

Rewriting the History of Polish-Jewish Relations from a Nationalist Perspective: The Recent Publications of the Institute of National Remembrance

Jan Grabowski



In Western Europe and in North America the interest in Jewish history is primarily driven by the present-day political situation in the Middle East. In Poland (and in several other East European countries) the situation is fundamentally different. Here the debates surrounding the Jews and their place in history are inseparably tied to the issue of the Holocaust. I would go even further and suggest that the attitude to the problems surrounding the Holocaust can be taken as an indication of the political choices made today by many Polish voters. This phenomenon should be looked at on several levels.

First, many Poles perceive their own society through the lens of “victim history.” According to this vision of their own past, Poland was victimized at the hands of stronger (and ruthless) neighbors. Although defeated, the nation maintained the high moral ground of a country with no Quisling and provided an example of heroic defiance to Nazi and Soviet totalitarian barbarisms. From this perspective there is little room for other victims, such as Jews. This is especially true when the “other” victims often claim to have been victimized by the Poles themselves.

Second, the resurgent popularity of nationalist thought tends to draw its inspiration from the pre-war National Democracy movement (Narodowa Demokracja; Endecja; ND) and its political arm, Stronnictwo Narodowe (SN, since 1928). Unfortunately, this ideological and cultural heritage is heavily laden with antisemitism, which is an integral and undeniable part of the ND intellectual legacy. Most recently, the nationalist view of the past, its ideology and its ethos found a powerful ally in the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN).

The Institute was created in 1998, as the custodian of the massive archives of the Polish Communist secret police (Służba Bezpieczeństwa; SB). It was also given a sweeping legal and educational mandate to become a clearing house for historical research and information. Hundreds of historians, archivists, and lawyers have been hired to help the Institute fulfill its mandate. However, unlike historical research centers and university-based research groups, the Institute is a dependent agency of the Polish state, and its goals are closely linked to the political objectives of the government in power. After the 2005 elections the IPN became a useful tool in the hands of the ruling populist-nationalist coalition.

Frequent “leaks” from the IPN archives started to target people such as Jacek Kuron, Zygmunt Bauman, independent journalists, and liberal-minded clergy, whose political credentials make them unpalatable to present-day followers of the Endecja (often referred to as “neo-Endeks”). The files of the Communist secret police have become, in the hands of many IPN historians, sources beyond reproach. Without any methodological critique, they find their way to the media or to the monthly *Biuletyn*, the Institute’s official mouthpiece.

IPN, with its hundreds of full-time employees, including scores of professional historians and multi-million dollar publishing and research budgets, plays a fundamental role in shaping the collective memory of Poland. The educational programs developed and sponsored by the IPN quickly enter the school curricula, and workshops organized by the Institute for primary and high school teachers broaden the audience and facilitate the direct transfer of IPN’s “historical policy” into the minds and hearts of the young generation.

Some of the recent appointees to positions of influence at the Institute were roundly criticized both for their lack of academic standards and for their militant nationalism. Karol Modzelewski, one of the most eminent Polish historians, assessed the scholarship of Piotr Gontarczyk, the new chief of the IPN’s archival section, in this way: “Gontarczyk’s article [about Polish dissidents in 1968, JG] places him among the communo-fascists.”¹

“Gontarczyk’s scholarship brings shame to Polish historical scholarship,” added Henryk Samsonowicz, another leading historian, and the former rector of the University of Warsaw.

1 Interview with Karol Modzelewski, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 6, 2006.

If such a person has been appointed to a position of authority in the archival section of the Institute, if the spokeswoman for the IPN defends his publications and the Director of the IPN chooses to remain silent, we see it not only as an issue of Gontarczyk, but rather as an issue of the whole Institute.²

Michał Głowinski, linguist and expert on communist propaganda, added:³ “Gontarczyk’s writing resembles not only texts from *Nasz Dziennik*,⁴ but one can also hear the tone of “Moczar’s press” from the late 1960s.⁵

Historians’ critiques notwithstanding, Gontarczyk and his associates are now in a position to dictate the pace and the direction of the historical research done under the auspices of the Institute.

Some historians, especially those specializing in minority issues, decided to part company with the new IPN. Dr. Dariusz Libionka, a specialist in the history of Polish-Jewish relations, left the IPN in 2007. “Under [Janusz] Kurtyka’s leadership, the IPN operates in an atmosphere of fear,” he said in a recent interview.⁶

Another historian (still working for the IPN, who refused to give his name) told the reporters: “There is pressure to document cases of Poles helping the Jews [during the war-JG], and the need to study the *szmalcownictwo* [blackmailing of the Jews — JG] is being dismissed. This state institution follows a clearly nationalist [endecki] approach.”

Dr. Grzegorz Motyka, another IPN historian and an expert on Ukrainian-Polish relations, has also left the Institute. The right-wing nationalist vision of Polish history promoted by Dr. Kurtyka’s new appointees made it increasingly difficult for historians with different viewpoints to continue working in the IPN.

Last year the Institute invited Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, a Washington-based historian, President George W. Bush’s appointee to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and one of the leading pro-

2 See “IPN oczernia Jacka Kuronia,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 13, 2006.

3 Ibid.

4 *Nasz Dziennik* (“Our Daily”) is a Polish daily known for its virulent antisemitism and unapologetic nationalism.

5 Mieczysław Moczar was the instigator and driving force behind the antisemitic campaign of 1968.

6 Krzysztof Burnetko, “IPN pod parą,” *Polityka*, nr 32/33 (2616), August 11, 2007, p. 44. Dr. Janusz Kurtyka was appointed the new director of the IPN in December 2005.

ponents of the neo-nationalist school of historical writing, to deliver a speech to IPN employees. In his talk Chodakiewicz stressed that the time has come for Poles to stop apologizing for alleged Polish crimes against the Jews.⁷ The uniqueness of the Holocaust was also a matter of debate: “other nations and people,” claimed Chodakiewicz, “also suffered tragedies: the Holocaust was one of the slaughters of the modern era, and not even the greatest one.” The reinvented IPN should, according to Chodakiewicz, debunk the myth of Polish complicity in the Holocaust and help refute claims advanced by “leftist rags such as *The New York Times*.”⁸ He also expressed hope that “young scholars would take an interest in Polish-Jewish relations in a different manner than their older colleagues, who naively accepted the Western intellectual model, which, in fact, is anti-scientific.”

The recent publications of the IPN seem to indicate that historians employed by the Institute took Chodakiewicz’s advice to heart and have soundly rejected the “Western intellectual model.”

A recent issue of IPN’s *Biuletyn* was devoted entirely to the Nationalist movement.⁹ Despite the fact that the nationalist past is mired in controversy, and despite numerous accusations including the most serious ones involving the large-scale murder of Jews by the Nationalists during the war the IPN bulletin paints a flattering and heroic image of the movement. Among the many studies featured in this official Institute publication, the lengthiest contribution is by IPN historian Wojciech Muszyński. The text, entitled “From the History of the Nationalist Movement, 1928–1947,” offers some interesting albeit startling insights. Even if these studies tell us little about Endecja history, they are certainly revealing in terms of the IPN’s institutional state of mind.

Polish mainstream historians generally agree that the 1930s was a period of a worsening political and social situation for Polish Jews. The growing fascist orientation of the public discourse went hand-in-hand with discriminatory measures (such as the *numerus clausus*

7 Chodakiewicz’s speech was published in IPN’s *Biuletyn IPN*, no.10 (69), October 2006.

8 Referring to *The New York Times*, Chodakiewicz actually used the term “gadzinówka,” which in Polish has only one meaning, denoting collaborationist journals published by the Nazis in occupied Poland, in Polish, between 1939 and 1945.

9 *Biuletyn IPN*, nr. 8–9 (79–80), August–September 2007, pp. 79–80. The bulletin has a print run of 15,000 copies and is also distributed in Polish schools.

and *numerus nullus* for Jewish students, boycotts of Jewish commerce, prohibiting the Jews to engage in certain professions, and so on.) and was supported and often legislated by the state. By the end of the Second Republic, the Jews felt that Poland, where they had been born and raised, was less and less of a home to them. The responsibility for this situation belonged, in part, to National Democracy and its youth wing called *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Polish Youth; MW) who placed themselves at the forefront of the anti-Jewish attacks.¹⁰

The mainstream historical findings notwithstanding, the “new” IPN set out to revisit this interpretation of the past and offered a new one in return. According to *Biuletyn IPN*, even if the Nationalists had an anti-Jewish agenda, they had good reasons for it. “There were also anti-Jewish events,” writes Muszyński. “They were directly caused by riots in Lwów (June 2, 1929) provoked by a group of pupils from the Jewish high school whose behavior wounded the religious feelings of participants in a Corpus Christi celebration.”

According to Muszyński, the anti-Jewish sentiments of the notoriously anti-Jewish *Młodzież Wszechpolska* were inflamed by the unwillingness of Jewish organizations to supply the universities with Jewish cadavers for medical schools. “Polish nationalists argued that Jews should cut Jewish and not Polish cadavers.”¹¹ The Nationalists warned the society of “a real threat of Jews dominating liberal professions.”¹² Muszyński admits that anti-Jewish sentiments were on the rise during the 1930s, but it was “a verbal antisemitism, expressed in slogans shouted during rallies, in press articles and in pamphlets.” The anti-Jewish message was, according to this IPN historian, an attack “by proxy” on the hated Sanacja, the ruling political force in Poland. Unable to attack the Sanacja openly, the Nationalists used anti-Jewish arguments, in an attempt to discredit their opponents indirectly. Therefore, writes Muszyński, “these actions testify to an instrumental treatment of anti-Jewish slogans, which ceased to be [an expression of — JG] an anti-Jewish worldview and became an empty political gesture.”¹³ Physical

10 It is noteworthy that *Młodzież Wszechpolska* was resurrected in 1990, by Roman Giertych, until recently vice-premier and minister of Education in the government of Jarosław Kaczyński.

11 Wojciech Muszyński “Z Dziejów Stronnictwa Narodowego, 1928–1947,” *Biuletyn IPN*, 8–9, August–September 2007, p. 36.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

force was used, according to the author, sporadically, and then mostly in self-defense. Finally, Muszyński adds, “the activities of MW were countered by a well-planned and well-executed action conducted by radical Jewish and left-wing groups. They resulted in beatings of members of Polish nationalist organizations at the hands of Jewish thugs.” According to this IPN historian, there seems to be a certain moral equivalence, with Jews and Polish Nationalists involved in a rather innocent sparring match between two partners of equal strength.

The IPN historian’s eagerness to revisit the history of the Polish Nationalist movement is understandable. Vilified and dismissed in the postwar, Marxist-dominated historiography, the Nationalists certainly deserve a new and thorough historical re-evaluation. Their attitude towards the Jews, however, is, unfortunately, the least ambiguous of the many aspects of their political platform. Muszyński’s thesis about the benign character of the Nationalists’ pre-war antisemitism and the moral equivalence between antisemites and Jews, follows a line of reasoning developed previously by Piotr Gontarczyk and Jan Zaryn, his colleagues from the IPN.

Gontarczyk, the above-mentioned director of the archives at IPN, published a study on the 1936 Przytyk pogrom,¹⁴ during which one Pole and two Jews were killed, several dozen other Jews were injured, and Jewish businesses and homes were sacked. According to the author, it was the influential Jewish press in Poland that branded the “Przytyk events” as a pogrom. According to Gontarczyk, one should not refer to this as a “pogrom” but rather to “events in Przytyk.” And the “events” in question were really an action of Polish self-defense against a Jewish provocation. Still, an “event” sounds better than a “revolution”- which is how Polish Nationalists referred to various pogroms that took place in Poland in the 1930s.¹⁵

In light of the existing scholarship, such claims are not only wrong, but they testify to ignorance, or to the lack of elementary knowledge of the historian’s craft on the authors’ part. The sweeping wave of anti-Jewish violence, orchestrated by the SN and energetically supported by the Catholic clergy, forced the Jews onto the margins of Polish society

14 Piotr Gontarczyk, *Pogrom? Zajścia polsko-żydowskie w Przytyku 9 marca 1936 r. Mity, fakty, dokumenty* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rekonkwista, 2000).

15 See Anna Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Prószyński i S-ka, 2004), p. 33.

and created an atmosphere of hate, which served the Germans well during the occupation.¹⁶

Dr. Jan Zaryn, the head of the Bureau of Public Education of the IPN, extended the historical inquiry to the war period and suggested that pre-war anti-Jewish convictions on the part of Polish Nationalists had no discernible influence on their willingness to help the Jews.¹⁷ Quite to the contrary, Zaryn suggests that the Nationalists were as likely as all other Poles to extend a helping hand-- at deadly risk to themselves and to their families. In order to support his thesis, Zaryn provides several examples of righteous Nationalists. No question, people like Jan Mosdorf and Edward Kemnitz, known for their visceral dislike of the Jews, did help the Jews under the occupation. Can we assume, therefore, that the Nationalists in general were likely to help the Jews? Can we assume that the vicious antisemitic Nationalist pre-war indoctrination was a harmless and benign exercise in political rhetoric?

Before reaching any conclusions, we might want to consider some of the testimonies below. On November 20, 1942, Wincenty Sobolewski, a doctor and a ND activist from Sandomierz, noted in his unpublished diary:

Recently the Germans murder all Jews in our area. They murdered them already in Sandomierz, Słupia, Busko, Kielce and in other towns. Returning to Tuczep, through Staszów, on my way back from Lwów, I followed the road to Stopnica. The day before, the Germans used this road to herd the Jews from Staszów to Stopnica. Those unable to keep up were shot. Without exaggeration, I can say that the entire road was soaked and drenched in blood. They say that even before they reached the railway station, more than 800 Jews were shot ... the others were taken to Bełżec, where they were gassed in gas chambers. Horrible is the fate of the Jews, but one can openly say that they deserve nothing less, because they caused millions of people (they talk of 35 millions) to die in Russia.¹⁸

16 See Dariusz Libionka, "Duchowieństwo diecezji łomżyńskiej wobec antysemityzmu i zagłady Żydów," in Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persaka, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: IPN, 2002), pp. 105–128.

17 Jan Zaryn, "Postawy Elit Obozu Narodowego wobec Zagłady Żydów," in Andrzej Żbikowski, *Polacy i Żydzi, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: IPN, 2006), pp. 365–429.

18 Wincenty Sobolewski, Archiwum UJ, Dziennik sygn. 9849 III, 20 listopada 1942, pp. 17–18.

Earlier, on May 25, 1942, Sobolewski ventured that:

Jews are the worldwide capitalists! That is how people explained to me the reasons for war. When I asked, why are the Germans shooting all the Jews in the East, I was told that rich Jewish capitalists are afraid of competition, and that is why they want to see them killed.¹⁹

Later, on January 29, 1943, he added:

The Germans finish off the last remaining Jews in Poland. I have no pity for them, because they deserve it, because they were so ungrateful to us, Poles. Most of us are shocked, however, how a whole nation is murdered in such a way. So, finally the justice has been done ... Jesus gave the Jews two thousand years to mend their ways but seeing their obstinate refusal, he decided to punish them.²⁰

Many people may harbor appalling thoughts and ideas; few will verbalize them, and only a tiny minority will decide to commit them to paper. Nevertheless, such words were obviously not impossible to write down by a staunch Jew-hating Endek in Poland in 1942. To make matters worse, Sobolewski was not an uneducated simpleton, but a doctor, a member of the local intellectual elite. And Sobolewski was not alone. Franciszek Wyszyński, an engineer, and a follower of Dmowski, also perceived the Jews as a problem “that needed to be solved.” During the “Great Action” in Warsaw, which began on July 22, 1942, when 300,000 Jews were being shipped off from the Warsaw ghetto to the extermination camp in Treblinka, Warsaw-based Wyszyński noted in his diary:

Horrible things are happening over there in the ghetto ... people saw a Jew being thrown down from the 4th floor. It is still unknown where they are taking the Jews. Some say that to Polesie [in eastern Poland--JG]. The Germans will have a grave sin on their conscience, but after the war the power of our Jewry will be broken to a great extent and life will be easier.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., May 25, 1942.

²⁰ Ibid., January 29, 1943.

²¹ Franciszek Wyszyński, *Dziennik, 1941–1944*, edited by Jan Grabowski and Zbigniew Grabowski (Warsaw: Bellona-Mówią Wieki Publishing House, 2007), entry of 25 July 1942, p. 172.

Józef Górski, another ND organizer and landowner from Polesie, noted:

As a Pole, I looked at the extermination of the Jews differently. Following Dmowski's ideology I have always considered Jews an internal occupier, an internal enemy always hostile to the country of [their] Diaspora. I could not conceal, therefore, a sense of satisfaction that we were getting rid of this occupier. Not only we were not doing it with our own hands, but it is being done by our other, external, occupier.²²

The statements above are not unique. Similar ones can be found in contemporary diaries and journals (not to mention the underground leaflets and newspapers published by the Nationalist resistance). Do they prove that all Nationalists applauded the implementation of the "Final Solution?" Obviously not. Just as Zaryn's cases of a few select Nationalists saving Jews cannot be used to argue that pre-war attitudes had no bearing on wartime actions.

Before we lend any credibility to IPN's whitewashing of the Nationalists' war-time deeds, and before we agree that pre-war anti-Jewish propaganda had little influence during the later, tragic period, we need to remember that the SN continued its anti-Jewish offensive under the occupation. Not surprisingly, in 1942, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was the most popular (and most heavily borrowed) book in the clandestine collection of the SN.²³ In mid-1943, the Warsaw section of the SN prepared a report on the postwar takeover of Jewish property, and, in the first months of 1944, the military arm of the SN was particularly interested in "keeping an eye on communist organizations, Bolshevik troublemakers and Jews remaining in hiding."²⁴

IPN historians who claim that pre-war antisemitic propaganda had no bearing on the war-time actions and inactions of Dmowski's followers do so at their own academic peril. These basic methodological remarks, obvious to most first-year history students, unfortunately seem to be lost on many IPN historians.

22 Józef Górski, unpublished memoir, *Na przełomie dziejów*, National Library, Warsaw, Manuscript Section, III 9776.

23 Andrzej Janowski, "Okręg Stołeczny Stronnictwa Narodowego. Dzieje Organizacji, 1939–1944," in *Warszawa Lat Wojny i Okupacji* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1972), p. 187.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 191 and 196.

In order to be able to evaluate the state of Polish-Jewish relations during the war, I would like to cite a short excerpt from Jan Karski's report to General Władysław Sikorski, the Polish prime minister-in-exile in France in early 1940. Karski, an official messenger of the Polish resistance, informed the Polish authorities in exile, that:

The solution of the Jewish Question the Germans – I must state this with a full sense of responsibility for what I am saying – is a serious and quite dangerous tool in the hands of the Germans, leading toward the “moral pacification” of broad sections of the Polish society. It would certainly be erroneous to suppose that this issue alone will be effective in gaining them the acceptance of the populace. However, although the nation loathes them mortally, this question is creating something akin to a narrow bridge upon which the Germans and a large portion of Polish society are finding agreement. The present situation is creating a twofold schism among the inhabitants of these territories – first, a schism between Jews and Poles in the struggle against the common enemy, and second, a schism among the Poles, with one group despising and resenting the Germans' barbaric methods [conscious of the danger in this], and the other regarding them [and thus the Germans too!] with curiosity and often fascination, and condemning the first group for its “indifference toward such an important question.”²⁵

This inconvenient part of Karski's report was removed from the official, sanitized, version, submitted later to the Western allies. Unfortunately, Karski's opinions seem to have accurately reflected the state of mind of at least part of Polish society in the first years of the war. It is only in such a historical context that one can appropriately situate the attitudes of the Polish Nationalists. In his closing remarks, IPN's historian cites a SN activist: “This struggle against Jewish supremacy in commerce left many Poles under the impression that Endecja equals anti-Semitism, as if it were the most important feature of the SN. Today,

25 David Engel, “An Early Account of Polish Jewry under Nazi and Soviet Occupation Presented to the Polish Government-in-Exile, February 1940,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 47 (1983), pp. 12–13. The full Polish text of the report can be found in *Mówią Wieki*, November 1992 and in Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna Dekada, Eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców, komunistów i kolaboracji*, Kraków, 2007, pp. 16–17.

the Jewish question in Poland does not exist, this struggle is therefore harmful.”²⁶

One can only be sorry that it took three million dead Polish Jews to enable SN activists to come to this conclusion.

IPN and the Kielce “Provocation”

Recently the IPN published a book entitled *Reflections on the Kielce Pogrom*.²⁷ My complimentary copy included a letter from Dr. Kurtyka, the head of the IPN:

The volume contains four studies presenting the context and the consequences of the pogrom of Jews in Kielce on July 4, 1946. These articles based on broad archival research shed new light on the subject matter. Let me express my hope that our book would encourage you to take part in the debate on the dramatic fates of Jews and Poles and the complicated Polish-Jewish relations.

I am delighted to take up Dr. Kurtyka’s invitation.

The pogrom in Kielce, one of the bloodiest peacetime pogroms in twentieth-century Europe (and certainly the bloodiest pogrom of the postwar period), claimed the lives of forty-two innocent men, women, and children, who were slaughtered by an angry mob.²⁸ Eighty-two other people were wounded. The victims were survivors of the Holocaust, and the crowd was driven to a murdering frenzy by a rumor that the Jews had killed a Christian boy and had drained the child’s blood for ritual purposes. The pogrom had broad consequences, extending far beyond Kielce; it was reported in the media around the world, and it precipitated a dramatic exodus abroad of the remnants of Polish Jewry.

Three hypotheses have been put forward by Polish historians to explain the reasons for the pogrom. The first one argued that the deeply-rooted antisemitism of the local Polish population, combined with the extraordinary corruption brought about by five years of German occupation and the long-lasting effects of Nazi propaganda were re-

26 Zaryn, *Elity obozu narodowego wobec zagłady Żydów*, p. 399.

27 Łukasz Kamiński and Jan Zaryn, eds., *Reflections on the Kielce Pogrom* (Warsaw: IPN, 2006), p. 151.

28 With the possible exception of the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, which claimed forty six lives.

sponsible for the tragedy. The second explanation tends to shift blame away from the ordinary Poles, and onto the Polish Communists. According to the proponents of this hypothesis, the Communists' intent was to orchestrate the atrocity, and then discredit the right-wing Polish underground in the eyes of public opinion, both at home and abroad. The third theory, piggy-backing on the previous one, also implicated the Polish Communists but, in addition, suggested the involvement of the Soviet secret police, working through its Polish Communist proxies.

How then, in light of the above, does the IPN book fit into the existing historiographical context? The surprisingly thin volume contains four studies; two of them are by Bożena Szaynok, a respected scholar and authority on the Kielce pogrom. Unfortunately, Szaynok's role in the IPN's *Heft* is clearly secondary. Her first text is a brief introduction to Polish-Jewish relations during the postwar period and the second one is a reprinted translation of an earlier article dealing with the historical debates surrounding the Kielce events.²⁹ The book is built, in effect, around two studies one written by Ryszard Smietanka-Kruszelnicki,³⁰ and the other one contributed by Jan Zaryn,³¹ the book's editor. Kruszelnicki sets out to prove that, in the aftermath of the pogrom, the Communist authorities tried to frame the members of the anti-Communist underground for the murders. Indeed, Kruszelnicki presents a credible case, and there is little doubt that the authorities were, in fact, actively involved in fabricating evidence against their political foes. This, of course, is hardly surprising, considering the tactics that were employed by the Communists during the post-war period. Nevertheless, while interesting in terms of the postwar political struggles in Poland, this article is much less relevant with regard to the tragedy of the murdered Jews.

Zaryn's article is more ambitious and strives to explain the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the Jews and to place the Polish Catholic clergy in the broader context of Polish-Jewish relations. Unfortunately, the chapter is so deeply flawed that only the most egregious

29 Bożena Szaynok, "Poles and Jews from July 1944 to July 1946, pp. 9–26; and "Disputes over the Kielce Pogrom," pp. 118–138.

30 Ryszard Smietanka-Kruszelnicki, "Pogrom in Kielce – the Underground as Defendant," pp. 26–79.

31 Jan Zaryn, "The Catholic Church Hierarchy vis-à-vis Polish Jewish Relations between 1945 and 1947," pp. 80–118.

errors can be listed here. During the war, according to Zaryn, both Poles and Jews underwent a process of moral corruption, enhanced by the ruthless laws of daily life and death under occupation. The Poles blackmailed, cheated, and stole, as did the Jews. The Germans were thus able “to incite among the Jews shameful attitudes and behavior, for instance fighting in a square to gain a place in a truck leaving the ghetto walls (p. 83)”

The author draws our attention to the fact that, among the ghetto Jews, there were “numerous cases of schemers, speculators, bums” and others who were “doing a roaring trade with Germans and for Germans” (p. 83). Despite these morally dubious traits of certain Jews, the Polish resistance (especially that of the nationalist hue), individuals, and the Church hastened to help the “non-Aryan population.” The Poles offered their help despite the “lack of support on the part of the Jews for Poles who were deported and arrested between 1939 and 1941 by the Bolsheviks,” argues Zaryn (p. 80). The postwar perception of the Jews was influenced by their overrepresentation in the Communist secret police and in other branches of the repression apparatus, further claims Zaryn. Other Jews were also seen as Soviet lackeys, especially those who arrived in Poland after 1945 from the Soviet Union.

I do not wish to justify heinous acts such as the murder committed in Kielce, *but I simply want to remind about the joint responsibility for the creation — clearly not only by others — of the collective image of a Jew in Poland after 1945, mythologized, but also based on actual experience* (p. 91; emphasis added JG).

The close association of Jews with the Communists “created an atmosphere of definite hostility towards Jews as a nation of ungrateful men,” concludes the author (p. 95). One can only add that this “definite hostility” included not only “the ungrateful men” but women and children, too.

Given the theme of the article, the author focuses on the role of the Church. Higher clergy, including Primate August Hlond, head of the Polish Catholic Church, seemed to have been preoccupied with Jewish participation in the structures of the new regime and often expressed their disappointment with the Jewish attitudes. Regrettably, the Jewish organizations and their leaders paid no heed to the clergy’s concerns and, Zaryn argues, continued to collaborate with the Communists.

Blaming the victim and accusing the Jews of at least partial responsibility for their own misfortune is one of the highlights of Zaryn's line of reasoning. Here Zaryn follows familiar arguments espoused earlier by the Polish clergy. A brief quotation from Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek of Kielce helps to understand this reasoning better. Several months before the pogrom, the bishop made the following declaration to Jewish delegates who asked for his help to defuse the antisemitic sentiments among the populace:

Why are you Jews not doing what you know how to do best; why do you have to meddle in politics? Can you imagine what happens when a priest goes to an office and there he sees a Jewess? This Jewess is not even a Polish Jewess, but a Jewess who comes God knows where from and she treats our clergy with impudence and in a haughty manner!³²

Of course, this citation does not appear in the reviewed text, but it would have nicely balanced the image of the attitude of the highest Catholic official in Kielce to the "Jewish problem". As far as Bishop Kaczmarek is concerned, one might add that, in the spring of 1941, the bishop warned his flock about the "destructive influence of Jewish children on Polish children."³³

Zaryn argues that, in the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom, the clergy continued to show empathy toward the Jews. Local priests issued communiqués and proclamations against the belief in the "blood libel". However, in fact, Cardinal Hlond made repeated statements to the members of the press in which he mentioned the Jews' role in the Communist apparatus, rather than to condemn the murders in Kielce. He also refused specifically to condemn the anti-Jewish violence. Bishop Teodore Kubina of Częstochowa, the only bishop honest and courageous enough to condemn the pogrom, was later roundly reprimanded by the Conference of Polish Bishops. Bishop Kaczmarek of Kielce formed his own investigative commission, and the findings were presented to the American ambassador in Poland. The bishop's commission blamed the pogrom on the Communists and the Jews. As the argument was that, throughout the German occupation, Poles sheltered the Jews, the change in attitude could only be at-

32 Testimony of Jechiel Alpert, Yad Vashem Archives, O.3/2985.

33 Libionka, "Duchowieństwo diecezji łomżyńskiej," p. 108.

tributed to the fact that the Jews had offered their support to the new regime.

The historical record here is unequivocal and overwhelming: the position adopted by the Polish bishops and Primate Hlond after the pogrom is difficult to defend. This does not mean that Zaryn would not try to do so. According to Zaryn, Hlond's statements were taken out of context by the journalists; Kubina's declaration was manipulated by the Communists and caused the Church more harm than good; and the bizarre findings of Bishop Kaczmarek's commission are not even mentioned.

The volume published by the IPN is linked to a ten-year investigative effort undertaken by the Institute's own historians and by several prosecutors who were given the task of bringing the culprits of the 1946 pogrom to justice. The prosecutors decided to halt the proceedings and concluded that there was no convincing evidence of an outside conspiracy during the period leading to the pogrom and during the massacre itself. For Polish nationalist historians the hypothesis that the murders of Jews in Kielce could be a direct result of an unprovoked and un-manipulated explosion of anger and hate of the local Christian population is clearly unacceptable. The idea that the murder of innocent Jews might have been somehow related to the latent antisemitism of the Polish population is dismissed early on, and the "provocation" theories are argued instead.

According to Jacek Zurek, the editor of the documentary section (omitted from the English translation), the IPN investigation into the pogrom was incomplete and disappointing. The prosecutors failed to take note of certain indications, which would have implicated Polish Communists and (perhaps) even their Soviet masters. Thus, the term "pogrom," insists Zurek should have been replaced by the more appropriate word "provocation."

IPN chief Dr. Kurtyka, in his preface to *Reflections*, has little doubt as to the identity of the real culprits. "Was it a spontaneous act of violence by a mob incited by a random rumor," asks Kurtyka, "or perhaps a planned provocation by the communist authorise [sic] that aimed to discredit its political opponents" (p. 7). The outside inspiration is, according to the chief of the IPN, quite obvious: "the 'Jewish pogrom' – the shameful side of traditional politics in Tsarist Russia – were [sic] generally inspired by, or conducted... under the watchful eye of the *Okhrana*, the Russian secret police."

The fact that the official IPN investigation failed to place the blame for the “Kielce provocation” squarely on the shoulders of Communists and found the local elements guilty of the crime instead, seems to Dr. Kurtyka simply irrelevant.

A debate concerning the Kielce pogrom is all the more timely, since the IPN book arrives after Jan Tomasz Gross’s *Fear* was published in English in 2006.³⁴ Gross’s well-documented and hard-hitting study, also devoted to the Kielce pogrom, spares no one and is a powerful indictment of the Polish Church, the ruling Communists, the ordinary citizens of Kielce, and practically all the others who failed to act, or who acted in bad faith, and thus precipitated the massacre. Gross’s book, while still not available on the Polish market, has already provoked an intense debate in the Polish media. Unfortunately, the present IPN publication should not even be considered a voice in this exchange.

Reflections on the Kielce Pogrom is not simply a bad book. It is an affront to the memory of the victims of the Kielce pogrom and the others who were directly and indirectly affected by its aftershocks. It is also a sad testimony to the sorry condition of state-sponsored historical research carried out under the aegis of the Institute of National Remembrance. The book draws our attention to the fact that the “battle for memory” in Poland rages on, that historical truth is its prisoner, and that the attitude toward the “Jewish question” tells us more about the present political views of the authors than about the post-1945 realities.

Conclusion

In recent years the “new” IPN has become an important element in the implementation of the so-called “historical policy.” The past, seen as a source of national pride, does not need to be examined in light of historical methodology. Rather, it ought to help reinforce the feeling of national pride and to reinvigorate the national ethos weakened by decades of Communist rule and the recent expansion of “materialistic individualism.” The historical battle for the hearts and minds of the Poles is being fought on various levels and fields, and the “Jewish question” is often at the center of the debate. Historical truth, unfortunately,

34 Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

seems to be the early victim of this struggle. IPN historians, subjected to a dogmatic vision of the past as espoused by their superiors, tend to pursue a simplistic vision of national history. The recent IPN publications discussed above are, most probably, only a harbinger of things to come.³⁵

In 2006, IPN published an important study on Polish-Jewish relations during the 1939–1945 period.³⁶ This book, conceived and completed under the previous leadership of the IPN, did not shy away from tackling painful issues and asking difficult questions. This kind of research seems to have a limited future in the “new” Institute. The chief of IPN’s Bureau of Public Education made it rather clear. In the foreword to the book in question, he wrote: “Thus we close a certain phase of our research. In the coming years IPN will undertake new challenges. Other topics, such as the question of Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation and the German repressions against Poles saving the Jews, still await their turn.”

Historical research and the publication of historical findings is a time-consuming process. Nevertheless, given the political views and the financial and organizational resources of the present leadership of the Institute, one can be certain that further findings regarding Polish-Jewish relations will soon find their way to the Polish bookstores and to the Polish schools. The forthcoming studies will, quite likely, also firmly reject “the Western intellectual model.”

Despite the recent political changes in Poland (the November 2007 election victory of the centrist and pro-European Citizen’s Platform), the Institute of National Remembrance seems to be holding its course. There are no indications that the “historical policy” espoused by its present leaders will change in the near future.

35 In early 2008 IPN published a Polish translation of Marek Chodakiewicz’s book *After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflict in the Wake of World War II* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2003). The book is intended by the Institute as a sui generis “antidote” against Gross’s *Fear*. Chodakiewicz argues that the post-war killings of Jewish survivors were related to the Poles’ fight against Communism, rather than to their antisemitism.

36 Andrzej Żbikowski, ed., *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką, 1939–1945. Studia i Materiały* (Warsaw: IPN, 2006).

