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Denying the Holocaust in Poland

An Abstract

The Nazis carried out their mass extermination of the Jewish people mainly on Polish soil. Poles witnessed all the stages of this crime. For this reason, one might expect that “Holocaust denial” should not take root in Poland. But a kind of rivalry of Polish martyrdom’s narration were already under way quite early after the war. Tradition of pre-war Antisemitism and the focus on dealing with own trauma were not conducive to an empathic contemplation of the Jew’s tragedy during the Holocaust. Of course, such emotions among Polish society were an object of political manipulation of different fractions of communist regime. Due to these tensions a specific form of the Holocaust denying developed, especially in 1968. A kind of struggle over memory is still continuing in the contemporary Antisemitism in Poland. Remembrance is being divided between “Jewish” and “Polish” themes. This paper examines development of Holocaust Denying’s propaganda motives and absorbing of elements of Auschwitz lie in Poland after 1989.

The Nazis carried out their mass extermination of the Jewish people mainly on Polish soil. Here, the Germans established mass extermination camps near Chelmno, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka. German chemists and companies developed the technology in those places for committing mass murder via gas chambers. Germans transported to the extermination camps Jews who had been deported from many countries of Europe¹. Poles witnessed all the stages of this crime.

¹ See: R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Chicago 1967; R. Hilberg, *Perpetrators victims bystanders. The Jewish Catastrophe 1935-1945*, New York 1992; Y. Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, New York 2001.

For this reason, one might expect that “Holocaust denial” should not take root in Poland. However, this assumption is only partially correct.

Denying the fact of the Holocaust as such, or in particular denying use of gas for killing in gas chambers, could not develop easily in Polish anti-Semites’ propaganda. However, discussions on the numbers of victims and their “not quite so” tragic fate, were already under way quite early after the war. Saying it, we must make clear few facts.

It must be stressed that the Second World War was a great trauma for all Poland’s citizens. In waging total war, the armies of the Third Reich, which invaded Poland in September 1939, acted brutally from the very outset. They did not limit their hostilities to the Polish army, but also struck at the civilian population. Towns were bombed and streams of refugees strafed by German warplanes. The German attack on Poland (as well as the Soviet Union’s seizure of Poland’s eastern provinces) caused huge losses to the population. Six years of occupation followed, which were marked by terror, persecution and the merciless implementation of racist laws. Each day brought arrests, torture and executions of political elites, intellectuals, members of the resistance, and even random hostages taken from street round-ups. Each Polish family lost someone either in combat, or through Nazi repressions and persecution.

The trauma of war affected the entire Polish nation. Shortly after the liberation, it showed itself in deep indignation and led to demands for collaboration and national treason to be held to account. Court cases were launched against collaborators and enjoyed great popular support. Nevertheless, following the occupation, many Poles harboured guilty consciences or moral uncertainties about what they had done. Those ambivalent feelings manifested themselves, among others, through the superimposition of restless consciences onto Jews who had survived the Holocaust. The traditions of pre-war anti-Semitism, which were reinforced by the invasive anti-Jewish racist propaganda pursued by the German occupiers for six long years, led people to seek an imaginary enemy and “traitor of the nation” in the Jews - especially as the Jews were demanding the return of sequestered workshops, homes or belongings². A notion in circulation already before the war and used by anti-Semites, accused all Jews for having a

² A. Cała, *Die Genese des polnischen und des jüdischen Märtyrermythos nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, [in:] Anna Wolf-Powęska, Piotr Forecki (hrsg.), *Der Holocaust in der polnischen Erinnerungskultur*, Frankfurt am Main, 2012, pp. 112-126.

“birthright of their race”, namely a tendency to subversion manifested by supporting the left. After 17 September 1939, when the Soviet Union took advantage of the German aggression against Poland and occupied the eastern reaches of the Polish Republic, Polish anti-Semites began accusing Jews of favouring the annexation and even greeting it with enthusiasm. The German authorities reinforced this message, identifying Jews with the Soviet apparatus of coercion and accusing them of crimes against Poles: the mass arrests of elites, the deportation of around one million Poles to Soviet labour camps in Siberia and their involvement in numerous atrocities. Soviet crimes were attributed to Jews: in society, it was a readily propagated element of anti-Jewish Nazi propaganda in the occupied territories of Poland, especially from 1941, when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union³.

The idea of the Jew as a national traitor, founded on the delusions caused by post-war trauma, who is “once again trying to corner all business”, calling for the return of “all that belonged to the Jews – though, not necessarily to him personally” and conspiring with communists to “enslave the Polish nation” or constituting, indeed, the very essence of communism - was the most common image of Holocaust survivors in the eyes of anti-Semites. Moreover, anti-Semites were quite numerous. In addition, anti-Jewish sentiments rose after the war, not only in Poland, but also in many other European countries⁴. In Poland, they led to numerous clandestine killings and three pogroms. As a result of anti-Jewish violence in 1945-1947, nearly a thousand Jews were murdered mainly by anti-communist partisans, but also by their former neighbours. They were also the frequent targets of robberies, because contrary to reality but in line with traditional views, Jews were associated with wealth. Also, collective anti-Jewish actions led to bloody results: two Jews were killed in the Krakow riots (August 1945), while as many as 43 in the pogrom in Kielce (4 July 1946)⁵.

The hostile attitudes to the Jews and the focus on dealing with own trauma were not conducive to an empathic contemplation of the Jew’s tragedy during the Holocaust. While in 1944-1946 there was public support for penalising those who had betrayed

³ J. T. Gross, *The Jewish Community in the Soviet-Annexed Territories on the Eve of the Holocaust*, [in:] L. Dobroszycki, J. Gurock (eds), *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, Armonk, New York, 1993.

⁴ A. Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture*, Jerusalem, 1995.

⁵ A. Cała, *Ochrona bezpieczeństwa fizycznego Żydów w Polsce powojennej. Komisje Specjalne przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce* [Protecting the physical safety of Jews in post-war Poland. Special Commissions of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland], Warsaw 2014; B. Szaynok, *Pogrom of the Jews in Kielce of 4 July 1946*, Warsaw, 1992.

Jews or had somehow facilitated their murder by the Germans; by 1947 such proceedings increasingly met a wall of silence from Polish witnesses and obstruction from judges. In parallel, a myth started to arise about the martyrdom of the Polish nation and its heroic struggle against the Nazi invaders. The fate of the Jews began to be seen as equivalent to Polish martyrdom – or even as a less important “spin-off” of the Poles’ suffering. Collaborators could not fit this martyrly-heroic vision, so attempts were made to forget inconvenient facts.

Communist state policy stoked these attitudes. Official memorials and celebrations of anniversaries embellished the martyrly-heroic myth. Concentration camps such as Majdanek and Auschwitz were turned into museums. Nevertheless, the extermination camps that the Nazis had built specifically to murder Jews, such as in Chelmno or Auschwitz-Birkenau, were not commemorated. An exposition presenting the extermination of Jews was opened in one of the barracks at Auschwitz, but it was dismantled as early as in 1949. The information presented in the Auschwitz Camp Museum was manipulated. One could learn that the Poles were murdered at Auschwitz as well as people of many other European nations. The nationalities were listed alphabetically, so “Jews” (in Polish “Żydzi”) were placed last. There was no clarification that the overwhelming majority of those nationalities, apart from Poles, Gypsies and Soviet prisoners of war, were Jews who were transported to the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau from countries occupied or dominated by the Third Reich, such as Austria, Hungary, Romania, Greece, and France. Around this time, historians somewhat mechanically determined the numbers of victims of the Second World War as three million Poles and three million Polish Jews, thus equating the weight of the losses of these two nations.

The outcome of state policy was that the genocide of the Jews started slipping from memory. School textbooks barely mentioned the Holocaust: the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was also noted, but on no more than one page. The leftist narrative ignored the nationality of Nazism’s victims, due the ideas of “humanitarianism” and “internationalism” and thereby obscuring the differences between Jewish and Polish fates during the war. In society the belief grew that Polish sufferings were the same, or even greater, than the Jewish⁶.

⁶ A. Cała, *La malédiction de la mémoire traumatique* [in:] Jean-Charles Szurek, Annette Wieviorka (eds), *Juifs et Polonais, 1939-2008*, Paris 2009, pp. 327-338.

The communist state's strong censorship expunged anti-Semitic propaganda from printed texts. This did not mean, however, that it did not exist in the spoken word. The subsequent generation of communist activists recognised its potential for social engineering. At the beginning of the 1960s, the bosom of the ruling single party gave rise to a faction of activists that adopted anti-Semitic discourse in the struggle for a more authoritarian model of communism that was coupled with nationalism. Mieczyslaw Moczar stood at the head of this faction, named the "Moczarites". They enjoyed the tacit support of the leadership of the Soviet Union, which at that time had decided to side more actively with the Arabs during the conflict with Israel. As a result of this conflict, there was strong anti-Israel and anti-Zionist propaganda developed from 1969 on in Soviet Union⁷. But Poland was pioneering in anti-Zionist propaganda, starting already in 1967. In 1968, the Moczarites took advantage of nationwide student protests that were being organised against censorship and restriction of freedom of thought, as a pretext in the struggle for power in the communist party. Another faction of communists tried to beat the Moczarites with their own weapon, namely anti-Semitism hidden in anti-Zionist rhetoric. Thus, in 1968-1969 an anti-Semitic campaign was unleashed in all contemporary media. Many intellectuals of Jewish origin experienced various types of harassment, as a result of which more than 13,000 of them were forced to emigrate from Poland⁸.

On the initiative of the Moczarites, in 1968 the key words devoted to the Second World War were changed in the new edition of an encyclopaedia, which had been published since 1965. This was accompanied by a press campaign against the editor and the head of the publishing house that had issued it, which emphasised his Jewish origin. The publisher lost his position and was forced into exile. He moved to Sweden, where he lived until his death. He was accused of being "unfavourably disposed towards Poland and Polish people" that he had overstated the number of Jewish victims, exaggerated the description of their suffering during the Holocaust and detracted from the extent of assistance they had received from Poles. The slogans enforced by the

⁷ See: S. T. Possony, *Anti-Semitism in the Russian Orbit*, Leiden-Boston 1976; E. Goldhagen, *Communism and Anti-Semitism*, Berlin-New York 1987. On the influence of Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda on the Polish one, see: D. Libionka, *Brakujące ogniwo. Sowietcka literatura antyzyjonistyczna w Polsce przed i po Marcu 1968* [The lacking link. Anti-Zionist Soviet Prints before and after March 1968], [in:] T. Szarota (ed.), *Komunizm. Ideologia, system, ludzie*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 272-288.

⁸ D. Stola, *Kampania antyzyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968* [Anti-Zionist campaign in Poland 1967-1968], Warsaw 2000.

Moczarites contained the seeds of the “Auschwitz lie” because they underestimated the number of Jewish victims, while inflating the number of Nazism’s Polish victims.

Anti-Semites who were supportive of the Moczarites published books and articles, which quite remarkably transposed the Jewish victims of the Holocaust with their persecutors. Jews were accused of having supported the Nazis, all cases of Jewish collaboration in the ghettos were widely publicised, and emphasis was placed on the role of Jewish police in carrying out deportations from ghettos to death camps. In one book, which played on conspiracy theory, Zionists were accused of having initiated the destruction of European Jewry by secretly influencing the policies of the Nazis⁹. The Moczarites stressed the roles of many Poles who had helped the Jews, overstating their numbers and accused those saved of showing lack of gratitude. At that time, another frequently adopted anti-Semitic journalistic theme was accusing Israel of conspiring with its “former oppressors” in West Germany against Poland. The alleged aim was to decrease Poland’s international standing through “false” accusations of anti-Semitism. It is worth noting that this last propaganda theme of the Moczarites carried particularly well in Polish society, which, though brimming with anti-German resentment, was quite well disposed towards Israel, where it was believed, the most widely spoken language was Polish and Polish Jews were vanquishing the pro-Soviet Arabs (anti-Soviet resentment was as strong as anti-German).

The Moczarites’ propaganda was finally suppressed after one year, when the faction was broken up. The authorities amended the rules on censorship, which resulted in a general ban on Jewish subjects - which contributed to the further forgetting of the Holocaust and the multi-ethnicity of Poland’s past. Nevertheless, a seed of a specifically Polish version of the Auschwitz lie still managed to take root among anti-Semites.

The lack of any attempt at all to combat anti-Semitism and also the lack of polemic with the Moczarites’ propaganda offensive (due to lack of freedom of speech under communism) had long-lasting effects. First, anti-Semitic authors, though they could no longer publish any anti-Jewish texts, failed to change their views, thus contributing to the sustainability of certain strands of Moczarist propaganda. Collective memory was distorted. There was a fairly common belief that the fate of the Jews was an offshoot of the Nazi plan to murder all Poles, the sufferings of both parts of society

⁹ T. Bednarczyk, *Obowiązek silniejszy od śmierci* [Duty greater than Death], Warsaw 1982.

were identical or very similar and the Poles did everything they could to help and save the persecuted Jews. This view still lingers today and is even strengthening along with the departure of the generation of witnesses who remember and can provide a somewhat different portrayal of the past.

Views like those described above started a kind of struggle over memory that is still continuing. Previously, it was manifested by the removal of traces of Jewish martyrdom (as in 1949 on information boards in the museum at Auschwitz), and currently in the specific conflict “over memorials”¹⁰. In the 1980s, a monument was erected for the deportees of the Warsaw ghetto. Its abstract form resembles a wagon, into which Warsaw’s Jews were packed and sent to the Treblinka extermination camp. In the 1990s, a monument was built nearby for Poles who were transported by the Soviet authorities in 1939-1941 to Siberia. The symbolic form was very similar: a realistic wagon in which deportees were displaced. The wagon was filled with crosses to underline the Catholic faith and Christ-like martyrdom. For balance, one matzevah was included among the crosses – to commemorate the Jewish victims of the deportations. The proportions of religious symbols indicate, however, that despite the facts, the Jews suffered much less than Catholic Poles¹¹. Given the entrenched belief among anti-Semites that Jews in the Soviet apparatus of coercion were responsible for the deportations, this monument’s location near the first is contentious. Some people are not so concerned about the equation of Polish martyrdom with that of the Jews, but about the transformation of Jewish victims into oppressors. When the Jewish History Museum was established, anti-Semitic groups initiated a monument for Poles who had saved Jews. Remembrance is being divided between “Jewish” and “Polish” themes.

The numbers of Polish and Jewish victims of Auschwitz, as well as of the whole Second World War were revised by historians only after the fall of communism, therefore in the 1990s. Those new findings, although carefully grounded in sources, aroused and continue to arouse the opposition of parts of Polish society. Particularly, as the fall of communism and the building of the foundations of a democratic system gave an opportunity for anti-Semites to reveal their views in print and to create legal political

¹⁰ E. Janicka, *Festung Warschau*, Warsaw 2011.

¹¹ Deportees in 1940-41 included 52% Poles, 30% Jews, 18% Ukrainians and Belarusians. See: D. Boćkowski (2004), *Losy żydowskich uchodźców z centralnej i zachodniej Polski przebywających na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich w 1939* [Fates of Jewish refugees from central and western Poland in the north-east borderlands in 1939], [in:] K. Jasiewicz (ed.), *Świat nie pożegnany*, Warsaw and London 2004, pp. 91-108.

bodies, in which anti-Semitism could be the most important or a key trait of political identity. A significant part of politically active anti-Semites originated from supporters of Moczarism, with the difference that they had rejected communism and bound themselves with the extreme right, including ultraconservative Catholic circles. A group of such activists, who were prior Moczarites, determined the political content of Radio Maria, the strongest anti-Semitic Catholic media in Poland and possibly Europe, which at the height of its popularity in the late 1990s, had an audience of just less than 8% of Polish society¹².

In Poland, modern anti-Semitism is a mix of old pre-war anti-communist propaganda motives, combined with Moczarist argumentation, whose totalitarian communist roots are barely masked. Anti-Semitic narrative threads arriving from Western Europe are adopted with some delay. One of them is historical revisionism. We can fairly accurately trace the process by which this theme was adopted.

The maturing of the generation that drew its knowledge about the Nazi genocide only from school, paved the way for a group of historians questioning the numbers of victims of the Holocaust and trying to minimise or deny the Nazis' guilt. It is no coincidence that they started their work in England and the United States, countries that had not experienced the drama of the extermination within their borders, and where the different stages of the debate on the greatest crime of the twentieth century did not impinge upon the sense of national identity, as, for example, in Germany and Poland. They were able to achieve popularity because it was easier for them to hide the ideological entanglements of their assessments. The greatest exposure was achieved by David Irving, an English historian, who in the late 1970s began to undermine the very fact of the mass murder of Jews in death camps, arguing that the crematoria were actually bathing houses and that gas was used for disinfection¹³. These statements were

¹² A. Cała, "Żyd- wróg odwieczny? Antysemityzm w Polsce i jego źródła, ["The Jew as eternal enemy?" Anti-Semitism in Poland and its roots], Warsaw 2012, pp. 519-528. See also: Y. Bauer, *Danger of Antisemitism in Central and Eastern Europe in the Wake of 1989-1990*, Jerusalem 1991.

¹³ D. Irving (1977), *Hitler's War*, New York. The first person to question the genocide of the Jews was a French socialist Paul Rassinier, a former prisoner of Buchenwald, author of the book *Le drame des Juifs européens* (1964). D. L. Hoggan in *The Myth of the Six Million* (1969) accused Jews of inflating the number of victims to extort compensation. The 1970s saw a flowering of similar anonymous publications in the US, for example, *The Six Million Swindle: Blackmailing the German People for Hard Marks with Fabricated Corpses* (1973), *Why Do They Lie to Us? Perhaps Hitler was Right?* (1974), *Did Six Million Really Die?* (1974) etc. The term "revisionism" appeared for the first time in the title of a book by H. E. Barnes (1967) *The Public Stake in Revisionism*. The year 1979 saw the establishment in the US of the Institute for Historical Review that propagated revisionism. A similar organisation was set up in 1982 in the Federal Republic of Germany – both

taken up by anti-Semitic publicists in the US, Germany and Scandinavian countries. Historical revisionism has become one of the most important components of a new wave of anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism in Western Europe and the United States. The authors of revisionist books were taken to court several times, during which their lies and factual errors were proven and they were ordered to make large compensation payments, which circumscribed the circulation of their conclusions in popular and academic spheres. Germany introduced the category of “Auschwitz lie” to the Penal Code, with its dissemination penalised by courts.

In Poland, strands of Western European historical revisionism started being accommodated in the 1990s. The stages can be traced in detail. First, the National Rebirth of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski)¹⁴ group issued a selection of translations of works by Western revisionist historians that was titled, *The Holocaust Myth (Mit Holokaustu)*, as the first volume of a “Szczerebiec” Library series (1993). Nonetheless, this publication went unnoticed. Three years later, the subject was picked up by Tomasz Gabis. In a two-part article *The Holocaust Religion* (“Stanczyk”, No. 2/1996, Part II in No. 1/1997) he accused the West of succumbing to “the Holocaust myth”, which he said is an omnipresent, constantly updated and instrumentalised component of ideology and politics. He believes that it has taken the form of a religion, with its temples (the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles or Yad Vashem in Jerusalem) and “holy books” (e.g. The Diary of Anne Frank). Christianity is being not only dethroned, but also indicted for joint responsibility for the Holocaust. He claims that the “metaphysical guilt” for crimes committed on Polish soil leads to a state of “theological humiliation” of Poles and a charge of “deicide” against the Polish nation. According to the author, “only” 300,000 people of Jewish origin died in the death camps, and the Jews overstated the number of victims to justify the creation of Israel and to force favour for the country on the international arena. He used quotation marks for each mention of the word “Holocaust”. Gabis’s article resonated in certain right-wing circles, though it did not yet lead to much debate. Igor Figa discussed this article in details in the ultra-Catholic “Fronda”

were shut down by court order in the mid-1980s. See D. E. Lipstadt (1994), *Denying the Holocaust*, New York; H. Schulman (1999), *The Revisionist*, London.

¹⁴ (NOP) National Rebirth of Poland emerged from the skinhead movement in 1989. The name refers to a similar pre-war fascist grouping. Registered in court in 1992, it has cooperated with the English International Third Position and the German Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands. It is active to this day, although with marginal support.

publication titled *On the Holocaust Religion (O Religii Holocaustu*, “Fronda”, 1997, No. 9-10), writing in conclusion:

“The Jews themselves and the Germans have already noticed the phenomenon which Gabis has termed the “Holocaust religion” and are devoting increasing numbers of studies and analyses to it and putting it to earnest debate. Meanwhile, in Poland, discussions have not yet begun. [...] Dialogue cannot avoid sensitive and controversial issues, if we want Polish-Jewish reconciliation to be not fictional, but a reality”.

Gabis was praised for combating the “Holocaust myth”, on the pages of “Nasz Dziennik”, a newspaper associated with the Catholic Radio Maria. According to the paper’s editors (on 23 February 1999, *Stańczyk as a conservative*), the author presented the conclusions of “very serious historians that negated the generally accepted stereotypes about numbers of casualties during the Second World War, the internal policies of the Third Reich, concentration camps, etc”.

The Radio Maria fraternity was not the only one that picked up on the conclusions of Auschwitz liars. In 1999, the “Kwartalnik Narodowy” (No. 2) published by Leszek Bubel (anti-Semitic activist and leader of the Polish National Party¹⁵) printed a translation of a piece by the French denier Robert Faurisson¹⁶ *There were no gas chambers*. One of the editors of “Nowe Pokolenie” magazine (1999, No. 1), the NOP’s mouthpiece, claimed:

“I do not intend to question the Holocaust, but to make it clear that a Christian cannot afford to believe in the Holocaust Religion, which is being stubbornly promoted and recognised by governments and media around the world. Currently, the Holocaust has taken on all the features of a new religion, which is slowly displacing others. There is no room for religious tolerance, each challenge of Holocaust dogma is punishable by imprisonment [...] it is just another instrument being used by the “chosen people” to fight Christianity and the Truth”.

Gabis’s conclusions were then repeated by Grzegorz Gorny on the pages of “Rzeczpospolita”, one of the most widely read newspapers, which was taken over in

¹⁵ The Polish National Party acted legally from 2004. It specialised in mass printing anti-Semitic publications. It achieved 8,000 votes in the elections of 2005. It ceased its activity around 2009, after several sentences handed down to its leader for inciting ethnic hatred.

¹⁶ R. Faurisson was a lecturer of literature at the University of Lyon. In 1983, he was suspended for promulgating the Auschwitz lie and fined in 1990 and 1991. Like Irving, he referred to the “Leuchter Report”, the author of which, claiming to be an engineer, argued that the operation of the gas chambers, as described by witnesses, was not feasible for technical reasons. In 1991, it was revealed that Fred Leuchter did not possess a technical education and was obliged by a court to withdraw the false allegations contained in the report. Irving also publicly withdrew certain of his claims, on grounds that he had been misled by Leuchter.

2006 by right-wing activists, in an article entitled *Auschwitz instead of Sinai* (18 July 2009)¹⁷.

Gabis's text inspired Dariusz Ratajczak, a lecturer of history at the University of Opole and an activist in one of the National Parties¹⁸. He wrote a book called *Dangerous Subjects* (*Tematy niebezpieczne*, 1999), which sparked a nationwide debate that concluded in court. In the chapter on Holocaust Revisionism (pp. 21-25), Ratajczak supported Irving's hypotheses. He described the researchers of the Nazis' genocide of Jews as "followers of the Holocaust religion and therefore supporting censorship and imposing a false, propaganda-based image of the past onto world opinion". He repeated the English historian's assertions:

"In summing up this theme, we can say without much error that Zyklon B was used in the camps as a disinfectant and not to kill people".

The book came out in April 1999. In May, the author was suspended from his duties as lecturer and investigated. This led to court proceedings in November and an acquittal in December "due to the low harm to society". In the verdict's justification, the judges wrote that the publication was issued in a negligible print run of 300 copies. However, it was re-issued by Leszek Bubel's publishing house and fragments of it began to circulate in the internet. Despite the acquittal, in April 2000, the Senate of the University of Opole decided to remove Ratajczak from his position, with a three-year ban on teaching. This was not the end of the matter. Following an appeal in November 2001, Ratajczak was, nonetheless, found guilty of an Auschwitz lie and received a suspended sentence and a small fine¹⁹. The book and the court cases were widely discussed and reported in the press. They also triggered a fierce debate on the limits of free of speech. Radio Maria's on-air defenders of ideas propounded by Ratajczak were Andrzej L. Szczesniak (author of school textbooks), Ryszard Bender (Professor at the

¹⁷ <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/336127.html>><http://www.rp.pl/artykul/336127.html> (internet version of the article by G. Gorny in "Rzeczpospolita").

¹⁸ The National Party was founded in 1928. It was the strongest nationalist group in interwar Poland, preaching anti-Semitism. It was headed by Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), the father of Polish nationalism. After the fall of communism in Poland, six parties with the same name were active in 1989-2001. Each of them claimed to be advancing Dmowski's legacy.

¹⁹ D. Ratajczak wrote for antisemitic periodicals, like "Myśl Polska", the weekly "Najwyższy Czas" and the Wrocław-based "Opcja na Prawo". He took odd jobs and for a long time was unemployed. Having fallen out with his family, he lived in a car. He was found dead on 12 June 2010. An autopsy showed the cause of death as alcohol poisoning. This has become fertile ground for internet conspiracy theories about his assassination through an injection of alcohol.

Catholic University of Lublin) and Thomas Wituch (Professor at the Department of History of the University of Warsaw). Bender said, among other things, that:

“Oswiecim was not an extermination camp, but a labour camp. Jews, Gypsies and others were destroyed there through hard work, although it was not always that hard and they were not always destroyed, because first-hand reports exist that the camp provided meals three times a day and sick inmates were given delicate soup, milk and white bread, and Jews often held important camp positions, such as kapo”²⁰.

The scandal of Ratajczak’s book contributed to revisionism becoming one of the most common themes of anti-Semitic discourse in 1999-2005. In 2000, Jewish organisations’ protests prevented the publication of Irving’s book by the state publishing house, Bellona, associated with communist military circles. Since then, private publishing houses have printed translations of all of his works and the author has visited Poland several times, invited by various anti-Semitic organisations.

From 2007 onwards, anti-Semitism began to decline in Poland. Several political and sociological factors have been responsible for this. The most turbulent phase of the transition from communism to market capitalism had ended. Society had adapted to the, albeit often painful, reforms. The older generation of anti-Semitic activists, guided by pre-war and Moczarite traditions, were no longer active. Among young people, the skinhead subculture lost its fashionable appeal. Meanwhile, the West radiated new examples of xenophobic ideologies that exploited hostility towards immigrants and Islamophobia, and to a lesser extent, anti-Semitism. Political correctness prevailed over aggressive anti-Semitic hate speech. This does not mean that one cannot discern patterns of anti-Semitism rooted beneath polite wording, including accusations of moral responsibility for crimes of communism and the alleged anti-Polish stance of Jews. Nevertheless, Holocaust denial has not taken permanent root in Polish anti-Semitic discourse.

²⁰ “Night Talking”, Radio Maria, 26 XI 1999. This statement led to the protest of the Catholic University of Lublin’s Senate and the start of proceedings for a disciplinary dismissal, but were interrupted after a court in Torun dismissed the complaint against Bender’s assertion.

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