least in the 1920s, but even in this first decade of Polish independence, which later appeared to many Jews as a kind of golden age of Polish democracy and tolerance, it was clear that the Jewish condition was tragic. The triumph of Polish nationalism meant the unleashing of latent antisemitism which struck at all Jews, assimilated and unassimilated, Orthodox and secular": Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 43. If the concept of "the Second Golden Age" was derived from this quotation, then even if such a gradual transformation of its meaning may not be regarded as a direct misuse of a source text, it cannot be read otherwise than as an intentional removal of the dark irony evident in Mendelsohn's description.

openness of the old days, saves its equally mythical innocence. This second image holds a key nostalgic potential, giving access to interrupted futures, and simultaneously allowing for the bypassing of critical reflection arising from knowledge of the catastrophe, a reflection that questions the very model of modernization that is being assumed.

As representatives of the Museum's Polish institutional architects explain and establish the hegemonic position of the nostalgic discourse, they construct and further emphasize the dialectical correspondence between commemoration and nostalgia. Shortly after the Museum's opening, Waldemar Dąbrowski, a former Minister of Culture and the government's ministerial plenipotentiary for the Museum, explained that he sees its construction as "a part of the decades-long project of rebuilding Warsaw to its pre-1939 state," while Bogdan Zdrojewski, the Minister of Culture, expressed his certainty that the Museum "will build up Poland's strength and its good standing in international relations."[16] As these repeated efforts to revive and recreate the national and political dreams take place, the rubble of the Warsaw ghetto achieves more than ever the quality of an active physical substance containing two conflicting qualities. The more it becomes employed as the construction material of Polish modernity, the more its "witnessing location" becomes exposed. The architectural and curatorial project of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ) strongly exemplifies a struggle with the ineffaceable two-sidedness of the Museum's physical location, a space that seems to offer a key to the "genuinely 'Polish' Poland" the more the historical knowledge its Polish institutional designers remain unwilling to confront is exposed.

The Narrative History Museum

The strategy of locating the site's materiality within the architectural space of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews was derived in the earliest stage of the design work from the masterplan of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C., an institution that at the time of its creation defined new approaches to the location of a material exhibit. During the opening

16 Allison Hoffman, "The Curator of Joy and Ashes: How ethnographer Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett became the keeper of Poland's Jewish heritage," *Tablet*, April 10, 2013, http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/128885/poland-new-jewish-museum; Polska Agencja Prasowa, "Nowy dyrektor: To będzie najlepsze muzeum historii Żydów w Europie," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 26, 2014, accessed November 14, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,15531488,Nowy_dyrektor__To_bedzie_najlepsze_muzeum_historii.html.

of the USHMM in 1993, Grażyna Pawlak, by then an employee of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (JHI), together with Jerzy Halbersztadt, the originator of the MHPJ, invited Jeshajahu Weinberg, the director of the USHMM design team since 1988, to coordinate the creation of the Warsaw exhibition.

During five years of designing the Holocaust Memorial Museum, Weinberg worked on implementing his concept of a "narrative history museum," an idea built on the principle of abandoning the established model of a collection-based exhibition, alongside the traditionally central location of a contextualized authentic exhibit, and embedding a historical narrative as a key component of museum design, in a role previously given to the physical artifact.[17] The USHMM was intended to commemorate the Holocaust and to educate about its history, focusing primarily on the American public. The exhibition space, free of curatorial gestures associated with a traditional collection, like contextualization and legitimization, was instead designed to induce strong emotional involvement by means of visual media structured by the language of theatre and the film industry. Weinberg saw the decision to attribute the central narrative function to visual technologies as a means of facilitating the visitors' identification with the victims and enabling the "internalization of the moral lessons" embedded in Holocaust history.[18] The curator decided to couple his own experience in theatre production (Weinberg worked as a director of theatre for 15 years) with the technical expertise introduced by Martin Smith, a British documentary film director, whom he employed as an exhibition director. The "narrative history museum" was intended to become "an exercise in visual historiography," maximizing visitors' emotional involvement through the use of dozens of video screens and digital displays, while still maintaining "historical objectivity" and restricting itself to a dispassionate communication of knowledge.[19]

Weinberg's decision to entrust the requirement of objectivity to the conceptual structure of the historical narrative conveyed by digital technology created a series of design problems, which were then exposed in the debate that followed the opening of the USHMM. Reliance on the visual language of cinema caused worries about the risk of promoting the "Disneyfication" of Holocaust history and of obtaining "a straightforward narrative" by discouraging the visitor from taking a

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17 Jeshajahu Weinberg, "A Narrative History Museum," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 37:4 (1994): 231–239.

18 Ibid., 231–233.

19 Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 142; Weinberg, "A Narrative History Museum," 232, 235.

critical approach.[20] The disappearance of a traditional construction of objectivity, previously provided through the authority of the curators' contextualizing actions and by the concept of exhibit authenticity, raised substantial concerns about the risk of exposing Holocaust history to contemporary political uses. Such a threat, arising from the de-contextualization of this history from its topographical and social locations and its ensuing "Americanization," was seen as located primarily in an emphasis on the liberation of Europe by American soldiers and on the role of the American state.[21] The designers responded to these concerns – many of which they had been aware of before the opening – by presenting the USHMM's universalizing impact on the historiography of the Holocaust as morally beneficial and self-conscious.[22] Their line of defense also gravitated toward a partial reversal of the legitimizing power of the "real" exhibit: Weinberg argued that while the USHMM is not a collection-based museum, "it has the world's largest collection of Holocaust artifacts" that structure the Museum's objectivity through their witnessing status.[23]

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20 Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 145, 216.

21 See, for example: James E. Young, "America's Holocaust: Memory and the Politics of Identity," in *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 68–82. Rob Baum writes that in the American historical narrative "the saviors of World War II Europe are not only American but also white. Yet, an African-American platoon liberated a Polish camp. Liberation of Dachau by Japanese-Americans of the 442nd army battalion is another suppressed story. For political purposes, American heroes were uncomplicatedly Anglo, white, Christian and enfranchised. They would not return to internment camps on the West Coast, or segregated water fountains in the South, would not wash bloody crosses or swastikas from their front doors. […] The difference between savior and the saved adds dramatic effect to an already pathetic vision. I suggest that the appearance of Jews – like Romani and Sinti, representative of a dark, arcane other – is to a great extent partly responsible for the whitening of the liberators: problem people can only be saved – or solved – by an unproblematic hero. Thus was born the myth of the white American liberator": Rob Baum, "United States Holocaust Museums: Pathos, Possession, Patriotism," *Public History Review* 11 (2011): 26–46.

22 In the words of Michael Berenbaum, the USHMM's project director: "Millions of Americans make pilgrimages to Washington; the Holocaust Museum must take them back in time, transport them to another continent, and inform their current reality. The Americanization of the Holocaust is an honorable task provided that the story told is faithful to the historical event. Each culture inevitably leaves its stamp on a past it remembers": Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 20.

23 Weinberg, "A Narrative History Museum," 231.

The construction of the USHMM as a "narrative history museum" required establishing a (curatorial) narrative about the (exhibition) narrative, one that would support the decision to make this institution "an American museum, a museum demonstrating an overwhelming importance of the democratic foundations of American society."[24] It also needed a discursive defense of the decision to establish a collection of physical exhibits related to a historical event that "had not taken place on American soil,"[25] to counter the risk of what Rob Baum bitterly defined as "suggesting that Jewish victimization is a European phenomenon while Jewish liberation is an American one", and the political risk of "physically mythologiz[ing] American participation."[26]

An Exchange

If the debate triggered by the opening of USHMM allowed for the articulation of these doubts and consequently for the delineation of a boundary between the opportunities to deconstruct the collection-based exhibition model and the risks of exposing the Museum's narrative to a threat of political appropriation, then Weinberg's decision to accept the invitation to Warsaw and to proceed with the transatlantic export of the "narrative history museum" resulted in the reopening of these design problems by casting their mirror reflection onto their new Polish location. The design process of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw was initiated in 1993, the year of the completion of the USHMM in Washington, D.C., but also just four years after the fall of communism in Poland, and precisely ten years after the first symptoms of the abovementioned nostalgia for prewar modernity appeared. The nostalgic turn, initiated simultaneously but separately by the communist government and anticommunist opposition circles on the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1983, by 1993 had begun to take on its full shape.[27] The location of Jewish history within the Polish cultural context was by then defined equally

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24 Ibid., 239.

25 Ibid., 238.

26 Baum, "United States Holocaust Museums," 45.

27 Michael Meng comments on the simultaneous unofficial and official celebrations of the 1983 anniversary and the emergent revival of interest in Jewish history: "Some Poles had became interested in the Jewish past as a way to imagine a different Poland, but this did not necessarily involve thinking deeply about the traumatic, dark parts of the history. […] What is more, it is not clear how broadly Polish interest in the Jewish past stretched. Outside the capital, the condition of Jewish sites quickly deteriorated and interest in them declined. Warsaw was exceptional": Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces:*

by the post-communist reestablishment of institutional centers of Jewish social and religious life;[28] by the emergent nostalgia for modernity described by Michael Steinlauf as a "fashion for Jews," "a nostalgic return to an idealized prewar youth" of the Polish society;[29] and by the post-communist rise of religious Polish nationalism that had already silenced the first stage of public debate on Polish-Jewish history and Polish complicity in the Holocaust, trigged in the 1980s by the release of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and the publication of Jan Błoński's "Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto."[30]

The first concept of the MHPJ emerged within this very cultural scenery. Retrospectively narrating the emergence of the idea for the Museum's creation, its curators suggest today that the inspiration came to Grażyna Pawlak during the opening ceremony of the USHMM, scheduled to happen in April 1993, on the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The curators inform that Pawlak's experience of "a modern narrative museum, retelling the history of the Holocaust, gave her the idea for a museum in Warsaw that would extend that narrative by including the story of Jewish life before the Shoah."[31] The concept of "extending" Polish-Jewish history from the Holocaust narrative, symbolically relocated to the capital of the United States, appears to follow the dialectical correspondence between commemoration and nostalgia, together with its crucial but ambiguous positioning of the material "historical fabric." The action of "extending" can be

Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 181.

28 The Union of Jewish Communities in Poland was officially registered in 1993; some other community initiatives, such as those funded by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, were initiated in late 1980s.

29 Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage To the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 103.

30 In the early 1990s, the debate on Jewish history in Poland was equally preoccupied with the sudden popularity of the Festival of Jewish Culture in Cracow and the planned "revitalization" of the former Jewish district of Kazimierz, as it was overshadowed by the culmination of the conflict over the Carmelite convent in the former Auschwitz camp, or by yet another surge in Polish antisemitism, which reached the level of over 50% of the general population by 1993: Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 7; Konstanty Gebert and Helena Datner, *Jewish Life in Poland: Achievements, Challenges and Priorities since the Collapse of Communism* (London: The Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2011), 10.

31 "Jak zrobic muzeum? How to make a museum?," POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, 2014.

seen as a symbolic exchange: a synchronized export of the Polish memory of the Holocaust in its "raw," repressed form, and a return acquisition of the end product, the design of the "narrative history museum," sanitized of "difficult subjects" and employable in the process of nostalgic production.

In the Polish context, such a transatlantic exchange appeared to work on both ends of the commemoration–nostalgia dichotomy. On the side of nostalgic production, it provided the narrative of a "thousand years of Jewish life in Poland" with the imported conceptual structure of the "narrative history museum," thus allowing for a discursive reduction of the impact of the destroyed materiality by structuring the objectivism of the nostalgic narrative and giving it priority over the narratives carried by a physical object. On the side of the commemorative voice of the Museum's location, the symbolic transferring of the burden of Holocaust commemoration to the ownership of an American institution may have appeared to allow the Polish curators to consider the obligation of "memory work" to already be fulfilled. It might also have given the impression of providing a means of symbolic control over the materiality of the Warsaw ghetto, a perceived obstacle to the nostalgic project, as such control became observable in the cases of Holocaust objects donated by Polish institutions to the USHMM in the late 1980s.

Authentic Power

The USHMM's collection team obtained a series of artifacts and sections of urban fabric from the spaces of the former Warsaw ghetto, including a sewer cover, two thousand square feet of historical cobblestones, and two bricks from the surviving section of ghetto wall located at number 55 Sienna Street, together with an exact replica of the section.[32] Acquiring these artifacts had a two-sided effect. While their presence in Washington was clearly intended to contribute to the USHMM's discursive construction of objectivity, in the Polish context the action of their obtaining became a curatorial gesture of establishing control over the ruined materiality of the ghetto and over the knowledge it carries[33] – about the

32 Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 151–152.

33 Some of these curatorial side-effects were observed by the members of a collections team; a USHMM employee commented that in Poland "the artifacts carried a terrible immediacy. They were 'at home' in these places," recalling his observation of "authenticating" the impact of the artifacts' material context, while another remembered feeling shock when, during a walk though Warsaw, "he glanced at an area excavated for phone lines and saw, clearly, a layer of rubble of the ghetto": Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 162, 146.

cultural and spatial location of the Holocaust "at the surface and in the centre of [the Polish] culture and society."[34]

Two wall sections at 55 Sienna Street and neighboring 62 Złota Street were maintained since the 1980s by Mieczysław Jędruszczak, a local resident and private caretaker of the site since the 1950s. The official ceremony of donating two bricks from the Sienna Street section to the USHMM allowed Polish state institutions to officially recognize, for the first time, the surviving ghetto wall sections as sites of commemoration. The ceremony was commemorated by a plaque installed on the wall; signed by the USHMM and decorated with the United States' coat of arms, the plaque informs in Polish and English that "a casting and two original bricks of this wall erected by the Nazis to enclose the Warsaw ghetto, were taken to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington to give authentic power to its permanent exhibition."

The ghetto wall at Sienna Street is not authentic. While it is likely located in the exact place of the structure built by the Nazis in late 1940, the original ghetto wall was demolished shortly after the end of the war.[35] In this respect, the Sienna Street wall is different from the nearby section at Złota Street, which constitutes an external wall of a school building that became excluded from the ghetto and survives until today. The wall at Sienna Street was reconstructed by Mieczysław Jędruszczak, most likely in the early 1980s, with the intention of establishing a private place of memory, maybe in relation to the broader wave of interest in Jewish history that emerged as a part of the nostalgic turn after 1983. Nonetheless, it was only the ceremony in 1989 and interest from an American memory institution that allowed the Polish administration to convert Jędruszczak's private memo-

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34 Elżbieta Janicka and Wojciecha Wilczyk, *Inne miasto/Other city* (Warszawa: Zachęta – Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2013), 9.

35 As the MHJP's "Virtual Shtetl" website informs: "The Ghetto wall at 55 Sienna St. collapsed after the war and was subsequently reconstructed": Krzysztof Bielawski, "The Former Ghetto Wall Has Been Fenced Off," *Virtual Shtetl*, September 29, 2014, accessed November 15, 2015, http://www.sztetl.org.pl/en/cms/news/4321,the-former-ghetto-wall-has-been-fenced-off/. The fact of the postwar reconstruction of the ghetto wall at Sienna Street was most likely discussed for the first time in Damien Monnier's French-language documentary movie *The Six Sides of a Brick*: Damien Monnier, *Six faces d'une brique* (2012), https://vimeo.com/98942077. The documentary contains an interview with Mieczysław Jędruszczak in which he recalls brick-laying during the wall's reconstruction: "And I constructed it over there, I have a photo handing up a brick" ("ja tam domurowałem, mam zdjęcie, jak podaję cegłę"), alongside conversations with other residents who remember the courtyard without the wall from the side of Sienna Street. I thank Elżbieta Janicka for the information on Monnier's documentary.

rial object into a physical resource of authentic artifacts and a symbolic source of historical authenticity. In many ways the "discovery" of the Sienna Street wall exemplifies the structure of transatlantic exchange described above. While the text inscribed on the plaque openly informs of the logic behind the USHMM's acquisition, the very fact of the plaque's existence attests to Polish difficulties in establishing a commemorative frame for witnessing materiality.[36] Such materiality not only communicates knowledge about the central cultural and spatial location of the Holocaust within the Polish social and topographical context, but also deconstructs the mythologies of the ghetto wall as an impenetrable physical separation between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles during the Nazi occupation, alongside the myth of the Polish "bystander–witness"[37] – physically unable to react to the Nazi crimes because of the spatial separation, yet otherwise sympathetic and willing to help.

If not framed by the externally acquired commemoration strategy, the very fact of the ghetto wall's existence within the tenement's interior, its spatial privatization and domestication, suggest different historical scenarios. Integration of the wall with the tenement's interior during the Nazi occupation allowed for the employment of the exclusion of Jews from the Polish majority group as a device of extermination and for the "domestication" of the violence. Such an architectural design, as Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski point out, did not leave much space for any form of "indifference" or "bystanding."[38] The Polish curators' readiness to acquire a "foreign" framework of historical reflection from an American institution of memory allows, in turn, to reestablish and legitimize the myth of the "Polish witness" and to give symbolic structure to the ghetto wall – firstly by authenticating a replica of the wall with a plaque stamped with the U.S. coat of arms, and secondly by allowing for the replication of the replica in the Washington

36 This effect is even more strongly visible in the case of another section of surviving ghetto wall located at 62 Złota Street, where another three plaques inform that the bricks from there were sent to the Holocaust Museum in Houston, to Yad Vashem, and to the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre in Melbourne, Australia.

37 For a discussion of the figure of the Polish bystander–witness, see: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "The Open Secret: Victims, Perpetrators, Witnesses and Bystanders in Polish Public Discourse at the Beginning of the 21st century [unpublished]" (2015), http://www.academia.edu/9757266/The_Open_Secret._Victims_Perpetrators_Witnesses_and_Bystanders_in_Polish_Public_Discourse_at_the_Beginning_of_the_21st_Centrury.

38 Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski, "Ci nie są z ojczyzny naszej," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 29–30, 2011, 20.

museum as a "source of authentic power."[39] Consequently, the exchange allows for the conversion of a problematic architectural space into "a safe place" of Polish memory,[40] "where Poles and Jews – radically separated by the external power – only look at themselves."[41]

The Polinization of Jewish History

Robin Ostow saw the design framework of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews as "a late result of what has been called the 'Americanization of the Holocaust,'" referring to the Museum's dependency on the narrative model developed by its Washington counterpart, and to the reliance of the MHPJ's masterplan on a principle of "externally imposed nation (re)building" that may desensitize the MHPJ toward local issues that a European Jewish museum would be expected to address.[42] She describes Poland as "an exporter of original Jewish artifacts and an importer of images, sounds, voices, smells and special effects developed in the West," and this view is by all means accurate.[43] Yet, as the conflicting concepts of authenticity indicate, a depiction of the Polish context in exclusively (post) colonial terms misses a uniquely local political process that, while reliant on the Polish-American transatlantic exchange, serves to fulfill quite independent local goals and projects. Referencing the Museum's most recent name,[44] this process can

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39 Elżbieta Janicka comments: "Extraction [of the bricks] clearly did not reduce the local amount of *authentic power*. Besides, it does not rely on bricks. In so many other places the wall was demolished, and it stands firmly anyway. Actually, the *authentic power* could be exported. By us, the Polish state. In absence of soft power. In small quantities and wholesale": Elżbieta Janicka, *Festung Warschau* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011), 36.

40 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir writes that pre-modern antisemitism "located Jews in a truly 'unsafe place,' continually able to disappear from the surface of earth": Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2004), 66.

41 Janicka and Żukowski, "Ci nie są z ojczyzny naszej," 21.

42 Robin Ostow, "Remusealizing Jewish History in Warsaw: The Privatization and Externalization of Nation Building," in *(Re)visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe*, ed. Robin Ostow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 158, 174.

43 Ibid., 174.

44 In October 2014, shortly before the opening of the main exhibition, The Museum of the History of Polish Jews was renamed the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews; its logotype was also changed. As Dariusz Stola explained, the rebranding was done "so that the Museum of the History of Polish Jews instantly embeds itself in people's mind as the Polin Museum": Mikołaj Gliński, "The Museum of the History of Polish Jews

be termed the "Polinization" of Jewish history – a political principle of harnessing Polish-Jewish historical narratives to the nostalgic project of constructing a modern "genuinely 'Polish' Poland," of materializing a political dream built on the phantasmic Polish "golden era" of pre-Holocaust modernity. Since this dream is invariably founded on the collective self-image of the Polish majority as a powerful Western society that nevertheless remains a haven of freedom and tolerance, the principle of Polinization is simultaneously constructed through an open refusal to confront the histories and memories that may call this self-image into question, or even subject it to some form of a critical reflection. Confronting these histories – with the history of Polish violence against Jews during the Holocaust in first place – would require a deep revision of the Polish dreams of modernity with respect to their antisemitic and exclusivist backgrounds, the most likely side-effect being a discovery of the roots of Polish intolerance and anti-Jewish violence at the heart of the "golden eras" now being rebuilt.

The materiality of the district of Muranów, where the Museum was set to be built, stands directly on the conflict line between the curators' decision to proceed with the nostalgic recourse to the imagined past, and the decision to neutralize the historical narratives questioning the majority's self-image. The line of conflict can be precisely – and physically – located. It lies two to three meters below the surface of present-day Muranów's ground, under the mass of ghetto rubble that postwar Polish architects decided should be left on site and used as a source of reclaimed construction material for the new city, or as a means of giving the postwar residential district a picturesque, hilly landscape. The geological stratum of rubble physically separates the surface layer of the postwar, contemporary city from the foundations, basements, and relics of the pre-Holocaust Jewish district. If seen in the context of Polinization's ultimate aim, the nostalgic reconstruction of prewar modernity, the rubble becomes a modern ruin in Huyssen's understanding of the term: a section of materiality that conceals "a promise of alternative futures," yet at the same time materializes the fact that these collective dreams were cancelled by the same modern project and reduced to a formless substance that can no longer be employed as a source of authenticity or authentication. The efforts undertaken by the designers and curators of the MHPJ to access hard ground that would give support to the project of Polinization, analyzed in the following paragraphs of this essay, indeed became performatively similar to geological works as attempts to secure some stability for the highly uncritical project of Polish national nostalgia.

Has a New Name," *culture.pl*, October 30, 2014, accessed November 14, 2015, http://culture.pl/en/article/the-museum-of-the-history-of-polish-jews-has-a-new-name.

The Site

The MHPJ's development process began with the constitution of the Museum's design team in 1996 and Weinberg's appointment as its chairman,[45] followed by the donation of land by the Warsaw municipality for the purpose of the Museum's construction. The property measured nearly 3000 square meters and occupied a section of a park area located in the district of Muranów. It was located directly in front of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and Martyrs designed by Natan Rapoport in 1948 in the midst of the rubble of the ghetto.[46] The urban layout of this site was radically transformed in the process of the postwar reconstruction of Warsaw. Before the Nazi occupation and the creation of the ghetto, the area constituted a busy intersection of Zamenhof and Gęsia Streets, shaped by the compositional dominance of the 18th-century Crown Artillery barracks building, with the surrounding street blocks densely lined with late 19th-century tenement housing. The barracks building served as a military jail from the second half of the 19th century; inside the Warsaw ghetto, it housed a post office, and after the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto in 1942, it was used as the headquarters of the Judenrat. The building was one of the few to survive the destruction of the district, although it was substantially damaged. The plot designated for the construction of the Museum occupies a large part of this building's former layout, alongside a section of a prewar Zamenhof street lane, and a section of a plot formerly

45 Weinberg directed the team for another four years until 2000, when he died at the age of 81.

46 The donated land, constituting a section of a maintained green area divided between two plots numbered 27/2 and 28/2 and measuring 2929 square meters, historically overlapped with the layout of the building of the Crown Artillery barracks, which served as the headquarters of the Judenrat after the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto in 1942. The building survived the destruction of the ghetto but was substantially damaged, was not reconstructed after the war, and was finally demolished in 1965. The plot also occupies a section of a prewar Zamenhof street lane and of a section of a tenement layout on the opposite side of the street. The donation of the plot was formalized as "a grant of a perpetual lease of land properties" and dated April 17, 1997. It is not known whether the signing date was intended to commemorate another anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising ("Akt notarialny – umowa o ustanowienie wieczystego użytowania gruntu, 17 kwietnia 1997," exhibited in "Jak zrobic muzeum? How to make a museum?"), but it seem important to the donors that, contrary to Robin Ostow's statement, the majority of the land was not owned by Jewish public institutions or private owners before the Nazi invasion of Poland: Ostow, "Remusealizing Jewish History in Warsaw," 170.

occupied by a tenement located at the opposite side of historical Zamenhof Street, at number 38.

The Ghetto Heroes' monument was constructed in 1948 on the compositional axis of the Judenrat building. The choice of this location resulted largely from Rapoport's insistence on constructing the monument at the central point of the ruined ghetto,[47] in the place previously chosen by Leon Marek Suzin, the monument's co-creator, as the location of the first memorial plaque, installed in 1946.[48] For Suzin, the choice resulted from the proximity of the remains of the Jewish Fighting Organization's bunker at 18 Miła Street and the intersection of Zamenhof and Miła streets where the Ghetto Uprising started.[49] At the moment of the

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47 According to James E. Young, the members of the Jewish Committee "asked whether the sculptor had a location in mind. Rapoport was adamant here; the only possible site would be that of the uprising itself, where the first shots were fired, where the leader of the rebellion, Mordechai Anielewicz, had died in his bunker. In fact, the committee had already marked the site of the bunker in 1946 with a large red sandstone placed in a flower bed, inscribed to the Jewish Fighting Organization, and so they agreed to build the Ghetto Monument nearby": James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument," *Representations* 26 Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 81.

48 Young writes that Suzin "was commissioned to design and construct the base of the monument in Warsaw. Suzin planned at first to clear the mountain of rubble from the monument's site at the corner of Zamenhof and Gęsia Streets, the latter already renamed M. Anielewicz Street, to anchor the monument solidly in the ground. With no mechanical equipment at his disposal, however, architect and assistants undertook this clearing by hand, a broken stone at a time. After two weeks' work without discernible effect, he abandoned this approach and decided to incorporate the ruins themselves into the monument's base by pouring tons of concrete and reinforcement over them": Ibid., 82.

49 The decision as to the location followed the vision expressed by Julian Tuwim in a poem published in 1944, a year after the destruction of the ghetto. The text was certainly known to Rapoport after its publication: "And there shall be in Warsaw and in every other Polish city some fragment of the ghetto left standing and preserved in its present form in all its horror of ruin and destruction. We shall surround that monument to the ignominy of our foes and to the glory of our tortured heroes with chains wrought from captured Hitler's guns. (…). Thus a new monument will be added to the national shrine. There we will lead our children, and tell them of the most monstrous martyrdom of people known to the history of mankind. And in the center of this monument, its tragedy enhanced, with God's help, by the modern Glass Houses of the rebuilt city, there will burn an eternal fire": Julian Tuwim, "We Polish Jews," *Free World* (July 1944): 54. The translation of Tuwim's poem by R. Langer, first published in New York literary monthly *Free World*, alters the original version of

monument's dedication in 1948, it directly faced the front of the damaged Judenrat building and was surrounded by a field of rubble. The postwar reconstruction of Warsaw transformed the location entirely. Zamenhof Street was moved eastwards, parallel to the face of the monument; Gęsia Street, renamed Anielewicza, was also relocated. Between 1949 and 1963, the modernist residential district of Muranów was constructed around the site according to a design by Bohdan Lachert, who initially planned the estate as a district-memorial; but the commemorative architectural approach was eventually abandoned.[50] The residential block that now faces the back of the monument, a design by Wacław Eytner, was built in 1959. Lachert planned to convert the former Judenrat building into a "Museum of Struggle against Fascism" but the plan was not implemented.[51] For another twenty years it stood as a ruin before it was eventually demolished in 1965; its former space was converted into a green square with park walkways and groups of trees.

While the choice of this site as the Museum's location was already decided in 1996, because of a shortage of funds the design work on the exhibition project did not fully begin until 2001, when the exhibition masterplan was commissioned to

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the quoted verses. Apart from removing Tuwim's reference to God, the translator transformed a mention of "houses of glass," a literary image of idealized architectural modernity, originating from a 1925 novel by Stefan Żeromski. The motif of "houses of glass" became a significant reference point for visions of Polish interwar statehood and for Polish imageries of urban and architectural modernity. As Martin Kohlrausch points out, "The way that the metaphor 'houses of glass' was used in Poland refers to the discourses on hygiene, planning, and reform of society in general and reform of community in particular": Martin Kohlrausch, "'Houses of Glass': Architecture and the Idea of Community in Poland 1925–1944," in *Making a New World: Architecture & Communities in Interwar Europe*, eds. Rajesh Heynickx and Tom Avermaete (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 93. The Polish version of Tuwim's poem reads as follows: "*W centrum tego pomnika, którego tragizm uwydatnią otaczające go nowoczesne, da Bóg, Szklane Domy odbudowanego miasta, płonąć będzie nigdy nie gasnący ogień*"), which was translated into English as: "And in the center of this monument, its tragedy enhanced by the rebuilt magnificence of the surrounding city, there will bum an eternal fire": Julian Tuwim, "My, Żydzi Polscy," *Nowa Polska* 8 (1944): 491–494; Tuwim, "We Polish Jews," 54.

50 Katarzyna Uchowicz, "Reading Muranów. Memory of a place/memory of an architect. Commentary on the postwar work of Bohdan Lachert," *RIHA Journal*, Special Issue "Contemporary Art and Memory" (December 2014), http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2014/2014-oct-dec/special-issue-contemporary-art-and-memory-part-1/uchowicz-muranow-en.

51 Jarosław Zieliński, *Realizm socjalistyczny w Warszawie. Urbanistyka i architektura (1949–1953)* (Warsaw: Hereditas, 2009), 332.

Event Communications, a London-based exhibition design company. The masterplan, structured around the framework of the "narrative history museum," was completed in 2003, still in the absence of an architectural design for the museum building. For a few years, the design committee hoped to commission the building design from Frank Gehry, the author of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1997), but the architect left the project in 2003. In January 2005, the Museum's financial and institutional frameworks were finally established: the Polish government, together with the municipality of Warsaw and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute, established the Museum as a legal entity; financial support was also secured from Polish state institutions and foreign sponsors. Two weeks later, in February 2005, an open architectural competition was announced, and another five months later the competition entry by Rainer Mahlamäki from the Finnish company Lahdelma & Mahlamäki Architects was chosen out of eleven shortlisted projects. Simultaneously, in April 2006, a design team was appointed to prepare a detailed design of the main exhibition, with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, a professor of Performance Studies at New York University, designated as its director.

The Entrance Lobby

Rainer Mahlamäki's building is planned as a regular rectangular structure. Its front facade is positioned opposite to the front face of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and Martyrs, perpendicular to its axis; its back elevation faces the green square. The building is clad in vertical, semi-translucent glass panels. Their surface conceals the reinforced concrete structure that supports the building, and covers the entirety of the facades with the exception of two asymmetrical and organic openings on both the front and back elevations, which are covered in plain glass surfaces. These openings constitute the large-scale windows of the Museum's entrance lobby, a space that Mahlamäki identified as the functional and compositional heart of the building.[52]

The lobby is an organic architectural interior enclosed on both sides by two curvilinear concrete walls that cut through the entire height of the building. It is narrow near the building's front, where the main entrance is located, and widens toward the back elevation, where a window opens onto a view of the park area

52 Dariusz Bartoszewicz, interview with Rainer Mahlamäki, "Projektant o Muzeum Żydów: Liczy się piękno," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 20, 2013, accessed November 14, 2015, http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34889,13765943,Projektant_o_Muzeum_Zydow__Liczy_sie_piekno__ROZMOWA_.html.

behind the building. Visitors' access routes are organized along the lobby, from the front door towards the back of the building where, near the large-scale window with a view of the park, a stairway leads down to the main exhibition located in the basement. Proceeding from the front entrance, visitors cross an internal bridge constructed over a section of exhibition space on the underground floor, while another bridge is visible above, crossing the lobby perpendicularly on the first floor level and connecting two curved walls. With its organic, geological shape and linear structure of access, the lobby is a space to walk. The curved walls covered with sandstone-like, warm-colored concrete provide a path to follow; the spectacular, eighteen-meter high corridor of the lobby provides a view that unfolds as visitors proceed further.

Mahlamäki designed this interior during the eight weeks leading up to the competition deadline in June 2005. On April 19, 2005, on the anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising, the competition committee invited the participating architects for a site visit, in which he took part. "In the beginning I knew nothing about the location," he admitted in 2013, stating that what he found inspiring about the location was mainly the visual surfaces: the monument, the green park, and the modernist residential buildings. His first design idea was simply to rely on these superficial aesthetics "to maintain the origin and atmosphere of this area, because it is a nice green park with two historical monuments."[53] He commented, however, that even after the site visit it was not clear to him whether – and to what degree – the building was to serve a commemorative function. "Initially I had the impression that it was to be a Holocaust museum – more or less," he commented, stating that he could not work without clarifying this matter.[54]

The matter seems not to have been fully clarified until Mahlamäki was announced as the winner. His competition project contains visible references to recently constructed museums narrating Holocaust history – the Jewish Museum Berlin, by Daniel Libeskind (2001), and the new Yad Vashem museum building in Jerusalem, by Moshe Safdie (2005). Mahlamäki's initial competition images show the entrance lobby as a spacious but visually cold cavern, an interior reminiscent of both the underground corridors ("Axes") and vertical "Voids" of Libeskind's museum, and of Safdie's linear composition, structured along an 180-meter corridor enclosed by two curved concrete walls forming an opening at the top of the building.[55] The competition committee praised Mahlamäki's project for providing

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 In the quoted interview, the architect mentioned these two museum projects as his points of reference: Ibid.

a "dramatically curved space of limestone texture, illuminated from above," which was "compared by the Authors to the sea coming apart (*Yam Suph*)."[56] Limestone, like raw concrete, is a construction material of a cold, pale color; as a finishing material that emphasizes the weight of the commemorated event, it was used extensively in the design of USHMM, while raw, gray concrete was exposed both in the Jewish Museum Berlin and in Yad Vashem. The biblical metaphor of a "void" or "chasm" created by the Red Sea coming apart, while superficial, also holds a commemorative function, if it is narrated as such.

The eight-year long construction process of the Museum in Warsaw is a history of clarifying the matter that the architect initially found to be unclear. As a first step, the color of the interior was changed. The gray paint visible on the competition images was asked to be replaced by a much warmer, sandstone-colored covering. As the architect recalled, he had "made a great many tests and mockups to find the right tone. It's actually very close to sandstone. Perhaps it underlines hope and beauty."[57] Modifications to the architectural design were followed by alterations to the discourse on the building – what had been seen as a "void" was later interpreted as the much more reassuring environment of a "gorge," "canyon," or "valley," especially since, once recolored, the lobby interior indeed began to resemble natural features of the Israeli or American landscape.[58] With the principle of the "museum of life, not the Holocaust" becoming a main narrative thread, the design of the lobby interior came to be interpreted accordingly: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett saw the lobby as "a bridge across the chasm of the Holocaust," an interior "filled with radiant light" that communicates "a message of hope on a site of genocide."[59] Accordingly, the metaphor of the Red Sea became a symbol

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56 The decision of the competition jury in "Jak zrobic muzeum? How to make a museum?."

57 "Projektant o Muzeum Żydów." The architect admits that the narrative of a "thousand years of Jewish history in Poland" influenced his design: "I will give an example: I did not want raw concrete. […] Use of this material in a specific way – exposing its cold, raw surface – in Holocaust museums around the world reminds one immediately how terrible this event was. We wanted to achieve a different effect." In the context of Mahlamäki's earlier comment on his lack of certainty about the degree of the Museum's commemorative function, experienced during his work on the competition entry, it can be assumed that the above declaration refers to the post-competition work on the final version of the design.

58 Mahlamäki comments: "This lobby also resembles a canyon, a gorge, similar landscapes can be found in Israel, but not only there. The Americans have similar associations. They say: a canyon!": "Projektant o Muzeum Żydów."

59 Ruth Ellen Gruber, "The Arts: A Museum in the Void," *Hadassah Magazine* (October/November 2013): 53–57; Tony Barber, "A New Warsaw Museum Devoted to

of "a ritual of the crossing or transcendence of the long and winding road of Polish-Jewish history to a symbolic, wide opening to a peaceful future."[60] Such a narrative shift harmonizes with threads of Polish right-wing historical discourse, since the concept of "crossing the Red Sea" circulates in Polish public debate less as a symbol of surviving the Nazi occupation, and more of the passing through the "red occupation" of Soviet communism.[61] In his own statements on the project, Mahlamäki conformed to the discourse's transformation; he made efforts to downgrade his own architectural metaphors that proved problematic for his clients, commenting that "one could say it [the lobby] looks like an empty river, or rocks in the East, or whatever. In the competition phase we tried to open our ideas, just telling the story of the Red Sea and how Moses escaped from Egypt. But it was only one metaphor, one allegory." However, he could not stop himself from commenting aphoristically that the "architecture is ever a mirror which reflects our hopes, our abilities, and what it is possible to do today."[62]

Since the natural landscape came to the surface while the "void" was discursively converted into a "(Great) canyon," the lobby became even more of a looking device, a framing installation designed to produce a landscape perspective. In compositional terms, the lobby is an optical mechanism, intended to focus the visitor's gaze by means of a set of visual frames and apertures, constituted equally by the curved walls and by two large-scale windows. The frames transform the view as visitors proceed through the architectural space: if visitors positioned at the Museum's front door see only the curved walls and an indefinite source of light behind them, then those who pass the bridge over the exposed underground floor begin to see the huge window surface and the park greenery behind it. The view unfolds as visitors walk toward the ticket counter, and opens up further along the way toward the steps leading down to the main exhibition. As the frame widens, the light exposure increases. From the top of the stairs, the window allows a full perspective onto an entire green square with one large linden tree in front and another tree cluster in the background, with pathways and benches, and the

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Jewish-Polish History," *Financial Times*, October 26, 2014, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/86f06bbc-5a48-11e4-8771-00144feab7de.html.

60 The decision of the competition jury in "Jak zrobic muzeum? How to make a museum?."

61 I thank Anna Zawadzka for pointing out this context. For instance, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (Intytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN) together with the right-wing Catholic weekly *Gość Niedzielny* have published a series of popular brochures on the history of Polish communism titled "Through the Red Sea" ("Przez Morze Czerwone").

62 "Projektant o Muzeum Żydów." Original in English.

outlines of residential buildings in the far background. Commenting on this view, Mahlamäki recalled his first impression from visiting the site on April 20, 2005: "the exceptionally beautiful spring, warmth and sunlight, the vivid colors and freshness of the park"; the director, Dariusz Stola, making a clear reference to the "museum of life" narrative, simply called this view "a beautiful symbol of life."[63]

Mahlamäki's design decision of opening the lobby interior onto the view of the park is directly inspired by Safdie's design of the new Yad Vashem building, opened on March 15, 2005, just weeks before Mahlamäki began his design work. There, in Israel's memorial museum of the Holocaust, after passing a long claustrophobic corridor with ten exhibition rooms on both sides and walking through the monumental Hall of Names, visitors reach a wide, elevated terrace with an open view onto a green valley, and with the panorama of Jerusalem in the background. The view conveys a strong symbolic message. As Safdie commented on the use of landscape in this design, "to stand on the extended terrace, the side walls of the prism curving away from the site seemingly to infinity, and see the fresh green of the recently planted forest with its great sense of renewal and the urbanizing hills beyond is to understand that, indeed, life prevailed. We prevailed."[64] If Mahlamäki's opening of perspective is considered a reference to what Eran Neuman saw as "an attempt to embed the Holocaust inside the Israeli landscape and to make it an inherent part of the local territory," then everything seemingly remains in a formal accordance: the wide angle of the view, the natural-urban landscape, and the green of the trees.[65] Yet in Warsaw, a few key components are different – the first is Safdie's "we," the "prevailing" subject. In the visual absence of the materiality covered by the surface of Muranów park, the sign of "we" continues to signify the collective subject of modern nostalgia: the Polish majority. What is also likely to be different in the case of the Warsaw museum is the very action of prevailing. In Warsaw, too, the landscape's surface is appropriated and turned into a museum exhibit, the "historical fabric" that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refused to notice in her

63 "Projektant o Muzeum Żydów"; Tomasz Urzykowski, interview with Dariusz Stola, "Montują wystawę główną w Muzeum Żydów. Zdążą?," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 10, 2014, accessed November 14, 2015, http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34889,16446025,Montuja_wystawe_glowna_w_Muzeum_Zydow__Zdaza___ ROZMOWA_.html.

64 Moshe Safdie, *Yad Vashem: The Architecture of Memory* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publications, 2006), 99.

65 Eran Neuman, *Shoah Presence: Architectural Representations of the Holocaust* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 69.

design.[66] Such an appropriation, performed by the opening up of a visual perspective, also results in the "embedding [of] the Holocaust inside the landscape." Yet what establishes the other fundamental difference with Safdie's project is the collective subject's intention to keep the Holocaust "inside the landscape" on a permanent basis – to keep in under the surface of the grass in the same way it was hidden there during the postwar reconstruction of Warsaw sixty years earlier.

In the first architectural design of the space visible from the MHPJ's huge window, Bohdan Lachert, the architect of postwar Muranów, saw this visual perspective as much less unproblematic. Quite the opposite, his design carried the intention of exposing as much of the destroyed materiality of the ghetto as possible: on the new buildings' facades in the form of reused brick, and through exposed landscape forms, hills and mounds, that differ significantly from the flat geological landscape of Warsaw. Lachert's Muranów was to become "a memorial district," a space complementing Rapoport's monument where "new life comes into existence," but the architectural plan continues to hold its obligation to protect "the atmosphere of a mausoleum, erected among a cemetery of ruins, soaked with the blood of the Jewish nation."[67] Surely, the architect's decision to construct new buildings from reclaimed material from the ghetto was motivated by practical reasons resulting from shortages of new construction material in the destroyed city. To a degree, the decision to leave the rubble on site can also be seen as a pragmatic one, yet it was also strongly rooted in the concept of leaving the destroyed ghetto in a form of a permanent ruin, an idea promoted by postwar Jewish leaders.[68] Presenting his design, Lachert wrote that the "rubble should be

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66 Eran Neuman points out the political implications of Safdie's design decision: "At this point the landscape is appropriated, objectified and turned into another exhibit in the history museum; what began with the display of the events in Europe ends in the Jerusalem landscape. The building itself supports this process and marks an act of liberation, both symbolically and experientially. The visitors are liberated from the past, from the building, as they move toward the present, to the contemporary Jerusalem landscape. The symbolic approach of representing the Holocaust, constituted by the building's path along the prism and its exit, is highly significant; it indicates the acceptance of the common Zionist narrative – from Holocaust to national revival": Neuman, *Shoah Presence*, 68.

67 Lachert's 1948 report quoted in: Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 79; Uchowicz, "Reading Muranów."

68 Artur Tanikowski quotes Warsaw rabbi Szymon Efrati, who stated that "the places, where these martyrs died in a shared feeling of solitude, should remain untouched […] Such commemoration expresses the Shoah in a more suggestive way than any building of a monument, because no description or visual image will represent this

left on the site in the biggest possible quantity to commemorate the days of terror and struggle – to form the ground on which new city and new life will be erected. The visual perception of the two levels of former streets and the new buildings will evoke the historical cataclysm, the historical break."[69] The visibility of the destroyed materiality under the ground's surface was to serve the creation of a "communicative urban design that remains a meaningful historical document"; its direct visibility on the surface of the buildings would serve the creation of architecture "built from red rubble, as if from the blood of Warsaw."[70]

Lachert's project was not free from omissions that can today provoke accusations of facilitating the appropriation of Jewish spaces, either in the form of rubble, seen by many non-Jewish Poles as a "'post-Jewish property' – so belonging to nobody,"[71] or in the form of urban space that suddenly appeared as the sum of land properties "belonging to nobody." The latter charge becomes substantial especially in the context of the simultaneous careful reconstruction of Warsaw's Old Town, perceived by its postwar architects as an urban complex of an exceptional value, "a document of [the] national culture" of Poland,[72] quite unlike the former Jewish district; Lachert's design also seems to lose part of its discursive idealism in the context of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office's 1945 manifesto, where Lachert and his colleagues stated that "only what is really worth restoring, able to live, will be

catastrophe more meaningfully than an empty place, a void space": Artur Tanikowski, "Zabytek hańby naszych wrogów, a chwały naszych umęczonych bohaterów. Urodziny Pomnika Bohaterów Getta," *Cwiszn* 1 (2013): 113, http://www.cwiszn.pl/files/files/Tanikowski.pdf.

69 Bohdan Lachert, "Pomnik Bohaterów Getta," *Głos Plastyków* 9 (1948): 56; Uchowicz, "Reading Muranów."

70 Waldemar Baraniewski, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy okresu realizmu socjalistycznego," *Rocznik Historii Sztuki* 22 (1996): 248; Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 79.

71 Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote żniwa. Rzecz o tym, co działo się na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów* (Cracow: Znak, 2011), 146; The quoted phrase does not appear in the English version of the book: Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). The rubble from the site of the Warsaw ghetto was utilized not only for the state-sponsored reconstruction of the city, but was also re-sourced by private individuals, who used it for the construction of private houses. Numerous Warsaw residents collected household items, furniture and scrap metal. Many looked for gold and valuables; the Warsaw press also reported on individuals digging for valuables in mass graves in nearby Gęsiówka prison, behind the Judenrat building: Beata Chomątowska-Szałamacha, *Stacja Muranów* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2012), 134–138.

72 Jan Zachwatowicz, "Przeszłość w służbie nowego życia," *Skarpa Warszawska* 2 (1945): 7.

reconstructed," while the "rebuilding may even require confirming the sentence of destruction."[73]

Yet, the value of Lachert's design lies in its attention to the witnessing historical substance, a quality emphasized by the surprisingly short life of his project. If the construction of postwar Muranów began in 1948, it was just 1951 when it met with strong criticism from Lachert's governmental clients, which resulted in an extensive transformation of the design and a thorough erasure of its commemorative function. The government-sponsored authors complained primarily about the project's aesthetic and practical choices, the "sad and grey" look of the buildings resulting from the "monotony" of the "pink color of brick combined with gray concrete";[74] they also questioned the idea of forming rubble into hills and embankments, suggesting the architect should have removed the entirety of the remaining rubble.[75] The criticism can be partially attributed to a move away from modernist design principles and the enforcement of the official doctrine of socialist realism, introduced in 1949, but the discursive focus on aesthetics and style cannot obscure the directionality of the design modifications made to Lachert's project: after 1951 all the buildings were plastered and covered in stucco, trees were planted to cover the embankments, and the remaining rubble was removed from the construction sites where it was still possible to do so.[76] Effectively, the entirety of the memorial

73 "Od redakcji," *Skarpa Warszawska* 1 (1945): 1.

74 Jerzy Wierzbicki, "Dzielnica mieszkaniowa Muranów (próba krytyki)," *Architektura* 9 (1952): 224; Baraniewski, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy okresu realizmu socjalistycznego," 249.

75 "Muranów w 90 procentach zamieszkany," *Stolica* 7(269) (1953): 4.

76 The anonymous author of one of the critical texts argues that while "the architect managed to resolve the problems caused by the curious landform features [...] a question remains whether this task should have been exercised at all? Would it not be better to simply clear the rubble and flatten the land? It seems that the architects have reached this conclusion after finishing the first section of Muranów, because now the rubble is removed before the construction works begin, and all the 'landscape features,' 'craters' and remains of the former district's destroyed houses are cleared": "Muranów w 90 procentach zamieszkany," 4. In an official self-criticism published in 1952, Lachert admitted that he was wrong in designing spaces "completely devoid of greenery, but full of clouds of dust from crushed brick and mortar," and that the design principles should not "affect the quality of buildings' external finishing." He also admitted that "removal of rubble from the entire construction site, as contemporary experiences show, would not be difficult": Bohdan Lachert, "Muranów. Z doświadczeń 3 lat prac urbanistyczno-architektonicznych," *Miasto* 9 (23) (1952): 30–31.

district was "sanitized of its past"[77] through the removal and concealment of visible pieces of materiality that might have caused a reflection about the Holocaust history this space had witnessed. The modernist architectural principle of providing residents with access to fresh air, sunlight, space, and greenery,[78] implemented by Lachert, became appropriated as a device for turning the district into another "safe place" where the self-image of the Polish majority could be peacefully constructed since the "beautification" of Muranów.

The frame of the lobby opens a view onto this landscape. The design decision to entrust the Museum's first architectural narrative to a perspective onto Muranów's multiple layers of visual insulation allows the "sanitized" district to enter the building's interior as would a cinematic panorama. There, magnified by the scale of the architectural frame, the view continues to produce a visual blind spot that silences the Jewish histories communicated by the materiality of the Museum's location, and perpetuates its reduction into an invisible and untouchable site. Indeed, in the Museum's lobby, "we," the Polish majority, have prevailed over the obstacles of historical and memorial nature that might have interrupted the nostalgic dream of continued modernization. "We" have also prevailed over the rubble, the materiality that carried and materialized the histories that the nostalgic subject is continuously unwilling to confront. Mahlamäki's design, combined with the curators' efforts to structure the discourse on the Museum are, in fact, constituting yet another closure of Lachert's project of a memorial district, performed by means of a visual reinforcement of the ground surface and the keeping of the unavoidably present "historic substance" at a safe distance from the Museum's main narrative.

This omissive overlooking appears to be even stronger if a visitor turns around and looks back toward the other large-scale window at the main entrance. One can expect the frame to remain focused on the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and Martyrs, as the curators' narrative on the Museum as a "memorial complex" would suggest, and as Mahlamäki's early visualizations of the lobby interior showed. Yet, the shape of the window strongly restricts the visibility of the Monument. Commenting unofficially on the design background of such a framing, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explained that "once in the building, the visitors do not have a clear view of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes from the large glass window at the entrance. This placement was intentional, because POLIN Museum stands in

77 Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 81.

78 International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), *Athens Charter* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973 [1933]); Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 130.

relation to the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, but is not a Holocaust museum."[79] The exclusion was intentional, yet the frame is not empty. While it allows visitors to see only a corner of the Monument, similarly to the wide perspective at the back of the building, it does offer a direct view of a tree, one that not only constitutes a section of the "beautiful symbol of life," but also carries stronger and well-defined political connotations. According to information provided by the Museum, it is "a Tree of the Joint Memory of Poles and Jews, planted in 1988 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It commemorates Jews murdered by the Nazis in the years 1939–1945 and Poles who died while providing aid to Jews."[80] While there is no room inside the lobby for a commemoration that allows for the visual presence of the heroes and martyrs, there is enough space for a commemoration of the same Ghetto Uprising that provides an opportunity to emphasize the heroism of Poles, one that, importantly, permits a merger of the infinitely different and incomparable Polish and Jewish memories of the Holocaust. One may ask how such "Joint Memory" can possibly be produced, and why its production has to be carried out just on the side of Rapoport's concealed monument, directly on the lane of historical Zamenhof Street. But these questions do not appear to be overly significant while the merger is successful. Visitors curious

79 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "More on the contested memorialisation around the location of the monument to the Righteous," *Facebook,* March 5, 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10103730894673969&id=839586&pnref=story. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's comment, published on social media, was a voice in the debate on the construction of a monument commemorating the Polish Righteous, planned to be built behind the back window of the Museum's lobby.

80 A plaque next to the tree informs: "The tree of shared memory. To the Polish Jews murdered between 1939–1945 by the German invaders, and to the Poles who died bringing help." The Museum's website explains further that "The museum devoted to the history of Polish Jews 'enters into a dialogue' with the Monument standing opposite and facing it. The monument commemorates the murdered people and those who died fighting. The Museum complements the space of commemoration with a historical context and shows how Jews had been living throughout a thousand years of their history in Poland. The designers tried to break the symmetry and did not place the main entrance to the Museum opposite the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes but closer to the building's corner at Anielewicza Street. Therefore, the Tree of the Common Memory of Poles and Jews is growing opposite the entrance": POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, "Audio descriptive guide through the building of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews," http://www.polin.pl/en/planning-your-visit-accessibility-of-the-museum/audio-descriptive-guide-through-the-building-of-polin-museum-of.

about its conditions and outcomes will find their answer in the larger window on the opposite side of the lobby.

Zamenhof Street

The visitors' gaze rests on the surface of aestheticized Muranów, limited by the frame of the lobby and by the sanitizing procedures performed on Lachert's project in the postwar decades. But attempts to control the ruinous materiality of the site are not limited to the politics of vision. The back section of the lobby, a place where the panorama is widest and most spectacular, is also a place where the architectural design literally breaks the surface of the postwar ground and allows visitors to walk 5.8 meters down the wide stairs and, crossing the thick layer of rubble, to access the basement floor. It is where the main exhibition is located, communicating the narrative of the thousand years of Jewish history in Poland. The action of crossing the geological layer of the rubble is designed to take place in the architectural space of the lobby's "canyon," which is curved downward, yet still narratively remains "a bridge across the chasm of the Holocaust."[81] What the lobby communicates in the symbolic language of landscape becomes translated by the device of the staircase into a physical action of transcending; the horizontal direction of the lobby's visual perspective prefigures the vertical vector of movement through the space of rubble.

While the action of transcending the ground level happens in the safe and hermetically isolated environment of the lobby interior, reassuringly covered in warm sandstone, not all visitors have found that movement to be fully unproblematic. The artist Artur Żmijewski remembered his first visit to the Museum:

> I left my coat in the cloakroom and while I went down these spectacular stairs, I had the irresistible feeling that it is a situation similar to that of Auschwitz. That it is a descent down into the abyss of a gas chamber. Why is this exhibition in the basement? Why is it not in this sunny space? Why is this glass building occupied by the museum offices, and in order to see the exhibition you need to go down to the cellar? For me, it opposes the concept that it is a museum of life. From the very beginning, I see death.[82]

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81 Ruth Ellen Gruber, "The Arts: A Museum in the Void," *Hadassah Magazine* (October/November 2013): 54.

82 Zofia Waślicka and Artur Żmijewski, interview with Jacek Leociak, "Leociak: Gruz z papier-mâché," *Krytyka Polityczna*, March 31, 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/kultura/20150331/leociak-gruz-z-papier-mache-rozmowa.

Żmijewski very clearly notices the Museum's design logic and its architectural precision. What is more, at every moment of his visit, he remained safely isolated from the narratives contained in the rubble and the possibility of being influenced by its materiality; the "descent" is not planned as a means of experiencing the destroyed space but rather of walking past it. To be sure, as deep as 5.8 meters below ground level, no residue of the rubble, and of the narratives it contains, remains. The Museum's basement walls, immersed in this materiality, are constructed not to confront the ruin of modernity but rather to bypass it, to create an opportunity of accessing the geologically stable ground below on which the Polish nostalgic dream can be re-founded. The ground works performed during the construction of Mahlamäki's building were based on the assumption that the soil of Muranów can indeed be stratified, divided into historically distinct layers, and that after accessing the surface of pre-Holocaust Warsaw, removing the unwanted substance, and constructing retaining walls all around, a "safe place" will be established, albeit in the sterile and artificial atmosphere of an architectural laboratory. The designers' and curators' idea relied on the hope that creating such a safety zone inside the Museum's glass-and-concrete walls would facilitate the re-modeling of the urban layout on which the building stands, a reconquering of the territory that simultaneously seems to allow to ground a nostalgic (self-) image of the interrupted Polish "golden era," but also communicates the histories and memories that call this image into question. Considering their aim of sanitizing the foundations of pre-Holocaust Warsaw of the residues of rubble, it would be significantly less productive for the Museum's designers to locate this building in any space other than the epicenter: opposite the commemoration of the ghetto, on the grounds formerly occupied by the Judenrat and Zamenhof Street, which during the destruction of the ghetto became a main route to Umschlagplatz. It is indeed there, on the excavated lanes of the street, where the attempts to sanitize the space and to construct the nostalgia for the lost modernity as a physical architectural object appear most evident.

While the majority of the Museum's layout occupies the former site of the Judenrat, previously the military barracks and a prison, the northeastern corner of the Museum diagonally crosses the lanes of prewar Zamenhof Street and overlaps with a section of a space previously occupied by a tenement on its opposite side, at number 38. According to the Museum's masterplan, the northeastern corner of the underground floor was to be designated for two sub-galleries of the main exhibition – the gallery of the interwar history of Poland (1918–1939), and the Holocaust gallery, respectively sixth and seventh out of the Museum's eight sub-galleries. Entering the gallery of the interwar period, visitors are positioned at the

end of a long corridor designed to resemble a street. On both its sides, walls have been constructed in white plasterboard to resemble the lines of tenement facades; a series of digital projectors cast black-and-white images onto the walls, adding more detail: windows, stucco decorations, and signboards advertising shops and businesses: a newspaper office, a cinema, a bookstore, a food shop, a cafe. Many signboards are signed with Ashkenazi Jewish surnames. The "tenements'" doorways lead to a series of exhibition rooms, narrating Jewish political and cultural life during the time between the re-establishment of the Polish state in 1918 and the beginning of the Second World War. The lane surface is covered in cobblestone. If one looks at the architectural plan of the Museum, it appears evident that the line of the street simulated in the exhibition space overlaps precisely with the line of historical Zamenhof Street. The original street was only wider, and its eastern lane is now occupied by the row of "tenements"; yet, inside the "tenement" located opposite the entrance to the sub-gallery, there is a door leading to a technical room, normally closed, which is positioned almost exactly where the door of the tenement at number 38 was located.

Referring to the architectural plan may be necessary in order to trace this overlapping, because the fact that the visitors physically walk the street that, for nearly eighty years, was located in the center of Jewish Warsaw and later became a place of its destruction, is not communicated by the design of the exhibition, and was openly denied by its curators. In official communications, this space was identified not as a device for encountering the material past, but merely as a collage of unconnected urban settings. Michał Majewski, the curator of the prewar exhibition, called the reconstructed street "a visualization" and stated that the interior can probably be compared to Nalewki Street, the main street of Warsaw's Jewish quarter, but in fact "it isn't any exact street," while Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett stated that it is an "abstractive street" and "not a literal recreation of anything," emphasizing that the projections of shop fronts were copied from historical photographs of various Polish cities.[83] A mention of the site's past appears on the Museum's website.[84] Yet, no information about the street's layers of materialized

83 Anna Bernat, "Galerie MHŻP – 'Na żydowskiej ulicy' i 'Powojnie,'" *dzieje.pl*, October 27, 2014, accessed November 14, 2015, http://dzieje.pl/kultura-i-sztuka/galerie-mhzp-na-zydowskiej-ulicy-i-powojnie; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Rising from the Rubble."

84 The website informs that "The Street is situated at the prewar location of Zamenhof St. – the main artery of the Northern District, a neighborhood inhabited chiefly by Jews. This fact was very much present in the minds of the creators of the gallery, which is set up along a "street" whose frontage is formed by multimedia building facades. It is on these that presentations on topics of importance to this time period

history is provided to visitors in the exhibition space while they walk on its very surface and watch its beautified simulation.

The layers of history are numerous. Historical Zamenhof Street was a space located in the very center of Warsaw's semi-formal Jewish quarter known as the Northern District, established in the early 19th century by a series of administrative decisions that forbade Jewish ownership of land along many streets of central Warsaw, simultaneously encouraging resettlement to the suburbs that surrounded the Warsaw Citadel,[85] north of the historical city center. Zamenhof Street, until 1930 known as Dzika Street and later renamed to honor Ludwik Zamenhof, the inventor of Esperanto, was initially an access road leading to artillery barracks and military training grounds and, further north, to the Powązki tollhouse. With the rapid urbanization of the industrial era, the section of Dzika Street closer to the city center became the residential area of Nalewki, a busy merchant street. The relative wealth of the area closer to the center disappeared as the street continued further towards the district of Powązki, an overcrowded area of extreme poverty and inhumane living conditions.[86] The economic, social, and ethnic exclusion of the suburban parts of the Northern District also reflected on the more central section of Zamenhof, which was by no means an area of wealth and safety. The tenement at number 38, a part of which is now occupied by the interior of the exhibition's "tenement," was a huge building with two narrow courtyards and almost one hundred individual apartments – or, more likely, cramped rental rooms. It also contained at least two prayer houses located inside the courtyards. Chone Shmeruk, a literary historian who spent his childhood in this house, remembered one prayer room owned by Kotsk Chasidim, and another maintained by a group of tailors.[87] The tenement was not entirely a safe place; in 1935, it became the scene of the killing of a police spy who attempted to infiltrate the delegalized Communist

will be displayed. From the street, visitors will be able to go into building entrances, where they will discover the vibrant cultural and political life of the period": POLIN, "On the Jewish Street."

85 Housing developments in the immediate neighborhood of the citadel were forbidden for military reasons. This limitation significantly contributed to the overcrowding of the Northern district: Andrzej Gawryszewski, *Ludność Warszawy w XX wieku* (Warszawa: IGiPZ PAN, 2009), 23–25.

86 Mosze Zonszajn, *Yidish-Varshe*, trans. Aleksandra Geller (Buenos Aires: Tsentral farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1954), 41–44, http://www.varshe.org.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28%3Aulica-dzika-zamenhofa2&Itemid=55&lang=en.

87 Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, interview with Chone Shmeruk, "My Warsaw is Gone…," *Więź,* Special Issue: Under One Heaven: Poles and Jews (1998): 326–333.

Party of Poland.[88] It is possible that one of the prayer rooms described by Shmeruk remained in the building after the Nazi invasion and the creation of the ghetto. Such a prayer room was visited in this tenement in January 1943, five months after the liquidation of the ghetto by Hillel Seidman, a historian and an activist from the Orthodox Jewish community. Seidman was invited to see this place by a group of yeshiva students, who led him though a series of attics and blocked rooms in the neighboring buildings before taking him to the tenement at number 38 where, through an entrance hidden in an oven, he entered an underground bunker. It was fully supplied and at that time had access to water and electric power; religious studies continued inside.[89] It is almost certain this bunker was destroyed three months later, before the outbreak of the Ghetto Uprising. On the first day of the fight, on April 29, 1943, the tenement was burned by the Nazis; it is known that many people died inside.[90] During the weeks that followed, most of the civilians captured in the bunkers were escorted to Umschlagplatz through Zamenhof Street, similarly to the liquidation of July 1942.

With the separation of the Museum's exhibition space from the materiality it is located on, all these histories become excluded from the visitors' access, hidden behind the plasterboard facades of the artificial tenements. Considering the underground location of the exhibition, it is possible that the bunker visited by Seidman was located just meters away from today's "Jewish Street" constructed in the Museum's basement. Yet it is not to be connected to the reconstructed "second Golden Age of Polish Jews," and neither are the other histories and memories materialized by the space of prewar Zamenhof Street. The rubble remains outside, safely isolated by the reinforced concrete of the basement walls; inside, the designers created a space that communicates a political longing for the interrupted past, even more literally than the "ruin of modernity" would do so. The reconstructed "Jewish Street" conveys a message that indeed nothing happened: if geological works are carried out thoroughly enough, a street untouched by history can be uncovered below the rubble of the ghetto, ready to prove that a return to the "genuinely 'Polish' Poland" is more than possible.

Standing on the cobblestone surface of the street-like museum interior, visitors are physically standing in a re-creation, an identical replica of the prewar

88 Klara Mirska, *W cieniu wiecznego strachu. Wspomnienia* (Paris: M. & K. Mirski, 1980), 258.

89 Hillel Seidman, *Du fond de l'abîme: journal du ghetto de Varsovie* (Paris: Plon, 1998), 180–188.

90 Barbara Schieb, Martina Voigt, and Frederick Weinstein, *Aufzeichnungen aus dem Versteck: Erlebnisse eines polnischen Juden 1939–1946* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2006), 526.

city cleansed of all the material and symbolic residue of the original. Like the landscape of Bohdan Lachert's postwar Muranów, the interiors are sanitized of the "historical fabric of where Jews once lived."[91] The design concept of the "narrative museum" allowed for the transfer of the perceived objectivism of a physical object onto the historical narrative and for the abandonment of the constructions of an artifact-based authenticity – but the designers of the MHPJ have pushed this principle to its extreme by excluding the spaces already present in the exhibition and narratively replacing them with the concepts of "abstraction," "virtuality," and "visualization." Such a design decision allows for the omission of the narratives carried by the real relic of Zamenhof Street and to keep them outside the double walls of this laboratory of national nostalgia.

The narratives that remain outside would probably include the history of the economic and cultural growth of interwar Poland and Warsaw. They would, however, also be likely to convey narratives of continued exclusion and segregation of an economic, spatial, class, and racial nature – contexts that were clearly visible in the spaces of prewar Zamenhof Street and constituted the essential structure of prewar Polish visions of growth and modernization. Among the other surfaces of the city, these contexts were strongly visible on the "Jewish" shop signboards, which did not so much reflect the Polish traditions of multiethnicity and tolerance as they were a direct result of Polish trade regulations intended to visually separate "Christian" businesses from "non-Christian" ones in order to facilitate the economic boycott of Jewish shops.[92] Finally, these narratives would make it

91 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Rising from the Rubble."

92 Formally, none of the legal acts of interwar Poland differentiated between Jewish and non-Jewish shop owners. Practically, the obligation to denote the business owner's name on the shop front served the boycott actions against Jewish businesses, organized by National Democrats since the reemergence of the Polish state in 1918; the boycott actions intensified in 1932, and even more in 1934, after the Przytyk Pogrom. The law about signboards first appeared in the Industrial Law Act introduced on June 7, 1927 (*Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 7 czerwca 1927 o prawie przemysłowym*). The Act defines "industrial business" as every business with activity in the field of production, sales or services (Article 1). Article 33 of the Act informs: "The manager should label his industrial business accordingly on the building exterior. The external description should denote precisely and clearly the name and surname, or the company name of the industry, and should clearly denote whether the business deals with production, sales of goods, or services. Written names and surnames should remain in accordance with the details given for the business registry or in concession application documents": "Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 7 czerwca 1927 o prawie przemysłowym," *Dziennik Ustaw RP*, nr. 53, poz. 468, 701.

more difficult to delimit the antisemitism of the German Nazis presented in the Holocaust gallery from their Polish counterparts, thoroughly separated by the design and content of the main exhibition's sub-galleries.

Even if such a separation of the temporal sections of presented history is considered a valid and productive narrative method, and it is accepted that the Poland of the interwar period and the country occupied by the Nazis were two fully distinct spatial-temporal islands – the decision to keep the materiality of Zamenhof Street outside the Museum's exhibition space is impossible to defend in the context of positioning this street inside the Holocaust gallery. The reconstruction of Zamenhof is continued within its space, along the same street axis. There, the "virtual" street is presented as the so called "Aryan street," an exhibition space narrated as remaining outside the ghetto and designed to educate visitors about the attitudes non-Jewish Poles adopted toward the Holocaust. Above the reconstruction of Zamenhof Street, a gallery was designed to cross its axis perpendicularly on an upper level, decorated to resemble the well-known Chłodna Street footbridge, which connected two parts of the Warsaw ghetto across a street that remained outside its borders. Visitors are allowed to look from the gallery down to the "Aryan" street, encouraged to assume the perspective of ghetto prisoners. If we realize that the "Aryan" street indeed constitutes a reconstruction of the lane of Zamenhof Street in its exact historical position, the image of design confusion is complete: in the gallery narrating the history of the Holocaust, visitors look at the historical way to the Umschlagplatz, disguised as a street outside the ghetto while standing on a gallery intended to imitate the space that constituted a part of the ghetto but was fully detached from the physical ground.

These strategies of multiple concealments prevent visitors from accessing the site of the history upon which they physically walk. The discursive and physical

In the late 1930s, the boycott action was supported by local governmental bodies. A series of documents was published by local authorities (*starostwa*), reminding of the obligation to clearly mark shops with owners' surnames. See, for instance: "W sprawie oznaczenia na zewnątrz przedsiębiorstwa," *Orędownik Ostrowski* 41 (May 21, 1937): 1; "Obwieszczenia Starostwa i Wydziału Powiatowego," *Gazeta Sępoleńska* 62 (August 3, 1938): 1. The nationalist press reported on cases of avoiding the law; a local newspaper informed in 1938: "The obligation to disclose names and surnames on the signboards is strongly disliked by the Jews. As much as they can, they try to avoid it. In Płock, one can notice the following situations: on a regular signboard, an anonymous shop name is displayed, looking as a Polish, Christian one, and another, with a Jewish surname, is hanged somewhere high on the building, where not everyone can spot it. And it is done only to hide the Jewish name and mislead the Christians!": "Byle tylko nazwisko ukryc…," *Głos Mazowiecki Handlowy* 19 (1938): 1.

double insulation shields visitors from the site of the Museum, from the possibility of critically differentiating between the destroyed space and its reconstruction, and from narratives that could constitute a threat to the nostalgic image of Polish modernity. Historian Jacek Leociak, the co-author of the Holocaust gallery who later became critical of the Museum's final design, very accurately commented on the practical implementation of this design. He commented on the plasterboard rubble that appears in the postwar gallery in order to illustrate the look of destroyed Muranów just as plasterboard tenements appear in the earlier sub-galleries:

> they look extremely false, as if made of papier-mâché, while the authentic Muranów rubble could have been taken from the archeological excavations opened during the construction of the Museum. It is entirely a misunderstanding. In promotional materials it is emphasized that the Museum was created in the heart of the Jewish district of Warsaw, in the heart of the ghetto. And the bricks excavated during archeological works are simply thrown away.[93]

Conclusion

In July 2009, just after an official construction permit was granted for the Museum building but before the excavation works began on the site, a temporary structure appeared on the site of historical Zamenhof Street, opposite the Ghetto Heroes' and Martyrs' Monument. In the summer of that year, Israeli video artist Yael Bartana filmed her "Polish trilogy," a three-part work titled *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, which was presented in the Polish pavilion during the 54th International Art Exhibition in Venice two years later. Bartana's work is a study in collective psychology: the artist extracts and isolates images from Polish and Israeli national dreams, mixes them, shuffles and re-pronounces, allowing their repressed content to return, as a nightmare. The work, inspired both by the artist's confrontations with Israeli politics of memory and her experience of living in Poland during the debate initiated by Jan T. Gross *Neighbors*, allows for the interpretation of these dreams; it "gradually reveals layers of latent meaning."[94]

In the first video, titled *Nightmares*, a young fictional Communist politician calls "three million Jews" to return to Poland.[95] He stands in the center of the

93 "Leociak: Gruz z papier-mâché."

94 Joanna Mytkowska, "The Return of the Stranger," in *And Europe Will Be Stunned: The Polish Trilogy*, ed. Yael Bartana (London: Artangel, 2012), 130.

95 Yael Bartana, "Nightmares," Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw (2007), http://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/bartana-yael-mary-koszmary-2.

empty 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw, a 1955 construction made of Warsaw rubble, addressing himself to the derelict structure's empty terraces. Without a clarification whether the activist is addressing the living or rather the ghosts of the dead (the number of Polish Jewish victims of the Holocaust is estimated at three million), the speech contains references to Polish participation in the Holocaust, the appropriation of the victims' properties, and the postwar materialization of a nationalist dream about a "Polish Pole in Poland, with no one disturbing him."[96] The speaker opposes the nationalist imagery, yet he calls for a "return" presented as a work of new Polish-and-Jewish nation-building, an effort at modernizing and creating new "works of hands and minds the world has never seen."[97] "Return, and we shall finally become Europeans" – calls the politician, simultaneously evoking the postwar discourses of Polish communism and Zionism, but also making a reference to contemporary Polish aspirations of "becoming European" by "working through" the memory of the Holocaust, which would allow Polish society to leave the burden of history behind, and at last to join the phantasmic "West."[98]

The second video, entitled *Wall and Tower*, was filmed in Muranów, literally under the poster advertising the Museum of the History of Polish Jews about to be constructed. Drawing from both Polish and Israeli national imageries, the film shows a group of pioneers constructing a "kibbutz Muranów," a response to the call articulated in the first movie, and also a first place of Polish-Jewish symbiosis on Polish lands.[99] The images of their work are reminiscent of the 1950s video reports on the construction site of Lachert's new Muranów, but the *Wall and Tower*, *Homa u-Migdal* in Hebrew, is also the name of a strategy implemented by Israeli settlers in the 1930s and 1940s, permitting the construction of a kibbutz that could immediately be used as a point of defense in twenty-four hours.[100] Bartana's building's appearance corresponds to the film's name: a high wooden fence with narrow vertical slots enabling active defense backed by an observation tower with a clear view of Rapoport's sculptures of ghetto fighters. Inside the wall's perimeter, the video shows images of symbiosis: under the green of the Muranów trees, the pioneers are learning each others' languages, the background music plays

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96 Mytowska, "The Return of the Stranger," 120.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Yael Bartana, *Wall and Tower*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw (2009), http://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/bartana-yael-mur-i-wieza.

100 Uri Milstein and Alan Sacks, *History of Israel's War of Independence: Volume II, The First Month* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), 233–239.

the Polish and Israeli national anthems (the latter, however, is played backwards), a flag combining the Polish and Israeli national emblems flies at the top of the tower.

The place created and filmed by Bartana prefigures the design of the Museum's interiors, constructed in the same space during the following few years. It mirrors the aims the Museum was designed to serve, the curatorial and architectural solutions used to achieve these aims, and the substantial design problems and symbolic and spatial costs that the construction of this Museum has revealed. It mirrors the structure of the nostalgia for Polish modernity, for a project of a "Polish Poland" interrupted by the Holocaust that the curators of Polish history are trying to revive today. It reveals that the Holocaust is integral to this project, and that any attempt to revive it would require either confronting this project's integral background of nationalism and exclusion, or exercising incessant attempts to isolate the project from its context. It shows that materializing a nostalgia for a lost modernity requires constructing a wall: a structure that would give a shape to a view and, if needed, would fully isolate the inside from the outside environment – the historical substance of the place and the materialized substance of history, which poses an irremovable threat of criticality to the otherwise uncritical hope of moving past history without touching it. What the isolative qualities of the wall do not change is the outside, also – but not only – understood in architectural terms. The rubble of Muranów, while swept under the green surfaces of the district's parks or hidden under technologically advanced works of architecture, retains its quality of an active "historical fabric," the physical and symbolic ground on which the Museum was founded. Despite design efforts to isolate the Museum and its content from this territory, the rubble of Muranów might appear to be the only ground available to support it.

Piotr Forecki and Anna Zawadzka

The Rule of the Golden Mean

> In a society in which normative power is pervasive, control over the means of rationality is as important as, if not more important than, control over other social forces.
>
> – Jodi Melamed, 2011[1]

The purpose of this paper is to present a certain rule that currently predominates in Poland, organizing and determining public discourse on "Jewish topics." We have dubbed it "the rule of the golden mean." We will demonstrate its properties, functions, and practical application in three cases: the reception of Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida*, the opening of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and the initiative behind building the Memorial to Righteous Gentiles, "The Rescued to the Rescuers," in the Warsaw ghetto area. Before we move on to our examples, however, let us explain what we understand by the rule of the golden mean.

Until now, debates over the attitudes of Poles toward Jews have followed the following pattern: first, some forgotten or previously unreported past events exemplifying Polish anti-Semitism were publicly revealed. If it was impossible to overlook such revelations on purpose, because they rested on a solid foundation, there was an outbreak of national discussion on this topic. This happened in the case of Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross books, certain publications by the Polish Center for Holocaust Research, Michał Cichy's article on Jews murdered during the Warsaw Uprising, research by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir into the persistence of the legend about ritual murders, the text by Bożena Umińska-Keff on Stefan Żeromski's anti-Semitism, and so on and so forth. On one side of these discussions were the "humiliated patriots," who defended the good name of Poland and the Poles, and acted as the guardians of Polish innocence. On the other side were "enlightened citizens" who called from their intellectual high ground for a collective examination of conscience, instructed researchers to refrain from making "hasty generalizations" and "losing sight of context," and warned that "ordinary people" should not be given shock therapy. A number of recent debates and

1 Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 11.

discussions, however, have shown that this division is a thing of the past. This is not where the dividing line falls today.

At present, the issue of "Polish-Jewish relations" is clearly dominated by a conservative discourse leaning towards nationalism, but calling itself a centrist approach, a voice of moderation and common sense. This discourse is repeated and reproduced by Polish symbolic elites, regardless of their political sympathies and affiliations, while the rule of the golden mean structures this discourse. This rule is the reference point when determining how legitimate public knowledge is. The following discursive categories are employed to build the golden mean: moderation, weighed arguments, objectivity, balance, fair judgment, critical distance, a factual approach, a sober attitude, consensus, and finding a middle ground. Rhetorical expressions based on the rule of the golden mean include the following: "let us not exaggerate," "one cannot generalize," "the truth lies in the middle," "one needs to weigh the arguments," "we need more distance," and "there is no use festering." According to the rule of the golden mean, voices that do not conform to these requirements can be rejected as extreme, radical, ideological, doctrinal, far-fetched, hysterical, and emotional (the last two terms are typically applied to women), as the voices of freaks who always nitpick and are never content with anything.

It is therefore worthwhile taking a look at the opinions that win the honorable status of being balanced, as they constitute excellent material for analyzing what is the hegemonic discourse on the topic of "Polish-Jewish relations" by indicating what knowledge it rejects.

Ida

The discussion over Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* is a striking example of the rule of the golden mean at work. There were two stages to this discussion. The first one took place when the movie was released in Polish movie theaters, before it started winning awards at international festivals. The second, and much more heated stage accompanied *Ida's* triumphant trajectory from one renowned film festival to another, to eventually be crowned with the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

Initially, the reviews were purely enthusiastic. The film was acclaimed as a masterpiece by reviewers from the liberal mainstream media as well as by right-wing journalists. Typically, the latter scrupulously seek "anti-Polish" traces everywhere, but even they failed to find any in *Ida*. As a movie about anti-Semitism and Polish participation in the Holocaust, *Ida* was contrasted with another movie on the same topic, *Pokłosie* (*Aftermath*). *Ida* was assessed to be a balanced and fair movie, as opposed to *Aftermath*. Łukasz Adamski wrote on the ultra-right wing *Wpolityce* website:

> *Ida* is everything that Władysław Pasikowski's coarse *Aftermath*, with its straightforwardness of a baseball bat, is not. Both movies talk about the sins some Poles committed against their Jewish neighbors during WWII. In contrast to the director of *Psy* [*Dogs* – Władysław Pasikowski], Pawlikowski does not judge, does not condemn, nor stigmatize Poles. Instead, he focuses on the complexity and universalism of an individual's sin. I hope that *Ida* will let us forget about *Aftermath* and that it will become the main movie that settles accounts with the dark episodes of our past.[2]

The only public criticism of *Ida* in the first stage of discussion was voiced by researchers who noticed anti-Semitic clichés in Pawlikowski's movie, namely that of "Jewish-Communism," the Christianization of the Holocaust, and false symmetries. The director was accused of having created a story that sought to "cure with a dream," and of using Jews to build agreement between Poles.[3] These opinions, however, were downplayed and invalidated in a number of ways. Since the majority of critical opinions about *Ida* were voiced by women, they were referred to in gendered terms, as behaving in a hysterical or crazy manner. Right-wing, centrist, and left-wing periodicals alike assessed the criticism of *Ida* as overly politicized, ideological, resentful, and petty, as well as insensitive to the movie's aesthetic, and hence oafish. The authors of critical reviews were compared to reviewers from the times of socialist realism, which is the worst possible offence in a country characterized by unanimous anticommunism.[4]

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2 Łukasz Adamski, "'Ida' – opowieść o ludzkich grzechach," *Wpolityce,* October 26, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wpolityce.pl/kultura/79608-ida-opowiesc-o-ludzkich-grzechach.

3 See: Anna Zawadzka, "Ida," *lewica.pl,* October 25, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://lewica.pl/blog/zawadzka/28791/; Agnieszka Graff, "'Ida' – subtelność i polityka," *Krytyka Polityczna,* November 1, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/en/artykuly/film/20131031/graff-ida-subtelnosc-i-polityka; Piotr Forecki, "Legenda o Wandzie, co zastąpiła Niemca," *Krytyka Polityczna*, November 8, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/film/20131108/legenda-o-wandzie-co-zastapila-niemca; Bożena Keff, "Ida i jej ubranka," *Zadra: Pismo feministyczne*, November 14, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://pismozadra.pl/felietony/bozena-uminska/675-ida-i-jej-ubranka.

4 See, for example: Krzysztof Varga, "Piękno pod pręgierzem," *Gazeta Wyborcza,* November 8, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/piatekekstra/1,134662,14913929,Piekno_pod_pregierzem.html; Katarzyna Szumlewicz, "Być Żydówką w powojennej Polsce," *Bez Dogmatu* 103 (2015); Helena Datner and Agnieszka Graff contested Krzysztof Varga's standpoint: Helena Datner and Agnieszka Graff, "My, komisarki od kultury," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 13, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,14939785,My__komisarki_od_kultury___polemika_z_Varga_o__Idzie_.html.

Ida's successive awards, however, and in particular its Oscar, changed the course of the discussion. First, they influenced the standpoint of Polish right-wingers, who came to consider Pawlikowski's movie to be "anti-Polish" after all. This happened because the Polish raison d'état is currently determined by the politics of image. It is sufficient to mention here the phrase "Polish extermination camps,"[5] in reference to which "Polish diplomatic offices made 150 interventions last year alone,"[6] as recorded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Michał Kozłowski wrote about these interventions that

> the use of the "phrase" is incriminating. However, using the phrase does not mean taking a standpoint; its meaning depends on the context. In this case, he refers to the geographical location of the camps. Why does not the Ministry protest whenever it is claimed that extermination camps were established by the Polish state, or even were initiated and managed by Poles? This is probably because no such claims have been made. […] The Polish state and media institutions perform an act of manipulation here. They are fervently fighting an accusation that nobody makes, in order to take the position of a victim of slander. The history of the Holocaust, however, corroborates another claim – that concerning the mass attitude of hostility towards Jewish victims, commonly tolerated denunciation, violence, robberies, murders, and the difficult fate of those Poles who resolved to help Jewish people and continued to conceal their help for the Jews after the war, as if it was shameful. "Polish Concentration Camps"[7] have become a smoke curtain, a way to reverse roles and manipulate collective consciousness.[8]

In the context of such politics of image, *Ida* suddenly became dangerous when released in cinemas outside Poland, because although Pawlikowski made reference to the events of WWII, he ignored the significant context of the occupation and

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5 The expression "Polish death camps" was used by Zofia Nałkowska in *Medallions* as early as summer 1945. We extend our thanks to Jacek Leociak for this information. See: Zofia Nałkowska, *Medallions*, translated and with an introduction by Diana Kuprel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000). For more on the expression "Polish extermination camps" see: Dariusz Libionka, "Truth About Camps, czyli Polacy, nic się [w 1942 r.] nie stało," *Zagłada Żydów* 8 (2012): 631–641.

6 "Schetyna: nie będziemy bierni w przypadku prób fałszowania historii, depesza PAP z 23 kwietnia 2015 r.," *Rzeczpospolita Polska, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych*, accessed November 14, 2015, http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/msz_w_mediach/schetyna__nie_bedziemy_bierni_w_przypadku_prob_falszowania_historii__depesza_pap_z_23_kwietnia_2015_r_;jsessionid=51CF3B1B9D616063C7310C8D91C3410C.cmsap1p.

7 The expression "Polish extermination camps" is used more often than "Polish concentration camps" and it is the former that evokes the outrage of the Ministry and Polish media.

8 Michał Kozłowski, "Polskie obozy na straży polskiej tożsamości," *Bez Dogmatu* 2: 104 (2015).

the presence of the Germans as the causative and executive agent of the Holocaust. In this way, he undermined the principle of the symmetry of Polish and Jewish suffering, as he failed to introduce the main perpetrators of Polish martyrdom. Therefore, the Polish League against Defamation (Polska Liga przeciw Zniesławieniom), headed by a Council that included Piotr Gliński, a former candidate for the office of Polish Prime Minister, petitioned the producers of *Ida* to supplement the movie by adding an introductory statement on Poland's history under occupation, for instance.[9] After *Ida* was awarded the Oscar, national and patriotic circles mobilized against the movie under the flag of the defense of Poland and the Poles' good name.

What we find most characteristic of the second stage of the debate over *Ida* is that liberal and even left-wing members of the film and art milieu lumped all critics of *Ida* together, from scholars of anti-Semitism to patriotic anti-Semites. They were collectively labeled as mad and as ideologues, representatives of extremist standpoints, opposites that attract and are excluded from civilized debate. It had been a long time since critics had so many invectives thrown at them: stupid, rabid, insensitive, and uncultured; they were accused of being members of an "unrefined audience," exhibiting the mentality of communist Poland, and using Stalinist methods; and it was alleged that ideology had clouded their minds and doctrinarism had made them insensitive to true art. Agnieszka Holland was among those who performed such a collective diagnosis, classification, and characterization of *Ida's* critics, and she was joined by a number of renowned Polish opinion leaders.[10]

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9 These are the demands made of the producers of *Ida*: "It is not our intention to interfere with the artistic message of this movie or to change its plot in any way. What we want is that an announcement be displayed at the beginning or end of the movie, presenting the historical context of the plot, for instance featuring the following six statements: 1. Poland was under German occupation in the period 1939–1945; 2. the German occupants implemented the policy of Jewish extermination; 3. under German occupation in Poland, hiding Jews was punishable by the death of the person who was hiding them as well as this person's entire family, yet nevertheless many Poles hid Jews; 4. thousands of Poles died in this way, giving up their lives for their neighbors and citizens of Poland – the Jews who were being persecuted; 5. the legitimate government of the Polish Underground State, which was recognized by the Allies, was strictly punishing those Poles who persecuted the Jews, having been affected by the cruel and ruthless German occupation, by death; 6. the Yad Vashem Institute conferred the majority of titles of the Righteous Among the Nations to Poles": accessed May 25, 2015, http://reduta-dobrego-imienia.pl/?cat=4.

10 Cezary Michalski, interview with Agnieszka Holland, "Poraża mnie brak wrażliwości u krytyków 'Idy,'" *Krytyka Polityczna*, March 3, 2015, accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.kry

Appreciation of *Ida* has become a measure of good taste, moderation, cultural sophistication, and refinement; it is now a criterion of belonging to the "normal," healthy majority – to an audience capable of appreciating the movie's artistic value and universal message instead of the clichés of dominant discourse. These clichés portray Jewish communists as either lost or evil; women as unhappy and driven to madness by emancipation;[11] communist Poland as a country that remained grey, terrifying, dirty, and abhorrent for fifty years; and Polish Catholicism as a dependable rock and moral compass. Whoever did not like *Ida* was accused of bad taste as the film features beautiful images and touching music.

Despite their references to the movie's "aesthetic assessment," *Ida's* advocates also applied the rule of the golden mean to its content. They stressed that the movie is fair and provides balanced arguments, showing mutual Polish-Jewish sins: you did this to us, so we did this to you. It is "balanced," featuring both a Jewish communist and a Polish peasant who murder Jews. There was Polish guilt, there was Jewish guilt, and there is the Oscar. The right wing got their on-screen Jewish communist, while readers of Jan T. Gross got a Polish peasant (surely not an intellectual) – an anti-Semite and a murderer who, however, saves a Jewish child, and so is also righteous to a certain extent. Consent builds; discord destroys. If you do not like the truth emanating from the screen, go and make your own movie. *Ida* has accomplished the task of building a national consensus, and the discourse of the golden mean does not leave room for questioning the value of this consensus, nor of asking at whose cost it has been achieved.

The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Those excluded from the debate over *Ida* as extreme ideologists learned their lesson; they discovered how to avoid becoming marginalized. They applied this experience to the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The outcome is that the discussion on the Museum can barely be called a discussion, as it is a monolithic and monotonous expression of admiration. Both the creators and reviewers of the Museum speak in unison, supporting one another's opinion.

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tykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/opinie/20150303/holland-frank-underwood-zostal-bohaterem-naszych-czasow.

11 Eliza Szybowicz presented an outstanding analysis of *Ida* as a disavowal of women's emancipation in communist Poland. See: Eliza Szybowicz, "Wanda nasza siostra," *Czas kultury*, February 20, 2015, accessed May 26, 2015, http://e.czaskultury.pl/felieton/eliza-szybowicz/1864-wanda-nasza-siostra.

Here is a handful of terms used to describe the Museum, uttered by various right-wing, liberal, and left-wing officials, journalists, and commentators. All of these have been used in an unequivocally affirmative context: "a museum of uneasy coexistence,"[12] which "does not ignore difficult topics"[13] and shows "the longstanding mutual permeation of the Jewish and Polish worlds";[14] "emphasizes one thousand years of Poles and Jews living under the same Polish sun,"[15] and "gives an excellent account of our common history – both its most beautiful and difficult moments";[16] a museum that is a "manifestation of life"[17] and does not forget that the Jews treated Poland "as a secure asylum";[18] a museum that expresses "a longing for a lost multiculturality"[19] and provides a "comfort zone, where a discussion on controversial topics […] can be held in an open manner and with the participation of all parties";[20] a museum that "teaches empathy and tolerance for the other,

12 Filip Memches, "Muzeum niełatwego współistnienia," *Rzeczpospolita*, October 29, 2014, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1152782.html.

13 Adam Cissowski, "Tysiąc lat historii Żydów Polskich. Wystawa w Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich otwarta," *TVP.Info*, October 28, 2014, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.tvp.info/17348169/tysiac-lat-historii-zydow-polskich-wystawa-w-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-otwarta.

14 Bronisław Komorowski quoted in "Komorowski: przywrócić pamięć o życiu Żydów w Polsce" *Rzeczpospolita*, October 28, 2014, accessed May 22, 2015, http://beta.rp.pl/article/20141028/KRAJ/141029685.

15 Gabriel Kayzer, "Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich Polin otwarte," *Fronda,* October 28, 2014, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.fronda.pl/a/muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-polin-otwarte,43339.html.

16 Biskup Mieczysław Cisło quoted in "Biskupi zwiedzili Muzeum Żydów Polskich," *Katolicka Agencja Prasowa*, March 12, 2015, accessed May 22, 2015, http://ekai.pl/wydarzenia/ekumenizm/x87122/biskupi-zwiedzili-muzeum-zydow-polskich/.

17 Roman Pawłowski, "Otwiera się interaktywne Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich. Czyli pierwsze muzeum historii Polski," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 27, 2014, accessed May 22, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,16869612,Otwiera_sie_interaktywne_Muzeum_Historii_Zydow_Polskich_.html.

18 Piotr Semka, "Oczekując na wejście do ziemi Izraela," *Życie Warszawy*, October 26, 2014, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.zw.com.pl/artykul/666747.html.

19 Pawłowski, "Otwiera się interaktywne Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich."

20 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett quoted in Antony Polonsky, "List tygodnia: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Wsieci*, September 23, 2013, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.wsieci.pl/list-tygodnia-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-pnews-401.html.

the stranger";[21] "the opening [of which] let another image of Poland emerge than that painted by certain anti-Polish circles."[22]

The story of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews reveals the following picture: there were some strangers who were welcomed with open arms by the Polish nation and the Polish state, in contrast to the rest of the evil world. The strangers liked life in Poland, which received them generously, granting them numerous privileges and ensuring a sense of security. Owing to this Polish hospitality, Poles and Jews lived alongside, yet independent of, one another, but liked, respected, helped, copied, and sometimes quarreled with each other. These quarrels concerned some difficult issues that were then a bone of contention, but today should be the subject of dialogue. And there was also the Armageddon of the Holocaust: an external force that came from abroad and killed the Jews. Now, the Poles miss them. They fondly remember the time when their country was the cradle of multiculturalism and tolerance. Unfortunately, history deprived them of that past. This is precisely the spirit of the speech given by Piotr Zychowicz during the debate "About Polish Jews – Whispering and Shouting," organized by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.[23] Piotr Zychowicz is the author of the book *Pakt Ribbentrop – Beck* (*The Ribbentrop-Beck Pact*), where he postulates that before WWII, Poland should have entered into an alliance with the Third Reich, as it would have protected it from falling into the Soviet zone of influence.

A number of inconsistencies can be spotted in this picture. Let us focus on just one. Speaking about the hospitality Poles apparently extended to the Jews, it is assumed that we are dealing with two entities of unequal status: the host and the visitor. One is at home, owns a certain space, and can choose to make it accessible or not. The other is on someone else's territory, is bound by someone else's rules, and resides in a given space only at the mercy of his host. Another category, that of tolerance, also indicates that the two entities are not equal. Tolerance is the privilege of the majority, after all.[24] Nobody speaks about the Jews living in their

21 Marian Turski, "Muzeum życia," *Polityka*, October 21, 2014, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1596477,1,marian-turski-opowiada-o-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich.read.

22 Kayzer, "Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich Polin otwarte."

23 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, "Relacja wideo z debaty 'O polskich Żydach szeptem i krzykiem: polityka pamięci," accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.polin.pl/pl/wydarzenie/relacja-wideo-z-debaty-o-polskich-zydach-szeptem-i-krzykiem#.

24 See Wendy Brown's *Regulating Aversion*, in particular the chapter "Tolerance as a Discourse of Power": Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion. Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

shtetl who tolerated the different customs of the Poles, albeit with difficulty. Finally, the terms of the "stranger" and "other" when talking about Jews in the descriptions of the Museum, indicate that it was the non-Jew who was "at home," who was "normal" and "ordinary," which means that Jewishness was a stigma in Poland.

These same reports from the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and interviews with the creators of the Museum, however, make references to dialogue, communication, conversation, co-existence, concomitance, mutual relations, complaints, grievances, and attitudes. All these terms paint a picture where Poles and Jews, both as individuals and groups, were equal to one another, equal before the law, had equal rights in the symbolic sphere, and were equally represented. On account of this symmetry, we lose sight of the structurally conditioned minority-majority relationship with all its dynamics – first and foremost, the inherent power, dominance, and violence it implies. This power, dominance, and violence find an excellent illustration in the fact that the term of "over-representation" is seen as justified and accepted when speaking about Jews present in politics, academia, art, and the media. Both in journalistic and academic discourse, it is applied as a descriptive category, especially when used with reference to history.

In Polish discursive practice, symmetry serves the primary purpose of cancelling out anti-Semitism and presenting it as the Polish response to harm suffered at the hands of the Jews. For example, a journalist from a leading Polish newspaper writes that the core exhibition in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews demonstrates that

> Poland's triumphs and defeats were also the triumphs and defeats of the Jews living here. This cannot be denied even by bench ghettos in the interwar period or the considerable representation of persons of Jewish origin in the Stalinist repression system.[25]

A co-creator of the Museum declared in an interview for one of the country's most popular opinion weeklies:

> [T]his millennium has witnessed difficult aspects of coexistence on both sides. […] Around 300,000 Jews out of a community of 3.5 million have survived. There are only slivers of material culture left. We do not avoid difficult topics. We talk about people of Jewish origin among the communist authorities.[26]

25 Filip Memches, "Muzeum niełatwego współistnienia," *Rzeczpospolita*, October 29, 2014, accessed May 22, 2105, http://www4.rp.pl/artykul/1152782-Muzeum-nielatwego-wspolistnienia.html.

26 Joanna Podgórska, interview with Marian Turski, "Marian Turski opowiada o Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich: Muzeum życia," *Polityka*, October 21, 2014, accessed May 22,

Similarly to *Ida*, here we are also dealing with the symmetry of guilt and symmetry of harm: you did this to us, we did this to you. The discourse of the golden mean also employs the symmetry of heroism, encapsulated in the slogan "Warsaw of two uprisings" propagated by the Warsaw Uprising Museum. The logo features a fist, bearing the tattoo of the Star of David next to the Anchor – the emblem of Fighting Poland. The 1943 uprising in the Warsaw ghetto appears as the twin of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, thereby making the Museum of the History of Polish Jews the twin of the Warsaw Uprising Museum. This was emphatically expressed when the beams from two spotlights, one located at each museum, merged in the sky, celebrating the opening of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

As in the case of *Ida*, the main task of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is to protect the image of Poland and the Poles. This task is by no means concealed, quite the opposite. A conservative party politician, Jarosław Sellin, wrote in an ultra-right wing magazine:

> It is going to be one of the most important places shaping the image of Poland in the world. It is thereby the place where Poland's historical policy should be implemented in the most direct manner. […] [The Museum] is largely financed with Polish taxpayers' money. Therefore, it should express Polish goals in the historical policy of the state. […] From the point of view of the Polish state's interests, it is crucial to emphasize those elements of the history of Jews in Poland that contribute to the positive image of our nation and our state.[27]

Antony Polonsky, Chief Historian of the Museum, thanked Sellin for his "valuable and perceptive" remarks on the pages of the same magazine. In his thanks, he exemplified the most mature form of the discourse of symmetry:

> In my opinion, it is a persistent sin of both Polish and Jewish historiography (alongside that of other nations of Central and Eastern Europe) that it is apologetic and tries to show things as better than they actually were. The objective of the Core Exhibition is to avoid apologetics, both Polish and Jewish, and to take an open and self-critical look at all the complex and difficult aspects of the Polish-Jewish past.[28]

The openness and self-criticism the senior historian and internal Museum reviewer calls for are to be expressed through a lack of guiding narration. The illusion of polyphony is achieved by creating successive galleries of the Core Exhibition

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2015, http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1596477,1,marian-turski-opowiada-o-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich.read/.

27 Jarosław Sellin quoted in "Pokazać współistnienie," *Wsieci*, August 29, 2013, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.wsieci.pl/pokazac-wspolistnienie-pnews-324.html.

28 Polonsky, "List tygodnia."

exclusively out of quotations. In "Polinizacja historii" ("Polinization of History"), Konrad Matyjaszek stresses the inconsistency of the declarations made by the creators of the Museum, who on the one hand emphasize that this is a narrative museum, but on the other hand state that the Museum "does not present any superior historical narration" (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett).[29] Matyjaszek notes that the Museum's program and official premise not to deal with anti-Semitism (or "to leave anti-Semitism to anti-Semites" as the Museum Director phrased it) defined its narration

> in opposition to important current historical research. The team opted to get out of the methodological impasse by means of founding the core exhibition of the Museum on an extensive selection of the fragments of written historical sources and attributing them to historical objectivism.[30]

The quotations the exhibition abounds in create an impression of informational chaos. Out-of-context, impressive, emotionally-charged sentences filled with grandiloquent key words ("nation," "people," "Israel," "Poles," "defense") surround the visitors. By this token, spectators feel that they are given the right to put these puzzle pieces together into a picture that they are free to compose and interpret. The Museum of the History of Polish Jews gives them the facts without any additional commentary and thereby gives them the privilege to think of them whatever they want.

The exhibition's guides and their stories are among the keys to introducing some order into this chaos. One can learn from them, for instance, that in the Middle Ages "there were less than 1% of Jews in Poland but they stood out and had connections with the rulers"; that "the Jews were identified by pointy hats"; that "King Casimir was kind to the Jews because he had a Jewish mistress, Esterka"; that the synagogues in eastern Poland's *shtetls* "burned down spontaneously due to lightning strikes or arson"; that "in general, the hierarchs of the Catholic Church and kings opposed the persecution of Jews, but they were not always able to do so effectively"; that "Polish-Jewish relations developed somehow, the Jews working as servants to the Christians and the other way round"; that the

29 Tomasz Łysak, interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Nowe rozumienie autentyczności – o Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich z Barbarą Kirshenblatt-Gimblett rozmawia Tomasz Łysak," *Obieg*, January 24, 2009, accessed November 15, 2015, http://www.obieg.pl/rozmowy/6956.

30 Konrad Matyjaszek, "Polinizacja historii. O wystawie stałej Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Kultura Liberalna*, March 24, 2015, accessed November 15, 2015, http://kulturaliberalna.pl/2015/03/24/konrad-matyjaszek-mhzp-wystawa-stala-recenzja/.

Jews' poverty was caused by "their enormous population growth"; that if the Jews could not work in manufacturing plants, it was because "they did not want to work on Saturdays, and Sunday was the only free day in the plants"; that anti-Semitism was caused by "a sense of threat, aversion, fear, and competition"; that "multiculturality generated numerous tensions in Poland"; that the universities applied the *numerus clausus* (that is, the principle of limiting the number of Jewish students at Polish universities in the interwar period) believing that they thus "protected Jewish students from the violence of hit squads." In the gallery dedicated to the Holocaust, our guide gave a long talk about the extermination of the Polish population. She repeated three times that from 1941 on, helping Jews was punishable by death. To conform to the symmetry principle, she also said that "the majority of Poles remained indifferent to the Holocaust and were merely 'witnesses.' But there were also two other groups: those who took advantage of the wrongs done to the Jews, and those who helped them, putting their own lives at risk." At the end of our tour, we learned that what devastated Jewish life was post-war Stalinism.[31]

We are purposefully quoting the guides' single sentences as they merely utter them, without any commentary. Their narration reflects the logic that reverses causes and effects. Why was there anti-Semitism? Because people feared the Jews. Why were the Jews not employed by Polish plant owners? Because the Jews did not want to work on Saturdays. Why was the bench ghetto introduced? To protect Jews from the anti-Semitic accusation that there were too many of them. Anti-Semitic violence is present in this tale as an exception, the initiative of ignorant people as contrasted with the enlightened elites, or a response to how the Jews behaved.

The Core Exhibition at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is crowned by a movie showing the revival of Jewish culture in Poland. It tells us that, contrary to the common belief that Poland is an anti-Semitic country, no other country has initiated so many campaigns to counter anti-Semitism. Do you need proof? Here we have Rafał Betlejewski's campaign of painting "I miss you, Jews" on city walls; there is a mayor removing anti-Semitic graffiti, young Poles are restoring Jewish cemeteries, Jewish music is increasingly popular, the Makabi sports club

31 When we presented an abbreviated version of this text at the Princeton Polish-Jewish Studies Workshop (April 18–19, 2015) the Director of the Museum demanded that we provide the personal details of the guides quoted. We are not going to reveal them, as it is not our intention to stigmatize individuals, let alone to inform on the Museum's employees. We treat the voices of the guides as those of the institution they work for, which trains them and is represented by them.

has been reactivated; there is a wealth of festivals of Jewish culture, and Jewish cuisine has become fashionable. The movie starts with pictures taken during the protests staged by the Solidarity movement in the 1980s, accompanied by the Polish Anthem. The message is that the political transformation marked a new beginning for Jewish life in Poland. This is a new chapter, so we can close the former one. We know the history, including its most difficult episodes. Poles have learned, come to terms with, and worked on their history like no other nation in this part of Europe. They could not do so earlier, because Poland's communist authorities blocked access to knowledge about the Jews and the Holocaust and – by the same token – blocked all mourning and commemoration. Now, we have a new beginning.

Admiring *Ida* and visiting the Museum are currently in good taste and ensure participation in the legitimate (mainstream) culture. At present, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the target of pilgrimages from all over the country; to get tickets for a guided tour, you have to book six months in advance. Thanks to the Museum, its visitors can feel like good hosts. The Museum gives visitors an opportunity to fall into a narcissistic ecstasy over themselves and elevate themselves as those who approve of the Jews to the extent of visiting a museum of the history of Polish Jews, and even of missing the Jews, missing Polin. The Museum presents a tale of tolerant, open, and hospitable Poles who created a paradise for the Jews. The Museum instills this belief in Polish visitors, who congratulate themselves, and reproduces the discourse of the symmetry of Polish and Jewish wrongs, guilt, suffering, and heroism, thereby succumbing to the hegemonic discourse of contemporary Poland, where the history of Poland is the history of the Poles' good name. The Museum's location in the ghetto reinforces the feeling of the fairytale-like, fictitious narration that does not take into account the surrounding reality which can be seen through the glass walls of the Museum: apartment blocks erected on a site where there have been no exhumations.

The Rescued to the Rescuers

With regards to the Memorial to Righteous Gentiles, this same location is of key importance. This paper is not the place to conduct a thorough analysis of the various standpoints that came to light when discussing the initiative of the memorial. The discussion was started by the text "Cierpienie wymaga ciszy i przestrzeni" ("Suffering Calls for Silence and Space") by Barbara Engelking, published to

celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.[32] This was the first of a series of public protests against the idea of locating the memorial in the Warsaw ghetto. The authors of the letters and appeals that followed represented a variety of entities and institutions and emphasized that the place, time, functions, and meaning of the memorial were inappropriate. Maintaining the chronological order of public protests, it is worth mentioning the open letter of the Polish Center of Holocaust Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów PAN);[33] the appeal from representatives of Jewish organizations in Poland (Stowarzyszenie Drugie Pokolenie – Potomkowie Ocalałych z Holokaustu, Żydowska Ogólnopolska Organizacja Młodzieżowa, Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska w Warszawie, Stowarzyszenie Żydowski Instytut Historyczny);[34] the open letter to the Memorial's Construction Committee written by Helena Datner, Elżbieta Janicka, and Bożena Keff, which was subsequently signed by several hundred people;[35] the appeal of writers and poets requesting another location for the memorial;[36] and press publications by Jan Grabowski,[37]

32 See: Barbara Engelking, "Getto, powstanie, pomnik Sprawiedliwych. Cierpienie wymaga ciszy i przestrzeni," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 4, 2013, accessed May 22, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,13673789,Getto__powstanie__pomnik_Sprawiedliwych__Cierpienie.html.

33 See: "List otwarty w sprawie lokalizacji pomnika Sprawiedliwych Polaków wystosowany przez środowisko Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów," *Otwarta Rzeczpospolita,* April 4, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.otwarta.org/list-otwarty-w-sprawie-lokalizacji-pomnika-sprawiedliwych-polakow-srodowiska-centrum-badan-nad-zaglada-zydow/.

34 See: "List przedstawicieli organizacji żydowskich w sprawie lokalizacji Pomnika Sprawiedliwych," *Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska w Warszawie*, April 9, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/pl/aktualnosci/419-list-w-sprawie-pomnika-sprawiedliwych.

35 See: "Nie budujmy Pomnika Sprawiedliwych obok Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Krytyka Polityczna*, April 29, 2014, accessed May 26, 2016, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/opinie/20140327/nie-budujmy-pomnika-sprawiedliwych-obok-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich.

36 See: "Pisarze i Poeci Popierają Strefę Pamięci," *Facebook*, April 6, 2015, accessed May 26, 2015, https://m.facebook.com/notes/czy-upami%C4%99tni%C4%87-sprawiedliwych-na-terenie-by%C5%82ego-getta/pisarze-i-poeci-popieraj%C4%85-stref%C4%99-pami%C4%99ci-writers-and-poets-support-the-zone-of-m/1591487997761903/.

37 See: Jan Grabowski, "W sprawie Zagłady Polska gola!," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 25, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,137926,15859357,W_sprawie_Zaglady_Polska_gola_.html.

Paula Sawicka,[38] Kinga Dunin,[39] the above-mentioned authors of the letter to the Committee,[40] and Jan T. Gross.[41]

All these appeals have not changed the course of events, and the decision as to where to locate the memorial is likely to be made soon, therefore this polyphony can be considered an isolated expression of opinions that was doomed to lose when confronted by the ideology of Polish grandeur. This ideology was additionally supported by institutions of the state, which spared no money or authority, instrumentally using the Righteous for the purposes of their politics of image. Its effectiveness, which is its most important aspect in the context of the rule of the golden mean, is rooted in an alliance identified by Jan Grabowski, who stated:

> [I]t is both astounding and symptomatic that the issue of commemorating the Poles who rescued the Jews (CPRJ) creates a narrow bridge where the representatives of the left-wing, the center, the right, and extreme right meet in unison (albeit for various reasons). They can even be seen as being joined by loyal Jews. It can be said that the CPRJ is the only forum of national agreement in present-day Poland.[42]

Let us take a look at how the opinions that questioned the foundations of the memorial were invalidated by this agreement across political divisions, as discussed by Grabowski.

As in the case of *Ida*, critics of the monument's proposed location were labeled radical. Piotr Zychowicz starts his article with the words: "[a] group of radicals declared war against the Memorial to the Poles Rescuing the Jews," and continues to specify who he has in mind: "the Jewish radical left wingers [who] are publicly humiliating those Polish Jews who dared come up with the idea of building a memorial to the Poles Rescuing the Jews in the vicinity of the Museum of the

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38 See: Paula Sawicka, accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.otwarta.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Kilka-uwag-po-wys%C5%82uchaniu-rozmowy-Konstantego-Geberta-i-Bo%C5%BCeny-Keff-http.pdf.

39 See: Kinga Dunin, "Postawić na cudzym," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 6, 2015, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/politykaekstra/1,137933,15912729,Postawic_na_cudzym.html.

40 See: Elżbieta Janicka, Helena Datner, and Bożena Keff, "Polska panika moralna. Czy upamiętnić Sprawiedliwych koło Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 30, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,137948,16065323,Polska_panika_moralna__Czy_upamietnic_Sprawiedliwych.html.

41 See: Jan T. Gross, "Polski problem żydowski," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 17, 2015, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,143015,17227696,Polski_problem_zydowski__GROSS_.html.

42 Grabowski, "W sprawie Zagłady Polska gola!."

History of Polish Jews in Warsaw."[43] Whereas Piotr Zychowicz does not mention any names, Adam Michnik identifies a Jewish radical by his full name. He indicates Jan T. Gross, who made a critical statement concerning the initiative to build the memorial. Gross expressed his protest in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in an article which is nearly entirely devoted to the passivity of the Catholic Church in the face of the Holocaust and to the structures of the Polish Underground State as the main source of rules and legal regulations during the German occupation.[44] The Editor-in-Chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Michnik, took it upon himself to disarm Gross' thesis, adopting a patronizing attitude in an article published on the next page: "[m]y close friend is a ruthless and witty writer expressing radical opinions. They are frequently excessively radical, and therefore – lopsided. The French say, after all, that a song is all about melody. And hence our dispute. A dispute over melody…"[45] Michnik believes that Gross "paints his picture in a single, black, color," overlooks significant motifs, and loses sight of the context, and therefore he juxtaposes Gross' views with the balanced judgments of Władysław Bartoszewski, Teresa Prekerowa, and Jacek Bocheński. In Adam Michnik's opinion, Gross' standpoint is determined by the fact that "Gross looks at those times through 'Jewish glasses,'" albeit he is generously not refused the right to do so. Michnik notes, however that these glasses "show a picture that cannot be clearly seen through Polish glasses. That is what Jewish testimonies were like: to a great extent, the persecuted and tracked Jews saw racketeers in the streets rather than the soldiers of the Polish Underground Army [AK] or the Righteous."[46]

Let us imagine that this text had been published in *Nasz Dziennik* by another author. It does not call for a great stretch of the imagination. There was an actual barrage of similar statements and accusations against Jan T. Gross, and disparagements of his findings, published by the Catholic-nationalist press regarding the massacre in Jedwabne. Having written *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* and co-authored *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, Gross is likely to have become accustomed to being accused of "losing sight of context," "over-interpreting," "forming hasty judgments," "exaggerating,"

43 Piotr Zychowicz, "Zakazani Sprawiedliwi," *DoRzeczy,* May 16, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://dorzeczy.pl/id,3271/Zakazani-Sprawiedliwi.html.

44 Gross, "Polski problem żydowski."

45 Adam Michnik, "Dobrzy Polacy patrzą na getto (komentarz Adama Michnika)," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 17, 2015, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,143015,17227813,Dobrzy_Polacy_patrza_na_getto__KOMENTARZ_ADAMA_MICHNIKA_.html.

46 Ibid.

and "radicalizing" by taking a "Jewish perspective." What is intriguing is that the Editor-in-Chief of the leading liberal daily of nationwide circulation legitimized this line of reasoning. Apparently, such judgments do not raise objections, or even surprise, when they emerge in the mainstream of public discourse. There is more to it: by summoning such arguments, *Gazeta Wyborcza* is positioning itself as a voice of the center, from where it patronizingly instructs the Jewish radical. "Let us repeat," Adam Michnik concludes, "Jan Tomasz Gross is an important writer. I think that he is as distinguished as he is stubborn. I do not believe I could convince him. But I want to be remembered for having tried to do so."[47]

Resorting to a "Jewish voice," other than the voice of radicals, was an important discursive strategy when building the consensus regarding the location of the Memorial to Righteous Gentiles, contributing to silencing its opponents. It could repeatedly be heard in the discussion that the memorial that was to be erected near the Museum of the History of Polish Jews was an expression of Jewish gratitude. The initiative to build the memorial was named "The Rescued to the Rescuers" by the Memory and Future Foundation. Criticism was refuted by admonishing that nobody has the right to forbid the Jews from fulfilling the needs of their hearts by supporting the memorial, which was financed by them, as was duly noted. The image of "Jewish gratitude" was to counterbalance "Jewish ingratitude," drawn from the repertoire of anti-Semitic clichés. Following the logic of domination, the initiators of the memorial are trying to prove that they are different from the image painted by anti-Semites. Coupled with the rule of the golden mean this logic has produced a situation where only those Jews who have no problem with the location of the memorial are considered legitimate participants in the discussion. Dissenting Polish-Jewish voices, representing several Jewish organizations, are ignored.[48]

It is true, however, that public criticism of the memorial initiative voiced by Polish Jews was rare. As the former Director of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews Jerzy Halbersztadt declared in an interview with Katarzyna Markusz:

> The letter [of Jewish organizations] stressed the great importance of the commemoration of the Righteous, but called for a different location. Apart from that, however, there were very few voices coming from the Jews. I see it as a weakness and manifestation of a certain servility, which prevents people from voicing their opinions on important issues,

47 Ibid.

48 Among the protesting organizations were: the Center for Holocaust Research, the Jewish Historical Institute, the Jewish Community of Warsaw, the "Second Generation" Association, the Polish Jewish Youth Organization, et al.

> even when the discussion takes place in the public sphere. I hold it against many persons who express their criticism in private, while taking great care to remain silent in public.[49]

The issue of who was excluded from the discussion was also addressed by the President of the Polish Jewish Youth Organization (Żydowska Ogólnopolska Organizacja Młodzieżowa, ZOOM), Jan Śpiewak, as quoted by *Rzeczpospolita*: "Mr. Rolat[50] is not connected with Jewish circles in Poland and he did not consult us with regards to the location. We are treated instrumentally, which we find appalling."[51] What Jan Śpiewak finds appalling and Jerzy Halbersztadt identifies as servility derives from the function the "Jewish voice" plays in discussions of Polish-Jewish matters. As Elżbieta Janicka put it:

> The "Jewish voice" becomes conclusive if it corroborates the majority perspective. Other voices, whether identified as Jewish or not, are deemed invalid if they diverge from the majority standpoint. More than that – they can be simply ignored. This is the kind of violence framing the ongoing debate. As long as this framework remains invisible, the debate can be regarded as pluralistic and uninhibited.[52]

Within the framework of such a "pluralistic and uninhibited" debate, opponents of placing the memorial in the Muranów district of Warsaw could learn that they were exaggerating, overstating, misunderstanding something, or simply talking about a different memorial. Dariusz Stola has said: "[t]his memorial raises controversies I sometimes cannot understand. It seems to me that the critics of this idea are criticizing some other plan."[53] Incidentally, this must be the Director of the Museum's favorite figure of speech to pacify those with divergent opinions. We experienced this ourselves when we presented our interpretation of the Core Exhibition of the Museum at a conference organized at Princeton University in

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49 Katarzyna Markusz, interview with Jerzy Halbersztadt, "Wojna pamięci," accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.jewish.org.pl/index.php/he/opinie-komentarze-mainmenu-62/7009-wojna-pamici.html.

50 Zbigniew Rolat is one of the initiators of the memorial in question.

51 Jan Śpiewak quoted in Janina Blikowska, "Dwa pomniki dla Sprawiedliwych," *Rzeczpospolita*, November 20, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1066085-Dwa-pomniki-dla-Sprawiedliwych.html.

52 Michał Siermiński, interview with Elżbieta Janicka, "Zderzenie cywilizacji," *lewica.pl*, August 20, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=29760&druk=1.

53 Tomasz Urzykowski, interview with Dariusz Stola, "Montują wystawę główną w Muzeum Żydów. Zdążą?," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 19, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34889,16446025,Montuja_wystawe_glowna_w_Muzeum_Zydow__Zdaza___ROZMOWA_.html.

2015. In response, Dariusz Stola told us that we either had very vivid imaginations or were talking about another exhibition in another museum. He then generously offered us free entry tickets.

As has already been said, the issue of whether the Memorial to Righteous Gentiles will be situated in the district of Muranów in Warsaw is of key importance to both the advocates of this location and its critics. Next to the gates of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, next to Karski's Bench and Irena Sendler Avenue, the memorial assumes particular importance and can act as a piece of evidence that the Jews are not ungrateful whatsoever; that the Poles helped the Jews during the Holocaust; that such help was widespread; that the ghetto inhabitants did not die in isolation; that the Polish hospitality celebrated by the Museum did not expire during that war, but actually contributed to the rescue of numerous Jews in need. As Zbigniew Rolat, one of the initiators of the memorial, stated:

> A memorial to commemorate the Poles who rescued the Jews during the occupation has long been my dream. I believe that it should not be funded by the Polish state nor any Polish city. The initiative and money should come from Jewish circles. I can imagine no better place for such a memorial than the square around the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. A symbolic space is created there, with the Monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto, Jan Karski's monument, and the bust of Willy Brandt. Locating the memorial there will ensure that numerous visitors to the Museum are going to see it.[54]

He is joined by another Polish scholar, alongside Dariusz Stola, who took it upon himself to implement Polish historical policy, the Director of the Museum of World War II, Paweł Machcewicz:

> The core of the dispute concerns the location of such a memorial and whether it should stand next to the Museum in the Warsaw ghetto, or outside the ghetto. I am for the former. Any other location will lead to the marginalization of the commemoration of the Righteous. Their memorial would become one of dozens of monuments in Warsaw that most people do not pay attention to.[55]

The Jewish voice that can be accepted by the Polish majority, as it is replete with Polish patriotism and gratitude for the generous help offered by Poles, is expressed by Konstanty Gebert:

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54 Zbigniew Rolat quoted in Katarzyna Markusz, "Wojna pomników," accessed May 26, 2015, http://www.jewish.org.pl/index.php/opinie-komentarze-mainmenu-62/5731-wojna-pomnikow.html.

55 Paweł Machcewicz, "Gdzie ma stanąć pomnik. Sprawiedliwi poza naszymi sporami," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 10, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,13881222,Gdzie_ma_stanac_pomnik__Sprawiedliwi_poza_naszymi.html.

> If there is no room there [near the Museum] to commemorate all these heroes who rescued the Jews within the framework of Żegota and outside it, it will mean the triumph of national negligence. I would feel insulted by this absence, both as a Jew and a Pole. Of course, we need to refrain from the easy triumphalism of memory, which the team of the Center [the Polish Center of Holocaust Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences – AZ] is justifiably warning against, and to ensure the appropriate artistic form and historical message of the memorial. One cannot ignore the didactic aspect here, though. The square, and the Museum located there, are going to be visited by a lot of people. The people from Poland, who – hopefully – usually realize that Poles are the largest group of the Righteous recognized by Yad Vashem, would not understand why there is no memorial there.[56]

The above-quoted statements emphasizing the visibility and impact of the memorial do not exhaustively account for all the functions ascribed to it. The journalists of the Catholic-nationalistic press see the memorial as a response to accusations that Poles participated in the Holocaust and – on a broader scale – are anti-Semites. The memorial is likely to overshadow such accusations. "What will we be left with if we give up saying that 'there were also upstanding Poles?' We can only hang our heads and passively accept the enormous nonsense in the books by Gross and in *Aftermath*."[57]

Social psychologist Michał Bilewicz also finds the idea of placing the Memorial to Righteous Gentiles in Muranów excellent. As Bilewicz writes about the miracles that the Righteous are able to achieve:

> Historical topics are true explosives that make it impossible for Polish and Jewish youth to come to an agreement. The Polish approach this topic in a defensive manner, expecting that they will soon be held accountable for the past of their nation, which they do not have any influence over whatsoever. Young Israelis and American Jews ask awkward questions – about everyday life in the great cemetery, as they see Poland, about the concrete behavior and standpoints of our grandparents during the occupation. It was only the emergence of the Righteous that allowed these mines to be disarmed. Both sides of the debate realized how different people's behavior was during the occupation – that among passivity and aversion there emerged heroes. Leaving such meetings, young Jews would open up to the present Poland and the entire non-Jewish world, while Poles would begin to understand the Jewish narration of the past.[58]

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56 Dawid Warszawski, "Miejsce Sprawiedliwych jest obok powstańców," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 9, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,13700619,Miejsce_Sprawiedliwych_jest_obok_powstancow.html.

57 Piotr Gociek, "Szlachetni? Broń Panie Boże!," *Do Rzeczy,* April 19, 2013, accessed May 26, 2015, http://dorzeczy.pl/id,634/Szlachetni-Bron-Panie-Boze.html.

58 Michał Bilewicz, "Sprawiedliwy wciąż czyni cuda," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 30, 2014, accessed May 26, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,137948,16065356,Sprawiedliwy_wciaz_czyni_cuda.html.

He concludes, therefore, that the Memorial to Righteous Gentiles, or rather the entire "park of heroic memories," stands a chance of bringing about the reconciliation of Poles, Jews, Germans, and "all those who want to commemorate the resistance of the few against the passivity of the others."[59]

Bilewicz's statement provides yet another example of the discourse of symmetry. The social and historical positioning of the above-mentioned entities, including cultural context and cultural legitimization, are lost from sight. The Polish dominant discourse is also lost from sight, along with its assumption that the anti-Polish attitudes allegedly raging in the West serve the purpose of invalidating the meaning and range of Polish anti-Semitism. The asocial discourse of individualism presents anti-Semitism as the property of individuals who are autonomous when choosing their beliefs, rather than the element of culture that this culture reproduces. All that is done in order to build mutual friendship, as if this friendship were a virtue in itself, a value that we have all accepted even if achieving it means hiding some skeletons in the closet. Skeletons are somewhat discomfiting, after all, while the comfort of the Poles is what Bilewicz cares about. No wonder, then, that he joined the supporters of the Memorial to Righteous Gentiles, which is definitely going to improve that sense of comfort with regards to Polish-Jewish relations, one that has been somewhat disturbed by the "Jewish radicals."

Although it was expressed in different language, the hope that the Polish state of mind could be improved also laid the foundation for another monument commemorating the Poles who rescued the Jews, to be erected in Grzybowski Square, next to the Church of All Saints. There was no discussion whatsoever with regards to this initiative. The outcome of the contest for the memorial's design has already been decided. The names of 10,000 Polish Righteous Gentiles, to be engraved on a stone ribbon running around the church, are being vigorously sought. This search faces certain difficulties, as there are only 6,532 recorded Righteous from Poland, but the Polish state is about to overcome this obstacle. The design of the memorial provides some free room to accommodate new names that can be systematically added. The committee to erect the memorial was established at the time of the discussion around Jedwabne. It was headed by a prominent opponent of the author of *Neighbors*, Tomasz Strzembosz. The origins of the memorial date back to the debate on Jedwabne or, more precisely, to the backlash against *Neighbors*. Both memorials to the Righteous are therefore going to stand "in opposition": in opposition to the history of Polish anti-Semitism and to research into its numerous instances. The difference is that, on account of the "Jewish voices," the Memorial

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59 Ibid.

to Righteous Gentiles in Muranów has been declared an expression of agreement, moderation, and compromise. The other memorial is more of a "Catholic and national" memorial that has been passed over in silence. In conformity with the rule of the golden mean one might like to call it extremist. This, however, would be a rash generalization. After all, this memorial was approved and supported by state institutions: the Warsaw City Council and the Council for the Protection of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom. Therefore, it appears that the critics of both monuments stand alone, cornered into being radicals by the discourse of the golden mean.

Conclusion

Owing to the rule of the golden mean, Polish public discourse produces knowledge of "Jewish issues," or rather a lack of knowledge thereof, which allows us to feel good about ourselves, and which is governed by the principle of symmetry. There were good Poles and there were bad Poles; there were good Jews and there were bad Jews. The guilt is mutual, and the grievances are too, because the truth lies in the middle. The rule of the golden mean is like the goddess of justice, Themis, wielding the power to decide whose voices in the debate are legitimate. Speaking in this manner, one can count on being taken seriously and gaining access to public debate. This access is refused to those labeled as extremist. The rule of the golden mean determines the limits of what statements are legitimate. Participants in debates who want to fall within these limits must not go beyond the truisms of the Polish public realm, nor infringe on them in any manner. Falling within these limits – or, to be more precise being in the very center, the "golden mean" of the area they delineate – is the stake of this game. It allows one to be heard, make a point, be present, and even form opinions. In order to speak with this voice, one has to be consistent in the implementation of the posthumous inclusion of Jews in an idyllic picture, painted by a Polish majority, where Poles and Jews lived together, an idyll that was interrupted by an alien force, to everyone's despair.

Translated from Polish by Katarzyna Matschi

Elżbieta Janicka

The Embassy of Poland in Poland: The Polin Myth in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews as Narrative Pattern and Model of Minority-Majority Relations

> In those words – alternative visions – you have in condensed form what I believe is the essence of a useful museum. For as I see it, that museum is best that helps to free a society from the tyranny of a redundant and conventional vision – that is to say, from the tyranny of the present. […] A museum, then, must be an argument with its society. […] A good museum always will direct attention to what is difficult and even painful to contemplate. Therefore, those who strive to create such museums must proceed without assurances that what they do will be appreciated.
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> – Neil Postman, "Museum as dialogue" (1990)[1]

Warsaw, Poland. 70 years later. A "Museum of Life" on the site of death. What is going on within the area where the Holocaust took place and which, until recently, was considered an icon of the Holocaust? I am referring here to the square, formerly filled in with a void – if not with the Void – which has now become a site loaded – if not overloaded – with other symbolic messages.[2] I propose to look at the space around the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the design of the building and its content – within their mutual interactions – as a text of culture, a kind of spatial-discursive production. What narrative stems from it? What is at stake in this narrative?

1 Neil Postman, "Museum as Dialogue," in *Museum Provision and Professionalism*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (New York: Routledge, 1994), 70. Originally published as Neil Postman, "Museum as Dialogue," *Museum News* 69: 5 (1990): 55–58.

2 I am dealing here with the site of the former Warsaw ghetto, where in April 1943 the first uprising against the Third Reich in German-occupied Europe broke out. During the Jewish uprising and after its suppression, the Germans razed the ghetto to the ground. After the war, housing was built in the exact same place where the remains of the murdered Jewish insurgents and civilians still rest. As a result of wartime devastation and postwar construction, a square was created on the site of the formerly densely built-up area.

De-Holocaustization?

For years, the only symbolic center in this place with no name was the 1948 Monument to the Fighters and Martyrs of the Ghetto, designed by Natan Rapoport and Leon Marek Suzin. Facing the Monument now stands the 2013 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ), designed by Rainer Mahlamäki. But there are also ten other, additional memorials. They encircle the Monument and the Museum. Three of them are devoted to the Ghetto Uprising. One identifies the Germans as the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Six emphasize efforts by both Polish society and the Polish Underground State to help the Jews – at the risk of the helpers' own lives – without any other mention of the context.

The message emanating from the content as well as the proportion of commemorations is clear: Polish solidarity with the Jews was a fact and it stood the test of terror and death brought about by the Germans. A few and isolated exceptions notwithstanding, such a version of events is drastically different from the actual facts.[3] Hence, the way this kind of commemorations materialize is characterized by the dynamics of an obsessive-compulsive disorder. I am referring here to the common conviction that there are never enough monuments to the "Polish Righteous." I am also referring to a plan to erect in this very place an additional monument to the "Polish Righteous" – one of two new monuments that are going to be built on the site of the former ghetto.

In other words, the present-day space around the Monument and the Museum is a manifestation of the narrative pattern characteristic of the dominant Polish narrative of the Holocaust. It has been an integral part of the Polish historical policy at least since the early 1960s, equally under the People's Republic of Poland as under the independent Third Republic of Poland.[4] Referring to Manfred Garstenfeld's reflections, Jan Grabowski termed this phenomenon the "de-Judaization of the Holocaust."[5] Instead, I would suggest here the category of

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3 See: Elżbieta Janicka, "The Square of Polish Innocence: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and its symbolic topography," *East European Jewish Affairs* 45: 2–3 (2015): 200–214, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501674.2015.1059246.

4 See: Dariusz Libionka, "Polskie piśmiennictwo na temat zorganizowanej i indywidualnej pomocy Żydom (1945–2008)," *Zagłada Żydów* 4 (2008): 17–80.

5 See Jan Grabowski's chapter in this volume, "The Holocaust as a Polish Problem." Grabowski refers to: Manfred Garstenfeld, *The Abuse of Holocaust Memory: Distortions and Responses*, foreword by Abraham H. Foxman (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Institute for Global Jewish Affairs, Anti-Defamation League, 2009). A number of authors have written about de-Judaization as one of the ways of preempting the Holocaust. See, for instance: Lawrence L. Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*

"de-Holocaustization," referring to the practice of removing the essence of the Holocaust from the narrative of the Holocaust. This is even more the case in today's Poland given the fact that the de-Holocaustization of the Holocaust goes hand in hand with the Holocaustization of the history of the Polish majority.[6]

The MHPJ's building was erected on the site of the final headquarters of the Warsaw Judenrat. Here ran Zamenhof Street, along which 300,000 Warsaw Jews were driven to the Umschlagplatz. On this site, the Jewish uprising took place. Later on, mass executions were also carried out there. "The square plan of the new building is in straight proportion with the front existing yard of the Memorial."[7] The Monument and the Museum are two structures referring to Pesach, two competing Haggadot based on an antithetic understanding of the Polish context. On the one hand, we have the Pesach of 1943 in flames, in loneliness, in the shadow of the Christian topos of the Crucifixion and Christian blood libels, immanent in the Easter narrative of the Resurrection. On the other hand, we have the Pesach of the Book of Exodus – the feast of liberation, the feast of unleavened bread (*Chag HaMatzot*), the feast of the parting of the Red Sea. The hall of the Museum symbolizes a life-giving sea cleft. It runs from east to west, representing a kind of correction to the former northwestern course of Zamenhof Street. So, what we have underneath is the *Himmelweg* (way to heaven) – immersed in semi-darkness, deprived of its name. What we have on top is a kind of glamorous Sunset Boulevard with a wide view of greenery, air, and light.

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 1–22; Alvin Hirsch Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). On the attempt to overcome the Holocaust by means of the figure of the Righteous, see: Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999). In the Polish context, the symbolic interest of believers in the "American dream" about the Holocaust coincides with self-image interests of the defenders of the reputation of Poland and the Poles.

6 See: Elżbieta Janicka, "Holocaustization," trans. Agnieszka Graff, in *Polish and Hebrew Literature and National Identity*, ed. Alina Molisak and Shoshana Ronen (Warsaw: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2010), 275–290; Elżbieta Janicka, "Memory and Identity in the Former Warsaw Ghetto Area," trans. Joanna Dziubińska, *Herito* 4 (2013): 66–81; Elżbieta Janicka, "Zamiast negacjonizmu. Topografia symboliczna terenu dawnego getta warszawskiego a narracje o Zagładzie," *Zagłada Żydów* 10 (2014): 209–256.

7 Declaration by architect Rainer Mahlamäki displayed at the temporary exhibition: "Jak zrobić muzeum?/How to make a museum?," POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw (October 24, 2014–February 2, 2015). The temporary exhibition was advertised as "an event accompanying the great opening of the core exhibition of the POLIN MHPJ". Original translation. Photograph in the author's personal collection.

Here, the name of the Red Sea is Polin. The facade of the building is made out of glass plates with the inscription "Polin" repeated in countless numbers in Polish and Hebrew. The Red Sea Polin is a protective figure, providing insulation from the enemy, enabling survival and crossing dry-shod and unscathed to Canaan, the land of milk and honey. Thanks to the goodwill of the Red Sea, the people of Israel were able to return home, to their place. The Red Sea is a figure of mercy and transit. And because we are talking here about transit, it may come as no surprise that we are looking through the "window of life" at a Poland of about 40 million citizens where 8,000 Jews live – as many as the French.

The establishment of the figure of Red Sea Polin runs opposite to the efforts the local culture undertakes – outside the margins of social legitimacy – in order to face the history of Polish Jews. The architectural representation contrasts with one of the most powerful images in Polish poetry concerning the Holocaust, namely the image of the Red Sea. Tadeusz Różewicz's poem "Chaskiel" describes Chaskiel's search for a hideout that would protect him from death, which after all was not unavoidable. When all possible options fail, the Red Sea ends his torment. This time, however – in an act of grace – it does not open up. It closes around the hero, hiding him in its hospitable interior. This is the Red Sea of Jewish blood. Here, the Jews do not escape anywhere, just as they did not escape from the surroundings of the Museum, where their unburied corpses remain to this day. The image of the Red Sea of Jewish blood depicted by Różewicz will always be the invisible reverse of the redemptive narrative of the history of Polish Jews with the Red Sea Polin as its central figure.

I leave aside the question of why the core exhibition is located in the dark basement of this big building advertised as "full of light" and what the symbolic consequences of this are. (At the very least, it looks like a visualization of the paternalistic platitude: "We did take Jews into our home, but we made them live in the cellar.")[8] Instead, I want to reflect on the Forest Gallery. The Forest Gallery is a kind of sluice gate through which we enter the core exhibition. The myth of the reception of the Jews into Poland, dressed up in Shmuel Yosef Agnon's words, is here presented uncritically. For the Polish visitor, it may bring the paintings of Artur Grottger and Jan Matejko to mind. On the screens, however – alongside

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8 Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto," in *Przeciw antysemityzmowi 1936–2009*, ed. Adam Michnik (Cracow: Universitas, 2010), 1087. The text was originally published as: Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2 (January 11, 1987): 1, 4. For an English translation, see: Jan Błoński, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," in *"My Brother's Keeper"? Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, ed. Anthony Polonsky (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), 34–52. The quotation is from page 44.

the text – an image is displayed. We know this image by heart – from our own experience and from films[9] – as an icon of the Holocaust. As in the case of the figure of the Red Sea what we have here is an attractive obverse, which lets its macabre reverse show through.

The forest is an emblematic figure of the Holocaust in its broad definition: both in the sense of the German process of industrial extermination and of what we nowadays call "the margins of the Holocaust." The latter refers to the attitudes and behavior of the majority societies towards the Jews. In the Polish context, the forest then denotes the period called *Judenjagd* – hunt for the Jews – which claimed 200,000 victims, the majority of whom are still scattered throughout backyard gardens, fields, meadows, and forests in particular. At this point, the fight for the signifier repeats itself. It is de facto a fight against the signified. Given that the signified, the Holocaust, is impossible to do away with (crime prevention cannot be instituted ex post), one can at least attempt to preempt it on the level of cultural representation. In a symbolic sense, the MHPJ is like a sarcophagus made of concrete, the kind that is used to cover the radioactive remains of nuclear reactors in disaster areas – dead zones.

The exterior, design, and content of the building are organized around a myth – one and the same, essentially. The Jews are saved from imminent and certain death by – in succession: Poland as the state and society of the Righteous among the Nations, Poland as the Red Sea, Poland as the forest – the Polish soil innately loving Jews ever since. This myth has also been inscribed into the identity of the institution as a result of the change of its name and logotype.[10] Such is the context of the core exhibition. This is not only an act of placing

9 This applies to both documentary and feature films. Among documentaries, the most memorable are *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann (1985), *Miejsce urodzenia* (*Birthplace*) by Paweł Łoziński (1992) and *Shtetl* by Marian Marzyński (1996). Feature films include: *Naganiacz* (*Beater*) by Ewa Petelska and Czesław Petelski (1963), *Jeszcze tylko ten las* (*Just Beyond This Forest*) by Jan Łomnicki (1991), *W ciemności* (*In Darkness*) by Agnieszka Holland (2011), *Pokłosie* (*Aftermath*) by Władysław Pasikowski (2012), *Ida* by Paweł Pawlikowski (2013), *Ziarno prawdy* (*A Grain of Truth*) by Borys Lankosz (2015) and *Klezmer* by Piotr Chrzan (2015).

10 "A new logo, created by PZL agency was approved in January 2013. It combines the Polish and Hebrew letter P, which begins the word 'Polin' – referring to the legend about the coming of the Jews to Poland. The word 'Polin' was included in the logo and in the museum's official name in September 2014. The blue-turquoise alludes to the colors of the building." The quotation is drawn from a chart featured in the exhibition: "Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?" Photograph in the author's personal collection.

facts and myths in the same space. This is an act of placing facts in a triple encirclement, in a triple bracket of myth. This results in the establishment of a conceptual and phantasmatic framework, which determines the perception and the space for mental and emotional maneuver. The visitor is placed in a field of emotions connected with the categories of guest and host, pity and gratitude. In this language, one cannot speak of historical, economic, political, and religious concreteness. In such a configuration, an analytical-critical reflection turns out to be an act of ingratitude. The same goes for the demand for equal rights that in this context would produce the impression that an open-hearted welcome is met with a clenched fist. What does this look like upon closer examination?

Original Logo

New Logo

Current Logo

Polin for Internal Use

What was the meaning of the Polin myth in the history of Polish Jews? "Bernard Weinryb, the historian of Polish Jewry, examined legends of origin from a historical perspective and found a striking resemblance among the legends of the various Jewish diasporas."[11] Irrespective of whether the story happens to be set in Poland or in Yemen, a good king features in all legends. From all of them we learn that:

> In the distant past, the Jews enjoyed fair treatment and equal rights. The deterioration in their circumstances came later, usually quite recently. […] He ascribed this similarity to the common lot of all such communities – the parlous situation that confront a minority that settles in the midst of another people.[12]

The legends of origin were addressed to both the Jewish community and the non-Jewish majority. Their function changed depending on the addressee. Addressed to an internal Jewish audience, they fulfilled onomatological midrash functions, making the place more familiar by Judaizing it. In addition, they bestowed divine sanction upon the presence of the Jews in the place of settlement, and hence the sense of a higher order, which helped them bear reality. The legends of origin were directed to the outside for political reasons, as an apologia meant to appease the non-Jewish environment. Such an operation is characteristic of the emotional work unilaterally carried out by the subordinated towards those on whom they are dependent.

All versions of the legends of origin and onomatological midrashim emphasize the temporary character of the Jews' residence in the place of settlement. In the Polish case, this also concerns the 20th-century literary versions, regardless of whether they were written by Sholem Asch, Aaron Zeitlin, or Shmuel Yosef Agnon – authors representing very different Jewish identities who were not on friendly terms with one another.

> The archetype of settlement – the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness during which God accompanies and guides His people, and the entry into the Land of Canaan – is repeated in the narrative of the settlement of Poland; but an awareness of the myth of redemption reforms the depiction of space and time. The Land of Israel remains the Holy Land, the navel of the world, the lost paradise, and thus the cynosure and object of desire.[13]

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11 Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland Legends of Origin: Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 27.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 41.

Nevertheless, the nomadic ethos did not necessarily harmonize with the frame of mind of Polish Jews – again, irrespective of their chosen identity. Thus, for example, the hearing that Józef Piłsudski gave the Jewish delegation from Jędrzejów on the eve of the independence of Poland was remembered as a traumatic event. It concerned the outbreak of anti-Semitic violence in the town. "During the audience Piłsudski expressed his opinion that in general the Jews attach too much importance to events of this kind, and afterwards he stated that the Jewish issue may be sorted out by means of emigration to Palestine."[14] The Zionists were devastated, to say nothing of non-Zionists of all possible orientations.

Regardless of this – or rather precisely because of this – Polish-speaking Jews of various self-definitions – from Zionists to assimilationists – drew on the Polin myth in the interwar years.[15] The Polin legend was disseminated in a different form in Jewish journals for adults, children, and youth. In certain periods, it appeared among the Jewish books recommended for use in schools, often in Agnon's edition.[16] The third variant of his version of the midrash about the Hebrew name for Poland – *Poprzednicy* (*Antecedents*) from the volume *Polska: opowieści legendarne* (*Poland: Legendary Tales*) (1925)[17] – met a growing need. The reason for its popularity was that the Polin narrative had a reactive character. The worse things were in reality, the more Jews drew on the legend. Within the subordinated group, the Polin myth was an instrument of despair management, part of a survival strategy.

> The acculturated Jews, living, if not in the Polish milieu, then at least within Polish culture, reading the Polish press, being hence exposed to nationalistic propaganda, also needed

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14 Anna Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni. Polska i Polacy w polskojęzycznej prasie żydowskiej II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015), 180.

15 In contrast to what the guides at the core exhibition of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews claim and what is generally believed in Poland, among Polish Jews being a Polish native-speaker did not have to mean, and usually did not mean, Polish identification, assimilation, and even less so assimilationism. On this subject, see: Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 30–32; Anna Landau-Czajka, *Syn będzie Lech… Asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton & Instytut Historii PAN, 2006), 207; Nathan Cohen, *Zapominanie języka. Polszczyzna i jidysz wśród młodzieży żydowskiej w międzywojennej Polsce*, translated from the English by Izabela Suchojad, in Eugenia Prokop-Janiec and Marek Tuszewicki, eds., *Polskie tematy i konteksty literatury żydowskiej* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 269–275.

16 Aleksander Halpern, "Piękna książka dla dzieci żydowskich," *Echo Żydowskie* 8 (February 11, 1934): 3.

17 See: Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Polin: Sipure Agadot* (Tel Aviv: Hedim, 1925).

> to be confirmed in their belief that had they not been foreign in this land from time immemorial, that they had not always been unwanted newcomers.[18]

The main purpose of the recourse to the Polin myth addressed to Jews by Jews was self-persuasion:

> the assertions that ancient Poland was tolerant, that it gave the Jews special privileges, the protection of the rulers, [all of these] had the task of convincing the readers that anti-Semitism is a temporary phenomenon, that Poland is a country in which one will be able to stay forever – or at least until the moment of regaining one's own state.[19]

This tendency was even present in Jewish historiography. History became a "heavenly realm of delusion"[20] on the basis of which it still seemed possible to achieve integration.[21]

> Both journalists and historians created the myth. By emphasizing a bright past and hope for a return to ancient tolerance lying in the "nature" of the Polish nation, was kind of a one-off spell cast on reality. […] What we are dealing with here then is a quite unusual operation – the attempt to convince the readers that what they see with their own eyes, what they encounter on a daily basis, is not typical and is bound to pass.[22]

Reality was placed outside of reality. The myth was supposed to be the truth, reality – a delusion. As Anna Landau-Czajka puts it: "Poland is not them." Poland is not Poland. Poland is Polin. Admittedly, Agnon "hints that the Jews' exaggerated sense of security had no basis."[23] However, no one drew upon his version of the Polin legend in order to interpret it in such a way. The self-deception – even if at first life-giving – soon proved to be death-bringing.

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18 Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 105.

19 Ibid., 108.

20 A reference to the fourth verse of Adam Mickiewicz's "Oda do młodości" ["Ode to Youth"].

21 "A positive assessment of Polish-Jewish relations in the past was supposed to prove that co-existence was possible. […] Both Jewish historians who had begun their academic career on the threshold of independence and a younger generation of researchers – in the face of the deteriorating position of the Jewish community – changed their way of describing Polish-Jewish relations to a small degree": Natalia Aleksiun, "Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w piśmiennictwie historyków żydowskich w Polsce w latach trzydziestych XX wieku," *Studia Judaica* 1 (2006): 49.

22 Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 108, 112.

23 Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland – Legends of Origin*, 43. On Agnon's attitude toward Poland and the diaspora see, for instance: Gershom Scholem, "S.J. Agnon – ostatni hebrajski klasyk?," trans. Adam Lipszyc, in Gershom Scholem, *Żydzi i Niemcy: eseje, listy, rozmowa* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2006).

Polin for External Use

In relations with the dominant group, the Polin myth served as an instrument of mercy-evoking persuasion. Pseudo-arguments like the tropes of Polin and *Paradisus Iudaeorum* were called upon at the dawn of the Second Polish Republic in the face of the pogrom wave of 1918–1919. The Polish-language Jewish press of the period identified as the main problem the fact that Polish public opinion was receptive neither to sensible arguments, nor to facts, nor to declarations made by Jews.[24] Irrational Polish action thus provoked irrational Jewish reaction. In November 1918, the assimilationist *Rozwaga* (*Prudence*) invoked the *Paradisus Iudaeorum* myth. In the same issue, the Circle of Polish Patriots of the Mosaic Persuasion reminded of the merits of Poland for Jews, beginning with the sacrosanct formula: "Casimir the Great's Poland [...] offered the ever persecuted Jews sanctuary and shelter."[25]

> Poland was thus an exceptional country not only because it offered Jews a safe life and the protection of the powers that be, it was also exceptional as a center of Jewish culture. Texts of this kind, however, usually pertained not to the past they invoked, but to the abysmal contemporary Polish-Jewish relations and expressed regret that Jews were now treated like strangers, that anti-Semitism was flourishing.[26]

The idyllic myth had the purpose of convincing Polish public opinion that: a) Jews have the right to live in Poland; b) the "true Poland" is a Poland that is kind to Jews; c) anti-Semitism is a misunderstanding: a non-Polish element, instilled by the partitioning powers' "fanatic poison of thralldom."[27]

The reception of the myth by the Christian majority proceeded smoothly, not in small part because, from its point of view, the Polin myth had – and still has – nothing but advantages. First, it eliminates any rational language of description and any recourse to historical facts. In doing so, it renders one immune from any factual analysis, any conversation in rational terms. The persuasive aspect – the element of humble supplication and homage-paying address – is readily ignorable from the perspective of the lords, if it is noticed in the first place. The story not

24 Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 81.

25 "Odezwa Koła Patriotów Polskich Wyznania Mojżeszowego. Do ludności żydowskiej," *Rozwaga* 11 (November 1918): 165, quoted in Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 104.

26 Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 104.

27 The phrase comes from: "Przemówienie Prezesa Zarządu Gminy Żydowskiej J.L. Mincberga wygłoszone w dniu 11 XI 1929 r. w synagodze przy ulicy Wolborskiej," *Kronika Gminy Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Łodzi* (October-December 1929): 34–36, quoted in Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 106.

only binds to nothing, but downright absolves of responsibility. What is more, it is told by the subordinated themselves. One could hardly imagine a better alibi against the proverbial rest of the world and against oneself.

The Christian majority can afford to ignore the fact that the Polin legend does not mention it at all. Agnon writes:

> They [the Jews] went to the land of Poland and gave the king a mountain of gold. The king received them with great honor. The Lord had mercy on them and caused the king and ministers to show mercy to them. The king allowed them to settle in all the lands of his kingdom […] and to worship the lord according to the tenets of their religion. The king protected them against any foe and adversary.[28]

The construction of collective identity within the Christian culture made it impossible for the Christian majority to cast itself in the role of the Jews' "foe and adversary." Indeed, to this day, members of the Christian majority – predominantly descendants of serfs, the principal victims of the feudal system – consider themselves heirs to the mythical king, mythical ministers, and mythical land, and hence – the actual benefactors of the Jews.[29] Expressing the Jewish experience is impossible within a culture in which merely tolerating Jews, even in a subordinate role and out of one's own interest, is seen as an act of benevolence. After all, a benefactor deserves gratitude, not exegesis.

The Museum's rendering of the Polin myth is thus unable to accommodate the postwar, post-Holocaust tradition of poems, always addressed *zu Poyln* (to Poland).[30] Yiddish literature counts around a hundred of them. Their artistic value

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28 Shmuel Yoseph Agnon, "Qedumot," in *Kol sippurav shel Shmuel Yoseph Agnon*, vol. 1, (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1966), 353. Translation quoted from Bar-Itzhak, Jewish Poland Legends of Origin, 33. The Polish translation of Agnon's text – "'Nie wiedzielim' (Z legend o Polsce)" – appeared in the Polish-language Jewish journal *Naród* 11 (January 1930): 65–66.

29 On the identification of today's Poles with the figure of the benevolent ruler and the career of the myth about welcoming Jews in Poland see: Elżbieta Janicka, "Casimir the Great's Flying Circus presents: 'The narrowest house in the world – an event on a global scale.' Historical re-enactment on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Aktion Reinhardt," *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 1–56, http://dx.doi.org/10.11649/slh.2013.005.

30 Incidentally, in terms of sources, the midrash about the Hebrew name for Poland is a legend of destruction. "The oldest written source […] is the *Elegy of the Massacres in Polonia*, an elegy on the pogroms of 1648–1649 by the seventeenth-century Jacob b. Moshe Halevy, first printed in Venice in 1670–1671": Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland Legends of Origin*, 31. On the affinity of legends of origin with legends of destruction, see Ibid., 133–158. A separate study would be warranted on the relationship between the

varies but each expresses the pain of those who found out last and were disillusioned – often fatally. ("The one who finds out last" is Henryk Grynberg's definition of a Jew). These were people who imagined a life for themselves in Poland, and did so not just because they had no way of escaping, but also because they harbored hope – a hope that was contrary to reality, yet fed on the myth, a hope they thought they had lost completely. The *zu Poyln* poetic tradition – whose key date is the year 1946 – means the Polin myth's confrontation with reality, evaluation, and final farewell. The most famous work in this current is the rhapsody by Avrom Sutzkever.[31] Carefully browsing through the material on one of the light pads in the postwar gallery, one can come across the 1946 short poem "Poyln, Poyln" by Yitskhok Yanasovitsch. This, however, offers no chance of appreciating the magnitude and importance of the phenomenon, let alone confronting it with the inscriptions covering the building's exterior glass paneling, the Museum's new name, or Agnon's story on display by the entrance to the core exhibition. These Jewish dirges mark a turning point that is tragically important for Polish Jews but utterly irrelevant from the perspective of the awareness and emotions of the Christian majority. The POLIN Museum consolidates and legitimizes this state of affairs.

Polin Reloaded

The Polin myth has been seamlessly overtaken by the dominant group and included in the arsenal of symbolic violence as a tool of blackmail, precluding any factual debate. Before 1989, it was absorbed at home, in school, and in Church. It left one stunned by Jewish ingratitude, which after the war would time and again afflict Poland and Poles, like the outbursts of "Jewish anti-Polonism" and of the "slandering of Poland and Poles abroad" in 1946 and 1968. In the independent Third Republic, the Polin trope was revived after the Jedwabne debate and when the first results of research on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust by scholars from different disciplines were published. The burning barn then found its way into the collective imaginarium. Artists spoke out, as did teachers. Two of the latter

Museum-propagated version of the Polin myth and the research tradition, a part of which was (is?) constituted by the academic yearly *Polin: Studies on Polish Jewry*.

31 See: Chone Shmeruk, "Awrom Suckewer i polska poezja. Juliusz Słowacki w poemacie 'Cu Pojln,'" translated from the Yiddish by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, in Prokop-Janiec and Tuszewicki, eds., *Polskie tematy i konteksty literatury żydowskiej*, 279–287.

wrote the textbook *The Holocaust – Understanding Why* (2003).[32] The book is clear and accessible, based on up-to-date knowledge about facts and mechanisms, and takes as its point of departure the place and role of perception of Jews in the Christian doctrine.

Since then, the danger has been staved off. The debate was cut mid-word. The reckoning was limited to assessing the quantitative aspects of one isolated crime. Further research and the task of revising Polish culture were taken up by a handful of people. Most of their efforts never reach the general public. At that time, however, there seemed to be a viable threat that a textbook about the Holocaust would make its way into the school curricula. That when confronted with an alternative narrative, pupils – who are keen observers of the reality around them, tend to readily discern contradictions and, last but not least, are rebellious – would stop believing in Casimir the Great and might articulate their dissent in an undesirable manner. They could, for instance, start asking questions at the family dinner table or – God forbid – in Church. Sooner or later, they might start digging up their home gardens. In short, a threat emerged that education would lead to exhumation, if not revolution. I am referring here to a grassroots revolution of the communal imaginarium and of collective identity. For the reality of Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish history – a common history that divides – threatens the constitutive myths of the dominant model of Polishness. It threatens the founding myths of the independent Third Republic of Poland: the myth of the Second Republic (of which the Third Republic declared itself the direct successor), the myth of the Polish Underground State, and the myth of the anti-communist underground. This jeopardized set includes all that has hitherto been socially and culturally self-evident: from the master narrative of Christianity to what might be called the anti-communist dogma.

To rephrase the above in terms of the dominant culture: at the turn of the 21st century, an increase in knowledge caused the appearance of "Polish anti-Polonism" and the "slandering of Poland and Poles" began taking place in Poland and being paid for with Polish taxpayers' money. It became clear that what was at stake was not a partial revision of the image of the six years of Nazi occupation but the majority narrative and collective identity in their entirety. At stake were intergenerational relations within families, societal authorities (including within academia), the moral immunity of the dominant religion, as well as the political and economic

32 Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański, *Holokaust – zrozumieć dlaczego* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Mówią Wieki" & Dom Wydawniczy Belona, 2003). An annotation inside reads: "Auxiliary textbook for use in history instruction in middle schools."

position of the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of an unprecedented chance of emancipation, of achieving mental and emotional independence, of liberation through self-subjectivization, the dominant, or at least decisive, majority – including a considerable segment of the social elites – saw a vision of something much worse than the end of the world on the horizon. They saw the *Finis Poloniae.* In this situation, symbolic tools from the arsenal of anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic violence were put to use – both produced by the same matrix.[33] This was initiated at the grassroots level and in a top-down manner, and it was done consciously and unconsciously, with cynicism and with the best of intentions – but always following patterns of culture that were unproblematized and unreflected and, as such, remained in the realm of social and cultural self-evidence.

It was in this context that the Polin myth was reanimated and revitalized. Pieced together from mutually exclusive bits, it was restored, colorized, sonorized, and introduced into the field of public visibility – literally, as Jolanta Dylewska's 2008 "documentary" film *Po-lin. Okruchy pamięci* (*Polin. Scraps of Memory*). The film made a triumphant tour of cinemas throughout Poland and sites of the Polish diaspora, receiving along the way – in Chicago – the Golden Teeth award. (Humor after Auschwitz is possible! Humor is possible after Jedwabne!) Since then, the film has been periodically rerun on television, broadcast in schools, and shown during workshops on multiculturalism and tolerance as well as festivals of tradition and

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33 Referring to the Christian figure of the God-killing Jew, Artur Sandauer wrote: "This [Jewish] descent is surrounded by an aura which we cannot ignore. […] I therefore propose to coin a new term, 'allo-Semitism,' which describes a predilection to single out this descent and a conviction of its uniqueness. Allo-Semitism is the general base from which both anti- and philo-Semitic conclusions may arise. […] Seeing a Jew, the ancients did not experience this mystical shock, which lies at the core of all anti-, or speaking more broadly, allo-Semitic emotions. […] And so, Christian Europe demonizes Jews: they are all the more dangerous for having once been chosen and then having rejected the calling. […] This demonization perpetrated on the Jews results in a phenomenon much more dangerous than the general dislike they encountered in Antiquity. Dislike has now found itself an ideology, which consists in the conviction of their uniqueness, about some magical ambivalence of their lot. It is a people that is sacred in the double sense that Latin bestows on the word 'sacer,' a sacred-cursed people:" Artur Sandauer, *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku. Rzecz, którą nie ja powinienem był napisać…* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1982), 9, 10, 12. The current director of the MHPJ does not shy away from publically voicing an allo-Semitic motto: "Jews are people like everyone else, only more": Zofia Waślicka and Artur Żmijewski, interview with Dariusz Stola, "Muzeum tożsamości," *Krytyka Polityczna* 40–41 (2015): 283.

dialogue. The trope of Polin has thus survived its own decease, jauntily risen from the dead, and engaged in (re)-Polinization.[34] The term alludes to the slogan of re-Polonization, which in 2005, just a year after Poland's accession to the European Union, helped the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) come to power and install their leaders, the twin brothers Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński, as prime minister and president, respectively. Prime Minister Kaczyński would later ask rhetorically whether "it is all right that some nations hold in their hands the brains of other nations."[35] The Polish nation decided to take its brain in its own hands. The universal quantifier is fully justified. After the rival political party took over, it did not change the historical policy and patriotic education put in place by their predecessors by one iota. On the contrary, the policies were further radicalized. Suffice it to mention the state cult of Roman Dmowski, the state cult of the anti-Semitic postwar anti-communist underground (since 2011)[36] or of the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, NSZ), collaborators of the Third

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34 "Polinization" is a category coined by Konrad Matyjaszek: Konrad Matyjaszek, "Polinizacja historii. O wystawie stałej Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Kultura Liberalna* 324 (December 2015), accessed March 24, 2015, http://kulturaliberalna.pl/2015/03/24/konrad-matyjaszek-mhzp-wystawa-stala-recenzja/.

35 Piotr Śmiłowicz, interview with Jarosław Kaczyński, "Prezydent naprawdę się wahał," *Rzeczpospolita,* February 16, 2006, 3. The question was: "Roman Giertych suggests [...] that the signees of the pact [the pact for the stabilization of the mass media, signed by Jarosław Kaczyński's PiS, Roman Giertych's League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR) – and Andrzej Lepper's Self-Defense (Samoobrona) are in agreement concerning the need to re-Polonize the mass media [....]" One of Kaczyński's statements in reply to this was: "If someone were to ask me whether I would like for the mass media to become re-Polonized, I would confirm it."

36 The legislation was initiated by President Lech Kaczyński; the initiative was later upheld by President Bronisław Komorowski. On February 2, 2011, a law instituting the National Day of Remembrance of the "Accursed Soldiers" was almost unanimously supported by all parliamentary parties. 406 out of 417 parliamentarians present voted for the motion, 8 were against, and 3 refrained from voting. Having been passed by the lower chamber (Sejm), the law was then brought before the Senate on February 4 and passed with no amendments. The law was signed by President Bronisław Komorowski on February 9 and published in the Journal of Laws, No. 32, pos. 160, of February 15, 2015.

Reich rehabilitated by the Sejm of the Third Republic in 2012.[37] Radicalization has also taken place in the realm of the "foreign historical policy."[38]

Polinization, or Decontextualization

The essence and function of the smooth transition between the mythical land with its mythical king of the pre-national period and the nation as a whole was aptly parodied by Marek Edelman in a 1985 interview. The question concerned attitudes toward Jews during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, though in fact one is tempted to say that it could have concerned any event in Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish history. In reply, Edelman, the last commander of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, stated: "Do not listen to this, it's disgusting, it's not fit for this paper of yours, or any other. Because the Polish nation, as you are well aware, is tolerant. […] It's an extraordinary nation. Casimir the Great took in the Jews, and he cherished them and to this very day he loves them."[39] **By precluding – by force of the emotional blackmail inherent to it – any reflection or debate on rational terms, the Polin myth works like an absorber: it annihilates the factual. In doing so, the myth extends moral immunity to the dominant culture and the majority group. Polinization amounts to the decontextualization of Jewish history and, as a result, the loss of the essence of a significant part of Jewish experience.**

One result of Polinization is, for example, that the transboundary character of the civilization of Eastern European Jews has been obliterated. In consequence, in the term "Polish Jews" the very concept of "Polishness" comes to mean something altogether different than simply territorial affiliation. (The role of the adjective "Polish" in the Polish dominant imaginarium is best understood

37 For the Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland paying homage to the National Armed Forces, see: http://nsz.com.pl/index.php/dokumenty/793-uchwaa-sejmu-rp-odd-ajca-hod-narodowym-siom-zbrojnym. The debate concerning this resolution took place during the 25th seating of the 7th Term of the Sejm, on November 7, 2012. It can be found on pp. 123–130 of the official transcript: http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/StenoInter7.nsf/0/EC230E99A06A15C0C1257AB000103234/%24File/25_a_ksiazka.pdf. For the result of the voting, which took place on November 9, 2013, see: http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm7.nsf/agent.xsp?symbol=glosowania&NrKadencji=7&NrPosiedzenia=25&NrGlosowania=43.

38 See: Grabowski, "The Holocaust as a Polish Problem."

39 "Co było znaczące w getcie? Nic! Nic! Nie mówcie bzdur! Rozmowa z Markiem Edelmanem przeprowadzona wspólnie z Włodzimierzem Filipkiem dla poznańskiego podziemnego kwartalnika 'Czas' w 1985," in Anka Grupińska, *Ciągle po kole. Rozmowy z żołnierzami getta warszawskiego*, foreword by Paweł Szapiro (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Książkowe "Twój Styl," 2000), 30.

by drawing upon the example of the "Polish concentration camps" affair, which takes up the lion's share of the energy of both public opinion in Poland and Polish diplomacy.)[40] In the Polin discourse, the "Polishness" of Polish Jews refers not so much to their relation with Poland and all things Polish, as to a dependency on – if not indebtedness to – Poland and Polishness; both, of course, under the sign of Polin. Here is a formulation of this mechanism from the Polish majority perspective: "This is my country and in this country there developed something as wonderful as this Jewish culture. I'm proud of it. [...] I am proud of Poland, proud of Polish Jews."[41] Even suggesting that the MHPJ might present a perspective other than that of the majority proved unacceptable.[42] To paraphrase Roman Dmowski's aphorism:

40 "Since 2011, Polish diplomacy has intervened about the 'camps' 636 times. But what was the reason for those interventions in the first place? The website for the Foreign Ministry which lists them leaves no place for doubt – they were protesting the usage of the phrase 'Polish concentration camp.' A phrase, however, is not a proposition. In this case, the phrase probably refers to the geographical location of the camps. Why doesn't the ministry intervene in cases when the proposition is voiced that the extermination camps were set up by the Polish state, or that they appeared on the initiative of Poles or that they were run by the Polish? The probable reason is that nobody makes such claims. We know of no historians of the Holocaust, either in Poland or the U.S., Europe or Israel, who would hold such views. Not even those very critical of Polish activities at the 'margins of the Holocaust.' [...] Both the Polish state and institutions of Polish public opinion are perpetrating an act of manipulation. They fight feverously against an accusation nobody is making so as to present themselves as victims of libel. [...] The scandal over the usage of the phrase 'Polish concentration camps' has become a smokescreen, a way to reverse roles, a manipulation of collective consciousness and an infallible trumpet call to national hysteria": Michał Kozłowski, "Polskie obozy na straży tożsamości," *Bez Dogmatu* 2 (2015): 1. The phrase "Polish death camps" was used by people like Jan Karski and Zofia Nałkowska. See: Jan Karski, "Polish Death Camps," *Collier's* (October 14, 1944), facsimile in: *Zagłada Żydów* 8 (2012): 642; Zofia Nałkowska, *Medaliony* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1982), 63.

41 "Muzeum tożsamości," 283–284. Such logic came to the forefront in Poland during the Six-Day War with ubiquitous expressions of pride of "our Jews" who bashed "the Russky Arabs." In a similar vein, today's public discourse refers to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as: "A typically Polish fight for honor. Honor requires that a man says 'no!' when the weak, women, children, the elderly are dying. [...] An uprising so romantic could only have been organized by Polish Jews. Let me stress that: Polish": Aleksandra Klich and Jarosław Kurski, interview with Władysław Bartoszewski, "Arcypolskie powstanie żydowskie," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 13–14, 2013, 14.

42 See: Piotr Paziński, interview with Helena Datner, "Jankiel, chasydzi i Tuwim. O Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich z Heleną Datner rozmawia Piotr Paziński," *Midrasz* 1 (2015): 8.

it is the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, therefore it has "Polish duties."[43] By this token, **Polinization has a further consequence of a pseudo-logical nature. It turns out that the better the situation of Polish Jews, the more heavily their position depends on the behavior and attitudes of Poles. The worse their situation, the weaker its connection with the Polish context.**

Another ironclad law of Polinization is that it prevents the problematization of key phenomena, which are never seen from a *longue durée* perspective. From the beginning, all the way through to the end of the core exhibition, Judaism remains consistently unproblematized. The same applies to the master narrative of Christianity. Along with it, unproblematized are the Christian doctrine and culture, in which, after all, Jews occupy a central position: that of the enemy constitutive for the new religion's identity. As a consequence, then, what remains unproblematized is anti-Semitism, its origins, essence, mechanisms, and its place within the dominant culture. Meanwhile, it was the dominant culture that determined the situation of Jews. The symbolic dependency of Christian culture on Jews (at the level of identity) and the actual dependency of Jews on the Christian culture (at the level of elementary conditions of existence) remain completely invisible. **Factual knowledge remains scattered and de facto ceases to signify.** We do learn of the Sandomierz trial (1710–1713), which ensued after accusations were made of a supposed ritual murder, and about the Kielce pogrom of 1946, which likewise was the result of such accusations. An understanding perspective, however, is missing. We receive no information as to the reason for this pattern's persistence, that is, no information about the place and importance of the ritual murder myth within the master narrative of Christianity. And this place is fundamental.[44] In today's Poland, indicators of belief in the myth of ritual murder are alarming.[45] Yet, the core exhibition informs us that Christianity had

43 The original quote from Dmowski, which has become part of common parlance, reads: "I am Polish, therefore I have Polish duties."

44 See: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu* (Warsaw: W.A.B., 2008). See also the changes introduced into the book's French edition, unequivocally situating the work within the anthropology of Christian anti-Semitism: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Légendes du sang: Pour une anthropologie de l'antisémitisme chrétien*, trans. Małgorzata Maliszewska (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015).

45 A survey carried out in 2011 by the Centre for Research on Prejudice of the University of Warsaw revealed that 10% of respondents believe or firmly believe that Jews abduct Christian children; 56,4% neither agree nor disagree with the statement. "The survey was nationwide, [conducted] on a sample of 620 Internet users, aged 15–35. Its goal was to shed light on whether legends of this type appear among modern people who are active users of contemporary technology": Michał Bilewicz and Agnieszka Haska,

little, or indeed nothing, to do with this myth.[46] Again, it is not about mentioning anti-Semitism more. It is about taking a different, problematized stance.

Anti-Semitism appears – as *deus ex machina* and, at the same time, very discretely – with the advent of modernity and nationalism. Its role is limited to that of an ingredient of a particular political ideology. It is new, external, and strange in relation to the cultural code. In the Museum's narrative, the realities of the bureaucratizing partitioning monarchies turn out to be more important than Polish nationalism. The exhibition fails to mention that this nationalism reproduced the anti-Semitic structures of Christian culture, simultaneously doubling and thus reinforcing them. A religious criterion of exclusion came to be supplemented by an ethnic (or indeed, a racial) one. In the dominant Polish culture, this was the moment when the figure of Christ – which was central to the pre-modern construction of collective identity – found its double in the figure of Poland the Christ of the Nations. The trope of Crucifixion found its double in the trope of Judeo-Communism. Both these tropes had a crucial – if not downright decisive – consequence for the situation of Jews in Poland. In the POLIN Museum, however,

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"Wiara w mord rytualny we współczesnej Polsce," released October 1, 2012, http://www.otwarta.org/index.php/kto-wierzy-w-mord-rytualny/. The questionnaire used in the survey did not consider secularized and rationalized versions of the myth.

46 "In the central frame of the panel a quote is inscribed in large cursive. It comes from an encyclical by Benedict XIV, dated 1751: 'The Jews are not to be persecuted; they are not to be slaughtered; they are not even to be driven out.' Further down, slightly below the line of sight of the visitor, are reproductions of three images by Carlo de Prévôt from the Sandomierz Cathedral and a caption informing us that they depict the 'alleged ritual murder'; lower still is a quadrangular slate with a factual description of the Sandomierz trial, information about the role that the founder of the pictures, father Stefan Żuchowski, played in the trial, and about the resulting execution of three falsely accused officials of the Kahal. That is all we are told. What then is the purpose of quoting the pope's words? Are the authors of the exhibition suggesting that the pope was 38 years late in reprimanding father Żuchowski? Was the trial a breach of the guidelines from the Church hierarchs? A non-historian visitor does not have to know that the encyclical quoted, *A quo primum*, is not a protest against judicial murders but rather a call to observe more strictly the restrictions placed upon Polish Jews: not to allow them to take office or to employ Christian servants. The document ends with the phrase: 'We promise you that when the situation arises, We will cooperate energetically and effectively with those whose combined authority and power are appropriate to remove this stain of shame from Poland.' When the pope writes of the 'stain of shame,' he refers not to the judicial murders of falsely accused Jews but to the Jewish presence in Poland": Matyjaszek, "Polinizacja historii."

when it comes to decisive matters for the common history that divides, the rule clearly is: "Don't ask, don't tell."

Polin as Master Narrative

The core exhibition's program director put a lot of effort into arguing *urbi et orbi* that the narrative POLIN Museum does not feature a master narrative. However, the Polin myth has been built into the main-frame construction of the undertaking: first, into the architecture of the building (its design and the exterior glass paneling); second, into the identity of the institution (its name); and, third, into the core exhibition as its conceptual frame, since the reverse side of the opening projection "Forest" features a screening of a film on the present-day "Jewish revival and rebirth," which closes the exhibition. (The spatial proximity of the two films makes the twittering of forest birds blend with enthusiastic "revival and rebirth" exclamations.) **Because of the overriding position assigned to it, the Polin myth is not just one of the narratives present in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. It is the Museum's master narrative. And it is not only a narrative; it is also a principle that legitimizes and delegitimizes alternative narratives.** Indeed, there is no confrontation of narratives at the exhibition. The exhibition does not offer any other narratives. The confrontation took place earlier. In the ex-Jewish district of Muranów basement exhibition we see just its results. On the one hand, we have an explicit and multiple articulation of a Polin narrative. On the other, we have a muddle of dispersed information, which does not add up to any alternative narrative.

The master narrative is a system of knowledge organization. The Polin myth represents a criterion of selection, positioning (hierarchizing) and articulating knowledge. The master narrative under the sign of Polin respects all *lieux de mémoire* pertaining to the dominant narrative,[47] even if they are of no great importance to the situation of the Jews, such as the Constitution of May 3, 1791. This is accompanied by a downgrading of the importance of *lieux de mémoire*

47 To understand the hiatus at hand here, it suffices to compare the reception of, for instance, the January Insurrection of 1863–1864 in both universes. See: Israel Bartal, "Loyality to the Crown or Polish Patriotism? The Metamorphoses of an Anti-Polish Story of the 1863 Insurrection," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 1: Poles and Jews: Renewing the Dialogue, ed. Antony Polonsky (1986): 81–95; Lidia Michalska-Bracha, "Powstanie styczniowe," in *Polskie miejsca pamięci. Dzieje toposu wolności*, ed. Stefan Bednarek and Bartosz Korzeniewski (Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2015), 251–272.

essential for Jewish narratives – like the Khmelnytskyi Uprising. The core exhibition's program director justified this by saying that "recent investigations of the effects of the Khmelnytskyi Uprising no longer consider it a turning point in the history of the Jewish communities in the Commonwealth of Both Nations. It was rather a catastrophe, after which these communities rebuilt themselves and life went on at the same rhythm."[48] "Recent investigations" are thus a sufficient argument for obliterating the importance of the pogroms of 1648–1649 whose anniversary appeared in the Jewish calendar[49] and was commemorated in Jewish

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48 Jan Śpiewak, Zofia Waślicka and Artur Żmijewski, interview with Barbarą Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Muzeum faktów odczutych," *Krytyka Polityczna* 40–41 (2015): 271. The idea of "recent investigations" is in itself an interesting construct, considering how already almost a hundred years ago Marxist theorists – both Yiddishist and Zionist – distanced themselves from what they considered to be bourgeois historiography, as represented by historians like Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, or Majer (Meir) Bałaban. The fascinating Marxist-Yiddishist Meir Wiener – who opposed Yiddishist historiography by the likes of Maks Erik, Yisroel Tsinberg (Israel Zinberg), or Max Weinrich – "in his historical studies […] sought to identify and explore the moments of class struggle, regarding them as the main engine of historical progress. […] In his scheme of things, the national dramas and tragedies, such as the Sabbatean movement or Khmelnytsky uprising, were historically less significant than the gradual socio-economic changes within the Jewish community in the course of its transition from the late feudal to the early capitalist mode of production": Mikhail Krutikov, *From Kabbalah to Class Struggle: Expressionism, Marxism, and Yiddish Literature in the Life and Work of Meir Wiener* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 290. As we know, majority cultures and societies verified negatively all the universalist aspirations of the Jews, regardless of whether these stemmed from a materialist or idealist motivation.

49 "The Sejm of the Four Lands, the chief institution of Jewish-self-government in Poland, by means of a document from 1690, established a day of fasting on 'the 20th day of the month of Sivan, on which the Niemirow tragedy began' [*Pinkas Va'ad Arba' Aratsot*, ed. Israel Halpern (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1945), 78]": Chone Shmeruk, *Rzeź Chmielnickiego: literatura jidysz i pamięć zbiorowa*, translated from the English by Maria Tengowska, in Prokop-Janiec and Tuszewicki, eds., *Polskie tematy i konteksty literatury żydowskiej*, 93; see also: Chone Shmeruk, "Yiddish Literature and Collective Memory: The Case of the Chmielnicki Massacres," in: *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 5 (1990): 173–83. The commemoration prayers of *churban Niemirov 20 Sivan* were said in the whole diaspora after the Kishinev pogrom (1903) and with respect to the pogroms of the years 1881, 1905, 1918–1919, and 1920. The Khmelnytskyi massacre was still referred to as an archetype of persecution at the beginning of World War II. In the 1960s – in Isaac Bashevis Singer's historical novel entitled *The Slave*, serialized in *Forverts* in 1961–62 – it was still used as an understandable and effective element of the communication code.

Eastern Europe until the outbreak of the Second World War.[50] Such an approach closes the door on important texts and whole swaths of the multilingual culture of the Eastern European Jews – from Nathan (Nata) ben Moses Hannover (17th century) to Hayim Nahman Bialik and Isaac Bashevis Singer (20th century), including Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, Shloyme Anski, or Moishe Broderzon. At the same time, there is no information at all about the "investigations" which would establish the Constitution of May 3, 1791 as a turning point in the history of the Jewish communities. This, however, did not prove to be an obstacle to its expositional overvaluation.

"Many elements of the core exhibition were designed in such a way as to serve as a presentation of Polish history for foreigners."[51] Whereas the figures and caesurae, which are mutually important, are presented through the prism of what in them is significant for the dominant perspective. Berek Joselewicz, for example, has been presented in such a way that one has managed to convert him into a fridge magnet to be sold in the Museum's Store as a memorial gadget. 1918 is in turn the year of the "regaining of independence by Poland," which the Jews greeted with joy,[52] as the exhibition would have it. On the margin, literally behind the visitors' backs, one can find information on the wave of pogroms during the years 1918–1919. However, there is no mention of the fact that it developed

50 See: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 52.

51 This is an observation made by the editor-in-chief of the journal *Midrasz*, Piotr Paziński: "I had the impression that some parts of the exhibition, for example the Partitions' hall with the portraits of the three partitioning monarchs and the empty throne of the Polish king, use the history of Jews in order to show an important, and in the West often completely unknown moment in the history of Poland": "Jankiel, chasydzi i Tuwim," 6.

52 "Indeed, the majority of the [Jewish] press stated that among Jews the general opinion prevailed that the regaining of independence by Poland was an extraordinarily happy event, not only for Poles but also for [the Jews] themselves. However, this statement was nearly always made in the past tense. Describing the present moment (from November 1918 to the end of 1920) the journalists expressed their prevailing feeling of disappointment. Not with the regaining of independence itself of course, but with the fact that in a revived Poland anti-Semitism was also revived. […] Thus, one cannot unequivocally state if this declared common enthusiasm was real or if evoking it rather served the journalists in emphasizing the discrepancy between the hopes for the emergence of a democratic, multinational Poland, a homeland for all citizens, and the actual reality, in which Jews were treated as a population for whom there was no place in the new country or in which a place as second-class citizens was assigned to them": Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 71–72.

into the anti-Semitic violence of the year 1920, as well as the state legitimization of the Judeo-Communism *(żydokomuna)* myth. Behind the visitors' backs, there is indeed a photograph of Jews interned in Jabłonna. However, it is presented in the convention of an interesting fact, not as an emblem of a phenomenon with far-reaching and long-term fatal consequences.

Returning to the year 1918, we do not understand the impetus of the pogroms nor the key significance they had for the Jews. We do not learn of Roman Dmowski's anti-Semitic display at the conference in Versailles, nor what the small Versailles treaty, i.e., the so-called minority treaty, meant for whom. (Roman Dmowski – a prophet of Polish chauvinism – is hidden in a 19th century closet, hermetically isolated both from the past as well as the 20th and 21th centuries.) We do not comprehend that in 1918, the status of the Jews in relation to the Poles changed: out of two minorities among the other minorities of the three empires, the Poles became the dominant majority, whereas the Jews became a minority in the Polish de facto nation state, not a nationalities state. All of these pieces of information are not important from the point of view of the dominant group's principal concern: the independence of Poland. The authors of the postwar gallery made an attempt at reversing the perspective of looking at independence. However, it was thwarted by an extraordinary intervention (more on that below).

The Polin myth does not allow for any reconfiguration of the dominant majority narrative. It prevents any reinterpretations of meanings. It also blocks the appearance of new symbols. Staying with the example of Poland's regaining of its independence: the photograph of Vayter's grave – unknown in Polish Poland and displayed discretely, to say the least, behind the visitors' back – remains a marginal symbol. Given the fact that within secular Jewish culture in Poland, and throughout the Yiddish world, this photograph was of central importance, should it not be one of the central symbols at a place devoted to the history of Polish Jews in the period of the Second Republic? Even more so because – visually speaking – it has a paradigmatic potential. The same concerns the refugee crisis in Zbąszyń and its entanglement with *Kristallnacht*. Zbąszyń is an important icon of the Jewish fate during the Second Republic. Understanding the ruthless attitude of the independent Polish state and the Polish majority towards the Jewish refugees – who were then both Polish citizens and victims of Hitler – would entail liberation from intellectual helplessness in the face of the subsequent course of the history of Polish Jews. It would help not to repeat potentially criminal gestures. It would enable – yes, all of us – to participate in a more conscious way in contemporary times. The relegation of Vayter and

Zbąszyń to a corner proves that the division into center and periphery dictated by the dominant culture has remained in force.

The same principle applies to the Jewish *lieu de mémoire* known as Grabski's devil's decrees, Grabski's carts, or the Grabski Aliyah. As Szymon Rogoziński wrote in his memoirs in 1994: "I doubt that the reader will be able to find in a textbook of Polish history this term or its explanation, even though it describes a very important period in the life of Polish Jewry."[53] Twenty years on, this statement still stands. In neo-liberal Poland the narrative of Władysław Grabski, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (1923–1925), and his reforms remain a legend about the common good. The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews does not even attempt to confront it, even though "[t]hese years were best remembered by the Jews of Poland for the oppressive economic measures that hit hardest at the Jews and were indeed perceived as directed against them."[54] **The core exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews squandered the chance of becoming a starting point for a debate about the difference of majority and minority positions and perspectives. It does not help to understand why these perspectives and positions are not symmetrical and why it is not possible to unify them if one wants to avoid lies and violence.**

An Interlude

Information, which would appear in the footnotes in small print. Traditionally. This time, however, will be different.

Ayzik Vayter (1878–1919) was a Yiddish writer and playwright, drawing on the Polish Romantic and post-Romantic tradition, a deportee to Siberia, an activist of the Bund, and the author of the first party proclamation. He was murdered in the pogrom of Vilnius in 1919 by Polish national heroes: the legionaries of Edward Rydz Śmigły, later Marshal of Poland. On Easter Monday. On the seventh day of Pesach. In Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish history these two narratives – Pesach and Easter – meet at the point known as *gzeyres Poyln*.[55] Vayter's body lay in the

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53 Szymon Rogoziński, *Moje szczęśliwe życie*, foreword by Arnold Mostowicz (Łódź: Futura Press, 1994), 30.

54 Chone Shmeruk, "Responses to Antisemitism in Poland, 1912–1936: A Case Study of the Novels of Michał Bursztyn," in *Living with Antisemitism: Modern Jewish Responses*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1987), 277. The article also offers a bibliography of the problem and of the rationalizations thereof.

55 "On Easter Sunday, 20 April 1919, […] the Polish nation of Vilnius celebrates not only the Resurrection of the Lord. The holiday of national liberation was also frenetically

gutter for two days, until the end of the pogrom, which the Jewish cemeteries also fell victim to.[56] This is not about an isolated incident. Nothing was incidental nor isolated about the circumstances of Vayter's death. The cause of the murder of the Bundist, as of many before and after him, was the belief of the majority in the Judeo-Communism myth – still present in Polish public life today, not named, not problematized, and not disarmed in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Vayter's death belongs to a permanent and important – if not essential – theme of an alternative Pesach Haggadah, that is, a type of narrative about the Red Sea that does not end in deliverance.

Vayter was especially revered by An-ski. Having learned about Vayter's murder, An-ski dedicated *The Dybbuk* to his memory.[57] Despite the huge popularity of the play in post-1989 Poland, this fact has not been brought into the public domain. The core exhibition of the MHPJ has not altered this state of affairs. The monument over Vayter's grave featured an eagle with a broken wing along with inscriptions in Yiddish. However, for the majority, which has yet to revise its own culture, all this counts at most as a possible blemish on its image. From the perspective of the majority, what is really important is the fact that leaving aside all the violence and exclusion, the Jewish culture flourished – for the glory of Poland and the Poles, of course. According to one of the abovementioned laws of Polinization:

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experienced. 'This event […] like the Vilnius operation which preceded it, went down in the pantheon of national history, establishing at the same time the legend of Józef Piłsudski as Commander-in-Chief'": Przemysław Różański, "Wilno, 19–21 kwietnia 1919 roku," *Kwartalnik Historii* Żydów 1 (2006): 13–14, quoted in Karolina Szymaniak, "Trup, wampir i orzeł. Romantyzm w kulturze jidysz u progu dwudziestolecia międzywojennego," in *Polacy-Żydzi. Kontakty kulturowe i literackie,* ed. Eugenia Prokop-Janiec (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 111.

56 Like his gravestone, Vayter's publicly decomposing corpse became an "icon of a pogrom commencing the Polish-Jewish interwar years and also an icon of modern Yiddish culture, which after World War I had to settle into a new system of political-cultural forces. The macabre corpse of murdered A. Vayter could, and what is more should, haunt Polish-Jewish imagination, asking questions, making people reflect": Szymaniak, "Trup, wampir i orzeł," 109.

57 The actor Avrom Morevski, who played the Miropoler Tsaddik at the play's world premiere staged by the Vilna Troupe, saw a place for both of them in the founding myth of a future Jewish culture. "Vayter and An-sky were 'tragishe ringen fun der "goldener keyt" fun der yiddisher kultur' (tragic links in the 'golden chain' of Jewish culture)": "An-sky," *Unzer Tog* (January 30, 1921), quoted in Michael C. Steinlauf, "Fardibekt! – An-sky's Polish Legacy," in *The Worlds of S. An-sky: A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Gabriella Safran and Steven J. Zipperstein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 238.

"This is my country and in this country something as great as this Jewish culture developed. […] I am proud of Poland, of the Polish Jews."[58] *Da capo al fine*.

Zbąszyń, in turn, was the site for the internment of roughly 17,000 Jews of Polish citizenship, expelled from the Third Reich in the last days of October 1938. This so-called *Polenaktion* was a reaction of the Nazi state to a legislative change implemented by the Second Polish Republic. The latter concerned a law, passed by both chambers of the parliament and signed by the Polish President, which allowed the state to deprive of Polish citizenship any citizen who "was active abroad to the detriment of the Polish state or who was living abroad continuously for a period of at least five years after the establishment of the Polish State, and who had lost contact with the Polish State."[59] From the consular instructions, it becomes apparent that the purpose of the law was to cut off the return route to Poland for Jews of Polish citizenship residing in Germany and Austria (approximately 70,000 people). Their impending influx had been expected as a result of the intensification of Nazi persecution policies.[60]

When the Polish consular posts announced passport controls among Polish citizens, the Third Reich decided on the policy of enforced *faits accomplis*. In an action organized by Reinhard Heydrich with Heinrich Himmler's approval, thousands of Jews of Polish citizenship who had been robbed of their possessions were taken to the German-Polish border and driven by bayonets into Poland. In Poland, the majority of them were met with the prohibition of proceeding any further into the country. Zbąszyń was transformed into a refugee camp. Soon afterwards, the situation reached the state of a humanitarian catastrophe. On November 7, 1938, under the influence of news from Zbąszyń, the Polish citizen Herszel Grynszpan shot the German Nazi diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris. This event was used by the Third Reich as "grounds" for initiating a wave of pogroms, arrests, and property destruction organized and coordinated by the Nazi leadership, which swept through Germany on the night from November 9 to 10, 1938 (Kristallnacht).

Polinization *In Flagrante*

Which criteria lie behind the selection, hierarchization, and articulation of knowledge, as well as how the narrative about Jewish-Jewish matters is contextualized,

58 "Muzeum tożsamości," 283–284.

59 Law of March 31, 1938 – concerning deprivation of citizenship, Journal of Laws, No. 22, position 91.

60 See: Alan Steinweis, *Kristallnacht 1938* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

can be most clearly seen by looking at the example of the fate of the postwar gallery, and specifically the confrontation of its authors with state censorship. The state was represented by presidential circles (the Chancellery of the President) and government circles (the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage).[61] The process itself has been described in detail by the co-author of the original version of the gallery, Helena Datner. Datner left the team of scholars in protest against this censorship, its ideological orientation, as well as its ultimatum form and the *last minute* formula in which it was carried out during the final phase of the production of the exhibits.[62]

As it turned out, the interests of the state's historical policy and patriotic education were directly threatened:

> In our gallery they pressured us to dedicate considerably more space to the changeover of the political system to a communist one, more than the history of Poland as a context for the history of Jews requires. What was important for the history of Jews were the liberation by the Red Army, the promises of equal rights, and the protection from anti-Semitism, including anti-Semitism on the part of the anti-Communist underground. The point of the critics was not only to narrate at greater length but also to do so differently: namely on Polish martyrdom under communism, in accordance with the currently dominant vision of history. The thing is that Polish martyrdom is not at all relevant to the history of Jews. For the Jews the entry of the Russians meant liberation from physical annihilation.[63]

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61 In February 2013, the presentation of three galleries – the interwar, Holocaust, and postwar galleries – took place in the Chancellery of the President in the presence of the Polish President Bronisław Komorowski. The Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Bogdan Zdrojewski, also participated in the presentation. The presentation of the interwar, Holocaust, and postwar galleries was repeated in May 2013. This time, it took place in the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage: "There we were informed outright that our gallery (the postwar gallery) is inconsistent with the Polish *raison d'état*, because the Museum is built with Polish money, isn't it?": "Jankiel, chasydzi i Tuwim," 7.

62 A notice board in the basement of the Museum says that Helena Datner left the team on June 18, 2014. The core exhibition was opened to the public on October 28, 2014. See: Poldek Sobel, interview with Helena Datner, "Z Heleną Datner rozmawia Poldek Sobel," *Plotkies* 62 (December 29, 2014), http://www.jewish.org.pl/index.php/pl/opinie-komentarze-mainmenu-62/6803-helena-datner-o-mhp.html. See also: "Jankiel, chasydzi i Tuwim," 5–10; Kacha Szaniawska, interview with Helena Datner, "Datner: Żydowski punkt widzenia. Pyta Kacha Szaniawska," *Dziennik Opinii Krytyka Polityczna* (May 30, 2015), http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/historia/20150529/datner-zydowski-punkt-widzenia-rozmowa.

63 "Jankiel, chasydzi i Tuwim," 7.

An alternative selection, hierarchization, articulation, and contextualization proved to be out of the question concerning matters of independence, the Polish underground, the Catholic Church, and the dominant majority.

In a bid to save the postwar gallery from itself, a letter was withdrawn from the exhibition in which Irena Sendler expressed her thanks for having received help from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Below the display of anti-Semitic leaflets, the name of the organization that published them and put their spirit and ideas into practice has been removed. In present-day Poland, this organization – The "Freedom and Independence" Group (Zrzeszenie "Wolność i Niezawisłość") – is the subject of a state-promoted cult, and is presented to the younger generation as a model, lauded by popular culture. In addition, the narrative of the Kielce pogrom was censored, namely the part concerning the attitude of the Catholic Church. A desperate defense of the Second Polish Republic was also implemented. To this end, an "outstanding Polish historian" (Andrzej Friszke) who had been appointed as an expert, "stated that one cannot use the term 'equitable social system' not even in a sentence like: 'many Jews, who did not leave Poland straight away, hoped that the new system would be equitable, that is, that it would bring with it real equality for Jews.'"[64] In short, in the original version of the postwar gallery, the portrayal of the anti-communist pro-independence underground, the Church, and the majority was at odds with the conviction that the entire responsibility for anti-Semitic oppression falls on the postwar authorities that fought against the underground and the Church, thereby alienating themselves from Polish society and, in effect, from the Polish nation. It is telling that in the postwar gallery's final version we watch a fragment of a film about Jewish refugees in Copenhagen made by Marian Marzyński in March 1968. One of them makes a statement, voicing his personal opinion. In this exhibition, however, it sounds like collective absolution: "We cannot identify the Polish nation with the Polish government."

Furthermore, the entire section concerning the post-1989 period was cut from the postwar gallery for "objective reasons" (lack of space). However, according to Helena Datner, what was *de facto* decisive was "the lack of a so-called political will to show the significant discussions of the 2000s, present-day anti-Semitism, and so forth. The end of the exhibition was supposed to be smooth-running and optimistic."[65] The anonymous film, which was added to the exhibition without the prior knowledge and agreement of the creators of the gallery, narrates post-1989

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.

history in a way that more than validates Helena Datner's statements.[66] The presentation of "Jewish contemporary life [...] as a colorful, trouble-free kaleidoscope"[67] perpetuates the Polin myth, thereby enabling a harmonious closure of the bracket opened with the Forest Gallery. As Jerzy Halbersztadt noted: "the last part of the exhibition is nearly devoid of any connection with the present time."[68] Polinization as annihilation of the facts is revealed here in its entirety.

Passing in front of a screen, on which enthusiastic representatives of the dominant majority uproariously shout "I miss you, Jew" ("*Tęsknię za Tobą, Żydzie*"), visitors leave the exhibition area and enter the Museum Store, the suggestiveness of which is such that it appears to be part of the Museum's narrative. The little store offers among others things folk handicraft, an album about the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, a large selection of culinary literature, as well as entire shelves of books about Jan Karski (the shelves are captioned in English: "We recommend!"). For a modest price, visitors can purchase a good feeling, which emanates from the gadgets emitting persuasive messages: "Memory unites us," "Remembering together," "Warsaw of the two uprisings," and "I love Poland." On shirts and mugs we also encounter the multiplied incantation: "Poland is OK." The candy wrappers entice: "Try a sweet taste of Poland." Here, the master narrative reigns absolute. This store resembles a duty-free store of sorts. Visitors exit it further relieved, liberated from any possible questions and obligations, freed from reality.

Polinization through Contextualization

The contextualization of Jewish experiences in such a way that they lose their essential aspects, sometimes their very essence, also appears to be an essential means of Polinization, that is, of decontextualization. To repeat: the point is that there is contextualization that actually results in decontextualization. This phenomenon intensifies when the entanglement of Jewish experience with the dominant culture and the behavior and attitudes of the dominant group

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66 "The part concerning the post-1989 period – so important for Polish-Jewish relations and for the very emergence of the Museum – is a weird, tacked on, hastily and haphazardly produced substitute. [...] Furthermore, particularly distasteful are the fairly important changes in content that have been made in the postwar gallery concerning thorny political questions. Its [the gallery's] significance has not been completely annihilated but in many places it has become nondescript and evasive": Jan Śpiewak, Zofia Waślicka, and Artur Żmijewski, interview with Jerzy Halbersztadt, "Muzeum żydowskie," *Krytyka Polityczna* 40–41 (2015): 315.

67 "Z Heleną Datner rozmawia Poldek Sobel."

68 "Muzeum żydowskie," 315.

becomes tighter. This principle did not spare the Holocaust gallery. The portrayal of Jewish-Jewish matters *intra muros* reflects the current state of research. It also takes into account the contemporary receptive context in the manner in which an educational institution should do so. It therefore attempts to disarm the majority phantasms of Jewish collaboration, Jewish passivity, Jewish cowardice, undignified Jewish death, and so forth. It also outlines in detail the context of the two occupying powers' occupational policy toward both groups – the Jewish minority and the Polish majority – with special emphasis on the German eliminatory and exterminatory policy toward the Jews. However, as far as the attitude of the majority group toward the minority is concerned, the results of recent research have been withheld.

The majority group has been conceptualized as indifferent witness/bystander. This figure marks out the maximum "truth limit"[69] that was acceptable to the most open-minded sector of Polish public opinion in the second half of the 1980s[70] – before both independence in 1989 and the subsequent debates about the works of Jan T. Gross. In the 21st century, the Polish majority has regained its status of acting subject. By the same token, the category of Polish witness/bystander has lost its status as a relevant descriptive category.[71] Why and how, then, has there been a return to the pre-Jedwabne-debate state of consciousness? Why the preemption of the knowledge established during that debate and during the course of further research? The figure of a passenger of an "Aryan" tramway crossing the Warsaw ghetto epitomizes the category of witness/bystander. It is underpinned by a symbolic reconstruction of the bridge connecting the two parts of the ghetto over "Aryan" Chłodna Street. The bridge is the visual equivalent of Raul Hilberg's triad, a sign of a clear distribution of roles: perpetrators, victims, bystanders.

The category of indifference, in turn, has been visualized as an element of the triad: benevolence, hostility, indifference. This division – emphasized by the use of quotes – has been further reinforced by the following comment: "Some sympathized with Jews […]. Most, however, were indifferent, while others made anti-Semitic comments." The occurrence of anti-Semitic commentary in the public sphere betrays its socio-cultural legitimacy, and hence belies the concept of

69 "Truth limit" is a formulation by Feliks Tych. See: Feliks Tych, *Długi cień Zagłady. Szkice historyczne* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny IN-B, 1999), 160.

70 See: Tomasz Żukowski, "Wytwarzanie 'winy obojętności' oraz kategorii 'obojętnego świadka' na przykładzie artykułu Jana Błońskiego 'Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto,'" *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 423–451, http://dx.doi.org/10.11649/slh.2013.018.

71 See: Elżbieta Janicka, "Pamięć przyswojona. Koncepcja polskiego doświadczenia zagłady Żydów jako traumy zbiorowej w świetle rewizji kategorii świadka," *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 3–4 (2015): 148–227, http://dx.doi.org/10.11649/slh.2015.009.

indifference. Nonetheless, as something that diverts from the dominant wishful thinking, this escapes the visitors' attention. The recipients' consciousness is authoritatively downgraded to the level of a laboratory experiment from the field of social psychology, disregarding the socio-cultural context. Nonetheless, an examination of the sources reveals that indifference on the part of the social environment – which was actually considered desirable by Jews – was decidedly lacking.[72] Even today, there can be no question of indifference towards Jews and the Holocaust. Suffice it to mention the excesses committed by both Bronisław Komorowski and Andrzej Duda when competing with one another during the 2015 presidential debate to capture the support of the electorate.

The notion of indifferent witness/bystander is based on the notion of physical separation between Poles and Jews. However, this is not borne out by the facts – even during the period of ghettoization, even in Warsaw. Given the perspective taken by the Holocaust gallery it is impossible to understand the following information:

> The Germans established nearly 600 ghettos, *jüdische Wohnbezirke*, in cities, towns and villages, across the entire territory of occupied Poland. Some of the ghettos were closed, surrounded by high brick walls, wooden fences, or barbed wire. Others were open. All of them were overcrowded, living conditions harsh, hunger and disease a constant threat.

It is just as impossible to understand as how in Jedwabne – and in several dozen similar examples – just tens of Poles were able to murder several hundred Jews without the participation of Germans. Indeed, the existence of an invisible wall around the Jews is mentioned – independent of any visible walls or lack thereof. The quote from *Megilat yisurin* (*Scroll of Agony*) by Chaim Aron Kaplan explains, however, that it relates to a wall of silence around the Jewish soul ("a wall of silence for our spirits"). In reality, that "wall around the wall" – which Israel Gutman describes as actual, horribly hermetic, and effective[73] – was constituted by the attitudes and behavior of the non-Jewish majority, in continuity with prewar behavior and attitudes.

72 "I am by no means so blind as to think that the obligation of every Pole would be endangering his or her life by hiding a Jew in his or her apartment, but I think that it was the obligation of Polish society to enable Jews free movement in the Polish district": Calek Perechodnik, *Spowiedź. Dzieje rodziny żydowskiej podczas okupacji hitlerowskiej w Polsce*, ed. David Engel (Warsaw: Ośrodek KARTA, 2004), 129. This statement is representative of Jewish testimonies.

73 See: Barbara Engelking, interview with Izrael Gutman, "Z profesorem Izraelem Gutmanem rozmawia Barbara Engelking," *Zagłada Żydów* 9 (2013): 207–242.

The notion of indifferent witness/bystander is also based on the assumption of a break in historical continuity. Prewar anti-Semitism, which in the previous galleries is presented in a dispersed way and on the periphery of the master narrative, remains suspended in a void, giving way to the policy of the Germans. The German Nazi ideas imposed on the Jews as a group come across as unprecedented and unimaginable. This impression is intensified by the *evergreen* of mass imagination: Messerschmitts with black crosses – an icon of absolute evil, which swooped down upon Poland like a bolt from the blue, to which nothing compares and with which nobody – apart from the Germans – had anything to do. A quote from Julian Tuwim's letter attests: "In Poland it was… sunny, fresh, azure blue…."[74] Given the de-politicization of the interwar gallery one can, without difficulty, endow the poet's words with a figurative meaning as well. All this, while in fact it was the activity of the Christian majority – the indefatigable daily bustle, which intensified after the German invasion of Poland in 1939, and did not stop after the Germans had been driven out of the country by the Red Army in 1945 – that determined the range of success of the German project of *Endlösung*. After the German invasion a pogrom atmosphere reigned, the results of which included the Warsaw Easter pogrom of 1940, which lasted for eight days.[75] We know about this from the testimonies left behind by the protagonists of the Holocaust gallery: Emanuel Ringelblum, Adam Czerniaków, and Jan Karski. We also know about this from the writings of both authors of this section of the exhibition. However, in the exhibition we do not find a single word on this topic.

From the perspective of the dominant narrative, the figure of indifferent witness/bystander, Messerschmitts, and the picturesque villa at lake Wannsee represent a message well acquired and fixed: strong. **The strong message functions**

74 All unreferenced quotations come from the core exhibition at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. In keeping with the intentions of its creators, I consider all captions as complete, self-contained exhibits. Accordingly, I do not explore such issues as: full titles of sources, original language versions, authorship of translations, omissions, or the relation between the excerpt quoted and the entirety of the text from which it originates. My analyses and interpretations assume as their point of departure the exhibits' existing form.

75 See: Tomasz Szarota, *U progu Zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2000), in particular the introduction (5–18) and the first chapter entitled "Warszawa" (19–82). See Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939–1945. Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, translated from the Hebrew by Ina Friedman (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982) and, in the first chapter, the part entitled "Relations between the Jews and the Poles" (27–36).

as an absorber of the message that is in conflict with the dominant narrative: weak, peripheral. At the core exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews the strong Polin message has been further reinforced by means of exhibitive solutions. The weak message, in its turn, has been further weakened. In the Holocaust gallery, the information comprising the weak message is placed below eye-level. One is forced to assume a position which is physically impossible to maintain for a prolonged period of time. Thus, it is also not possible to remain focused on the presented content owing to physical discomfort. In effect, visitors usually skip these parts of the narrative. Suffice it to compare the "watchability" of Jedwabne with the "watchability" of the huge, entire wall-encompassing exhibit displaying large and clearly visible photographs of all the participants in the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 – an event of relatively minor importance.[76] Wannsee – in a spatial sense elevated onto an altar – resembles a fetish in the psychoanalytical sense, namely a construction of a substitute object that is supposed to distract attention away from that which one does not want to remember. What one does not want to remember might be, for example, the cramming of debarked tree stumps on the opposite side of the Wannsee exhibit – deprived of any meaning by the way they are displayed in the exhibition, representing however a potentially distressing symbol of the death of Jews in the landscape of their childhood, disturbingly familiar and in close proximity to the dominant majority. A fully-fledged spatial arrangement of the dead forest would have discredited the Forest Gallery and the Polin myth ascribed to it.

That is not the end of questions raised by the exhibition's spatial arrangement. The names and personal photographs of those who were burned alive in Jedwabne – a clear sign of their unique individuality – remain an accumulation of visual

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76 The commentary accompanying the exhibition does not attempt to hide the secondary importance of the event. Thus, the spatial panache of the exhibit becomes openly absurd: "The purpose of the Wannsee Conference was not to decide on genocide, but solely to plan how to carry it out. The Conference focused strictly on the technicalities of mass murder, bureaucratic procedures, and legal issues. Indeed, the annihilation had already begun. During the previous six months, Einsatzgruppen had been carrying out mass executions in the East. Jews from the Third Reich were being deported to Chełmno (Kulmhof) – the first death camp – which was already in operation." The Germans began to build the extermination camp in Bełżec in December 1941. See: Christian Gerlach, "The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of German Jews, and Hitler's Decision in Principle to Exterminate All European Jews," *The Journal of Modern History* 70:4 (December 1998): 759–812. See also: Mark Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A reconsideration* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002). I wish to thank Katrin Stoll and Jan Grabowski for these bibliographical suggestions.

messages poorly individualized due to the size of the photographs and captions. Superimposed on this is a commentary, which diverts from an understanding of the crime in Jedwabne as Holocaust and presents instead an understanding of it as a pogrom.[77] All this is directly juxtaposed with a showy film from the Petlura Days, that is, of the murder of Jews in Lviv by Ukrainians. However, from available historical sources we know that Polish inhabitants of Lviv, who were more experienced in the pogrom practice, participated in the murder. Next to it – at the far end of the spatial arrangement – there is a map showing towns in which "pogroms [were] carried out by the local population, summer 1941." The category of "local population" permits the pushing of Jews away to a safe mental and emotional distance, namely to that of an exogenous population. It also avoids any mention of the nationality and religion of the perpetrators. For the purpose of comparison, let us imagine the following statement: "in 1943 murders occurred among the local population in Wołyń." In other words: how would the Polish majority react to a lack of distinction between the identity of perpetrators and victims in a situation in which Polish public opinion exclusively identifies with the victims and attributes sole responsibility to the Ukrainian side? We do not encounter this type of language in any contemporary literature on the subject.[78] LTI (Lingua Tertii Imperii) and postwar newspeak are no longer used today as a descriptive tool. Instead, they have become the very subject of research itself. However, the language of de-politicization and de-differentiation is not the only problem here.

On the map displayed in the exhibition, the sites of murder of Jews by the "local population" have been placed in… the USSR. The political borders on the

77 The difference in explanation between the two language versions in the exhibition is also striking. In Polish, it reads: "During the pogrom in Jedwabne Poles played a key role. All of the town's Jews were gathered in the market square. They were humiliated and beaten, and afterwards burned alive in the barn. Several dozen inhabitants of Jedwabne and its surroundings committed the crimes. The Germans were also present in the town. They observed the events, probably stimulated them, but they did not directly participate." In English, the information is phrased as follows: "Poles played a key role in the Jedwabne pogrom. Locals from Jedwabne and vicinity herded all Jews into the market square. They humiliated Jews, beat them and finally burned them alive in the barn. The Germans were present in the town. In all probability, they encouraged and observed the pogrom, but were not directly involved."

78 See: Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. I (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2002); Andrzej Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej. Wrzesień 1939-lipiec 1941* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2006).

map visualize – from the Generalgouvernement to the East – three entities: the USSR, Lithuania, and Latvia. This visualization does not reflect historical reality whatsoever.[79] The events happened on the former Eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic (needless to say, this does not concern Kovno), from which the Soviet Union – after nearly two years of occupation beginning in September 17, 1939 – withdrew after the Wehrmacht's invasion on June 22, 1941. In other words, this concerns Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, occupied by the Third Reich from the moment of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. How can one account for this error on the map? On the other hand, the map is very hard to read due to its location and size. Even after it has been photographed and subsequently enlarged on a computer monitor, only somebody thoroughly initiated into the geography and history of the area would be capable of deciphering the names of the towns. The only thing clearly visible is the indication "USSR," along with an enormous amount of sites of anti-Jewish violence.

The illustration is placed inside a textual frame. On the one hand, the Museum's voice explains that after the Third Reich's invasion of previously Soviet-occupied territories "the administration of these territories broke down, leading to chaos and lawlessness." On the other, however, the quote from Heydrich's order, dated June 29, 1941, deals with German consent, indeed with the triggering of "the cleansing activities of anti-Jewish and anti-communists elements." Heydrich also calls these elements "self-defense units," which in the exhibition has been translated as "resistance units" into English. Moreover, historian and survivor Szymon Datner would years later speak of the "wonderful opportunity" – for the "local communities" – "to get rid of their neighbors and competitors… the alien and accursed Jews." Datner concludes: "And they did what they did to take over the property of those they had killed." It is impossible to understand anything from

79 The Lithuanian-USSR border visible on the map reflects the course of the Polish-Lithuanian border until October 10, 1939. After this date, until June 1940, Vilnius, together with the Vilnius region, were part of Lithuania – not the USSR. For this period, the course of the border is similar to that of the present-day. From July 21, 1940 onwards, Lithuania in turn does not exist anymore. Instead, there is the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, that is the USSR, not Lithuania. The same applies to the fragment of Latvia represented on the map, which from July 21 onwards is part of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, that is the USSR, not Latvia. After the Third Reich's invasion of the Soviet Union, at the very moment of the massacre of Jews with which the map is supposed to be concerned, the situation becomes obsolete. I wish to thank my colleagues from the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences for their help in analyzing the cartographic phantasmagoria displayed in the MHPJ.

this mixture except that some rational reasons must have played a role here. The confusion is remedied by the visualization through which the USSR almost advances to the rank of an explanatory category. In the entire exhibition, there is no explanation of what anti-Semitism is and what function the phantasm of Judeo-Communism fulfills within it. This map is phantasmatic, symbolic dynamite, given the place and function of the anticommunist paradigm within the present-day historical policy of Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine.[80]

The POLIN Museum[81] – "Poland is what's most important"[82]

The actual de-contextualization is reinforced by the presentation of topics that are unimportant from the point of view of Jews and their fate, but are important for Poles. The following serves as an example: the diagram of great size outlining in great detail the structure of the Polish Underground State and the film accompanying it. It resembles a polemic with Michael C. Steinlauf's assertion:

> The Polish Underground was involved in various political, social welfare and military activities. But for all its exemplary democratic structure and its exalted national mission, or perhaps more accurately, because of them, the "underground state" was essentially for

80 See: Philippe Perchoc, "Les mutations du compromis mémoriel européen: Une étude balte" in, *Le Passé au présent. Gisements mémoriels et actions historicisantes en Europe centrale et orientale*, eds. Georges Mink and Pascal Bonnard (Paris: Michel Houdiard Éditeur, 2010), 55–67; Dominique Arel, "L'Ukraine, la guerre et le principe de responsabilité collective," in *Le Passé au présent. Gisements mémoriels et actions historicisantes en Europe centrale et orientale*, eds. Georges Mink and Pascal Bonnard (Paris: Michel Houdiard Éditeur, 2010), 83–102; Tomasz Stryjek, "'Wojna o pamięć' o wydarzeniach lat trzydziestych–pięćdziesiątych XX wieku w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej w latach 2005–2010 – strategie polityki Litwy, Łotwy, Estonii, Ukrainy i Rosji," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 4 (2011): 191–223; Yitzhak Arad, "La réécriture de la Shoah en Lituanie d'après les sources Lituaniennes," *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah* 197 (July–December 2012): 607–660.

81 "It is also paradoxical that the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is called Polin, that is Poland. The short name is becoming more and more popular and widespread and often one simply says Polin Museum. I understand all etymological nuances, but naming the Museum of the History of Polish Jews simply Poland is nonetheless absurd. And in a psychoanalytical sense it also says as much about us as about the content of the permanent exhibition": Zofia Waślicka and Artur Żmijewski, interview with Jacek Leociak, "Leociak: Gruz z papier mâché,"*Krytyka Polityczna*, March 31, 2015, accessed December 6, 2015, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/kultura/20150331/leociak-gruz-z-papier-mache-rozmowa.

82 A 2010 election slogan of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) party.

> Poles only. […] Its powerful bond to the community it defended was based on culture and blood, not citizenship, and this intimacy implied its mirroring of popular attitudes, including those about the Jews.[83]

However, in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews the Polish Underground State seems to have been very important for Jews and sincerely concerned about their fate.[84]

The attitude of the Polish Underground authorities toward the wave of pogroms in 1941 has been concealed. We just learn that the Underground State's *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (*Information Bulletin*) issued a statement during Easter 1943 – exactly on April 25, one week after the outbreak of the Warsaw ghetto uprising – declaring: "The madness… of sniffing after the Jews… has broken out recently. Shame on you, denunciators, blackmailers, and murderers!" We do not learn that the frenzied hunt for Jews in "Aryan" Warsaw dated back to the summer of 1942, namely the so-called *Großaktion* – the period of the mass deportations of Jews to Treblinka. Despite that, the Polish Underground State only became interested in the blackmailers at the end of 1943 (*sic!*). In Warsaw alone there were thousands of blackmailers. Yet, the number of death sentences handed down by Underground courts amounted to less than ten in total. They applied to those blackmailers whose activities simultaneously conflicted with the interest of the Underground State: "The blackmailers avoiding contact with the underground and the Germans did not have to fear the punishing hand of the Underground State."[85] However, one leaves the exhibition with the conviction that the *Information Bulletin* is beyond reproach in this matter. The periodical, presented to visitors in Jan Karski's words as the "'most valued underground newspaper'" – which was

83 Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 37.

84 To restore a sense of reality, see: Dariusz Libionka, "ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów," in: *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. Andrzej Żbikowski (Warsaw: IPN – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2006), 15–207; Adam Puławski, *W obliczu Zagłady. Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, ZWZ-AK wobec deportacji Żydów do obozów zagłady (1941–1942)* (Lublin, IPN, 2009). See also: David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1987); David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

85 Jan Grabowski, *"Ja tego Żyda znam!". Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie 1939–1943* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004), 55.

"published in occupied Poland by the Home Army" – functions as a *pars pro toto* of the Polish Underground State.

The real attitude of the Polish Underground State toward the Jews as well as its real significance for the Jews remains unmentioned. The bleeding anchor symbolizing "Fighting Poland" ("Polska Walcząca") is given an honorary place – above a German *Bekanntmachung* about the death penalty for those who helped Jews – and it appears four times in the film material. However, we are not informed that in the Polish case the heroic fight against the Germans did not actually exclude anti-Semitism. On the contrary, the illusion of Polish-Jewish brotherhood in arms has been sustained and legitimized owing to the commentary in the film and the captions under at least two photographs whose factual content drastically contradicts this brotherhood in arms. The liberation of Gęsiówka prison constitutes the context of the photograph of inmates and liberators. Mordechai Anielewicz's death, as well as the death of members of the high command of the Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB), constitute the context of the photograph in which Symcha Ratajzer, Stefan Siewierski and Yitzhak Zuckerman appear. One could also question the use of a quote from one of Marek Edelman's later statements, which justifies the subsuming of ŻOB into the communist People's Army (Armia Ludowa, AL) during the uprising in 1944 as pure coincidence, whereas the actual reason was the murder of one of the ŻOB members – as a Jew – by a Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) unit and the anti-Semitic atmosphere prevailing within the ranks of this organization. These are significant omissions, if one takes into account that all of these issues are dealt with in the source materials and are covered in the scholarly literature on the subject.[86]

Then, there is the question of the Council for Aid to Jews (Żegota), which was established and exploited by the Polish Underground State for propaganda and financial purposes. At the same time, its organizational possibilities were restricted and, with them, its scope for action.[87] From the Museum's explanation, we learn that both Żegota and the Jewish National Committee (Żydowski

86 See: Barbara Engelking and Dariusz Libionka, *Żydzi w powstańczej Warszawie* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2009); Symcha Rotem, *"Kazik". Wspomnienia bojowca ŻOB* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993); Yitzak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, ed. and trans. Barbara Harshav (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). See also: "No przecież jestem! Rozmowa z Lubą Gawisar," in Grupińska, *Ciągle po kole*, 166.

87 Marcin Urynowicz, "La Délégation du gouvernement de la République polonaise de Londres et le financement du Conseil d'aide aux Juifs (Żegota)," in *Juifs et Polonais*

Komitet Narodowy, ŻKN) were co-financed by the Polish government-in-exile, whereas in reality it was the other way around. The money from Jewish organizations was only partly forwarded to Żegota and the ŻKN. The rest subsidized the coffers of the Polish administration. There is no information about how often the money – transferred to occupied Poland via Polish Underground State channels – failed to reach Żegota for other than objective reasons or was paid to Żegota in Polish zlotys according to the official German rate instead of the much higher black market rate.

Finally, there is the question of proportion. The number of Jews who were saved by their fellow Jews – through the channels of Jewish parties[88] among others – was higher. Yet, the place assigned to this phenomenon is not directly proportional to the significance it had for Jews. The face of Żegota is represented by: Władysława Laryssa Choms, Julian Grobelny, and Maria Hochberg. On the other hand, the ŻKN as well as the Coordination Committee of the ŻKN and the Bund remain faceless, even though – or perhaps precisely because – Adolf Berman (simultaneously secretary of Żegota), Leon Feiner (simultaneously vice-chairman and chairman of Żegota after Grobelny and Jabłonowski), and Bathia Temkin-Berman were no less deserving of merit when it came to saving Jews. Żegota has represented an

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1939–2008, eds. Jean-Charles Szurek and Annette Wieviorka (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009), 79–93.

88 In interwar Jewish Poland, the word "party" referred to both a political stance and one's place on earth – in the most basic sense of the term – availed by the party networks, which featured kindergartens, schools, summer and winter camps for children and adolescents, libraries, clubs for adults, sport societies, eateries, night classes, workers' cooperatives, provident funds, trade unions, etc. "Ezra Mendelsohn described Jewish parties in Poland as substitutes for both the 'decaying home' and a state that was not 'serving this particular group the way it should'. Hence 'one gets the kind of party that is also an entire world, with its schools, its cultural institutions, its recreational institutions and so on'": Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*, 212, quoted in Gennady Estraikh, "The Kultur-Lige in Warsaw: A Stopover in the Yiddishists' Journey between Kiev and Paris," in *Warsaw: The Jewish Metropolis, Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, ed. Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 336. Marek Edelman emphasized that the Bund was more than just a political party: "We were a huge family," "The Bund was a mum for us all": Rudi Assuntino and Wlodek Goldkorn, *Strażnik. Marek Edelman opowiada*, foreword by Jan Józef Szczepański, trans. Ireneusz Kania (Cracow: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1999), 24, 142. Israel Gutman gave a similar account of the Hashomer Hatzair, a multi-generational Jewish scouting organization, which transformed into a political party after the war: "It was namely the organization that was a family to me": "Z profesorem Israelem Gutmanem rozmawia Barbara Engelking," 218.

icon of Polish mass imagination and an instrument of Polish propaganda from 1942 until today (with an interruption from 1945 to 1963). Emphasizing the role of the Jewish National Committee and the Coordination Committee would have ruined this narrative, as would have the admission that Żegota was a history of Poles and Jews fighting to save the lives of Jews threatened with annihilation. They fought against the Third Reich, against the majority of Polish society, and against the Polish Underground State, within which they were active. All of this was possible thanks to their own individual determination as well as to money from British, American, and Palestinian Jews. It is impossible to describe by using language from the 1960s. The narrative that has been articulated remains in line with the – apparently categorical – imperative of maintaining self-satisfaction on the part of the majority group.

When in the core exhibition there happen to be *lieux de mémoire* important for both Jewish and Polish narratives – even though they carry different meanings – they are presented from the Polish perspective. Katyń is one example. The film that opens the Holocaust gallery provides us with the information that among the victims of the crimes committed at Katyń there were 900 Jews, including the Chief Rabbi of the Polish Armed Forces, Boruch Steinberg. In connection with the depiction of the year 1943, however, the information about Katyń comes back to us in a de-contextualized form. Under the date April 20, 1943 (one day after the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising) we learn that the "news about… the monstrous crime of mass murder of Polish officers, POWs committed by the Russians… has shocked and terrified the Polish public." The concurrence with the simultaneous intensification of the hunt for Jews seems to be coincidental here. And yet, Nazi propaganda publicized Katyń as a Judeo-Bolshevik ritual murder a week before the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, during the final phase of the industrial extermination of Polish Jews. This illustrates the connection of the phantasm of Judeo-Communism to the master narrative of Christianity and allows us to understand the mechanism of its operation. It is a great opportunity to present matters clearly and plainly – in particular in a situation when the icon of the Nazi imaginarium is setting off the collective imagination. The Nazi Katyń poster – depicting the Judeo-Bolshevik murder – functions unhindered within the iconosphere of today's Poland, in the center of the public sphere, without any critical commentary.[89] Taking up the subject of Katyń in the

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89 During Easter 2010, the Nazi poster was displayed in the Warsaw Temple of Divine Providence, known as The Pantheon of Great Poles, at the grave of the chaplain of the Katyń Families. In 2012, one could see the poster on the cover of the popular historical supplement to the biggest largest Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

context of 1943 without accompanying commentary means leaving the field open to automatic thinking.

Polin *Maximum Perversum ohne Kompromisse*

The MHPJ's core exhibition not only does not challenge, but downright perpetuates and transmits, and therefore legitimizes and consolidates, constructions which are at home in a museum of anti-Semitism. Two such constructs are the figure of Esterka (Esterke) and the category of *Paradisus Iudaeorum*. Esterka is not presented as a character invented by an official of the Roman Catholic Church. Nowhere is it explained that this construct was brought to life to be used against Jews in a power play between the Church and the state. The aim of the Esterka legend was not only to humiliate Jews and undermine their position – it was also to delegitimize their very presence in Poland. Along with the master narrative of Christianity, it assigned them "a truly 'unsafe place,' one that at any given moment could disappear from the face of the earth."[90]

> There are no extant contemporary records of the relationship between Casimir the Great (1310–1370) and Esterka. The first mention of it is that of Jan Długosz (1415–1480), about a hundred years after the supposed event. […] In the footsteps of Długosz, the Casimir-Esterka tradition became a more or less permanent feature of Polish antisemitic literature, the supposedly preferential status of Polish Jews being traced to Casimir's partiality towards his mistress. […] These strictures, the bases for which are already present in Długosz, are encountered again as early as the sixteenth century, and in the most explicit terms.[91]

In 2013 – independently of the promotion in right-wing journals and in shop windows of so-called patriotic bookshops in the whole of Poland – it was twice reproduced in the April edition of the historical mainstream magazine *Mówią Wieki* (*The Centuries Speak*): in the main edition and in an educational supplement for teachers *Mówią Wieki w Szkole* (*The Centuries Speak at School*), etc. In April 2014, the poster decorated the door to the former synagogue in Krynki, currently transformed into the Municipal Cultural Center, as an advertisement for "The Solemn Commemoration of the Katyń Crime." Every year the collection increases. Not once was the reproduction accompanied by a commentary on the anti-Semitic meaning of the poster.

90 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Żydzi u Kolberga," in Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia,* foreword by Maria Janion (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2004), 66. The text was written in 1999.

91 Chone Shmeruk, *The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature: A Case Study in the Mutual Relations of Two Cultural Traditions*, trans. Paul Glikson, Polish citations translated by Jerzy Michałowicz (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for the Furtherance of the Study of Jewish History, 1985), 10, 14, 17.

The first Jewish mention of the alleged affair between Casimir the Great and "a beautiful Jewess" is a century younger than the Polish one. Which is to say that it appeared two hundred years after the death of this last king of Poland's first dynasty. The quote we are being indulged with at the core exhibition comes from *Tzemach David*, a 16th-century Jewish chronicle by David Gans: "The king performed great favors for the Jews for her sake, and she extracted from the king writs of kindness and liberty for the Jews."[92] We do not learn about the heated debate that revolved around the Esterke legend within Jewish culture, on one side of which was Sholem Asch, and on the other, such intellectuals as Shloyme Anski, Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, and Aaron Zeitlin. An-ski accused Asch of "Polish nationalism (for assimilated Jews)."[93] Yiddishists considered Esterka an inglorious symbol of assimilationism. Jewish historians followed suit, and sometimes quite bluntly so: "To equate an ordinary whore with Judith is a proof of an utter lack of pietism for the national traditions."[94] At the core exhibition, this toxic phantasm is on display, incorporated into a structure akin to a three-panel altarpiece with the caption: "Did Długosz invent this previously unknown narrative? Or did he use a story he had heard to explain the king's partiality to his Jewish subjects? No one knows." The English translation provided is no less radical: "Did Długosz invent the story? Or did he repeat a legend he had heard to explain why the Polish king was so good to his Jewish subjects? We do not know." It is simply beyond comprehension that the Hanna Zaremska who designed the gallery and

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92 English translation from Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Esterke*, translated from the Hebrew by David Strauss, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Esterke.

93 Shloyme An-ski, "Di cejlem-frage," *Dos naje lebn* 7 (1909): 612, quoted in Shmeruk, *The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature*, 65.

94 The Polish translation of Shmeruk's book uses the word "dziwka." See: Chone Shmeruk, *Legenda o Esterce w literaturze jidysz i polskiej. Studium z dziedziny stosunków wzajemnych dwóch kultur i tradycji*, translated from the English by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2000), 133. The German original reads: "Eine gemeine Dirne der Judith gleichzustellen zeigt von wenig Pietät für nationale Traditionen": Hermann Sternberg, *Geschichte der Juden in Polen unter dem Piasten und Jagellonen* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1878), 61–63, quoted in Shmeruk, *The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature*, 113. Or, as Shmeruk elegantly put it, "[Sternberg] objected to the elevation of Esterka, a Jewish concubine, into an honorable position in the traditions of Polish Jewry": Ibid.

the Hanna Zaremska who authored the study *Długosz and the Jews* are one and the same person.[95]

Another such element at the core exhibition is the notion of *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, whose original source is a 1606 pamphlet. The image of Poland as a paradise for Jews – "a goldmine for vagabonds" – has thus been a part of collective consciousness since the early 1600s. "An authoritative source-based study of the subject was published by Stanisław Kot in 1937."[96] Based on textual analysis of the squib, Kot identified its author as a Catholic bourgeois, presumably a priest. The anthropologist of Christian anti-Semitism whose findings I am quoting comments ironically:

> It is clear as day: the man who coined the opinion about Poland as a paradise for Jews was not a Jew himself. […] The moral intention behind the phrase "Poland is a paradise for Jews" proves somewhat different from how it is usually put forward. The undertone we hear is not the voice of a tolerant host but the sarcasm of a helpless man, terrified by the impunity of the newcomers who bring with them all that is evil.[97]

Another guise under which the *Paradisus Iudaeorum* myth remains active to this day is the myth of Judeopolonia. One of its victims was Gabriel Narutowicz, shot for being "a Jewish president" in 1922, at the dawn of Polish independence, after a smear campaign unleashed by Roman Dmowski's National Democracy party and the Polish Roman Catholic Church. As for the present-day life of the myth, one way to look into its workings is to follow the activities of the anti-Semitic foundation *Paradisus Iudaeorum*. At the Museum's core exhibition, this extremely biased category has been raised – with no question or quotation mark – to the status of an admissible and adequate, neutral descriptive tool. This procedure constitutes an inadvertent repetition of one performed in 1942 in an article entitled "The Jews in Polish Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions." The work was published by the Division for Research on Jewry (Judenforschung Referat), a part of the Section for Race and National Traditions Research (Sektion für Rasse- und Volkstumforschung, SRV) within the Institute for German Work in the East (Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit, IDO), a Nazi research institution based in Cracow. Concerning the formulation describing Poland as the *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, it informs the reader that "it is a proverb which provides a valid insight into the actual relations in

95 See Hanna Zaremska, "Długosz i Żydzi," in Hanna Zaremska, *Żydzi w średniowiecznej Polsce. Gmina krakowska* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2011), 267–292.

96 Tokarska-Bakir, "Żydzi u Kolberga," 53.

97 Ibid., 54–55.

Poland."[98] Thus, both then and now, the category of *Paradisus Iudaeorum* has been legalized and legitimized. What we have before us truly is a hard-core exhibition.

Both these phantasms are among those that are most emblematic – and that is also to say, most indispensable – for the dominant narrative.[99] Their deconstruction has been deemed impossible. Yet let us imagine what would happen if both were neither embraced nor disputed – in favor of a third way: that of disregarding and omitting. What would have happened if the MHPJ had never mentioned Esterka or the *Paradisus Iudaeorum*? If it passed over the majufes singer Jankiel?[100] If it did away with such Polish-Polish places of memory as the Constitution of May 3, 1791 or the "Fighting Poland" anchor emblem? If no place was found for pornographic-sized garlic, nor a goose, nor even gefilte fish itself? Questions would arise. About the absence of Esterka, the absence of the *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, the absence of Jankiel, the absence of the goose and the Constitution, the absence of the anchor and the garlic. A seed of doubt, discussion, and debate would be planted. In the first place, about whether and, if so – what and for whom – these

98 "[E]s ist des Sprichtwort, das die tatsächlichen Verhältnisse in Polen am knappsten in einem gültigen Urteil umreisst" (Josef von Sommerfeldt, "Die Juden in den polnischen Sprichwörtern und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten," *Die Burg* 3 [July 1942]: 314). The paper was consulted by Professor Tadeusz Estreicher. I thank Jan Grabowski for bringing to my attention this set of facts from the history of anthropology, ethnography, and anti-Semitism.

99 A particularly meaningful, if not downright grotesque, example of this was the treatment Piotr Wróbel's review of Hanna Zaremska's *Żydzi w średniowiecznej Polsce. Gmina krakowska* received from the editors of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Both the book and its review dealt with historical knowledge about the period. Despite this, and without Wróbel's permission, the article was renamed "Casimir and his Esterka." The Internet edition was additionally illustrated with a reproduction of Wojciech Gerson's painting *Casimir the Great and the Jews* (also known as *The Reception of the Jews*, 1874). The publication of a factual and sober opinion concerning a scholarly monograph could not do without the icons of the nationalist imaginarium. See: Piotr J. Wróbel, "Kazimierz i jego Esterka," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 14–15, 2013, accessed December 6, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,134734,15127974,Kazimierz_i_jego_Esterka.html.

100 "'This utter disinterest in the fate and needs of Jewry, this lack of understanding of its tradition and culture, this complete unwillingness to delve into Jewish life has characterized the entire course of Polish statehood' [ref. A. Russak, "Kwestia żydowska w Polsce," *Tel-Awiw* 1:1 (June 1919): 22]. […] The kind of Jew that was wanted in Poland was epitomized by Jankiel, who would bow down humbly whenever shouted at and never demand any rights but who loved Poland as much as a Pole. Unfortunately, as the author stated, this lack of understanding and unwillingness to learn about Jewish society survived until contemporary times.": Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 110.

facts, myths, and symbols signify. Second, about why the museum of a minority could not – or at least thought it could not – take an outright stand against figures aimed against this minority. A debate would ensue about the condition of culture and of society, including about the ways of silencing debate. Inevitably, this would lead to a reflection on the mechanisms of violence and exclusion – among them the mechanisms that produced the Holocaust – and on their continued presence in today's Polish culture. All this, however, would defy the meta-principle of Polinization, namely the annihilation of the facts of the matter.

We have at our disposal an extensive literature concerning each of the facts and myths used to piece together the POLIN MHPJ's master narrative. All these issues have long been recognized, analyzed, and subjected to critique. Knowledge about them is well established among scholars of Jewish history and culture as well as the majority cultures of Diaspora countries. From Berek Joselewicz to Mordechai Anielewicz. From John of Capistrano to Roman Dmowski and his successors of today. From the medieval pogroms to 1968. The history of the annihilation of Polish Jews is no mystery. And neither is the attitude towards Jews on the part of the Underground State, which in the MHJP suddenly becomes a secret. Books have been written on both the history and anthropology of Christian anti-Semitism (*sic!*). Monographs have appeared on each of the most toxic anti-Semitic phantasms, including Esterka and the *Paradisus Iuadaeorum*. And likewise explained has been the figure of the majufes singer, whom the exhibition presents as if none of this transpired. And that is not even all: the Jankiel of Adam Mickiewicz has been additionally legitimized as a literary replica of real-life cymbalist Mordko Fajerman (*photographie à l'appui*). Last but not least, there are a number of studies concerning the Polin myth itself.[101] In 2013, in the Museum's main auditorium, a debate took place regarding the violence-enabling and exclusionary functions of this very myth, taking as its point of departure a juxtaposition of the film *Polin* (2008) with its analysis, entitled *Philo-Semitic Violence* (2012).[102]

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101 See: Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland Legends of Origin*, 27–44; and the section entitled "Patriotyzm" in the chapter "Polin – czyli świetlana przeszłość," in Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 102–112.

102 See: Elżbieta Janicka, and Tomasz Żukowski, "Przemoc filosemicka," *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 1 (2012): 1–39, http://dx.doi.org/10.11649/slh.2012.001. The meeting, which took place on August 11, 2013, featured: the director of the film, Jolanta Dylewska, the authors of the text and, representing the MHPJ, Tamara Sztyma, co-creator of the interwar gallery and at the time curator of the temporary exhibition "Letters to Afar" by Péter Forgács.

New museology makes it its mission to create axiologically oriented interpretations of the past. To achieve this, it has at its disposal the tools of critical theory, postcolonial studies, not to mention the subsequent turns in the humanities, which were motivated by emancipatory pursuits and opposition to discrimination. In other words, in light of both current knowledge and the current level of consciousness, what we are seeing in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews could not have happened. It could not have happened in any museum in a 21st-century liberal democratic state. As Pierre Bourdieu liked to tell his students: "Whenever it's not about knowledge, it's about consent." We have thus come to a point when it seems absolutely crucial to reconsider the status of the institution of interest to us. If "[a] good museum always will direct attention to what is difficult and even painful to contemplate,"[103] then the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is not a good museum or… is not a museum at all. The MHPJ's priorities are the priorities of the current historical policy, including those set forth for Polish diplomacy. What is unacceptable in a museum becomes an obligation at a diplomatic outpost. The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the Embassy of Poland in Poland, located in the country's capital on the Square of Polish Innocence. "To a considerable extent, it is also a monument to free Poland,"[104] to quote a person of merit to both the creation of the MHPJ and to Polish diplomacy. Meanwhile, in 2015, the embassy-monument competed for the "best tourist product of the year" award, along with such contestants as the Wrocław ZOO or the Bieszczady Mountains Rail-Cycle Draisines.

Polin in Case of an Emergency

As Anna Wolff-Powęska remarked, after Auschwitz, "the Hebrew name Po-lin – 'rest here' – has taken on the character of a caricature."[105] What she means is clearly visible. At least in Muranów. On the one side, there is naked earth and the static,

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103 Postman, "Museum as Dialogue," 68.

104 Statement by Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka from a film screened during the exhibition "How to Make a Museum?" (in frame-by-frame photographic documentation of the film from the author's personal collection). Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka was Vice-Director for Development of the MHPJ project (2000–2005). She then went on to serve as an Undersecretary of State (2006–2008) and Secretary of State (2008–2010) in President Lech Kaczyński's Chancellery. In 2010–2015, she was the Consul-General of the Republic of Poland in New York City. She currently heads the Jan Karski Educational Foundation.

105 Anna Wolff-Powęska, "Alma Mater Auschwitz," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 18–19, 2015, 33.

silent, black structure of Rapoport's and Suzin's monument. On the other lie seductive architecture and an inundation of countless multimedia initiatives motivated by one and the same compulsive disorder. This neurosis has as its motto a slogan, which repeatedly reappeared in statements surrounding the architectural design contest for the Museum's building: "the power of the ground must be overcome."[106] Results of this confrontation can be observed in the interwar, Holocaust, and postwar galleries. In the interwar gallery, we get a chance to marvel at the *Himmelweg* of the (not so distant) past, cast in the role of an anonymous, "typical Jewish street." In the postwar gallery we have before us papier-mâché mock-up rubble. Apparently real rubble, dug up from the place where the mock-up now is, was deemed too obscene to be introduced into the field of visibility. Some expert must have declared it radioactive material whose force of impact exceeded the neutralizing capabilities of the concrete sarcophagus. A similar danger loomed over the Holocaust gallery. Its authors envisioned within it a space of silence: with no exhibits, filled in with a void. The plans were abandoned but that, as it turns out, was still not enough. The final result is that as you exit the Holocaust gallery, you find yourself facing an infographic that shows the way to the emergency exit.[107] The problem is that outside is the same, if not more of it. Postwar Muranów was built from the rubble of the ghetto and from the bones of Jews, and it rests on structural landfills of rubble and bone. In this respect, Muranów is like a *pars pro toto* of today's Poland. In other words, unlike the myth of Polin, the fact of the Holocaust does not have to do anything; it is sufficient for it just to be. There is truly no good news in sight for the enthusiasts of a safe and healthy lifestyle. All projects of an *Endlösung der Endlösungfrage* fall through on Polish soil. No emergency exit will be of any help here.

Although it receives a similar treatment to that of the remainder of the core exhibition, the Holocaust nevertheless occupies a special place in the MHPJ's narrative. For instance, the elimination of the Holocaust gallery from the Museum's promotional film footage particularly brings it to attention. The same effect is produced by the constant denial of the Holocaust's importance in the history of Polish Jews. This latter operation results in a message pushed to absurdity through its formulation by the Museum's guides: the Holocaust might be a turning point in the history of civilization, but not necessarily in the history of Poland, and as far as the history of Polish Jews goes – when we look at things objectively and

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106 Ref. photographic documentation of the exhibition "How to make a museum?" from the author's personal collection.

107 The Holocaust gallery's co-author, Jacek Leociak, gives an appalled account of this. See: "Leociak: Gruz z papier mâché."

impartially – the Holocaust was just several years out of several hundred. That is a dim-witted message, even if considered as a "Polish joke." Conceptualizations of this kind are difficult to get out of one's head: they haunt you. Finally, the Holocaust is placed in a central position by the Museum's most repeated catchphrase: "It is a museum of life, not death."[108] In this perspective, the Holocaust becomes the axis around which the MHPJ's identity crystallizes: the primary element in relation to which secondary elements are defined. It is striking that this repertoire of counterproductive discursive stunts has been implemented despite the existence of a readily available, neutral, descriptive formulation – the Museum of the History of Polish Jews – which neither overexposes nor conceals the Holocaust. The reconfiguration gave priority to an antithetical fixation. As a result, the entire project of the Museum has become subordinated to the Holocaust.

The most puzzling and astonishing aspect of the case under analysis is that the position in which the Holocaust is placed is simultaneously fundamental and antagonistic. The "museum of life, not death" formula assigns the Holocaust the key and at the same time indispensable role: that of the constitutive other, if not of the constitutive enemy. Thus was defined the Museum's politics of identity. Hastily pieced onto it is a rationalization, which is really a manipulation – and not just an intellectual one. Here is how the current director of the Museum motivated the antithetic formula of "museum of life, not death" during his first foreign visit to the US: "'If you, God forbid, were killed in an accident tomorrow,' said Stola as he leaned forward and knocked slightly against the underside of a filigreed wooden coffee table, 'would you want people to remember the day of your death, or your life?'"[109] And everything would fit, except in the case of the Jews, it was not an accident. In the case of the Jews, it was the Holocaust.

The word "death" means the Holocaust. But the word "Holocaust" means not only the death of Jews but also the life of Jews – and Jewish life was incredibly intense in the face of the Holocaust. The word "Holocaust" also means anti-Semitism. The word "Holocaust" means the crime perpetrated by the German Nazi state

108 Dariusz Stola quoted in Piotr Bakalarski, "Dyrektor Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich zapowiada: 'To nie będzie muzeum antysemityzmu,'" *TVN 24 / TVN Warszawa,* March 6, 2014, accessed December 6, 2015, http://tvnwarszawa.tvn24.pl/informacje,news,to-nie-bedzie-muzeum-antysemityzmu,115596.html

109 Anna Goldenberg, "Polish Museum Director Stresses 1,000-Year Jewish History," *Forward* (April 9, 2014), accessed December 6, 2015, http://forward.com/news/196311/polish-museum-director-stresses-1000-year-jewish-h/. This is more than simply an individual discursive strategy. In 2001, Józef Glemp, the Cardinal of Poland, used the word "accident" to refer to the Jedwabne murder. See: "Muzeum żydowskie," 308.

on the territory of occupied Eastern Europe, with special regard to Poland. The word "Holocaust" means the majority practices of local non-Jewish communities, which supplemented and sealed any holes and imperfections in the Nazi German project of extermination.[110] Diverting attention from the death of Jews results in diverting attention from the circumstances of their death and is in the interest of any non-Jewish majority that does not wish to confront its own past and draw from it conclusions for the future.

The rationalization, which keeps up the appearance of decency, is: the story about the Holocaust overshadows the story about the history and culture of the European Diaspora, and makes it impossible to express in full the splendor and glory of Jewish civilization. In reality, however, such a relationship is non-existent. **The story about the Holocaust does not make expressing the splendor and glory of Jewish civilization impossible. Considering what those murdered managed to achieve in the face of death, the story about the Holocaust in fact adds to both the splendor and the glory of Jews and their civilization. And as it does so, it renders the magnitude of the crime committed on them more and more enormous. And this is what is so difficult to hear for all those who have not reevaluated and rejected the culture that led to the crime.** This is why the majority group identifies the story about the Holocaust as an excess. Excess is in the eye of the beholder. This is what the phenomenon of "overrepresentation" consists in. The inability to express is a false problem; the real problem is an inability to listen. The majority group exhibits this inability, as does anyone who agrees to negotiate with it on its terms. What interests the majority in minority narratives and in narratives about minorities is its own image. Polinization allows the dominant group to visit Muranów without major discomfort. So far, so good. But because Polinization legitimizes and strengthens a regression in consciousness, the word "Polin" written all over exterior glass paneling in an apotropaic attempt to fend off reality might one day prove insufficient.

Polin Forever?

The Polin myth is a memento of a lack of equal rights, of a lack of conversation or the very possibility of conversation. It is a monument of exclusion and violence, of one-sided accusations that accompanied the unilaterally applied principle of alleged guilt without the right of defense. The Polin myth is a relic of humble supplications and homage-paying addresses. It is a sign of the weakness of the

110 See: Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski, "Ci nie są z ojczyzny naszej," *Gazeta Wyborcza,* October 29–30, 2011, 20.

weak. And, in the hands of the majority – an instrument of blackmail. Here and then. Here and now. The Polin myth is a symbol of the defeat of the concepts of citizenship and liberal democracy. "The head of the core exhibition, Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, views the use of the word 'Polin' as 'the DNA of what is Polish about the history of Polish Jews.'"[111] Sounds terrifying. If this was indeed the case, and if this is still the case – and the core exhibition of the MHPJ seems to be proof of that – it is time to ask: will it always have to be like this?

The Polinization of the MHPJ occurred gradually. Given the fact that it took such a long time for the institution to be established and that so many symbolic and non-symbolic interests were intertwined within it, it is difficult to answer the question of whether this process was unavoidable. But if it was, did it have to extend so deeply? The diplomatic character of the undertaking does not explain everything. In 2001, "the Jewish Museum […] found itself in the government's *exposé* – as one of the priorities of foreign policy."[112] However, it was placed there by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who only a short time before – while still a member of parliament – had asked: "Are we so terrorized by anti-Semitism that we are unable to openly join in the discussion about the fact that Poles murdered their Jewish neighbors?"[113] Apparently, one can define the Polish raison d'état in different ways. As Jerzy Halbersztadt put it: "Primitive politicians thought about this in terms of image, and the more sharp-witted in terms of a fundamental change in culture reflected in social relations, in a change of Poles, men and women."[114]

Between the announcement of the political will to build the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (2000)[115] and the changing of its name to POLIN (2014), fifteen years had elapsed. During this period, the Polish dominant culture and

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111 Shana Penn, "Museum of the History of Polish Jews: Now can we rest!," *Political Critique* (October 29, 2014), accessed December 6, 2015, http://politicalcritique.org/culture/2014/museum-of-the-history-of-polish-jews/.

112 "Muzeum żydowskie," 299.

113 Ibid. Jerzy Halbersztadt is referring here to Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz.

114 Ibid., 313.

115 "The first public speech delivered abroad by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski in which he spoke of the Museum was at the International Holocaust Forum in Stockholm on January 26, 2000. He presented the idea to the most powerful leaders from across the globe." The passage is excerpted from an information chart displayed at the "How to make a museum?" temporary exhibition: Photograph from author's personal collection. The very idea of the Museum came into being during 1993–1994. In 1997, at the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute a team of a few people was formed whose task – with the participation of advisors from abroad – was to work out a concept for the project. Jerzy Halbersztadt led the team.

majority society underwent a nationalist radicalization – in virtually all its political manifestations and social movements. Could one not have stood up to it, making use of a powerful – for Polish conditions – capital, not only economic, but also symbolic? Addressing the subject of symbolic capital, Jerzy Halbersztadt reported on his experience of running the MHPJ until 2011: "One has to admit, however, that the Jewish character of the Museum made [things] a lot easier for us. […] They did not want a possible conflict with us, which could have become an international scandal. What protected us was the potential of fear that this is an ethnic minority undertaking."[116] And so – again – could one not have stood up to the nationalist radicalization? And if not, did one have to yield to it to such an extent? Could one not have entered into negotiations with the stronger side (that is, the majority of the majority), taking into account an alternative potential of the weaker side (that is, the minority proper and the minority of the majority)? It seems that such an attempt was never undertaken. Was there any awareness that one had to undertake such negotiations? Did the unreflective patterns of culture and the ready-made scenario of Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish slapstick tragedy perhaps incapacitate the actors? Hence, did this scenario realize itself on the strength of cultural inertia?

The POLIN MHPJ is not merely the product of a situation, but also its co-producer. The institution has stood for the most pessimistic – determinist, if not essentialist – vision of the history of Polish Jews. The cultural code has been mistaken here for the genetic code! Repeating the ritual of subordinating the minority to the majority and materializing it through the Museum's endeavor has nothing to do with emancipation and a subjective treatment of Jews. Nor of Poles. If ipso facto something has been preempted, it is not anti-Semitism or the Holocaust, but the potential for change.

Summer 2015

Translated from Polish by Katrin Stoll and Jakub Ozimek

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116 "Muzeum żydowskie," 308.

Part III: Problematizing the Jewish Turn

Geneviève Zubrzycki

Problematizing the "Jewish Turn"

What I call the "Jewish turn"[1] refers to the revival of Jewish communities in Poland – both religious and secular[2] – as well as the phenomenal interest of non-Jewish Poles in all things Jewish. From the commercial success of klezmer music; the proliferation of Judaica bookstores and Jewish-style restaurants; the opening of new museums, memorials, and memory spaces; the growing engagement of artists and public intellectuals with Poland's Jewish past and Polish-Jewish relations more broadly; and the emergence of Jewish studies programs at multiple universities.[3] Last but not least is the relatively small but not insignificant number of conversions to Judaism, often from people who discover Jewish roots and feel compelled to "return to the source," but sometimes from Poles without Jewish ancestry yet called or seduced by the appeal of Judaism.[4] This brief essay seeks to problematize the Jewish turn by discussing some of its significations and identifying the challenges it poses.

The Jewish Turn as Polish Problématique

The extermination of Jews and destruction of Jewish culture of Poland is presented (and increasingly experienced) in liberal intellectual, artistic, and ecumenical milieux as a tragic loss for Polish culture and identity. It is in that name that it must be rescued, saved, or even resurrected. Poland, individuals in those groups argue, is not homogeneous. But instead of emphasizing the ideological heterogeneity of its current-day population as a legitimate form of diversity, they emphasize its

1 Geneviève Zubrzycki, "Nationalism, Philosemitism and Symbolic Boundaries in Contemporary Poland," *Contemporary Studies in Society and History* 58:1 (2016): 1–33.

2 See, for instance: Anna Dodziuk, *Second Soul: Twenty Jewish Culture Festivals in Cracow* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2010); Shana Penn, Konstanty Gebert, and Anna Goldstein, eds., *The Fall of the Wall and the Rebirth of Jewish Life in Poland: 1989–2009* (Warsaw: The Taube Foundation, 2009).

3 On klezmer, see: Magdalena Waligórska, *Klezmer's Afterlife: An Ethnography of the Jewish Music Revival in Poland and Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); on Jewish Studies, see: Marcin Wodziński, "Jewish Studies in Poland," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 10:1 (2011): 101–118.

4 See: Katka Reszke, *Return of the Jew: Identity Narratives of the Third Post-Holocaust Generation of Jews in Poland* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013).

(ethno)cultural heterogeneity, resulting from an ethnically and religiously diverse past. By creating "objective," tangible, visible, countable – and expanding – Jewish Others, a new generation of social actors and cultural agents implicitly and often explicitly contests the claim of the nation's ethnic and religious homogeneity. Symbolic boundaries in contemporary Poland are thus being redefined by overlapping discursive and performative practices: they are softened by poking holes in the ethno-Catholic fortress, stretched through memory work, and reshaped by discursively naturalizing and "indigenizing" Jewishness as "Polish."[5]

This is not to say that the Jewish turn is not about other important projects and processes, for it obviously is. What I suggest is that there exists an elective affinity between non-Jewish Poles' support of, and participation in, the revival of Jewish culture and preservation of Jewish memory, and the desire to build a Poland that is different from the one forcefully promoted by the Catholic Church and the Right. Resurrecting Jewish culture and actively supporting Jewish communities' revival of Judaism gives concrete shape to a seemingly amorphous ideological pluralism in order to trump the "hard" demographic "facts" of Poland's ethno-religious homogeneity;[6] a way to neutralize Catholicism as a religious tradition with political traction. As crucial as that progressive agenda is, it is not without serious challenges.

The first challenge of recent developments in the Jewish turn for Polish society is related to national mythology. Let us consider the likely inclusion of an additional Monument to the Righteous in the immediate vicinity of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. As we know, POLIN makes two important narrative correctives. One is oriented to foreign visitors to the Museum, as it emphasizes that Poland is not only the graveyard of European Jewry, but also the place where it grew and developed rich and diverse communities, important religious and secular movements, and historically significant political projects. This emphasis on life before death is important in itself, but also because it allows all visitors to fully grasp the tragedy of the Holocaust.

The second corrective offered by the Museum is to the dominant mythology of Poland's intrinsic Catholicity and ethno-national homogeneity. The Museum pointedly shows that the current demographic makeup of Poland is the exception instead of the rule in Polish history. Polish visitors are therefore learning an

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5 Zubrzycki, "Nationalism, Philosemitism and Symbolic Boundaries in Contemporary Poland."

6 Note that the civic vision also essentializes the national community. What is seen as the "true" and "natural" Poland, however, is not the ethnically and denominationally homogeneous nation, but its past multi-ethnic and multi-denominational version.

important lesson by visiting the Museum, namely that Poland was and *can be* different than it currently is.

Narratives do not exist in a vacuum, however. They are not isolated from other narratives and mythologies. The reception of POLIN's narrative is shaped by the very place in which it is situated: on a former Jewish space filled with life and death. The Museum as an institution is therefore read in relation to the Ghetto Heroes' monument, which tells the tragic story of Polish Jewry's destruction, and to the district of Muranów, which now increasingly tells the story of the erasure of the Jewish past.[7] The Museum's narrative is also likely to be read in relation to the new Monument to the Righteous. The introduction of that monument in that specific place, within the sacred museological-commemorative space, adds a new layer to a Polish narrative about Jews: that of the heroic efforts of Poles to save Jews. Consider, moreover, that Polish visitors to POLIN are also likely to visit the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising, perhaps even on the same school trip. Taken together, the museums and the monuments potentially tell a self-congratulatory story that fits neatly into the dominant martyriological national mythology: that of welcoming Poles who generously allowed Jews to thrive on "their" land for centuries, suffered heroically during the Second World War, and risked (and sacrificed) their lives to save Jews from Nazis. This is a problematic narrative for many reasons, not least because it moves away from the important process of demystification that was begun in 2000 with Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* and which needs to continue.[8]

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7 See: Beata Chomątowska-Szałamacha, *Stacja Muranów* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2013); Elżbieta Janicka, *Festung Warschau* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011).

8 See: Jan T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi: historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000) translated as *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz, An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006), translated as *Strach: Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści* (Cracow: Znak, 2008); Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote żniwa. Rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów* (Cracow: Znak, 2011) translated as *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd. Polowanie na Żydów, 1942–1945. Studium Dziejów Pewnego Powiatu* (Warsaw: Polish Center for Holocaust Research 2011) translated as *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

The Jewish Turn as a Problem for Jews?

The second challenge the Jewish turn poses is for Jews. As discussed above, the dominant ethno-Catholic understanding of Polishness is being challenged and redefined by activists and artists as well as ordinary people in mundane activities. Multiple forms of memory work such as graffiti art, walking tours of formerly Jewish spaces, commemorative marches, or the cleaning and restoration of cemeteries all serve to undermine the political claim and the dominant view that Poland is essentially, primordially ethno-Catholic. Through embodied and repeated actions such as learning how to "cook Jewish" or how to serve and consume Jewish foods during the festival, at a café all year-long, or at a Sabbath dinner at the Jewish Community Center (JCC); by singing, dancing, and learning Jewish paper cutting techniques; by donating time and energy to Jewish individuals and organizations, ordinary Poles become involved in the revival and assimilate Jewishness, but to the extent that it becomes "Polish."

This is certainly problematic, since the resurrection of Jewish culture is primarily made in the name of Polish culture and for Poles. Jews are included in the national narrative and expanded conception of the national self precisely *because* they are considered to be "different," or "other." That progressive inclusion of Jews within the symbolic perimeter of the nation in order to expand notions of Polishness necessitates the continued othering of Jews. It does not – and cannot – de-otherize the Jew. In order for a multicultural, diverse Poland to exist, the Jew must irremediably remain Other. For Poland to become "plural" and "inclusive," distinctions between citizens based on ethnicity and religion must be retained. And with differences and distinctions often come more or less rigid hierarchies.[9] Polish Jews, then, might be stuck between a rock and a hard place: Jews must remain Other to expand definitions of Polishness, while to fully "integrate" them, to assimilate them into a civic discourse of "Polish citizens," erases them. We know the problems that this has caused during the socialist period.[10]

This tension is important for scholars and memory activists alike to reflect on. How can it be transcended, overcome, or resolved? How can Jews be given their history and legacy, their due place in Poland past *and* present, without Othering

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9 See: Agnieszka Pasieka, *Hierarchy and Pluralism: Living Religious Difference in Catholic Poland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

10 See: Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1989); Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

them? How can Jews and Jewish culture be rediscovered and recognized without exoticizing and fetishizing them, and without reproducing the "intrinsic difference" between "Poles" and "Jews?" And how can this be achieved without making them disappear in a civic narrative of "Polish citizens" that erases them from the national landscape? In other words, how can Jews and Jewishness be "normalized?"

Part of the answer, I argue, is to work even harder at problematizing the Catholicity of Polishness. While there is a rich scholarship undertaking this agenda,[11] there is much work remaining to be done on the ground – in school curricula, museums, and public spaces to question the default, taken-for-granted Catholicity of Polishness. Another strategy is to make ideological, political, and sexual diversity a legitimate form of *national* pluralism – this is an area where the last few years have brought many significant developments in the public sphere that could be productive. Once people start thinking about Polishness in political, civic terms, there might not be a need for ethno-national and religious "others" to create diversity, and Jews can be Jews as Jews instead of proxies for diversity and multiculturalism.

11 See: James Bjork, *Neither German Nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Pasieka, *Hierarchy and Pluralism*; Brian Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*.

Karen Underhill

Toward a Diasporic Poland/Polin: Zeitlin, Sutzkever, and the Ghost Dance with Jewish Poland

> Peretz: You are wandering…
> Mickiewicz: Like you. Poland's night is driving me out as well.
>
> – Aaron Zeitlin, *Esterke*

Since the unveiling of the POLIN Museum's core exhibition in October of 2014, both the term "Polin" and Polin as a geographical and cultural concept have reentered public discourse. Beyond its immediate function as a name for the Warsaw Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and a term that evokes the centuries-long Jewish history and culture of Poland, what is the significance of the reemergence of the narrative trope "Polin," and why specifically now? What conceptual turns or narrative shifts within Jewish and Polish communal discourses may be suggested by this linguistic doubling of Poland – this public act of translation or linguistic displacement; and this allusion to and recovery of prewar Jewish narratives of Poland? While the term "Polin" is most immediately associated with narratives of Jewish *belonging* in Poland, and inextricably tied to the Polin legend of origin commemorated in the POLIN Museum's opening gallery, in the present discussion I explore the term's potential to signal not only connection to but also *distance from*, and difference from, Poland. Specifically, I consider the potential of this term to facilitate the development of alternate, diasporist and non-nationalist narratives within both Jewish and Polish contemporary discourse.

The term "Polin" can be seen to carry a "diasporic" valence in both Jewish and Polish contemporary communal narratives. In the first case, I will consider how the term "Polin," in contrast to Poland, signals and reminds of Ashkenazi Jewish culture's displacement and distancing, not only physical, but also cultural and emotional, from its physical and historical East European homeland. At the same time, a study of the term "Polin" may help to reveal the increasingly diasporic, deterritorialized nature of contemporary Polish culture as well – highlighting the extent to which the contemporary Polish cultural imaginary also exists in partial and multiple displacement from its prewar memorial homeland. Can we speak of the POLIN Museum, and the empty memorial space in the center of Warsaw on which it stands, as one point of entry into a diasporic, narrative, and

deterritorialized Poland/Polin that is desired by growing numbers within both Polish and Jewish communities today, who seek to engage meaningfully with Poland's past, and at the same time to distance themselves from the demographic and political realities of present-day Poland?

Indeed, a defining feature of Polish culture today is the striking dissonance that exists between the demographic, geographic, and political reality of the present-day Polish state, existing within post-WWII, shifted boundaries, and with a largely ethnically and religiously homogeneous population, and the prewar, multiethnic, and multilingual Poland that still exists and even dominates in the cultural imaginary – the Poland revisited in much of contemporary Polish literature, film, and scholarship. The term "Polin," the Hebrew word for Poland, that has reentered contemporary scholarly and communal discourse with the opening of the POLIN Museum in Warsaw, is highly suggestive in pointing to this dissonance. We may think of POLIN the Museum and the concept of Polin as a curious doubling of Poland in the heart of the country's capital city, that evokes *not only* the Jewish past of Poland, and the geographical space of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, or Poland's most expansive territorial definition, but also, to some users of the term, the "real" or desired Poland that can no longer be found within territorial Poland – pluralistic, multilingual, and multireligious Poland, Poland based on a civic rather than a strictly ethno-national definition. A commentary circulated widely since the opening of the museum is that the POLIN Museum is the first "real" museum of Polish history.

In proposing the formulation "*diasporic* Poland/Polin," then, I am adopting the term "diasporic" to suggest cultural formations, forms of cultural identification, or communal narratives that seek to disentangle themselves from the nation-state – whether Polish or Jewish; and also to differentiate the Poland of their narratives from the present-day geographic territory called Poland. I include "Poland/Polin" with a slash to suggest that individuals and groups within both Polish and Jewish communities are seeking such "diasporic" or deterritorialized cultural models, and that the term "Polin" is playing an interesting role, separately and simultaneously, in both.

Within Jewish communal discourse specifically, I propose that the reappearance of the term "Polin" may facilitate the development of contemporary narratives that seek to connect with and revive the prewar diversity and complexity of Jewish political and cultural programs – in particular the heated debates between diasporism, Zionism, and socialism that characterized Jewish intellectual and cultural life in Poland and Eastern Europe – while at the same time honoring the reality of Jewish movement *away* from Polish culture and Polish lands. An active

and dramatic distancing from Poland – physical, cultural, and emotional – and even a taboo surrounding identification with Poland, has predominated within Jewish communal narratives since WWII. In the discussion that follows I examine two Yiddish literary works that record or inscribe this decisive narrative turn away from Poland – Aaron Zeitlin's 1932 play *Esterke and Kazimir the Great*, rewritten in 1967 as *Esterke*, and Avrom Sutzkever's 1946 poem "To Poland." I consider whether the reemergence of the Polin trope today is allowing Jewish narratives to preserve and respect this break with Poland, while at the same time inviting the return of the ghost dance with politically and culturally diverse prewar Jewish heritage: the exploration of non-nationalist, post-Zionist, and newly diasporist models of Jewish identification.

Faces of "Polin"

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is primarily responsible for giving Poland's reemergent, spectral Jewish past a public name: "Polin." As it is used and reintroduced within the POLIN Museum's narrative project, the term "Polin" acquires a progression of successive valences. Initially, the term's cultural resonance and its significance as the name of the Museum is explained within the space of legend proposed by the Forest Gallery, that precedes the Museum's historical narrative. Read through the place-name midrash provided by the centuries-old Polin legend as "*Po- lin*" or "here – rest," "Polin" becomes the divinely ordained land in which European Jews would find safety, to live and to study until the coming of the Messiah.[1] Thus the name Polin in particular – as opposed to *Polska* or

1 Before entering the first historical gallery of the POLIN Museum, visitors move through an installation of screens on which are projected images of an ancient forest. A deer runs across the screens, and birds can be heard singing. Moving across the screens in three languages, English, Hebrew and Polish, is the text of the Polin legend of origin: a legend that the Jewish communities of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth told themselves about how Jews came to Poland and why they remained. Gershom Bader offered this version of the story in 1927: "If you want to know how it suddenly occurred to these Jews in Germany to seek refuge in Poland, legend has it that after the Jews had decreed a fast and beseeched God to save them from the murderers, a slip of paper fell from heaven. On it was written: 'Go to Poland, for there you will find rest… The Jews set out for Poland. When they reached it, the birds in the forest chirped to greet them: '*Po lin! Po lin!*'. The travelers translated this into Hebrew, as if the birds were saying: 'Here you should lodge…' Afterwards, when they looked closely at the trees, it seemed to them that a leaf from the Gemara was hanging on every branch. At once they understood that here a new place had been revealed to them, where they should

the Yiddish *Poyln* – signals safety, belonging, Polish-Jewish coexistence; and also Jewish nativeness to Poland and to Europe. Once the Museum's narrative moves out of the realm of legend, the term Polin takes on its role as a geographical and territorial designation: a Jewish name for the historical territories that would make up the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795), in which East European Jewish culture would develop and diversify for over four centuries.

Because this term encompasses the entire narrative project of the Museum, however, Polin also refers to the later forms of Jewish culture and Jewish identification that would develop on these territories after the Polish Partitions: distinct Russian-Jewish, Austrian-Jewish, and German-Jewish communities and forms of modern Jewish identity. The term also encompasses Jewish culture and communities that would move *outward* from historically Polish lands beginning in the 19th century, creating a new Jewish diaspora from the historical Commonwealth: to Odessa, Sweden, Palestine, and later Israel, New York, Buenos Aires, France, Australia, and so on. Thus the word "Polin" carries both territorial and diasporic connotations simultaneously.

Indeed, one of the greatest challenges faced by the Museum's metanarrative of Jewish belonging in or nativeness to Poland, a narrative that resonates with the interwar concept of *doikeyt* or "hereness," is the reality that beginning in the period of partition and continuing through the anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic campaign of 1968, Ashkenazi Jews and Jewish culture have been parting ways with Poland – taking their leave, and cutting off ties. The distancing, displacement, or movement away from a conscious connection to Poland or the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth that begins with the Polish Partitions in the late 18th century finds its culmination in the transformation of Poland within post-WWII Jewish communal and also literary narratives into primarily a place of death, destruction, and Jewish absence: a movement that is recorded in the works of Yiddish literature by Aaron Zeitlin and Avrom Sutzkever that I will discuss here. As these authors' works predict, today, most Jews in the world who could trace their ancestry to historically Polish lands do not think of themselves as Polish Jews, and do not want to maintain ties to Poland. For this reason, the discourse of Jewish belonging in, or Jewish nativeness to Poland that is a centerpiece of developing Polish multicultural narratives today runs into serious roadblocks. It is here, into this

settle and continue to develop the Jewish spirit and the age-old Jewish learning." English translation from: Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland: Legends of Origin* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 34.

narrative impasse, that the figure of Polin has begun to slip, introducing a third narrative possibility between belonging and taboo.

Indeed, if the reintroduction of the term "Polin" has begun to work as a narrative strategy for reopening the diasporist or non-Zionist conversation about Central and Eastern Europe as a European Jewish homeland, or place of cultural origin, it is not only because, as the Hebrew word for Poland, "Polin" reminds of Poland's Jewishness, and of the Polishness of Jewish culture – but also and precisely because it is *not* Poland. Like the glass outer wall of the Museum that is covered in this word, inscribed in both Hebrew and Latin letters, the term "Polin" itself provides a kind of linguistic barrier – a form of semantic protection or escape from the political and social reality implied by the word "Poland." The translation from "Poland" or "Polska" into "Polin" creates Poland, but with a redemptive difference: it effects a double displacement – a movement both backwards in time, and outwards into the diaspora. As a result, I speculate that the concept of Polin, and the word "Polin," with both its historico-territorial and diasporic valences, may play a key role in allowing contemporary Jewish narratives to develop that reattach Jewish culture to historically Polish space, and to cultural and linguistic traditions developed in Eastern Europe, *without* having to embrace narratives of return to, or belonging in, contemporary, post-WWII, territorial Poland.

Ghost Dance with Jewish Poland: Zeitlin's *Esterke* and Sutzkever's "Tzu Poyln"

The theoretical discourse of spectrality introduced by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, with its implications of both inheritance and responsibility, provides an intriguing set of tools with which to analyze the memory work, and the transformation of narratives, that surrounds present-day engagement with the Jewish past in Poland. Here, I enlist Derrida's concept of the spectral and Gayatri Spivak's use of the term "ghost dance" to examine this complex, multigenerational narrative movement both *away* from Poland, and *back* to Polin.[2] Specifically, I would like to examine more closely the narrative turn within Polish Jewish literature that marks a break with really-existing, historical and political Poland, by turning to the abovementioned works of Yiddish literature that implement and inscribe that break within the body of the text.

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2 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & The New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Spivak, "Ghostwriting," *Diacritics* 25:2 (Summer 1995): 64–84.

Both Aaron Zeitlin's 1932 play *Esterke and Kazimir the Great*, and Avrom Sutzkever's postwar, 1946 poem "To Poland" represent the anguished experience of writers deeply identified with Poland, who felt compelled to leave Poland, or to articulate their desire and need to break with Poland culturally. These works record a threefold transformation or metamorphosis of the figure of Jewish Poland – from historical/geographical, to textual/memorial, to spectral. The Poland that was for both writers a really-existing historical and geographical homeland, and the physical source of both heritage and inspiration, becomes an intangible past dream, preserved in the memorial landscape or even cemetery of the text; and finally a spectralized and haunting absent presence — repressed and silenced within, or even excised from, the text, through a narrative gesture of negation (Sutzkever), or through an actual rewriting (Zeitlin).

The figure of a ghost dance that appears differently in both works becomes a metonymy for the dance of desire and forgetting, anger and longing with respect to their Polish homeland that the Jewish authors themselves undertake in their works. While enacting a rejection of identification with Poland, their texts inscribe a powerful desire to continue to be haunted by the dream of Jewish Poland – a desire that, long repressed, can be seen to return today in the figure of "diasporic Polin." "Thus the 'end' of the ghost dance – if one can speak of such a thing," writes Gayatri Spivak in "Ghostwriting," "is to make the past a future."[3] By inserting difference between the Poland of East European Jewish heritage and present-day Poland, the figure of Polin allows the ghost dance with the Jewish past to be revived, and to energize ethical projects in the present, whose primary orientation is not toward the past, but toward the future.

Aaron Zeitlin (1899–1973), poet, playwright, essayist and publisher, and son of Hillel Zeitlin, played an important role in Yiddish literary life in Warsaw during the interwar period as chair of the Yiddish PEN Club in Warsaw (1930–34). He published the play *Esterke and Kazimierz the Great: A Jewish-Polish Mystery Play in Four Act*s in 1932, in the Warsaw Yiddish literary journal *Globus* that he founded with Isaac Bashevis Singer. Zeitlin was invited to New York in 1939 by theater director Maurice Schwarz to work on a staging of the play, and was trapped, unable to return to Poland and to his family, when the war broke out. He rewrote *Esterke* years later, after he had lost his family and the world he had known in the Holocaust.[4] The chasm that divides these two versions of the play

3 Spivak, "Ghostwriting," 70.

4 The original version of the play, written between 1929 and 1931, was published under the title: *Esterke and Kazimir the Great*, over two issues of the journal *Globus*: Aaron Zeitlin, "Esterke un Kazimir der Groyser," *Globus* 5 (November 1932): 5–38; and Aaron

records the poet's physical movement away from Poland, but also his resignation from the dream of Polish-Jewish coexistence – the dream of Polin – that imbued the first version of the play with much of its intensity.

Thus, Zeitlin's dark 1967 retelling of the legendary love affair between the Jewish Esterke and King Kazimierz the Great, set in 14th century Poland, ends with an epilogue that takes place on the smoldering ruins of Esterke's father's tavern in Opoczno, where he has been burned to death. Two shades, spectral figures from the distant future wander on to the stage and face each other: they are the ghosts of I. L. Peretz and Adam Mickiewicz, two great bards of Poland in the Yiddish and Polish languages. Walking on the burning ruins, they mutter to themselves, seemingly mad from despair. The Poland that they dreamed of, that they evoked in their literature and fought for in their respective political engagements, is in ruins. "You are wandering too," says Peretz, and Mickiewicz replies:

> Like you…
> Poland's night is driving me out as well.
> They have set me aside –
> Stay by us, their memorials plead –
> But I cannot stay by them.
> I must leave here.
> I am not from here, no.
> I must go, must go …[5]

And Esterke herself, who has been watching, joins them: "All of us, let us go, let us go. / Tata, I am coming with!"[6]

These lines from Zeitlin's 1967 epilogue reflect not only despair at the idea of Polish Jewish coexistence – that idea promised and inscribed for centuries in Jewish and Polish retellings of the Esterke and Kazimierz legend: but they also imagine that without its Jewish population, Poland is no longer Poland. Mickiewicz himself and his vision of a pluralistic Poland, in which Jewish presence

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Zeitlin, "Esterke un Kazimir der Groyser," *Globus* 6 (December 1932): 12–48. Zeitlin rewrote the play in 1967, and titled the second version simply *Esterke*. See Aaron Zeitlin, *Esterke*, in *Drames. Tzveyter Band* (Tel Aviv: I.L. Peretz Farlag, 1980).

5 Zeitlin, *Esterke* (1980), 148. Except where otherwise noted, all translations from Yiddish are my own.

6 Ibid., 149. Interestingly, in Zeitlin's 1932 version, Jesus, "The Figure on the Cross," is also among those who want to leave Poland. "And do you hear my groans?" he asks, "Listen! / Take me down—" "You?" asks the Polish Boryczko, surprised. "Me, the hanging Jew— / I want to go with the Jews who are leaving—": Zeitlin, "Esterke und Kazimir der Groyser," 45.

is divinely determined, have no place here – and Zeitlin's Mickiewicz wouldn't want to stay in any case. He chooses to go back into exile – in this case, it is implied, to Jerusalem with Esterke and the other Jewish characters. Interestingly, these lines also remind that in leaving Poland, Poland's Jewish émigrés before World War II, and later Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, do not only leave Poland. Many, and in particular assimilated Polish-speaking Jews, also *take* Poland – they take Mickiewicz, and their entire Polish heritage, with them into their new diaspora – to America, Palestine, and the rest of the world. According to Zeitlin's 1967 formulation, contemporary Poland is not able to be the steward of its own noble heritage. Mickiewicz's Poland goes into exile again, belonging more to diasporic Polin than to the Poland Zeitlin has left behind.

The complex and also anguished process of leaving Poland, and taking Poland and specifically Polish literary influence into diaspora, is perhaps most powerfully recorded in an epic poem by Avrom Sutzkever written just after the war, with which Zeitlin's lines are clearly in dialogue. Sutzkever, one of the founders of the Yung Vilne literary movement in interwar Poland, a survivor of the Vilna Ghetto and partisan fighter in the Vilna resistance, returned to visit Poland after the war, and to walk through the desert of rubble that was postwar Warsaw. After that visit, and only a few months after the Kielce pogrom, he composed the poem "Tzu Poyln" ("To Poland").

Opening with the invocation, "Oh elder sister of my native land," or "elder sister from my fatherland," "Tzu Poyln" names Poles and Jews as sibling nations that share a common homeland.[7] It also fashions itself as an ironic response to Mickiewicz's epic romantic poem "Pan Tadeusz," which opens "*Litwo! Ojczyzno moja!*" ("Lithuania! My Homeland!"). The poem expresses a complicated mix of love for the speaker's homeland and for Polish culture which is also the speaker's own culture; despair and anger in the wake of Kielce and postwar violence against Jews; and, finally, the resolution to keep Yiddish culture alive precisely by removing it from Poland – carrying it metaphorically on his back out into the diaspora. Thus, at the end of "Tzu Poyln" Sutzkever's persona concludes that if anything is to be handed down, to endure of Poland's Jewish culture after the Holocaust, it will have to be only what can be carried away from Poland within Yiddish poetry itself, within Jewish literature and culture; in verse, in song, within Yiddish language itself – and that it will have to go into exile again, this time *from* Poland, in search of another Vistula – perhaps the River Jordan, perhaps Manhattan's East River.

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7 *"Du eltere shvester fun heymerd fun mayner!"*: Avrom Sutzkever, "Tzu Poyln," in *Yidishe gas* (New York: Farlag Matones, 1948), 157.

The lengthy, five-part epic poem ends with a stirring image of the poet standing in Warsaw's enormous Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street, whose landscape of tombstones survived the war, hoisting onto his back the massive *ohel* or gravestone of the Polish Jewish writer I. L. Peretz, considered the father of Yiddish literature.

> And I, who have come to this place to
> say farewell – take this gravestone
> onto my back and wander out with *his* nigun […]:
>
> – "*And that is how we go,*
> *our souls – aflame!*" [8]

By "his nigun" Sutzkever refers here to the longer, then-famous passage from Peretz's "Di goldene keyt" ("The Golden Chain"), the proud and also messianically-tinged lines that are engraved on the writer's tombstone, and evoked in Sutzkever's final closing line.[9]

Here the Yiddish poet, casting himself in the role of the eternally wandering Jew, moves outward into exile with the grave of Peretz on his back in place of the iconic sack. Importantly, though Sutzkever would soon move to Palestine where he would indeed found a Yiddish cultural journal entitled *Di goldene keyt*, "Tzu Poyln" is not yet, in 1946, a Zionist verse. It makes no mention of Palestine, offering instead an image of Jewish culture moving outward from the rubble of Warsaw, into an unknown future, and toward an undetermined place. This is important because the emphasis is placed not on leaving Poland, or diaspora, and finally

8 Ibid., 165.

9 Hope, despair, and bitter irony cannot be teased apart in these closing lines of Sutzkever's poem, that evoke both determination and pride, and also the final end and failure of centuries of messianic aspirations, religious and secular, that had characterized Jewish life in Poland. The full text of the lines from "Di goldene keyt" that appear on Peretz's mausoleum, evoked by Sutzkever's lines, reads: *Azoy geyen mir/ Zingendik un tantsndik…/ Mir groyse, groyse yidn,/ Shabes-yontevdike yidn, / Di neshomes flakern! / Far undz volkn shpaltn zikh! / Himlen praln di toyrn oyf!/ In onen-hakoved shvimen mir arayn / Tsum kise-hakoved-tsu! / Un mir betn nisht / Un mir betlen nisht / Groyse shtoltse yidn zenen mir – / Mir zogn im: / Lenger vartn nisht gekont! / Shir hashirim zingen mir, / Zingendik, tantsndik geyen mir!* [So we go,/ Singing and dancing… / We, big big Jews, / shabbes-holiday Jews, / Our souls blaze! / Clouds part before us! / The heavens burst their gates! / Into the Cloud of Glory we swim / Right up to the Throne of Glory! / And we don't ask / And we don't beg / Big proud Jews are we / We tell Him: / Couldn't wait any longer! / We sing the Song of Songs / Singing, dancing we go!]: Y.L. Peretz, "Di Goldene keyt," in Y.L. Peretz, *Ale verk* (New York, 1947), 127. Unpublished translation by Michael Steinlauf.

returning to one's homeland – Palestine – but rather on leaving one's native land, now lost and ruined, and moving out into a new and eternal diaspora.

Like Zeitlin's play but with more artistic intention, Sutzkever's epic poem turns on a paradox: couched as a poem of leave-taking, a bitter and accusatory letter of farewell – "How can I praise you? When I have been witness to your pogroms of grandparents and children?"[10] – it becomes at the same time a textual record of the inextricable ties between Jewish and Polish history that preserves that heritage in Yiddish letters, making Polishness a part of the permanent, portable Jewish homeland. In the process of accusing Poland of betrayal, "Tzu Poyln" also offers a genealogy of the poet's own Polish literary forbears – chief among them Polish late Romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid – and of writers whose works represent Polish culture and territory as a space of Polish and Jewish coexistence, and also modern Polish literature as a space of Jewish expression: discussing Mickiewicz, Bolesław Leśmian, Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, and others. But, as in Zeitlin's play, the Polish Romantic bard Mickiewicz in Sutzkever's "Tzu Poyln" has been betrayed by the present-day Polish generation, and his memory must now be cared for by the Yiddish poet:

> So was your prophet then utterly blind, like an owl in broad daylight
> When a hundred years back he created in *golus* his legions
> of Polish Jews carrying Polish flags?
> What then has become of his grandson, what?
> *Smutno mi, Boże!*[11]

Most significantly, "Tzu Poyln" is constructed as a formal embodiment of Polish cultural influence. Both thematically and linguistically, Sutzkever's poem represents an adaptation of Romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki's famous poem "Hymn," in which each verse ends with the words, in Polish, "*Smutno mi, Boże.*" By inscribing Słowacki's well known Romantic refrain, "I am sad, O God" into his own Yiddish poem – and keeping Słowacki's words in their original Polish – Sutzkever affirms that Polish literary heritage has shaped him as an artist, and as a Polish Jew. Even as he writes about leaving Poland, he does so in the language and with the poetic tropes of Polish literary tradition: his image of Jewish exile has been shaped by the Romantic Polish poetry of exile and longing. That poetry constitutes a significant part of the poet's cultural landscape, just as the Wisła (Vistula) river and the storks or *bociany* that appear in both his and Słowacki's poem are symbols of a shared *physical* landscape, and a shared European homeland. Thus, like Słowacki's

10 Ibid., 162.

11 *"Smutno mi Boże"*: "I am sad, O God"; *"Golus"*: exile, or diaspora., Ibid., 158.

"Hymn," Sutzkever's "Tzu Poyln" is a poem of mourning, by a poet who knows he will not return to be buried in his native land; and his use of the phrase that had once spoken of common experiences is now filled with bitter irony.

The final break with Poland occurs in the closing lines of Sutzkever's poem, which enact not only a narrative but also a formal, linguistic leave-taking of Polish literary space. Whereas he had ended each previous section of the poem with Słowacki's words, "*Smutno mi Boże*" ("I am sad, O God"), printed in the Polish language and in Roman rather than Hebrew letters, at the opening of the final chapter the speaker will again repeat this refrain, but translate it into Yiddish – "*S'iz mir umetik, got mayner*" – signaling the linguistic performance of a detachment.

We may also read this ending as a spectralization: as a result of pain, anger, and loss of hope in a lifelong dream, the Polish voice and heritage of the persona, and Poland as the source of inspiration, is repressed, silenced, and transformed into the ghostly form of an absent presence. What is of Poland in the speaker must be excised, even as it cannot be. In Sutzkever's record of this, the Polish language and his own Polish voice no longer share the space of what had been a multilingual poem, but rather speak only as ghostly allusion, from behind the Yiddish words. In this sense, Sutzkever's spectralizing gesture – the pressing of Polish cultural influence and also of Poland as a place of belonging out of the poem's speech – can be read as a foreshadowing of, and a metonymy for, the intentional elimination of or repression of narratives of Poland as a source of inspiration or inheritance within Jewish communal narratives after World War II. "How *can* one drink from this vessel at which death has drunk its fill?" the poet asks himself.

I have proposed that we may read these works by Zeitlin and Sutzkever as a textual record and trace of the movement of Polin or East European Jewish culture away from Poland. They record Ashkenazi Jewish culture's movement outward, into a new diaspora from its East European memorial homeland. Both works, one originally written before and one after WWII, follow a similar logic of detachment and spectralization, advancing as if in passionate, empathetic conversation with each other – Sutzkever's "Tzu Poyln" as a response to Zeitlin's 1932 *Esterke and Kazimir the Great*; Zeitlin's 1967 *Esterke* as a further response to Sutzkever's "Tzu Poyln." Again, the three-part transition that we identify in them may also serve as a model for discussing the relationship to Poland of Jewish narratives, both popular and literary, more broadly. This movement involves increasing degrees of displacement and distancing: from disillusionment and departure, to memorialization and textualization, to spectralization. In this final movement, which is critical to understanding the powerful engagement currently taking place between contemporary non-nationalist Jewish narratives and the Polish-Jewish past, the

identification with Poland and with the hopes or dreams that Jewish life in Poland represented, is pushed from speech, from discourse, from visibility: it is repressed, only to return as a demand – placed on the present.

In one of the most uncanny images in Sutzkever's poem, when it is read within the present-day context of the return of spectral Polin, the poem's persona crouches behind a gravestone, watching as the ghosts of Jewish ancestors rise up, pulling him into a dance:

> In Lublin, in Kraków I stride among
> the marble temples of your cemeteries,
> Behind a small hillock I crouch, hiding in wait,
> And it seems: as though I am back again in that
> blackbearded Poland, on the day before Gehenna.
> The names of the resurrected greet me,
> With clay-covered faces they rise up,
> Hastily they draw my body towards them, whirling,
> For a moment… and they turn to grasses,
> Gracing the mounds of earth with a forgiving carpet of green.[12]

Sutzkever's powerful passage betrays a need; a demand, unanswerable in the present of writing, that has now been placed upon future generations – the readers of today. Walking on the rubble of the Warsaw ghetto, in the same space that the POLIN Museum stands today, his protagonist asks:

> How is one to erect a monument to this emptiness? A sign,
> That might reach the grandson of my grandson?
> What can be done, that yesterday might be revealed to
> tomorrow?[13]

Sutzkever's persona of 1946 sees no answer to these questions within the geographical space of Poland – only in diaspora. Interestingly, this work that performs a removal of Jewish culture from Polish space, has become an actor in the process of Jewish return in Poland. In 2014, Sutzkever's poem was translated into Polish by Polish Yiddishist Marek Tuszewicki, and published in the Yiddish cultural journal *Cwiszn*.[14] The translation offers a powerful tool for teaching readers about the interconnections that exist between Yiddish and Polish literatures, a subject until now almost entirely unavailable to students studying Polish philology. More powerfully, on the ruins in which Sutzkever's persona walks, despairing of the

12 Ibid., 164.
13 Ibid., 163.
14 Avrom Sutzkever, "Do Polski," trans. Marek Tuszewicki, *Cwiszn,* 1:1–2 (2010).

possibility of memorialization, the POLIN Museum has created an unprecedented memorial to East European Jewish civilization that, as he had asked, "might reveal yesterday to tomorrow" and "reach [his] grandson's grandson," even generations removed from Poland, with voices and narratives that have not been in currency for half a century. Under the sign of Polin, the Museum not only works to allow the minority discourse of Jewish Poland to interfere with dominant Polish ethno-nationalist narratives; it also proposes to allow the minority and marginalized discourse of Yiddish-speaking Jewish culture, and the alternate political programs and proposals that were articulated in that language, to interrupt dominant narratives of Jewish identity, heritage, and responsibility.

Undoubtedly, there is a complex ghost dance taking place between East European diasporic Jewish culture now and narratives of the Jewish past developing in Poland today. It is enabled by the transformation of "Poland" within both Jewish and Polish cultural imaginaries from a territorial, ethno-national model (the homogenous nation-state) into a diasporic, displaced, and deterritorialized Polin. Once again, I am using the term diasporic not only to suggest a geographical diaspora – that is, physical movements of peoples outside of the political boundaries of the memorial or geographic homeland. I am also mining the potential of this term to suggest *internal* diasporic formations – what Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin call "Diasporas-within-states" that, and I cite, "might even afford a modestly coherent logic of identification between indigenist and diasporist alternatives, challenges, or subversions of the nation-state."[15] Interestingly, by opening the POLIN Museum in the heart of Warsaw, doubly displaced, spectral Polin has returned to stake out a territory in the geographical heart of present-day Poland's capital city. I propose that we think about the Museum, centrally located in Warsaw, not only as the spectral reminder of an historical and cultural landscape that has irrevocably disappeared, but also as one portal into a present-day deterritorialized, diasporic, and narrative homeland: Diasporic Poland/Polin.

I would also like to return to Aaron Zeitlin's Warsaw of 1932, and to the original version of his play *Esterke and Kazimierz the Great: A Jewish-Polish Mysterium*. The play represents one example of a vast prewar heritage, pressed out of Jewish communal narratives, whose voices, resources, and ethical challenges become available with the return of spectral Polin. What demand does the spectral and silenced original version of his play place on the reader today?

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15 Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 23.

In this prewar exploration of the possibility of Jewish-Polish coexistence, several characters voice a dream that Zeitlin would later excise entirely from his revised drama. Offering his commentary on the parting of Esterke and King Kazimierz, a character named Pastuchl (Shepherd), the "Dreamer of Good Dreams," remarks: "Nisht kaput." "It's not all lost. Dreams remain. The two part – but something remains. […] There hovers a holiness between them."[16] Zekandl, the "Dreamer of Bad Dreams," counters: "One thing only remains: blood…" and Pastuchl replies, "Dreams also remain…"[17] Zeitlin presents their sparring as a disagreement about whether humankind itself is the "good dream" or the "bad dream of God."[18] In the same scene, the shade of I. L. Peretz voices a line that is strikingly moving in light of the Yiddish revival currently taking place in Poland, as illustrated by Tuszewicki's translation of Sutzkever; and in light of the space that the POLIN Museum has created to give voice to the Yiddish world of Poland:

The story has not yet ended
It is the story of two on one earth […]
Poland, your night and mine
Have joined together.
Spin, oh double night, spin –
Become so thin
That through your very insides I may hear
The voice, in Yiddish,
Of the world.[19]

And Zeitlin gives Kazimierz the following line, as he leaves Esterke: "We shall die. But so long as your lineage and mine inhabit this earth, it is not ended, Esterke of Opoczno."[20]

In this 1932 version of the play *Esterke*, the possibility of love between the Polish and Jewish nations, though suspended in the eerie realm of unrealized dreams, stands for a belief that the goodness in humans will have its day. "Holy is the kiss of the races!" repeat all the characters in unison, and the play ends with a literal ghost-dance or "shotn-tantz," reminiscent of the closing scene in Słowacki's *Wesele*, described in the final stage direction: "(light signals in the distance: *Ghost Dance*). The End."[21]

16 Zeitlin, "Esterke un Kazimir der Groyser," 39.
17 Ibid., 39–40.
18 Ibid., 40.
19 Ibid., 42.
20 Ibid., 37.
21 Ibid., 46.

In one sense, the contemporary Jewish narratives with which Polin is associated do suggest a return to transnational, pluralist, and non-Zionist discourses that existed and even predominated within prewar Yiddish culture. But their focus may not necessarily be on erasing or reversing the chasm that separates Jewish culture from Poland. The "ghost dance," described by Spivak as "an attempt to establish an ethical relation with history as such, ancestors real or imagined,"[22] looks forward, not backward, using the "real or imagined" past to formulate strategies of engagement with the *next* non-Jewish or non-Polish other. For both Jewish and Polish communities, then, that ghost dance has as much to do with the negotiation between nationalist and non-nationalist visions of the way forward, as it does with the reinvention of present-day Poland as a place of Jewish belonging, or Polish-Jewish reconciliation. And yet, if there does exist a continuation of, a return to the suspended dream proposed in Zeitlin's lines from 1932, and to the ghost dance with the names of Blackbearded Poland imagined in Sutzkever's "Tzu Poyln," perhaps it is taking shape in the emergence of the cultural formation of diasporic Poland/Polin, by whatever names it may come to be called.

22 Spivak, "Ghostwriting," 70.

Erica Lehrer

Public Pedagogy and Transnational, Transcultural Museums[1]

The evolving domain of "Polish-Jewish Studies" has been framed by its proponents in the context of the recently launched Polish-Jewish Studies Initiative (PJSI) as an anti-nationalist, anti-essentialist, transcultural, place-and-network based project, exceeding the boundaries and concerns of either of its constituent parts. Its goal is to reflect on the cultural and historical conjuncture of communities that gave rise to a vibrant and tragic history beginning almost a thousand years ago and continuing in the present day. The editors of the present volume "would ultimately like to reach several audiences: students, professors, heads of cultural organizations, archivists, émigré groups, and the larger public with an interest in Polish-Jewish relations."[2] This short text points to some ways that Polish-Jewish relations play out in – and trouble – both scholarship and public pedagogy, namely, in the often unacknowledged stakes of the project – personal, political, and professional – for its differently situated practitioners.

This friction was reflected in the difficult encounter between scholars at the spring 2015 meeting at Princeton University from which the present volume emerged. Participants identified as Poles and Americans, some also as Jews; they were historians, anthropologists, sociologists, literary scholars, and cultural studies practitioners. They lived and worked primarily in Poland or in North America. They included "pure" scholars and scholar-curators. Most, I would hazard, would call themselves politically progressive.

It is not irrelevant that the Princeton meeting (the second such gathering of the emerging PJSI) took as its thematic focus the new POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. This shared object of attention brought to the fore problems of epistemology, implication, and audience that shape Polish-Jewish studies as a scholarly and public pedagogical undertaking. The museum, which aspires to be a highly public form of knowledge dissemination, challenges scholars

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1 Thanks to Michał Bilewicz, Nadine Blumer, Shelley Butler, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Roma Sendyka, Karen Underhill, and Magdalena Waligórska for their comments on earlier drafts of this text.

2 Invitation to the first meeting of the Polish-Jewish Initiative held at Ohio State University on March 24, 2014.

in ways that ivory tower debates may not to articulate: their cultural and political commitments; their beliefs about how we learn; how social change happens; who in society can be trusted with critical thinking, and under what circumstances.

That scholars in and outside of Poland often have quite different investments, and operate in different political fields and pedagogical traditions, was made particularly clear during the panel dedicated to "Reading the Museum," whereby a group of Polish critics – including Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Konrad Matyjaszek, Elżbieta Janicka, Piotr Forecki, and Anna Zawadzka – trained their gazes on this newest of Polish-Jewish lieux de mémoire. In aggregate, these Poland-based scholars denounced the museum for downplaying historical Polish anti-Semitism, and for nostalgically framing the past to assuage the yearnings of a new cohort of progressive American Jews (and a few older philanthropic donors) to reconcile with Poland and connect with a past beyond the Holocaust. In doing so, it was suggested, the Jewish left plays unwittingly into the hands of the celebratory historical mythology of the Polish right. The trenchancy of the critique took a further ironic turn: an American Jewish historian in the audience, Michael Steinlauf, noted with some incredulity that in their rhetoric these politically left-wing Poles might have been mistaken for right-wing Jews. So harsh were these Poles in their accusations of the museum that they sounded (as Steinlauf put it) almost as if they were invoking the old racist canard, made famous by former right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, that Poles suck in anti-Semitism with their mother's milk. "Maybe we do suck it in," came the unapologetic response from Polish artist-critic Elżbieta Janicka.[3]

The diligent labor of a small vanguard of cultural critics and activists working in the Jewish world in the West – including some Poles (both Jewish and not) – is just beginning to loosen traumatically ossified, essentialist anti-Polish stereotypes and mythologies, helping to illuminate the situational forces that shaped the varieties of Polish anti-Semitism and their outcomes in different periods. (The POLIN Museum is itself a fruit of this labor, a project that equally challenges popular Polish and Jewish misconceptions). It is thus strange at this moment of Jewish communal maturation to hear ostensibly progressive Polish critics take up what sound like these same mythologies. The cynicism of a certain brand of left-wing Polish cultural criticism is captured in the lament published in a Polish arts and culture journal that the POLIN Museum is "doomed to success."[4]

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3 The critics discussed above elaborate their arguments in chapters in the present volume.

4 Iwona Kurz, "Tu Spoczniecie. Muzeum Polin," *Dwutygodnik* 145 (October 2014), accessed November 15, 2015, http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/5545-tu-spoczniecie-muzeum-polin.html.

If it seems puzzling to progressive Jewish scholars working in Polish-Jewish Studies – themselves often seen as radical in the largely conservative milieu of North American and Israeli Jewish scholarship and society – to be taken to task by a vocal cadre of left-wing Polish scholars for being regressively nostalgic, it is also edifying. The tense exchange sets in more nuanced relief the divergent stakes for variously-situated Polish-Jewish Studies practitioners, and thus both the challenge and the necessity of a transnationally, transculturally constituted sub-discipline in ongoing critical dialogue. It also highlights assumptions and implicit politics embedded in critical scholarship, and the need to both acknowledge and pursue writing, curating, and other forms of knowledge production and transmission that serve the ends of public pedagogy for progressive social change. Finally, we must recognize that different correctives are indicated for the range of differently constituted publics (Polish non-Jewish, Polish-Jewish, American-Jewish, Israeli-Jewish, and others) who feel primary ownership over and implication in the Polish-Jewish story. In short, only in exploring and clarifying the divergent stakes of Polish-Jewish Studies in various Polish national and Jewish communal (and Israeli national) contexts will we be able to realize the sub-discipline's potential as simultaneously rigorous, nuanced scholarship and progressive public cultural politics.

"Critical Museology" in Poland?

Critical museology is an approach to museum curating, programming, and governance that responds to the last few decades of trenchant criticism of museums as agents of dominant social and state ideology. It does so with a mandate for museums to work instead for democratic ideals, on behalf of social and cultural critique, and to resist cultural hegemony and authoritarianism by empowering diverse viewers.

The notion of critical museology has been among the motivating paradigms of the POLIN Museum, introduced by core exhibition team leader Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett of New York University. She describes the paradigm in terms of self-reflexive transparency about the museum's own technologies of meaning-making; its contributions to pressing contemporary debates; and its commitment to exposing conflicts, empowering viewers, and redressing inequalities.[5] These principles are manifested in POLIN's curatorial strategies – in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's idea of the museum as a dramatic (as opposed to

5 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Historical Space and Critical Museologies: Museum of the History of Polish Jews," in *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*,

didactic) "theater of history" that communicates on multiple levels, through diverse first-person perspectives, and as a "trusted zone" that presumes active visitors constructing their own narratives.[6]

One can debate the "criticalness" of these strategies, as well as the success with which they have been operationalized. But a larger question arises: is Poland ready for a major museum that is not a national shrine? As Piotr Piotrowski's ultimately failed attempt to implement a "critical museum" paradigm during his brief stint as Director of Warsaw's National Museum in 2009–2010 suggests, there are major tensions between the aspirations of internal visionaries to make their institutions "critical," and broader authorities like Boards of Trustees or official government bodies to which such institutions must answer.[7] And because museums not only serve, but also constitute their audiences in fundamental ways, we must also ask what strategies, tools, and time may be required to beget — and then to be responsive to — active audiences who are amenable to and skilled in the new ways of engaging with museums that critical museology demands.

Fascinating questions arise when the "critical museology" paradigm, developed in specific North American, Western European, and Australian and New Zealand post-colonial contexts, is transposed to the Polish setting. In these originary settings cultural pluralism has been at least rhetorically embraced, there has developed broad agreement about which populations require redress, and nationalism itself is a growing object of (self-)critique. In Poland, by contrast, discourses of cultural pluralism are still new and remain unevenly accepted in today's ethnically

eds. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Piotr Piotrowski (Farnham Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 147–161.

6 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Historical Space and Critical Museologies," 147–161; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "A Theatre of History: 12 Principles," *TDR The Drama Review* 59:3 (Fall 2015): 49–59; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum of the History of Polish Jews: A Post-War, Post-Holocaust, Post-Communist Story," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, eds. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 264–279; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Curating Between Hope and Despair: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews," *East European Jewish Affairs* 45:1 (2015): 1–21.

7 See: Piotr Piotrowski, *Muzeum Krytyczne* (Poznań Wydawnictwo Rebis, 2011). The question of "failure" is of course relative. The first exhibit under Piotrowski's direction, the 2010 "Ars Homo Erotica" curated by Paweł Leszkowicz, was one of the most debated exhibits of the decade, so despite his subsequent forced resignation, it may be seen in part as a success. On the exhibit, see "Warsaw's exhibition of homoerotic art stirs protest," *DW* (June 22, 2010), accessed November 15, 2015, http://www.dw.com/en/warsaws-exhibition-of-homoerotic-art-stirs-protest/a-5716488-1.

homogenous society. There is a highly ideological competition for the recognition of "marginalized status" among various groups excluded from (or perceived to have been excluded from) the Communist-era narrative, from so-called żołnierze wyklęci ("cursed soldiers"), to righteous gentiles,[8] to Jews, Roma, Germans, and other historical minorities, as well as present day subaltern communities like Vietnamese, Chechens, or LGBT people. Further, popular sentiments still focus on consolidating Poland's long-suppressed national project.[9] It is simply not a given from a local perspective, with its strong discourse of ethno-national martyrology, that a core goal of a critical museology in Poland would be for Poles to hold themselves accountable for working through their national failings vis-à-vis the country's historical Jewish population.

If plural tellings of history traditionally create anxieties for conservatives, who tend to embrace unified ethno-national narratives, the POLIN Museum's "open" strategy appears to be creating more consternation among their political opponents. In the current political context, the POLIN Museum's leftist Polish critics believe that Polish visitors will inevitably leave with their basic views unchanged – even reinforced – if the Museum does not forefront the ingrained historical presence of anti-Semitism. Simply, they will leave feeling everything is fine. They will not be required to confront their own society's anti-Semitism, neither in the Museum display nor in the broader society after their visit. Critics believe that only a strong authorial voice that takes (Polish) visitors to task for the history of Polish anti-Semitism would force the necessary reflection.[10]

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8 Dariusz Libionka argues that "the Righteous" was a central figure and metaphor of the Holocaust during the Polish People's Republic era, both in historiography and in public discourse, at least after 1968. See: Dariusz Libionka, "Polskie piśmiennictwo na temat zorganizowanej i indywidualnej pomocy Żydom (1945–2008)," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 4 (2008):17–80. But there is a pervasive sense in some, especially nationalist Polish circles, that "the Righteous" have not received due recognition, their heroism overshadowed by external accusations of Polish anti-Semitism. Ironically, many Righteous Poles self-censored their own stories of heroism due to fear that their nationalist co-ethnics would look askance at the help they gave to Jews.

9 "Cursed soldiers" is the name used for a variety of WWII anti-communist resistance fighters who continued armed struggle against Poland's new postwar communist government into the 1950s. They were persecuted by the state, but many also held strongly anti-Semitic views and some murdered Jews.

10 Along with an acknowledgement of cultural pluralism, an attendant trend towards "multi-vocality" in museums of culture and history is increasingly normalized in the West, "emerg[ing] as a standard curatorial solution for destabilizing master narratives associated with traditional place-centered museums." See: Shelley Ruth Butler,

But the fact that an exhibition designed by one group of progressive critical scholars may be deemed regressive by another may be only partly explained by each group's situatedness in a different sociopolitical context (Polish national politics vs. Jewish communal and Israeli national politics). After all, the museum's core exhibition team included Polish scholars. To better understand the tensions around the museum, then, we also need to consider scholars' different professional contexts: museum criticism vs. museum practice. Museum critics tend to write for other scholars and intellectuals, while museum practitioners curate for broad and diverse publics. These are fundamentally different undertakings with different terms of engagement.

The debates at Princeton suggested the need to develop two areas of inquiry: first, empirical (ideally ethnographic) research on visitor experience in the POLIN Museum (and other museums exhibiting Jewish subject matter) to inform critiques of the institution; and second, a broader discussion of "public history" (and public scholarship more generally, including anthropologists, sociologists, social psychologists, and others who breach the walls of the ivory tower) as a discipline and a practice that is exceedingly relevant to how the Polish public may come to understand their country's Jewish past and their relation to it. Both critical museology and public history are new imports to Poland. Without sustained conversations about the terms, methods, pace, and aspirations of these two undertakings we risk misunderstanding how museums —as well as the last two decades' proliferation of festivals, monuments, and artistic projects — might serve the shared aspirations of Polish-Jewish Studies to create and disseminate new understandings of the past and present and expanded communal identifications, as well as realistically assessing the limitations of these forms.

The 2015 PJSI meeting description highlighted the "conflicts surrounding narrative choices within museums." Without diminishing the significance of such choices, museum critics must understand that most of what museums do as a technology of communication is not actually narrative. As the contemporary curatorial adage goes, a museum is not a "book on a wall." (Nor, we might add, is it a photograph or a film.) For this reason, the idea of "Reading the Museum" – the title of the central panel discussion dedicated to the POLIN Museum at the Princeton meeting – will not suffice as an approach to understanding the institution's effectiveness nor its function as a mode of experience and knowledge production. Just as integral to critical museology as new curatorial strategies is

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"Reflexive Museology: Lost and Found," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 176.

an understanding of museums in terms not only of narrative and representation, but also of ontology, epistemology, and phenomenology: they are evolving spaces that visitors encounter in multi-faceted, multi-sensory ways.

Seeing museums as narratives – as the sum of the words contained in their texts – is a natural, comfortable approach for logocentric humanities scholars. But this leaves out innumerable mediating factors that influence how that text is understood (to the extent that the text it is even read by visitors with many kinds of input competing for their attention). Even textual information in museums is not just written, but staged, with different fonts, colors, lighting, and proximity to other visual, aural, even tactile materials. Then there are the narratives, personalities, and simple interface presented by gallery guides, who direct attention; offer shorthands, interpretations, and commentaries; and deliver their information with a range of affect and body language. Further, learning, and questioning, and identity formation also happen in the settings conjured by museum buildings and their gallery spaces. They provide new openings, and act as social forums and political catalysts. This is particularly the case in their increasingly "distributed" forms, as museums today extend far beyond their own walls, organizing intercultural exchanges as well as lectures, workshops, and events, and having active, participatory existences online. Museums also reconfigure and re-code the urban landscapes in which they are situated, disrupting sightlines and catalyzing new behaviors and memories as people traverse these new spaces. People experience museums with all of their senses, with their politics, their longings and grief, their national pride and shame, their resentments, curiosities, and memories.

In domains like museums, where Polish-Jewish studies touches on the realm of public pedagogy, scholars must revise their expectations and approaches to knowledge production and dissemination. We have to reconsider how it is that people come to know. Critiques of narrative open-endedness also presume that all audiences trust more authoritative narrative scaffolding. But while North American survey research suggests that museums today are generally regarded as trustworthy by the majority, ethnographic research and pedagogy theory suggests this is not uniformly the case. This is particularly true among marginalized visitor populations who are mistrustful of state power and dominant discourses, including African- and Indigenous-Americans. Research is needed to establish whether Poland's post-communist subjects trust and identify new museums as an authentic reflection of self (and what self that may be).[11] In any event, narrative

11 In a 1994 U.S. national survey conducted by Indiana University's Center for the Study of History-Making in America, history museums were rated the most-trusted sources

is only one kind of input that visitors consider, and they often consider it critically when building their understandings of and relationships with the past.[12] So a broader view of how specific audiences make meaning in specific museums is crucial if we want such institutions to be critical in productive ways. To do so requires ethnographic methodologies tailored to investigating actual museum experience and its impact over time.

Between Critique & Creation

What models of critical museology might be productive in the Polish context? Highly ideological, openly critical takes on sensitive social topics have produced polarizing, volatile results in high-profile cases in the United States and Canada, and serve as warnings in the minds of many museum practitioners – sometimes damaging the very populations they sought to help.[13] Perhaps there is a more oblique, disarming approach to "critical-ness" that speaks to the particular situation of Polish-Jewish history and relations, with its complex archaeology of wounds on both sides of the hyphen and embodied by it, which at turns binds and divides these two traumatized communities.

A recent volume titled Museum as Process stresses the value of "slow museology," which sees exhibition, program, and institution building in terms of long-term community engagement and evolution, and understands failures as always partial, part of a necessary process of developing new ways of thinking

of information about the past by the majority, but interviews suggested that African-Americans and Aboriginal people were far less trusting. See: Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 91.

12 See for example: Eric Gable, "How We Study History Museums: Or Cultural Studies at Monticello," in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Oxford: Wiley, 2008).

13 See for example the literature on the exhibits "Into the Heart of Africa": Shelley Ruth Butler, *Contested Representations: Revisiting Into the Heart of Africa* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); "Enola Gay": "History and the Public: What Can We Handle?" theme issue, *Journal of American History* 82:3 (December 1995): and "The West as America": Steven Dubin, *The Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Alan Wallach, "The Battle over 'The West as America,'" in *Exhibiting Contradiction: The Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 105–117.

and relating.[14] An exhibit I curated in Cracow's Ethnographic Museum in summer 2013 of controversial Polish-made figurines depicting Jews was part of such an unfolding process emerging out of my field research. In my exhibit, I employed an intentionally ambivalent, questioning, empathetic method, inspired by critical museology's call for an "interrogative" museology that aims to "exhibit the problem" – in this case the polarized "Polish" and "Jewish" views of these uncanny figurines — to spur both dialogue and learning in both audiences and museums.[15] It was a conflict-ridden exhibit to organize, and its challenges highlighted the ways such Polish cultural institutions are internally differentiated by generation, training, and ideology, and riddled with emotions like shame and anxiety about both national identity and job security in an age of professional paradigm shifts. Such socialized and politicized emotions impact what we do, and do not, see on gallery walls. (They also influence what we, as scholars, write — and how, and for whom). But the exhibit also helped seed discussions and new curatorial practices in and around the institution in which it took place, and formed a unique social setting for unique exchanges to occur and in which to continue research.

Some progressive Polish critics assessed my exhibit negatively for its failure to univocally condemn the figurines on display as anti-Semitic. In other words, my attempt to open up these objects to multiple perspectives and layers of meaning – that they may represent curiosity, compassion, pluralist politics, identification, commemoration, or witness – undermined the project of illustrating how they may also (even simultaneously) exoticize, stereotype, and quite literally belittle Jews.[16] (The wildly popular Jewish culture festival in whose context the exhibit took place is itself often accused of being celebratory, nostalgic, superficial, and distracting from Poland's real problems with anti-Semitism.) I admit that this is one of my own anxieties, one that followed me through the creation and aftermath of the exhibit. But I was unable to dismiss the diversity of figurine forms, nor the complexity of sentiments surrounding them, or to flatten these into irrelevant epiphenomena emanating from fundamental anti-Semitism. The

14 Raymond Silverman, "Introduction," in *Museum as Process: Translating Local and Global Knowledges*, ed. Raymond Silverman, Museum Meanings Series (New York: Routledge, 2014), 12–14.

15 Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, "The Interrogative Museum," in *Museum as Process: Translating Local and Global Knowledges*, ed. Raymond Silverman, Museum Meanings Series (New York: Routledge, 2014), 279–298.

16 See for example: Olga Szmidt, "Antysemityzm z Polskiego Kramu," *Dwutygodnik* 141 (September 2014), http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/5427-antysemityzm-z-polskiego-kramu.html.

exhibition project, I decided, demanded a suspension of the very mistrust that fundamentally plagues Polish-Jewish relations today: seeing the "other side" as a source only of misinformation, ill-will, and accusation, and presuming we already know all there is to know. My prior research had convinced me that such "Jewish spaces" in Poland – precisely because of their fundamental ambivalence on the backdrop of such a difficult history – can provide important "meeting grounds for interpersonal encounters and disputes, for the enactment of morality, for the development of empathy, and for the re-signification of identity" for both Poles and Jews.[17]

Museums, as Enlightenment-era institutions of social pedagogy, have long construed the public as coming to the museum from a place of emptiness and ignorance, needing to be formed and informed. But scholarship based in psychoanalytic and pedagogy theory argues for seeing museum visitors instead as coming to the museum with a vast array of experience and knowledge, and thus already implicated in the material on display.[18] It is in this implication, this prior entanglement, that rests the potential to learn not only "about" a topic, but to learn "from" it, in transformative ways.[19]

There are rich and ongoing personal attachments, sentiments, memories, and cultural forms that connect Poles (both Jewish and non-Jewish) and Jews of Polish origin worldwide. This means that new spaces like museums tap into the still existing *lieux de mémoire* that Poland uniquely boasts, when other European societies have rather thinner lieux. Jewish museum space has the potential to draw together and implicate these two communities in a shared stewardship of – and shared debate about – this heritage. The challenge is to simultaneously decenter each community's habitual approaches to history, and not let the past get in the

17 Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng, "Introduction," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, eds. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 8.

18 The POLIN Museum's advertising campaign, "1000 reasons – what's yours?" visible on massive posters around Warsaw, suggests precisely this point. It shows various people at the Museum holding up visitor comment cards that say "I am at the museum because…," with a range of answers. Many of these are "low stakes" curiosity- or entertainment-related. But they include more suggestive ones, like, "my mother told me to," or "because I have a feeling that I have roots…." One actual visitor comment card the Museum received – but chose not to use in the poster campaign – said, "because I want the whole history": Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, personal communication.

19 Roger Simon and Angela Failler, "Curatorial Practice and Learning from Difficult Knowledge," in *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, eds. Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

way of change. This requires creating what has been called a "third space," a space that is "unfamiliar to both [sides], in which different groups can share a similar experience of discovery" and "where individuals are permitted to cross the boundaries of belonging."[20]

People must do their own work to traverse the expanse between the frameworks for understanding that they bring with them, and the future knowledge, emotions, and social and cultural identifications (we hope) they may develop.[21] Creating exhibitionary mises-en-scène where people can see multiple sides of an issue allows them to recognize their own worlds of meaning, even as they confront the way these meanings may conflict with others' meanings, and even cause hardship or suffering for those others.

We know that museum visiting can be less about "learning" than about the performative reinforcement of pre-existing views, senses of self, and social or cultural belonging in ways that do not necessarily correlate with curators' intentions.[22] Many comments in my exhibit's notebooks suggested the simple repetition of strong and divergent views. But such an exhibit can also serve as "a system of potentially emancipatory experiences" that offers both inspiration and "critically probing ideas."[23] Watching visitors speaking animatedly with each other, and the mixed emotions on their faces, suggested that something new had been released. The exhibit's various modes of built-in response-collection also pointed

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20 David Edgar, Afterword to *Playing With Fire*, quoted in Naseem Khan, *The Road to Interculturalism: Tracking the Arts in a Chanding World*, quoted in Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs, and Margherita Sani, eds., *Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue: Selected Practices from Europe* (MAP for ID Group, 2009), 23, http://www.amitie.it/mapforid/Handbook_MAPforID_EN.pdf. For a further discussion of Third Space, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

21 As David Carr writes, "[S]timulated by resounding connections, suggestions, and ideas, [museum] users are more likely to seek further information and, through their own questions, arrive over time at their own truths… [museums allow people] to try out new information in a relatively safe environment": David Carr, "A Museum is an Open Work," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7:2 (2001): 173–175.

22 See, for instance: Laurajane Smith, "Theorizing Museum and Heritage Visiting," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, eds. Sharon Macdonald and Helen Rees Leahy (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 459–484.

23 Carr, "A Museum is an Open Work," 176.

to experiences of change.[24] Some Polish visitors said they'd never even noticed the figurines, but since visiting the exhibit they see them everywhere. Others said they never imagined anything problematic about these sculptures until they were confronted with how they make many Jews feel. Below are three statements – two from video recorded exit interviews with random visitors, and one from an e-mail response – that allude to the generative quality of non-didactic critical museology.

Bogdan Szymanowski, director of an engine parts company:

> […] crucially for me, it is not just an exhibition of Jewish figurines but an exhibition that raises questions. And there are dozens of those questions, and they are haunting, and I know when I leave I'll keep thinking about many of them. Whenever I see a figurine in a market stall now, I'll stop and think about it, I'll start thinking as soon as I leave. And that's probably the most important message of the exhibition […] because there are so few shows, so few museums that really force us to ask questions.[25]

Irek Socha, drummer/composer from Dębica:

> […] on the surface we all apparently understand what we're participating in [at this Jewish Culture Festival]. We can be happy that we're so open, that Americans can say: look, Poles aren't anti-Semitic. Because we have the festival right here, the biggest in the world. But on the other hand the reality is […] I come from a small provincial town and it's just the opposite there. All those demons you read about in Grabowski or Gross, they are very real, you simply have to live in the countryside to see it. It's great to have this exhibition, because it takes courage to present such things nowadays during a Jewish Culture Festival. […] the entries in the visitor book clearly show lots of people were outraged that you've shown it. I think it's a good thing that you have, because the main task of an intellectual is to provoke discussions. The wider the discussion, the better, as the topic won't be swept under the rug again. I wish these issues would be hashed out and that we'd ponder our heritage and our identity, which is very complex and different from what far-right zealots think.[26]

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24 Erica Lehrer and Lauren Ramsay, "Collecting (as) Dialogue? International Collaborative Collecting and 'Difficult' Objects," *COMCOL Newsletter* 22 (July 2013): 16–21.

25 "[…] najważniejsze dla mnie jest to, że jest to nie wystawa pokazująca figurki Żydów z pieniążkiem czy bez, tylko wystawa, która zadaje pytania. I tych pytań jest bardzo wiele i te pytania zostają w głowie i wiem, że ja wyjdę z tej wystawy, i będę myślał długo o wielu pytaniach, które tutaj zostały zadane. Kiedykolwiek będę widział figurki na straganach, Żydów, będę myślał o tym i będę także myślał o tym zaraz jak stąd wyjdę. I myślę, że to jest najważniejsze przesłanie tej wystawy i to jest znakomita praca, i jest tak niewiele wystaw, niewiele muzeów, robi to właśnie, że budzi w nas pytania."

26 "[…] wszyscy pozornie rozumiemy w czym uczestniczymy, cieszymy się z tego, że jesteśmy tacy otwarci, że Amerykanie mogą powiedzieć: 'Patrzcie Polacy nie są antysemitami.' Mamy festiwal, to się dzieje u nas, mamy największy festiwal na świecie. Ale z drugiej strony przecież rzeczywistość jest taka u nas, ja pochodzę z prowincjonalnego

Finally, I offer the response of an Israeli woman, a scholar whose passionate 2010 letter of complaint to the Polish Minister of Tourism, about the offence she felt on seeing the figurines in Poland, I had put on display in one of the galleries. She wrote to me on the opening day:

> I think it is such a good thing what you are doing in exhibiting these various figurines in a […] context which is educational and encourages debate. I watched all the video interviews, which put the horrible figurines I encountered some years ago in a broader perspective, and at times even [a] positive [one]. I still feel that there is also an element of anti-Semitic stereotyping, which I find very offensive, but does not relate to all figurines of Jews, but specifically to those that connect religious Jews with money and are ugly […] and grotesque. I hope that this issue is one of the issues that is being debated and brought to consciousness.

These responses offer a window onto the multiplicity of reactions to the exhibit. The "outrage" inscribed in the comment books mentioned by the first respondent was expressed by both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors. Those from the two groups who expressed anger did so in reaction to diametrically-opposed understandings of the exhibit's argument about the figurines: some Poles thought it made them, unjustly, look anti-Semitic; some Jews thought it made the figurines seem unproblematic. I took this as a sign that at minimum the exhibit frequently provoked rather than assuaged. While an intimate-scale, temporary exhibit is not comparable to a major national museum – and that fact may have implications for public encounters with "difficult knowledge" – the comments offered above suggest the "awakened appetite" that at least some museum visitors have for complexity and debate, and the incremental way that new, self-critical awareness may develop from exposure to it.[27]

miasteczka, że tam jest dokładnie odwrotnie. Te wszystkie demony jakie się czyta w książkach Grabowskiego czy Grossa, one są jak najbardziej rzeczywiste, tylko trzeba mieszkać na prowincji żeby to widzieć. trzeba być odważnym, żeby dzisiaj, na Festiwalu Kultury Żydowskiej w Krakowie pokazać taką wystawę, bo zresztą po tych wpisach do księgi było widać, że dużo ludzi było oburzonych, że pokazaliście to. Ja sądzę, że dobrze żeście to pokazali, bo głównym zajęciem intelektualisty powinno być prowokowanie do dyskusji. Czym szersza ta dyskusja będzie, tym lepiej, bo temat nie zostanie znowu zamieciony pod dywan. Chciałoby się, żeby o takich sprawach poważnie porozmawiać i zastanowić się nad naszym dziedzictwem, i nad naszą tożsamością, która jest bardzo złożona i inna, nie taka jak by chcieli piewcy narodowej prawicy."

27 The phrase "awakened appetite" is from David Carr, "A Museum is an Open Work," 182.

The Near Enemy of Polish-Jewish Studies

Given the political realities on both "sides" of the Polish-Jewish Studies divide, the notion that we are all fighting a battle – or various battles – is not out of place. In this context, the internal disputes among progressively minded Polish-Jewish Studies scholars remind me of the Buddhist notion of "the near enemy." In life's battles, the near enemy is an unhelpful attribute that masquerades as a useful one. It is essentially a pitfall in an attempt to vanquish the real enemy, who may be difficult to reach; "a bad cousin, a failing that closely resembles [a] virtue and can be mistaken for it."[28] Pity, for example, is the near enemy of compassion; indifference is the near enemy of equanimity.

In the present case, the far enemy – the one scholars and curators and culture brokers dealing with Polish-Jewish issues should really be targeting – is the willful disregard for historical facts, celebratory national self-regard, and denunciation of critics. But the near enemy is hyper-vigilance against "optimism" or "nostalgia" – which at times can seem to catch in its net any telling of Polish-Jewish history that does not take anti-Semitism as its defining framework. This near enemy, ironically, risks becoming a frozen mirror image of the far one that it disputes. The political anxieties of Polish "progressives" and nationalists alike distort both past and present. Both maintain essentialist categories that keep Poles and Jews (interchangeably) in black and white. So-called "progressive" critics thus denigrate, if not deny Jews their own diversity of perspectives, their own history outside of a confining framework that casts them as objects of Polish anti-Semitism, and their own evolving sense of Polish heritage, including the joyful feelings many have experienced upon encountering Poland's new Jewish spaces like the POLIN Museum. They also undermine the well-earned expressions of pride and possibility that non-Jewish Poles who have been fighting for a fuller, truer telling of Polish history have felt on visiting this new institution, where chilling stories of prewar anti-Semitism, Jedwabne, postwar pogroms, and March 1968 are told without apology in multiple media. Further, they assume that visitors – whether Polish or Jewish – are not having their assumptions unsettled in productive ways. In sum, ideology threatens not only to delegitimize, but also to desensitize us to the full range of experience.

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28 Lisa Ruddick's use of this concept inspired mine. See: Lisa Ruddick, "The Near Enemy of the Humanities is Professionalism," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 23, 2001, B7–B9, https://www.academia.edu/12836175/The_Near_Enemy_of_the_Humanities_Is_Professionalism.

My remarks at Princeton came directly on the heels of Jan Grabowski's searing description of Polish villagers hunting down and killing their Jewish neighbors in the southern Polish region around the town of Markowa during the Holocaust. Grabowski also mentioned the unwillingness of museum curators at Markowa's new Ulm Museum, dedicated to a family of Polish righteous gentiles, to complicate their story by including Grabowski's evidence of the larger context of murderous anti-Semitism in which this family's exceptional righteousness occurred. It is understandable that practitioners of this kind of devastating, essential scholarship might be left with little room for optimism. The tense alertness of a cohort of critical Polish scholars to ant-Semitism and its apologists — and indeed these scholars' sense of being the conscience of the Polish nation — may be an understandable reaction to the lack of institutionalized self-critical national memory. Critics may be driven to extreme rhetoric because of the perniciousness and tenacity they have experienced in the Polish ethno-nationalist enemy they are fighting. Perhaps it is too much to ask that these Polish intellectuals in the same breath take Jewish communities to task for their own pathologies regarding Poland. These critics are heeding Jan Błoński's famous 1987 call to break the cycle of defensiveness regarding the national bill of conscience and say, "yes, we are guilty" – full stop.[29] But 30 years later, with important new historiographical avenues opened and normalized, their relentless focus on anti-Semitism also disparages, and potentially undermines, equally constructive approaches to cultural criticism necessary for social transformation. A further danger of this monotone, "sledgehammer" approach is that in the public realm it will be not only indigestible, but will strengthen the right-wing populists whose approach it claims to fight.

The scenario looks different when viewed from Jewish communities beyond Poland, and within them the pressing tasks are different ones. High on the list would be requiring the Jewish youth groups who come to Poland for a week to visit not only the Rapaport memorial commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto uprising outside POLIN's front door, but to cross the Museum's threshold as well, to put the tragedy of Jewish death into the complex context of its prior (and subsequent) life. This will not be a perfect telling of history, but neither are most museum visitors scholars. They simply need a few new facts, a reframing of their deeply felt stories, and an experience of de-familiarization that a monumental,

29 Błoński here refers to a particular kind of historical complicity in and responsibility for the oppression of Jews and lack of solidarity with them during the Nazi occupation. Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 41:2 (January 11, 1987): 1, 4.

welcoming, modern museum filled with Polish families and school children contemplating Jewish history may help provide. This is a real political battle as well, against the xenophobia and nationalism that the traumatic repetition of lachrymose Jewish history can seed. As participants of the Princeton meeting Karen Underhill and Nancy Sinkoff each suggested, Polish-Jewish history – or parts of it – has been exported in ways that link Poland to other national spaces, a transnational heritage with far-flung pedagogical impact. The way Jewish life in Poland is presented and understood has consequences for Jewish communities and the safeguarding of ideals of cultural pluralism in both North America and Israel-Palestine.

Polish-Jewish studies implicates two ethno-national communities embedded in different political contexts, with different communal traumas and neuroses. There is fighting to be done on two fronts: a Polish national one and a Jewish communal one. The battles are not quite parallel or equivalent, but each side feels the stakes keenly in their own theater of conflict. It is essential that we keep reminding ourselves that the larger war – the war against the far enemy, the perversion of history, and in support of rigorous, nuanced scholarship – is a shared one, lest we are enervated by fighting each other.

If this new sub-discipline we are calling into being is to rise to the activist inclinations embedded in the rhetoric of our programming, which speaks of "strategies for 'overcoming the divide' between Polish history and Jewish history," and the need to "mark a path for scholars and activists who would like to see the study of Polish and Jewish cultures more intentionally and productively intertwined," we need to undertake some self-reflexive inquiry to recognize the ways that the divides and blind spots and pitfalls we study entangle us as well.[30]

A central challenge for Polish-Jewish studies scholars is to find a language in which to express difficult truths – truths that are inherently nuanced and ambivalent – in forms that can be heard and digested by diverse, even divergent publics. I sometimes wonder, as public humanities theorist Julie Ellison has asked, whether scholars, in our "necessary skepticism," have

30 The first quote is from the invitation to the first meeting of the Polish-Jewish Studies Initiative at Ohio State University, March 24, 2014. The second is from the invitation to the second workshop at Princeton University, April 18–19, 2015.

made analysis and hope, theory and action, "strangers to one another."[31] Do we cede hopefulness to our far enemies? Do we have theories of change? How do we envision narrow ethno-nationalist certainties being unsettled and complicated on both sides of the Polish-Jewish hyphen, and how do we encourage more expansive, interconnected subjectivities to emerge? Such questions are fundamental, and put us to the test, when considering the kind of public pedagogy that is the natural domain of the museum.

31 Julie Ellison, "Humanities and the Public Soul," in *Practising Public Scholarship: Experiences and Possibilities Beyond the Academy*, ed. Katharyn Mitchell (Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 113–121, 115.

Appendix

POLISH-JEWISH STUDIES WORKSHOP

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, APRIL 18-19, 2015

ORGANIZERS

Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Princeton University
Jan T. Gross, Princeton University
Jessie Labov, Ohio State University
Karen Underhill, University of Illinois at Chicago

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Anna Zawadzka, Polish Academy of Science
Geneviève Zubrzycki, University of Michigan

AGENDA

LOCATION: JONES HALL 100

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

9:30-10:10 – Introductory Comments & Framing the Workshop: Questions & Challenges

10:15-12:15 – Session One. Rethinking Historical Narratives: The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

1:30-3:30 – Session Two. Polish-Jewish Memory Work and Cultural Diplomacy

3:45-5:45 – Session Three. Reading the Museum: Critical Interventions

7:00 pm – Dinner for the participants in Chancellor Green 105
Combined with a distinguished lecture by Beth Holmgren, Duke University: "Banding Together Against the Cavalry: "Polishness" and the Soldiers' Song during World War II"

SUNDAY, APRIL 19

9:30 – 11:30 – Session Four. Vu zaynen mir? The Place of Yiddish in Developing Jewish/Polish Studies and Narratives

11:45-1:45 – Session Five. Engaging the Polish-Jewish Turn: Cultural and Philanthropic Institutions in a Changing Scholarly Landscape

2:45-4:30 – Working Group Session. Next Steps for Polish Jewish Studies

SPONSORED BY

Princeton University Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
Princeton University Department of History
Princeton University Council of the Humanities
Princeton University Program in Judaic Studies
Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture
University of Illinois Chicago Fund for Polish Jewish Studies
Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Warsaw
Polish Cultural Institute, New York
Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Science

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Visit the workshop website at https://pjsw.princeton.edu

Appendix I: Polish-Jewish Studies Workshop Participants

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Martha Himmelfarb, Princeton University
Beth Holmgren, Duke University
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Appendix II: Polish-Jewish Studies Workshop Agenda

Introductory Comments and Framing the Workshop: Questions and Challenges

Speakers: Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Princeton University, Polish Academy of Sciences
Jessie Labov, Ohio State University
Karen Underhill, University of Illinois at Chicago

Panel I. Rethinking Historical Narratives: The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Panel Chair: Yaacob Dweck, Princeton University
Commentator: Jan T. Gross, Princeton University
Speakers: Samuel Kassow, Trinity College
Dariusz Stola, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and Polish Academy of Sciences
Marcin Wodziński, University of Wrocław

Panel II. Polish-Jewish Memory Work and Cultural Diplomacy

Panel Chair: Anson Rabinbach, Princeton University
Speakers: Jan Grabowski, University of Ottawa
Erica Lehrer, Concordia University
Nancy Sinkoff, Rutgers University
Geneviève Zubrzycki, University of Michigan

Panel III. Reading the Museum: Critical Interventions

Panel Chair: Philip Nord, Princeton University
Commentator: Bożena Shallcross, University of Chicago
Speakers: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, Polish Academy of Sciences
Piotr Forecki, Poznań University
Elżbieta Janicka, Polish Academy of Sciences
Konrad Matyjaszek, Polish Academy of Sciences
Anna Zawadzka, Polish Academy of Sciences

Keynote. Beth Holmgren, Duke University: "Banding Together Against the Cavalry: 'Polishness' and the Soldiers' Song during World War II"

Panel IV. *Vu zaynen mir?* The Place of Yiddish in Developing Jewish/Polish Studies and Narratives

Panel Chair: Martha Himmelfarb, Princeton University
Speakers: Karen Underhill, University of Illinois at Chicago
Agi Legutko, Columbia University
Michael Steinlauf, Gratz College
Karolina Szymaniak, Jewish Historical Institute

Panel V. Engaging the Polish-Jewish Turn: Cultural and Philanthropic Institutions in a Changing Scholarly Landscape

Panel Chair: Stanley Katz, Princeton University
Speakers: Shana Penn, Graduate Theological Union and Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture
Jonathan Brent, YIVO
Irene Pletka, Kronhill-Pletka Foundation
Agnieszka Rudzińska, Adam Mickiewicz Institute

With the participation of:
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Małgorzata Mazurek, Columbia University
Joanna Regulska, Rutgers University
Bartek Remisko, Polish Cultural Institute, NYC

Working Group: Next Steps for Polish Jewish Studies

Session Chair: Jessie Labov, Ohio State University

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