

Polish-Jewish relations in Australia: the social consequences of historical misrecognition¹

Alexander Naraniecki

The doctrine that public opinion is not irresponsible, but somehow 'responsible to itself' – in the sense that its mistakes will rebound upon the public who held the mistaken opinion – is another form of the collectivist myth of public opinion: the mistaken propaganda of one group of citizens may easily harm a very different group.

Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, 1994: 155.

This paper aims to move beyond much of the literature on Polish-Jewish dialogue and relations by taking a closer look at what needs to be done to bring about more positive results. It raises pertinent issues of relations among and between diasporic Poles and Jews in Australia vis-à-vis ongoing concerns and dynamics in Polish-Jewish relations in Europe and Israel. This article offers a detailed reading of differential modulations of narratives of suffering through a reconstruction of Polish and Jewish perspectives. It further raises the important need of coming to mutual recognition of experiences of suffering despite difference and complexities. This is combined with a more conceptually orientate inquiry into the question of what kinds of public discourse on historical issues, particularly surrounding mass-murder, may be more conducive to facilitating the reduction of misrepresentation.

Although there has not yet been a systematic inquiry into Jewish-Polish relations in Australia it is clear to anyone involved in community activities that there are significant problems, particularly in light of the recent visits of leading historians as well as popular commentators. Tensions both in private circles and in public debate following these visits along with the Australian Centre of Jewish Civilisation's *Aftermath Conference* in 2011 which have raised some important moral, conceptual and social problems that this paper seeks to respond to. Although this discussion is framed within an Australian context, the proposed solution to the problems largely come from discursive commitments of leading Jewish figures in Poland such as Rabbi Schuldrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, who through daily intercultural interaction have managed to find common-ground for understanding, respect, recognition and ultimately reconciliation. The particular instances of misrecognition explored in this paper have implications for the way we understand diasporas in conflict more generally. When diaspora conflict persists after the 'homelands' (Poland and Israel) enjoy positive relations it is usually the case that the dilemmas are symbolically driven from acts of

¹ This paper was delivered to the Centre for dialogue at La Trobe University in Melbourne on Monday 17 October, 2011. I would like to thank Professor Timothy Snyder, Professor Antony Polonsky and Dr Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Professor Jan Pakulski for their advice during the writing of this paper.

misrecognition which explicitly, or unintentionally as a result of misunderstanding or myopic ‘tribal’ concerns, result in a sense of moral injury.

There has been much descriptive and empirical scholarship on Polish-Jewish relations and dialogue (for example Cherry & Orla-Bukowska 2007, Wróbel 1997, Opalski, and Bartal 1992, *Polin* 1987, 2007), however the discursive requirements for mutual understanding have largely been left out of the discussion. This paper aims to redress this through incorporating theories of public deliberation and rational communication associated with Jürgen Habermas (1990), as well as theorising on the misrecognition (*Mißachtung*) by Axel Honneth (1995) and J. M. Bernstein (2005). It places particular emphasis upon the special role for recognitive practices within theories of discursive or communicative action. Such theories of recognitive practices for discursive action can be used to clarify instances where principles of recognition and respect are violated through acts of public communication between or in relation to Jews and non-Jewish Poles. By highlighting the areas that cause the most impediments to effective dialogue we can be better placed to find particular discursive and rhetorical solutions to problems arising out of ill-will or misunderstanding.

Section One foregrounds the problem of Polish-Jewish dialogue within Honneth’s ethics of recognition and Popper’s understanding of the importance of rational discussion and Sen’s understanding of the importance for justice of ‘open impartiality’ for public deliberation. Section Two looks at the Polish narrative and suggests a discourse ethics that is needed in order to better respect the uniqueness of the Holocaust and thus make the Polish historical narrative acceptable to Jews through greater inclusion. Section Three analyses some central features of the Jewish narrative. I argue that comparing the Holocaust need not diminish its status as unique event in human history and thus is in keeping with the Jewish ethno-specific narrative. I argue that viewing the Holocaust alongside the mass killings of non-Jewish Poles and others is fundamental for understanding Polish experiences and memory that is needed in order to overcome stereotypical or unsympathetic attitudes towards Poles. This act of publically recognising Polish victimisation is non-negotiable from the Polish perspective and does not conflict or contradict with the Jewish narrative even if it is a differing narrative. Finally in Section Four, I explore the impact that the recent *Aftermath* (2011) conference had had on contributing to misrecognition through the way it priorities the historical arguments of Dovid Katz over those of Timothy Snyder.

1) The social harm of misrecognition

Mass suffering, especially of such magnitude as mass persecutions and war crimes, are incommensurable. Yet, they are often confronted and compared, explicitly and implicitly, in social consciousness and public debates. Such comparisons often result in ‘collisions’ of popular historical interpretations and moral frameworks that complicate the dialogues between national groups, both ‘at home’ and in diasporas. By ‘collision’, I mean a juxtaposition of exclusive popular interpretations of mass suffering, interpretations that is so intense, that it rejects any comparative relativisation, and therefore hinder dialogue and reconciliation. Moreover, this is often reinforced by traumatic experiences and personal memories, and are sometimes embedded in national(istic), often stereotypical, visions of nation-centred history. Debates which become centred around the ‘suffering of nations’ should take into consideration national sensitivities of both sides. Only through such mutual recognition leading to respect can genuine dialogue be promoted. The failure of this results in being locked into a dangerous circle of ‘accusations’ and ‘counter-accusations’.

This paper constitutes a response to various acts or misrepresentation both by Polish and Jewish diasporas in Australia. The spirit in which this ought to be carried out is outlined

by Amartya Sen's work on the practical demands of the pursuit of justice as involving 'open minded engagement in public reasoning as central'. For Sen we need to move beyond 'closed impartiality', which I associate with well-intentioned yet still ethno-centric view-points to true 'open' conceptions of impartiality central to the idea of justice and fairness. (Sen 2009: 390, 405). It further complies with the theoretical framework of Axel Honeth's and J. M. Bernstein's work on the 'moral injury' which can result from misrecognition. It argues that it is possible to work towards a respectful recognition of historical sufferings of the other's community grounded not on politics but on Honneth's threefold 'love, respect and esteem' (2003: 138). For Honneth, experiences of trauma and suffering or moral injury are the product of experiences of 'misrecognition' (1995). For Burnstein misrecognition or *Mißachtung* accounts for *all* forms of moral injury and represents a *universalist* foundation for legitimating various forms of social and political struggle (Sinnerbrink 2007: 283). Both Honneth's approach to recognition as well as Burnstein's grounding it on universalist foundations are background assumptions which are used to articulate the justice demands underscoring Polish-Jewish hostility in Australia as a result of perceived public instances of suffered injustice.

The Polish and Jewish diasporas are good examples of this difficulty. Dialogue between the two communities invariably centres upon the events of the twentieth century in which both communities often view in radically different ways. Both diasporas are bound together by the traumatic events of the Second World War as well as centuries cultural interaction in Poland which has shaped and informed both cultures. While there is considerable literature on Polish Jewish relations little attention has been paid to the communicative conditions and practices necessary for effective dialogue. Fundamentally, the conditions for effective discourse between the Polish and Jewish communities are surprisingly simple yet routinely absent from dialogue. These conditions come in the form of discursive acts of recognition and respect for the suffering of others irrespective of religious background. Recognising the suffering of others is not as strait forward as it seems as there are two levels to the operationalisation of discursive acts of respect and empathy.

The only way to overcome inter-cultural misrecognition is through engaging debate and argumentation. Karl Popper is useful here in his insistence on the need to discuss as the price for silence can be too high. For Popper there was no way around evolving Kantian cosmopolitan and normative universalistic discursive values, which underpinned his 'liberal theory of free discussion' (Popper 1963 [1965]: 352). Popper however, approached the problem with an evolutionary and realist understanding of traditions and the way this relates to discussions in mind. For Popper liberalism and liberal societies evolve as a 'creed'. Liberal societies must evolve a 'moral framework' analogous to a 'legal framework' (Popper 1963 [1965]: 351). Sen's *open* impartiality can be seen to sketch such a moral framework for Popper *open* society. Without such a framework the methodological procedures or techniques for free, critical and rational open discussion are not possible. This need is generally understood as part of a multicultural social contact that is implicit in Australian Multiculturalism and more explicitly theorised in the case of Canadian Multiculturalism (Mills and Pateman 2007).

Without access to stories and perspectives of others, stereotypical or misinformed views of non-group members characterise the way other ethnic groups are remembered within a particular ethno-specific, often highly politicised narrative of suffering.² Below are

² According to Sen the pursuit of practical justice is associated with open impartiality in public debate. Sen states: 'There are two principle ground for requiring that the encounter of public reasoning about justice should go beyond the boundaries of a state or a religion, and these are based respectively on the relevance of other people's *interests* for the sake of avoiding bias and being fair to others, and on the pertinence of other people's

presented two visions of mass suffering – both justified and ‘confirmed’ by personal experiences. For the Jewish community, Poles are viewed to have looked upon the Holocaust with indifference and were often participants in the extermination of the Jews. Poles however, traditionally have tended only to remember heroic Polish suffering and the Righteous who saved Jews during the war. However the recent democratisation of Poland’s public sphere has helped create a self-critical and ‘open’ approach to the country’s past which is having ramifications for the historical consciousness of the Jewish and Polish diasporas.

This paper explores ways in which the irreducible conflict between what Robert Putnam (2002: 11) has described as ‘binding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital can be better negotiated in the selection of memories for identity formation in the Polish and Jewish communities. It asks whether ‘binding’ capital consisting of ill-will towards the other is intrinsic to the identity formation of each group. Further it asks whether the enforcing of ‘bridging’ social capital through discourses of recognition come at the expense of ‘binding’ capital. To all these questions it answers in the affirmative, that the national(istic) narratives of Poles and Jews as they stand require a negative view point of the other in order to reinforce a sense of moral and historical exceptionalism and difference. The view by some within a community that ‘bridging’ capital might run the risk of undermining the ‘closedness’ of a community maybe enough reason to avoid such recognitive discursive practices as a matter of imperative. Such recognitive ‘bridging’ act are often considered subversive and may even be viewed as an existential threat to the survival of a community when forms of exclusionary ‘binding’ capital are understood as a necessary part of a community’s evolved survival strategy (Bullivant 1984: 28). I further argue that the mythical function of such diasporic reconstructive narratives that are used to imagine communities are subject to an implicit social contract when publicised to the broader society.

Sensitivity and recognition of the suffering of others as well as respect for fundamental differences provides the only possible avenue for piece-meal conciliation and rapprochement between incommensurable ethno-specific narratives and experiences of suffering. I argue that it is morally irresponsible to be content with disagreement resulting from a presumed innocuous differentiation of ‘perspectives’. The rational grounds for this argument are that misrecognition, misrepresentation and ill-will have practical social and psychological consequences; in our utterances we are responsible for the memory of others (Brandom 1994: 17-18, 639-640). We must be open to historical facts and prepared to discard aspects of our historical ethno-particular narratives and ‘imagined’ (Anderson 1991) memories for those that correspond better to the facts (Naraniecki 2009: 257-271). This notwithstanding, I view it necessary to respect ethno-centric narratives and world-views which play an important social role in creating community binding social capital (Putnam 2002: 11). Particularly for the Jewish community, there is an esoteric Midrashic tradition associated with Maimonides which seeks to withhold certain enclaved truths to the wider community if the community is not ready for such knowledge which can be seen to be destabilising (Ravitzky 2005: 313). This need not to radically oppose closed ‘tribal’ perspectives, however the sharp chauvinistic, xenophobic or discriminatory rhetorical edge that accompanies them needs to be blunted. This is the case at least in terms of public speech acts in a multicultural society in order for progress to be made in the realm of intercultural understanding. It needs to be perceived by community leaders that removing the sharp edge of exclusionary narratives will not affect the social ‘binding’ capacities of such narratives. A compromise needs to be made between the social utility of particularistic narratives of memory and the ideal moral universalism which sees the chauvinistic and exceptionalistic

perspectives to broaden our own investigation of relevant principles, for the sake of avoiding under-scrutinized parochialism of values and presumption in the local community.’ (2009: 402)

core of such narratives as unacceptable. We need to work with particularistic narratives as a social reality. However we also need to resist the attempt by members of a community to universalise such narratives, including their ethno-centric world-view and inherent prejudices. By resisting this tendency towards universalisation of ethno-specific narratives, we open a space for dialogue and the critical use of public reason. Poles and Jews provide an interesting case study as both groups hold history as a 'core value' (Smolicz 1999: 11-49). Both groups hold historical narratives that are highly exceptionalist, and centred upon victimisation and suffering. Further, the popular legacy of Polish Messianism, a world-view which remains operational in a variety of modes (initially universalist, anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan and philosemitic but also later evolved into Dmowskian antisemitic more chauvinistic and populist modes) is largely build upon Biblical and Jewish ideas: Poland as the new Israel; Warsaw the New Jerusalem. It is this ideological closeness and similarity that provides the point of difference and incommensurability. Because of the ideological conflicts, Poles and Jews provide an interesting case study for the limits of what one can hope to achieve through dialogue.

2) The Polish Narrative

The Polish experiences and popular interpretations of the WWII is in some respect similar to Jewish perspective, and in some respects different. Poles also see themselves as unique victims of categorical and targeted attempt at mass 'national' extermination, but this extermination was conducted by both the Nazi and the Soviet invaders. Further, the categorical extermination they were subjected to has been seen as 'clasicide-genocide' rather than a 'genocide proper' (if one may call it that way). It must be reminded, that the Nazi occupiers did also target the Polish intelligentsia for immediate 'elimination'; in the Polish folklore (popular interpretation of the war) 'Jews were first, and we were to follow'. This was the common sentiment of Poles in Warsaw after the creation of the ghetto. In parallel to the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust, Poles nurture in their memory the suffering as a result of Nazi mass murders alongside the unique massacre by the Soviets of Polish Prisoners of War in Katyn and other places of mass executions in western Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. As the recently released documents confirm, the victims of these Soviet-perpetrated war crimes were murdered as a targeted category: as members of a particular social class (the intelligentsia, the educated class), and because they were Polish citizens (about 500 of them were of Jewish religion and nationality). Thus, in Polish eyes, Nazi-Soviet occupation also constituted mass extermination, though conducted in steps, as a part of a joint Nazi-Soviet design aiming at subjugation and elimination of the Polish nation. What makes the war suffering unique, in the eyes of Poles, was this combination of categorical extermination of the Polish intelligentsia by both the Soviet and the Nazis, with brutal enslavement of the entire nation costing somewhere between 5.4 and 6 million lives. While there were Poles who sympathised with the fate of the Nazi-persecuted Jews, there are also extreme cases of those who blame pro-Soviet Jews for supporting the Soviet invasion – in clear ignorance of the fact that Polish Jews shared the fate of Katyn victims and were 'traded' to the Nazis by the Soviet occupiers.

In the interest of effective dialogue I suggest that Poles need to accept a discursive commitment to the fundamental difference both in degree of persecution and the nature of persecution. A discourse more acceptable to the Jewish community would be one following Jan Karski. Karski who famously warned the Western Allies about the Holocaust is a highly acclaimed person for the Jewish community as an exemplary 'righteous amongst the nations'. I suggest that the Polish community should follow the lead of the Jewish community in recognising Karski as one of the most important Poles of the twentieth century. This is based upon the belief in the educational potential and moral gifts that come with a familiarisation

with Karski words and his personal morality. It is important for the Jewish community that more Poles follow Karski's rhetorical lead on the Holocaust. Karski does not believe that another Holocaust is possible, not because humanity has changed because it has not but because 'the Holocaust should be remembered as it was, incomparable, unique, Jewish'.³ Any use of the term extrinsic to its Jewishness must for Karski be avoided. Attempts to locate Polish non-Jewish victims within the Holocaust, ought to be avoided. For Karski, the Polish people suffered immensely, they 'passed through Crucifixion' and 'martyrdom', however this is different from the Holocaust which was Jewish. For Karski there is a basic difference:

...if a German official saw on the streets of Warsaw...a local child he would not hurt that child. He would pass that child indifferently. The child was to grow into a slave of the master race. Now if he saw a Jewish child, he would dispatch the child for destruction as a vermin of humanity. This is the Holocaust, it is a different proposition.⁴

It is in this light that the *Polonia* or Polish diaspora ought to revise the exceptionalist content of its legitimate yet highly particular messianistic narrative. Further, I would suggest that it ought to view its own sufferings alongside a narrative which acknowledges where antisemitism played a part in the destruction of the Jewish community, both in the form of post-war pogroms in Kielce and Krakow as well as government sanctioned persecution of Jews under Gomulka.

Poles can be reassured as such a stance does not necessitate any sort of collective guilt, as according to Jürgen Habermas, the guilty must answer for it individually. However, in a conversation with Adam Michnik, Habermas stated that this does not mean that there is no such thing as collective responsibility for the mental and cultural context in which crimes become possible. In this regard Polish society is responsible for failing in the twentieth century for providing a 'home' for the Jews on Polish soil and in Polish society in the twentieth century. Even though before the rise of Polish nationalism and its social-psychology symptoms *Polin* was a Jewish national homeland. Adam Michnik summarises the ethos as one in which, 'If I have the right to be proud of Polish achievements, of what Mickiewicz or Kolakowski have written, I am also duty bound to be ashamed of what Polish fascists have done' (Habermas and Michnik 1994: 7-8). In short the *Polonia* ought to take its communicative and communal ethical stance from the renewed openness and self-critical attitude of the society in Poland today. In this way we can see how transnational consideration have direct consequences for local Polish communities abroad if they wish to be able to continue to identify with Poland and the evolving values and attitudes of its citizens.

The last few years have witnessed a remarkable change in the attitude towards Jews in Polish society so much so that Polish society has started to adopt Jewish memory and culture as its own. This can be seen at the grass roots levels through the adoption of Jewish cemeteries by local communities, as well as the popularity of major Jewish festivals in Warsaw and Krakow.⁵ Poland has emerged as a world leader in Holocaust scholarship through the work of the Centre for Holocaust Studies at Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In 2012 Warsaw will open one of the most important Jewish museums in the world the

³ Karski Interview. Shoah Foundation Institute. Uploaded Jan 14, 2009. Accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39iTbL2idhQ&feature=player_embedded#at=3216

⁴ Karski Interview. Shoah Foundation Institute. Uploaded Jan 14, 2009.

⁵ Prof. Jonathan Webber from the Galician Jewish Museum and the Jagiellonian University has led much many restoration initiatives.

Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Further, according to Konstanty Gebert visible symptoms of antisemitism are publically condemned by moral, religious and secular authorities as well as by politicians (Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 182). However Gebert, rather diplomatically glosses over the well-known influential personalities within the Catholic Church in Poland who hold a less enlightened world-view. For Michnik a Polish-Jew, ‘there is a common Polish identity, a pluralistic and heterogeneous one, which is our wealth, which we have in our genes. Either this is what Poland will be, or it will be nothing at all, as we shall be at each other’s throats’ (Habermas and Michnik 1994: 13).

Such a renewal of acceptance and interest in Jewish culture in Poland suggests that *Polskość* and *Yiddishkeit* are not mutually exclusive, but that Poles in Poland are finding that Polishness requires a Jewish component. The resulting celebration of the ‘revival’ of Jewish culture ‘without Jews’ may be hard for many Jews to understand given the supposedly antisemitic character of the country, however such a phenomenon is quite understandable for anyone familiar with Polish history, culture and *mentalité*. This national resurgence in Jewish culture in Poland is not about cynical self-interest, nor about guilt as some may suggest as the phenomenon goes beyond what would be expected if this were the case. I suggest that it is about the need to fill a national void that becomes more apparent as Poles reflect upon their past, their literature and art and the landscape and architecture of their towns and cities. The notion of Poland as containing philosemitic characteristics which sees Jewish history and culture as an intrinsic component may be a difficult proposition for many Jews outside Poland. How the Jewish community will react to this will also raise many questions.

However, this phenomenon is not the case with the *Polonia* or Polish (nominally, albeit not necessarily Catholic) diaspora in Australia and elsewhere which has evolved its own unique norms, values and customs (Naraniecki 2004). These evolved characteristics adhere to and arise out of a symptom common to the diasporic process; that is, the freezing of its values and communal ethics and practices at the moment of emigration. Thus, in Australia the attitude of the *Polonia* largely reflects the ‘frozen’ attitudes of Poles resulting from the manipulation of memory by the communist regime during the major periods of Polish migration during the 1940s-50s and 1980s. They are further reinforced by private and public anti-Polish speech acts emanating from the Jewish diaspora. Hence, pre-war anti-Semitism and communist era anti-Semitism have lasted longer in a more normative fashion in the diaspora as accepted public attitudes than in Poland where such views are no longer publically acceptable. This problem has been reinforced by the diasporic tendency towards ethno-homogeneity, ‘purification’ or essentialism which is a consequence of diasporic neo-tribalisms. In Australia this is further compounded by the way multiculturalism is operationalized according to the assumption that the basic social unit is the homogenous and easily definable and thus manageable ethnic group (Naraniecki 2011: 66-84).

3) The Jewish Narrative

For the Jews, the Nazi Holocaust is a unique, special and largely incommensurate tragedy, and this is justified not only by the scope of the crime, annihilating approximately 6 million innocent victims, but also the stunning brutality with which it was executed: its systematic almost ‘industrial’ nature; its racist ideological underpinnings; and – perhaps most importantly – the way in which Jews were targeted for unconditional extermination for what they were, or rather what Nazis attributed to them as an ‘inferior race’. Except for Gypsies (Roma), no other nation(al)ity was targeted by the Nazi occupiers that way. Poles, Russians,

Ukrainians were also labelled and treated as inferior races, but, in the perceptions of Jewish people, they were not sentenced categorically and *en masse* for immediate extermination. Rather, they were to be ‘used’ as slave labour, and therefore had much higher chances of survival. Jews, in other words, were murdered (after 1942) unconditionally and for what they were; others (including Poles) were murdered largely for what they may have done (or refused to do) – for opposition, resistance and refusal to follow the Nazi- and Soviet-imposed rules and orders. Jews, by contrast, were to be immediately separated and subsequently murdered – and this murder was conducted in a highly organised and systematic manner. This is seen as a principal justification of the uniqueness and incommensurability of the Nazi Holocaust and for the uniqueness of Jewish suffering. Moreover, this sense of ‘unique suffering’ is reinforced by a sense of either ‘indifference’ or even antisemitic hostility, attributed to Poles witnessing the Holocaust – and often generalised on ‘majority’ of Poles, or ‘typical Poles’. In extreme cases, Poles are even accused of being willing collaborators in the Holocaust – in spite of evidence of mass anti-Nazi resistance and opposition movement, executions of collaborators, and heroic cases of saving Jewish refugees by Poles, often at the cost of their lives.

Recent trends in Holocaust historiography are symbiotically related to Polish-Jewish relations as their private historical memory comes into conflict with public discourses that do not support ethno-centric world-views. This clash of public discourse and private values leads to contestations over the politics of memory with personal consequences for individuals of both the Polish and Jewish communities. The Polish-Jewish case in Australia highlights the real limitations to the commonly espoused rhetoric of ‘social-cohesion’ within a multicultural society based upon the real institutional and social impediments to open public discourse. There is a problematic cognitive requirement underpinning the possibility of positive Polish-Jewish relations which may not be realisable. This imperative stipulates that the Jewish community must find a way of recognising the suffering of Polish victims of the Second World War both at the level of the private sphere as well as the speech acts of public discursive spaces.

This paper argues that in a globalised era there are significant moral and social consequences in avoiding the contextualisation of the Holocaust. When such a refusal to contextualise the Holocaust within a universal cognitive framework is made by a particular group, it has practical social consequences resulting from the psychological effects it has on those communities and individuals whose histories are grossly misrecognised. The moral decision not to contextualise the Holocaust characterises the public stance of a significant part of the Jewish diaspora. Excluding non-Jewish narrative of suffering from the context in which the Holocaust is remembered potentially legitimises the interpretation of Poles as universal purveyors of criminality based upon the limited and negative way they are allowed to appear within the Jewish narratives of the Holocaust. There may be room for the exceptional individuals who are considered ‘righteous’ however there is no room for broad narratives of Poles as victims.

Academically the writing of Jan Gross’ book *Neighbours* (2002) which has been followed by a series of books all focusing on instances of Polish complicity in the destruction of Jewish life in Poland, has had dual consequences. For the Jewish community it serves to retrench or foster anti-Polish prejudices, for the Polish community it has led to a rather painful yet necessary confrontation with the past. For the Poles, this has been positive to the extent that it has opened public discussion on the topic of instances of Polish atrocities towards Jews during the Nazi occupation and is fundamental to the fostering of an emergent democratic discursive public space since Communism. However, for Poles living outside Poland, including and particularly Australia, Gross’ book acts as a catalyst for de-legitimising the Polish claim to recognition of victimhood by providing an empirical paradigm by which

genocide and crimes against Polish non-Jews have been excluded⁶. Not unexpectedly this raises the risk of provoking xenophobic and anti-Jewish reactions within Polish society.⁷

Secondly, Snyder's book *The Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2010) has provided a point of comparison in which the murder of millions of Jewish is contextualised alongside the genocides of millions of Poles, Ukrainians, Russians and others. This has led to debate filtering down from academia to broader levels of Polish and Jewish society in an often unarticulated form. Members of the Jewish community view works such as Snyder's as 'revisionist' as it seeks to include non-Jewish narratives of suffering into discussions of the Holocaust. However, works such as Snyder's cannot be regarded as 'revisionist' in a sense of the term as they do not contest or attempt to rewrite the 'facts'. What they are concerned with is the moral implications of the way we contextualise and frame discussions of genocide during the Second World War (Kirsch 2011: 10).

It is at this level of moral dispute that a disagreement over the selectivity of facts has arisen. It is not a dispute over facts in the sense of the Australian 'history wars' but a dispute over the *permissibility* of 'contextualization' of the Holocaust within a broader narrative of the central and Eastern European 'blood-lands'. It is in essence, a debate of what is allowed in a 'grand narrative' of Second World War suffering. This has resulted from the recent assertiveness of Jews to publicise a narrative of suffering in which Poles are portrayed as willing co-participant in their extermination. As a result any suffering of Poles is considered invalidated. The recent assertiveness of publicising such a view has led to opposition by Poles in Poland and in the diaspora who contest such a depiction to the extent that a new term 'anti-Polonism' is readily used to describe Gross and those who support narratives of Polish genocidal complicity. Such overly hostile and unsympathetic views of the Poles has the consequence, particularly in the *Polonia* or Polish diaspora of preventing a common framework for intercultural discussion. Poles in the diaspora are commonly concerned with the lack of recognition of their suffering on the one hand and defamatory concerns by the Jewish diaspora on the other. Thus, we return to the problem of the effects of misrecognition for the possibility of social cohesion and harmony within highly differentiated multicultural societies.

In the diasporic context the Jewish narrative of Poles as persecutors has gained increasing publicity over the last decade. It reflects perspectives of Poles 'frozen' as Rabbi Schudrich stated in attitudes formed in the 1930s-1950s⁸. It is seen in the comedy of Sandy Gutman (Austen Tayshus) whose SBS TV series *Aussie Jokers* (2001) depicted Poles as willing participants in the Holocaust and thieves of Jewish property. The poet Lilly Brett in her poem *Poland* (1987) accused Poles of being 'worse than the Germans' (Brett 1987: 139). It is also seen in Dian Armstrong's popular novel *Mosaic: A Chronicle of Five Generations* (2001) which depicts Polish as an underclass treated with derision by Polish Jewry. The more recent aired *My fear of Poland* (6 Nov 2010) by Natalie Kestecher for ABC Radio Documentaries presents a more complex at Jewish attitude towards Poland. Initially Kestecher's attitude is informed by a 'frozen' historical memory characterized by mistrust and anger. When encountering instances of Polish recognition and sympathy with the Jewish culture in the form of an audience clapping along to a Yiddish song Kestecher is overcome with an 'irrational anger at these appreciative Poles'. Later however, she comes to appreciate

⁶ This was the claim by protestors from a conservative Polish organisation called *Nasza Polonia* during Jan Gross's visit to Sydney.

⁷ For a study of recent increases in anti-Jewish attitudes in Poland see: Krzeminski in Kozlowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz *Difficult Questions in Polish-Jewish Dialogue* (2006):151-156.

⁸ Museum of Jewish Heritage. Interview of Schudrich, Michael. 11th February, 2011. Accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/MuseumJewishHeritage#p/u/12/cMIPaiBFaIc>

that ‘things are a little more complex than they seem’. Such examples of recognition of the ‘other’ from an empathetic standpoint of trying to understand the thought processes and memories of others. The limited and still rather mistrustful mode that Kestecher exhibited in the documentary is still an important step in fostering positive attitudes towards another cultural group. In this case, Jewish attitude towards Poles. Even from these public examples we can comparatively see a movement from the hostility and personal animosity of Gutman in 2001 to the more nuanced and complex attempt at understanding of Kestecher in 2010.

Andrew Markus the Pratt Foundation Chair of Jewish Civilisation at Monash notes what he regards as another important issue for the Jews which emerged in the 1990s within the ‘multicultural sphere’ (2006: 101). Markus notes that ‘Jews were amongst the leading advocates of the enactment and extension of racial vilification and anti-discrimination legislation by the federal and state parliaments’ (2006: 101). Markus quotes Grahame Leonard who was the B’nai B’rith Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC) chairman in 1997 who observed: ‘At times I am appalled by comments I hear from fellow Jews who speak disparagingly or dismissively or derisively about a variety of ethnic groups, too often targeting Asians, Russians and especially Australia’s own indigenous people’ (2006: 101). Markus then quotes the ADC director Danny Ben-Moshe who stated: ‘The reality is that, while the tiniest derogatory reference to the Jews in a newspaper article will result in dozens of calls to the ADC office, widespread discrimination against others raises not a peep’ (2006: 101). While the work of the ADC is crucial in actively defending the liberal principles of an open society, there appears to be some confusion as to what constitutes hate speech and what are presentations of legitimate alternative historical narratives that are incommensurable with Jewish memory.

Philosophers of communicative action have shown, different perspectives play a vital role in increasing objectivity through the intersubjective comparisons, conjectures and discussions that they stimulate (Habermas 1990, Popper 1994). According to Jürgen Habermas and Adam Michnik it is not enough to be satisfied with disagreement based upon ‘different perspectives’ we must learn to distinguish between what one says at home within an ethno-centric context and the public problem solving need for context neutrality and objectivity (1994: 8). One can hold ‘different’ community binding perspectives in the private realm so long as publically one is able to reason according to Michnik’s ethos ‘You have to remember, but you have to be able to go beyond the horizon of your own suffering, you mustn’t persist in your own world. That’s impossible’ (Habermas and Michnik 1994: 15). Such public acts of reason and communication requires the acceptance of Popper’s critical rational credo: ‘I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth’ (1994: xii).

A model for the need for tolerance and recognition of the differing Polish and Jewish perspectives within a normative multicultural framework can best be seen from a lead taken by a Rabbi in Poland. Michael Schudrich the Chief Rabbi of Poland has articulated a discourse of reconciliation that is necessary if any authentic rapprochement is to occur:

We ought to try and feel the pain of the other side, which might sound negative. But there is so much pain, certainly that the Jews come with, and also there is a lot of pain that the non-Jewish Poles experience during World War II and under the Communists. So the first thing of emphasis is try and look at it from the other side. I’m still waiting for the day where we can start to feel the joy of the other side, but I think we will get there. Another very challenging thing is that we Jews tend to view Poland as 1939...1935-1939 was a very hard time for Polish-Jewish relations. Maybe in some ways the worst time; but it got frozen. Polish-Jewish relations were in the freezer for 50 years. (Schulrich 2010)

For Poles, it is important that Jews understand the enormous brutal terrors that Polish society faced, during German occupation. According to Laurence Weinbaum, in ‘Jewish circles, Poles are often seen (much to their dismay, and often to their amazement) as accessories to the crime, if not prime perpetrators (Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 131). Israel Gutman emphasises the importance of avoiding general terms which claim that ‘Poles as a nation collaborated with the Germans in the persecution – and therefore in the annihilation – of Jews’. For Gutman:

It is often thought that the vast majority of Poles were indifferent and inactive in the face of Jewish suffering. Both of these notions – indifference and passivity – demand clarification and appropriate interpretation in the context of World War II and the Holocaust. One of the reasons for the lack of reaction and intervention on the part of the Polish populace was the Poles’ own situation under the brutal terrors of Nazi occupation, including humiliation and enormous difficulty in fulfilling the most elementary of human needs. (Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 45)

According to Laurence Weinbaum, ‘Jews today do not always take into consideration the existential dangers implicit in hiding Jews in occupied Poland and generally attribute the failure to rescue larger numbers as clear evidence that Poles were antisemitic.’ Further, ‘that the Germans elected to build the death camps on Polish soil is often cited in Jewish circles, quite groundlessly, as ‘proof’ of Polish antisemitism’(Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 134). It is often the case that participants in the March of the Living often hope to find evidence of antisemitic behaviour, such as graffiti or cat calls in order to reinforce an exceptionalist world-view in which the demonization of Poles justifies the non-recognition of their suffering and victimhood (Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 135). Bartoszewski reiterates the fact that the Polish population had not the slightest influence on the selection of sites of terror against Polish Christians, nor the places of deportation and extermination of Jews. This was only found out by delay through underground periodicals published by the underground press informed by the resistance movements such as the Home Army. (Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 57). To the question of whether more could be done Bartoszewski answered ‘all aid is always insufficient, especially in a situation of a powerful catastrophe like the Holocaust. The only people who did as much as they possibly could were those who gave their lives trying to help. And there were hundreds of such Poles – maybe even thousands.’ (Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 74)

The problem of selectivity of historical events to be remembered also constitutes a major problem. For the Jewish community and the Israeli education system the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 in which more Polish non-combatant civilians were murdered than in Auschwitz is completely ignored and according to Yaron Karol Becker and Alex Danzig many Israelis do not even know the event occurred (Kozłowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 117). The Hollywood film *Uprising* (2001) directed by Jon Avnet and written by Avnet and Paul Brickman has done much to popularise the Jewish narrative in Western popular culture. This film perpetuates the Jewish narrative of a Polish antisemitic Home Army who were too cowardly to fight the Germans and too antisemitic to assist the Jews in their heroic rising. However, for Poles it is important for Jews and the rest of the world to understand that the Home Army actually saved more Jews through its organisation *Żagota* than any other institution. It was only due to the logistical problem of a lack of weapons that they initially withheld support until it was evident that a rising would occur. Eventually it gave a substantial proportion of its own arms cache to the ghetto fighters (Snyder 2010: 286). Saving Jews was considered a major part of its resistance effort given that open combat with the

Germans was often not realistic (Snyder 2010: 286). Further, the Home Army did provide what limited weapons and support they could muster during the rising. From the example of the film *Uprising* we can see the kind of damage to intercultural relations that can be done through antagonistic representations. To complicate matters further, there were many Jewish members of the Home Army (Snyder 2010: 286). Paradoxically for historical memory, there were more Jewish participants in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 than in the Ghetto Uprising, which is even not acknowledge by the Jewish community because of the Polish national nature of the narrative. I argue that events such as the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the Katyn massacre, the deportation of Poles to the Soviet Gulags can more accurately be seen as examples of shared narratives capable of providing ‘bridging’ social capital and mutual recognition and empathy.

The recognitive consequences of binding narratives such as those popularised by the film *Uprising*, have not surprisingly, been shown to have contributed to a rise in Polish anti-Semitism. In a study conducted by Ireneusz Krzeminski, Poles in Poland believe that Jews have taken possession in the public sphere of the past. Krzeminski’s study revealed that Poles believe that no one remembers their victimisation and instead they are portrayed as Nazi collaborators (Kozlowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 156). Krzeminski states that:

This view is so painful to the Polish consciousness that it leads to a changed assessment of the past and an increase in hostility towards Jews, who are this time to blame for holding a ‘monopoly on suffering’....Thus, antisemitic declarations are to a large degree treated as a legitimate defence and an indication of disagreement with the image of the past which- however exaggerated- is seen as the one held by world public opinion. Anti-Jewish attitudes are thus a key mechanism by which the desire for recognition of Polish wartime and post-war suffering is manifested. (Kozlowski, Folwarczny and Bilewicz 2006: 156)

There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that the Polish and Jewish narratives are colliding in a way that prevents understanding and recognition. Historical facts are the casualty and no amount of positive Polish-Israeli diplomatic relations appears to have any meaningful influence.

4) Politics of Historical Contextualisation and Comparison

The problem of the contextualisation of the Holocaust erupted in Australia during the *Aftermath: The Politics of Memory* conference at Monash University’s Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation. Here three invited speakers Jan Gross, Fr. Patrick Desbois, and Dovid Katz gave talks on the opening day affirming non-contextualism as the conference’s normative stance. This conference was not so much about the ‘politics of memory’ but which politics of memory is acceptable. Snyder was invited to give a reply via web-camera from Vienna as a representative of an unacceptable politics of memory. Snyder’s book focus not on ethno- or national specific narratives of genocide but rather takes a geographical approach to a region he calls the ‘bloodlands’ the terrain known in Polish as *kresy* in which the various genocides (and their narrative memories) converge (2010: viii). Snyder’s historiography aims to move beyond traditional national or ethno-centric narratives by combining various archival resources in a way that crosses historical fields and national and linguistic boundaries.

The conference organiser and chair of the panel discussion Mark Baker attempted to create a debate the kind that they would have ‘in a private room over a glass of wine’. However, none of the speakers was willing to debate the issues of context from a methodological perspective let alone from the moral perspective. This consensus in civility

resulted in a non-debate over other issues of method. As this became apparent the chair prodded the speakers with questions designed to spark controversy, however none of the speakers (who are fully aware of consequences of such public arguments) was willing to debate critically the issues of context, nor the issue of Poles and non-Jews as victims within a shared narrative or empirical problem situation. The fact that the majority of the audience were members of Melbourne's close-knit Jewish community largely descendent from Holocaust survivors made the issue of contextualisation an extremely sensitive one.

'Contextualisation' has been used by Baltic governments to down grade the Holocaust and turn local Baltic collaborators into war heroes (Katz 2009: 261). However, this is a political problem of the *interpretation* of the contextualisation rather than a problem of contextualisation *per se*. The *decision* not contextualising the Holocaust within the broader empirical realities of the death's and sufferings of millions of non-Jews such as typical of the work of Polish historian Jan Gross is itself a form of contextualization. Gross's selectivity, exemplifying the epistemological problem of selectivity suffers from the empirical fallacy of *omission*. More significantly such an error of omission within the context of the politicization of memory constitutes a real moral danger. It is a decisionistic approach to the problem of the recognition of suffering. Such an approach makes the political decision to invalidate through omission the sufferings and genocides of groups such as the Poles. Dirk Moses' influential essay *The Holocaust and Genocide* (2004 [2005]) raised the concerns that many Jews had with contextualising the Holocaust. Moses cites Carter's establishment of the United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial in 1979 which referred to 'eleven million innocent victims exterminated', a number that included five million non-Jewish victims (Moses 2005: 533). Moses raised the issue that even though the Holocaust has 'assumed totemic status for much of diasporic Jewry it has become a 'cosmopolitan memory' and a transnational moral source for many non-Jews...' (2005: 533) Moses raised a legitimate methodological problem of contextualisation, however, such a risk of 'de-Judaizing' the Holocaust cannot be used as Katz proposes to eliminate comparisons and contextualisations with other concurrent genocides which are central to the historical memories of non-Jewish groups whether in Europe or in a diasporic context.

During his talk at the Monash *Aftermath* conference, as well as on his *Defending History* webpage Katz has sought to oppose what he regards as the 'Red-Brown Double-genocide' thesis which is used to 'obfuscate' the Holocaust. However, in attempting to overcome 'obfuscation', Katz goes too great lengths to deny that the term 'genocide' can be used in relation to Stalinist mass murders. Katz here is in keeping with Efraim Zuroff's assertion that Snyder's book attempts to present an 'equivalency' between the various mass murders of non-Jews and the Holocaust and that the *Bloodlands* 'is already on its way to being the bible of the Holocaust distorters in post-Communist Eastern Europe'.⁹ (2011: 3-4) What Zuroff fails to appreciate is that this is expressly not what Snyder's book does, as needed historical comparison highlights the incommensurability and uniqueness of the Holocaust within a broader narrative of atrocities against humanity.¹⁰ It is my argument that

⁹ In response Snyder has pointed out to me in correspondence that: 'Unpleasantly for me, but also awkwardly for Dovid, the one time that my work has been 'exploited' by a politician in eastern Europe it was by the far left rather than the far right -- a Ukrainian parliamentarian illegally republished one of my essays to show how bad Ukrainian nationalists are. Anyone who takes the trouble to watch my lectures on Youtube knows that the only heated discussions that happen are with, precisely, east European nationalists, the people who Dovid and Efraim keep saying like my book. I have a rather long track record on this, and the evidence is all in one direction.' Email, Snyder to Naraniecki, 20/7/2012.

¹⁰ According to Snyder: 'Zuroff does claim, counterintuitively, that nationalists of other national orientations like my book, but gives no evidence or cases. This move, which Helvétius would have called 'interested error', is routine. Zuroff's text typifies the reflexive nationalist response, regardless of national orientation: no fault is

this coupling of the denial or concerted effort to down-play crimes against non-Jews by associating it with Holocaust ‘obfuscators’ in Lithuania or ‘equivalency’ is not only morally harmful according to Honneth’s understanding of misrecognition, but also logically and historically unsound. Katz denied attributing the term ‘genocide’ to the mass murder of Poles, Ukrainians and others, particularly by the Soviets by appealing to the highly restrictive article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and rejecting common-sense and accepted normative understandings of genocide.

Article II of the Convention intentionally excludes ‘political’, ‘ideological’, ‘linguistic’ and ‘economic’ groups which has provoked more debate since 1948 than any other aspect of the instrument (Schabas 2000: 102). According to Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, ‘the wording of the Convention is so restrictive that not one of the genocidal killings committed since its adoption is covered by it’ (1990: 11). This limited scope has led many academics and human rights activists in two directions. Some have attempted to fill the lacunae in the definition with customary norms whilst others have proposed new definitions. (Schabas 2000: 102). However, Katz in insisting on this restrictive definition in order not to recognise Soviet acts of genocide is actually acting in accordance with the Soviet Union’s proposals in the drafting of this Convention. According to Schabas, The soviets insisted on limiting the scope of genocide to extermination ‘on racial, national (religious) grounds’, omitting the category of political groups. They had a distinctly ideological bent, insisting upon the relationship between genocide and ‘Fascism-Nazism and other similar race ‘theories’’ (Schabas 2000: 63).

In light of the potential inter-ethnic recognitive dialogue and reconciliation that can be gained from works such as Snyder’s, Katz’s argument for delegitimizing contextualization based upon the possibility of ‘Antisemites’ to ‘obfuscate’ the Holocaust through contextualisation seems alarmist and overly hasty. For Katz: ‘Holocaust Obfuscation is the systematic effort to relativise, minimize, obscure, confuse or eliminate the Holocaust, as a distinct historic entity in European history, without necessarily denying any of the documented murders’ (2009: 272). The risk of obfuscation by Antisemitic politicians in certain Baltic states is an unacceptable argument for the delegitimation of contextualisation and comparison by professional historians such as Snyder or in conferencing and intercultural dialogue in the Antipodes or any other part of the world. In fact, comparisons and contextualisation are essential to achieving understanding in intercultural dialogue (Bleszynska 2011: 73). In this regard Dovid Katz’s anti-contextualist discursive attitude (2009: 259) is inappropriate for the problem situation in liberal democratic countries such as Australia, or emergent liberal democracies such as Poland. What the threat of Antisemitic misuse of context ought to do is encourage historians to refute such erroneous interpretations rather than ‘close’ the discourse to a limited and exclusivist and ethno-specific discourse. Such closed discursive activity is not capable of approaching let alone refuting Antisemitic misuse of context on the one hand and not capable of providing a non-ethno-specific discursive space for the recognition of non-Jewish suffering on the other. Popper’s fighting liberalism, calls for ‘open’ discursive engagement with others in an effort at error elimination rather than a reactionary and undemocratic closing of discourse. Such undemocratic closing of discourse through contextualizaion even ‘non-contextual’-contextualizations is never entirely possible in a liberal democratic society.

found with the historical scholarship of the book, but the claim is made – always without examples – that history thus presented must somehow be helping the politics of someone else’s national narrative. Of course, the putative beneficiaries then take exactly the same position! They too cannot pinpoint what is wrong with the book, but feel sure that it must be helping someone else. And so on. The structure of this nationalist response is absolutely identical, regardless of the nationality in question.’ (2012: 156)

Katz proposes the term ‘Holocaust Obfuscation’ ‘as a cover term for a newly energized European movement to confuse, recombine or equalize phenomena that are empirically and conceptually unequal, in service of the effort to obscure, relativise, minimize or delete entirely ‘the Holocaust as such’ from European history and consciousness’ (2009: 259). Katz who is a linguist and a Yiddishist not a historian, fails to realise that there is an important methodological distinction between confusing, combining and equating and the method of rational reconstruction through comparison and contextualisation. The latter methodological practices are necessary for understanding in the reconstructive sciences (Hentschel 2003:251-275).

Bernstein (1985: 11) has shown that the Habermasian project of non-distorted and reciprocal communication cannot occur when the speech community is a restricted one. Where there are powerful constraints upon discussion, then the rationality (measured in terms of truth or falsity) will be impaired (Stokes 1998: 156). As global, national and ethno-local public discussions are becoming increasingly interconnected as a result of the processes of globalisation issues of contextualisation that invite comparisons can no longer be avoided. In an interview for the Jewish Museum of Heritage, Snyder, when asked by David Marewell to respond about the ‘troublesome’ nature of comparing Nazi and Soviet crimes argued that:

On the issue of comparing thing to the Holocaust, it is absolutely natural and unavoidable that people would compare things to the Holocaust, and awful lot of bad things happened in the twentieth century and one cannot by fiat demand that people not compare them to the Holocaust. I think then given that we are in a world where comparison is natural both in the 1930s and 1940s and today, one ought to be in a position to make the comparison. And to be in a position to make the comparison one has to have the history not just of the Holocaust but other German crimes and not just German crimes but Soviet crimes that took place on the same territory. When you have that you are in a position to say what was unprecedented what was different about the Holocaust which is where I come down. I think that the Holocaust was different and was unprecedented. (Snyder 2011)

For Snyder, attention to any single persecuted group, no matter how well executed as history, will fail as an account of what happened in Europe between 1933 and 1945. Often what happened to one group is intelligible only in light of what had happened to another. From a historiographical perspective the Nazi and Soviet regimes can only be understood in light of how their leaders understood the relations between the various cultural groups. According to Snyder ‘there is widespread agreement that the mass killing of the twentieth century is of the greatest moral significance for the twenty-first. How striking, then, that there is no history of the ‘bloodlands’. Mass killing separated Jewish history from European history, and east European history from west European history’. (2010: xix) The methodological innovation of his study was the way it brought the Nazi and Soviet regimes together, Jewish and European history together, as well as national histories together.

What Snyder’s work has done importantly has been to bring readers of various ethnic and national communities together in the reading of a shared narrative. This itself is a confronting task for someone not accustomed to historical narratives which are not centred upon a particular people or located within a clear ethno-specific discourse. Snyder’s work is fundamental in forcing the readers to recognise narratives that they would usually ignore as not being ‘inconvenient’ to one’s own story. Besides its clear methodological and historiographical importance for the professional historian, Snyder’s work can be said to be immensely morally important. From perspective of its potential capacity to provide intercultural and cosmopolitan world-views and needed for interethnic dialogue. Whether

Snyder's book makes much headway in this regard remains to be seen, what is important is that it is a step away from ethno-centric historiography without omitting the particular contents of any national history.

The sensitive issue for many Jews and their public discourse is not the diminishing or obfuscation of the Holocaust as Dovid Katz attempts to argue as this phenomenon is largely limited to the particular Baltic national narratives which are not shared by Poland or other European countries let alone the countries where the majority of the Jewish diasporas live. Snyder is clearly not in the business of Holocaust 'obfuscation' but of methodological clarification and attempting to understand the events, points which Katz, Gross and Desbois during the Monash Conference all agreed with. What many find troubling, especially at the level of public speech is the very act of comparison which presupposes an obligation to recognition of the suffering of others. Being confronted by the perspectives of other groups may be unsettling, however the social benefit is great. In a foundational document of Australian Multiculturalism the AEAC report 'Australia as a Multicultural Society' emphasises the importance of the 'social good' to that social resources and public fora are not used to forward sectional ethnic interests but to promote the interests of the 'whole' of society which is social cohesion seen within the broader concern of the universal social good of humanity as a whole. (AEAC: 1977: 4).

Despite the motifs of the Aftermath Conference the Monash scholars from the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation are aware of many of the concerns that have been raised in this paper. Michael Fagenblat in a response to a paper at the Aftermath Conference went so far as mention the risk of 'exceptionalism' arising from Hannah Arendt's 'survivors imperative'. Flagenblat, Landau and Wolski see the importance for communities in asking difficult questions (2006: 3). Such questions are needed in order to foster a sense of 'commitment and belonging' as 'challenge and critique are crucial for the well-being of every community' (2006: 3). Flagenblat, Landau and Wolski point out that the Holocaust for Australian Jews has a 'sacred aura' which has the consequence of 'narrowing the horizons of our Jewishness in the present' and that an opening to the 'full influences of Australian culture' may be needed (2006: 6, 12, 14). The problem with such an opening, is that it necessarily involves coming into contact with other migrant groups who as a group have different historical memory which is draws upon a narrative of national suffering and messianic redemption (Davies 1982, Wróbel 1997). As Amato eloquently states 'The claims of suffering confuse and divide us' (1990: xviii). For Andrew Markus 'Dialogue can be next to impossible to initiate – but the alternative, the closing of doors, is one not to be contemplated (2006: 106).

Conclusion

How both diasporas (so far as they can be separated) come to terms with rival and seemingly incommensurable historical narratives has a direct bearing social cohesion and day to day interaction. There is no easy way to overcome such problems especially since many in both the Polish and Jewish communities seen no need to get along. Poles and Jews however, are bound together as a result of historical events. Failure to understand and empathise with the other has consequences at the individual, diasporic, national and international level. As such any piece-meal progress towards mutual understanding and recognitive discursive practices should be promoted. How community leaders respond to public speech acts both in popular culture and in intellectual or academic activity has implications for broader mainstream receptions and opinion formations of the members of both the Polish and Jewish communities. The central moral issue with the publicisation of Gross's work is the possibility

of fostering further division and antagonisms between the Polish and Jewish communities resulting from an irresponsible presentation of historical events. However, the Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich points to a discourse that is inclusive and reconciliatory in tone and does justice to the historical memories of both communities. In the diasporic context we need not take the lead from scholars in the 'homeland'. Raimond Gaita a Melbourne based intellectual who Chaired Jan Gross's talk at the *Aftermath* conference and who is well appreciative of the Polish-Jewish dynamics has elsewhere stated that there is a kind of community of individual who are defined by the character of being concerned with problems evil at a very basic and profound level and are sensitive to its manifestations everywhere and not only in relation to one's own cultural group. Gaita aptly expresses sentiments associated with the kinds of character of individuals that are able to move beyond closed tribal concerns to a deeper humane relations with other. For Gaita 'There are those who have been the victims of such evil – Jews and many others, not only at the hands of the Nazis and not only at that time. But there are many others who have neither suffered nor witnessed such evil, yet whose lives and thought have been marked by its presence' (Gaita 1991: 1). It is this plea for perspective which I contend is increasingly important for those Poles and Jews who are descendent from such evils, yet who in Australia themselves have not experienced this, in an age where evil and suffering are no less diminished.

As both the Polish and Jewish communities have a strong commitment to history as a means of identity formation which include messianic and exceptionalist components, a way to enlarge the scope of narrative formation and collective memory reconstruction needs to be found that is not seen to threaten the evolving collective identities. This is something that is not evident so long as people continue to view the Holocaust and genocides of the 'bloodlands' according to their own ethno-particular world-views and exceptionalist politics of memory.¹¹ There ought not to be a competition of suffering, as the notion of 'suffering' pertains to individual persons whereas the Holocaust is a term used to refer to something that while involving persons it is a term which denotes a unique event which cannot be captured by the often unspeakable suffering of an individual survivor. Nor is it diminished by the need to confront other instances of unspeakable human suffering that at the level of the individual person, can be no less traumatic.

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¹¹ I agree with Jan Karski that the Holocaust was different and unique and the word Holocaust should only be reserved for this particular event. However, being a historically individual and unique event does not necessitate the jump to the support of ethical exceptionalism. By this logic most cultural groups would have something of their history to justify exceptionalist positions. I forward this argument in accordance with Popper's doctrine of anti-essentialism.

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