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Polish Debates on the Holocaust from the 1940s to the Present

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Since the late 1980s, Polish academics, publicists, and the public at large have engaged in several major debates about the Holocaust. The national media, historians, columnists, celebrities, political leaders, bishops, and philosophers, as well as many ordinary men and women, have felt obliged to speak up and write, often at length and emotionally, about the dramatic events associated with the Holocaust. The debate following the publication of Jan T. Gross' book *Neighbors*, about a masscrime in the small town of Jedwabne in 1941, was the most intensive Polish public debate over history ever, overshadowing the controversies of the recent communist past. Polish debates on the Holocaust have also attracted the attention of media in Europe, Israel, and North America, and some of the most significant contributions to these debates have been translated and published in English, German, Hebrew, and French. Scholars in various fields—history, sociology, anthropology, memory studies, and others—have found the debates sufficiently compelling to make them topics of research and analysis. Thus, numerous articles and books addressing the debates have appeared, providing a secondary literature offering diverse perspectives and conclusions, and sometimes spurring yet further discussions on the debates they analyze.¹

This author made his first presentation on the Polish debates on the Holocaust more than a quarter of a century ago, when he did not expect that the most significant of the debates was yet to come.² Years later, the goal of this chapter is to analyze some aspects of the debates that have been insufficiently addressed in most of the relevant secondary literature. First, it stresses that Poland was the main site and arena of the Holocaust, that is, where most of the killing took place and where the killing was more visible than elsewhere. Second, it considers the complex roles and

status of Polish “bystanders” to the horrible events and the likely psychological consequences of this experience, which may explain the emotional intensity of the debates. Third, it emphasizes the importance of the earliest debates, which began already when the Nazi “Final Solution” was unfolding, continued into the early postwar years, only to then be interrupted for almost four decades of communist rule. Fourth, it gives a brief outline of more contemporary debates on the Holocaust since the late 1980s and points to some of their unique features, such as the new and developing roles of historians and the media.

Occupied Poland and the Holocaust

Before World War II, the Polish Jewish community of some 3.4 million people was the largest in Europe. According to Nazi racial definitions, which the German administration applied in occupied Poland beginning in 1939, the number of Jews was even higher, as it consisted not only of those recognized as Jews in the prewar Polish census on the basis of their declared religion or language, but also all those having at least one Jewish grandparent, including second generation Christians of Jewish origin. This likely brought the number of Polish citizens targeted by the Nazis as Jews to nearly 3.5 million, of which only some 300,000 survived the war, mostly as deportees or refugees in the Soviet interior.³ The difference between these two figures—approximately 3.2 million—constitutes the majority of victims of the Nazi “Final Solution” in Europe as a whole. Moreover, in addition to killing more than 90 percent of the Jews of Poland, the Nazis made occupied Poland the final destination for hundreds of thousands of Jews deported from all over Hitler-dominated Europe, from Norway to Greece. Their trainloads arrived first to the ghettos and then to the death camps of Auschwitz, Bełżec, Chełmno, Sobibór, and Treblinka.

To refer to Poland as an arena of the Holocaust is to stress that killing was often in close proximity and visible to many. The killing in Eastern Europe—especially in Poland, the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine—was far more visible than in Western Europe. Those living in the vicinity of the camps and the railroads leading to them could hear screams from the cattle cars, see the transports full of Jews disappear in the camps, sometimes listen to the first-hand accounts of eyewitnesses, or smell the terrible stench of mass death. Contrary to Western Europe, from which the trains departed ostensibly “for resettlement in the East,” hundreds of thousands of East European Jews were killed on the spot or perished in

local ghettos and camps, that is, often in the sight of their non-Jewish neighbors.⁴

The period during which the extermination of Jews was visible to non-Jews was longer in Poland than anywhere else in Europe: brutal anti-Jewish policies and random killing began with the German invasion in 1939; starvation and disease took their massive toll in the ghettos in 1940–41; systematic mass shooting of Jews began in the summer of 1941; and 1942 was the year of Operation Reinhardt, which took the lives of the majority of Polish Jews—from the ghettos they were marched to the nearest railway station or were killed on the spot. This was not the end of the grim spectacle. The *Judenjagd*, or hunt for Jews in hiding, and the extermination of Jewish prisoners in labor camps continued in 1944 and 1945 until the last days of the occupation. Consequently, non-Jewish Poles were the first—and probably the largest—group of eyewitnesses to Jewish deaths. They could see, hear, or smell it. The knowledge of the horrible fate of the Jews was universal, often firsthand, and at times intimate.

Onlookers and Their Experience

Raul Hilberg's division of actors in the Holocaust into the categories of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders has been widely accepted in the scholarship, but has attracted growing criticism in recent years, as the dividing lines between these groups were sometimes far from clear.⁵ In particular, some non-Jewish Poles were not simply standing by: sources from nearly every Polish town and county mention local collaborators in Nazi anti-Jewish persecution, or people preying on defenseless Jewish victims for private profit, revenge, or pleasure. Much less visible were those who tried to help the Jews in various ways—a crime punishable by death to the helpers and sometimes their families as well. Out of fear of denunciation, they often did their best to hide their actions from the Germans and their Polish neighbors alike.⁶ The inaction of bystanders also was not without consequence. On the one hand, German decrees penalized the failure to report on Jews spotted outside the ghetto. From the Nazi perspective, remaining passive in the face of a Jewish escapee was a crime that increased the escapee's chances of survival. On the other hand, the failure to help, be it by refusing to assist a Jew seeking shelter or turning one's head from a begging Jewish child, reduced the Jews' chances of survival and could break their will to try. In short, the

passivity of bystanders could be lethal. It is only in recent years that scholars have tried to analyze systematically the actions and inactions of the onlookers and to find terms more appropriate than “bystander.”⁷

Michael Steinlauf has rightly noted that if the Holocaust was an unprecedented crime, seeing it unfold was also an unprecedented experience. He was perhaps the first to interrogate the psychological consequences of witnessing the Shoah in Poland, including the long-term impact on the memory of past horrors, and this he did on the basis of solid, academic psychology. Steinlauf draws on a model developed by American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, who analyzed the consequences of massive death trauma (i.e., the trauma resulting from witnessing the mass, cruel death of others). According to Lifton, those affected by the trauma were often marked by a “death imprint” and “psychic numbing.” Both strategies, often involuntary and unconscious, diminish the capacity to feel (*I see you dying, but I am not related to you or your death*). A long-term consequence of such phenomena is sometimes what Lifton refers to as “death guilt,” that is, a struggle with guilt for having survived while others died, or for having survived, perhaps, at another person’s expense. It is the guilt “over what one has done to, or not done for, the dying while oneself surviving.”⁸ While many analyses have used psychological terms or popular psychological explanatory models, Steinlauf has applied a model developed by an expert, a psychiatrist noted for his studies of “the psychology of the survivor.”⁹ Steinlauf has also done so without neglecting important and specific historical factors, such as preexisting widespread anti-Jewish prejudice, appropriation of the victims’ property, or the general demoralization and brutalization brought by war. His analysis also intersects with the observations of philosopher of history Franklin Ankersmit, who elaborated on the nature and role of traumatic past—a past that is a record not of past events but rather of the impact of experiences that cannot be assimilated or accepted.¹⁰

Steinlauf’s claim that many non-Jewish Poles had likely been affected by what Lifton found in other groups exposed to mass death seems well founded. It leads to a better understanding of reactions to the Holocaust in Poland and other countries of what Timothy Snyder has called the “bloodlands” of Eastern Europe,¹¹ and it has important implications for Polish memory of the Holocaust and debates over it from the years of Nazi occupation to the present day. Not only are the effects of the trauma powerful; they can also endure for many years. According to Steinlauf,

those affected by the trauma struggle for moral and psychic renewal, for “emancipation from bondage to the deceased.”¹² This, however, takes time, and is not always successful, as the healing process may be blocked. For Steinlauf, the Poland that emerged from the horrors of Nazi occupation only to experience the oppressive and violent process of Sovietization was a place for “a vicious circle of unmastered history.”¹³ The notion that the experience of witnessing the persecution and destruction of Jewish neighbors has influenced the thoughts, emotions, and behavior of Poles many years later, or into the next generation, requires further analysis, as does the contention that conditions in communist Poland constrained healing, especially on the supra-individual level of social psychology. Yet even if only partially correct, both claims can help explain the peculiar emotional intensity of the Polish debates discussed here.¹⁴

Early Discussions of the “Final Solution” and Their Suppression in Communist Poland

Discussions among Polish observers about what exactly was happening, what it meant, and how to react to it began almost simultaneously with the killing and developed further as the Nazi “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” unfolded.¹⁵ There was initially much confusion about the character of Nazi policy toward the Jews, but as fragmentary news about particular killings gradually accumulated (and until mid-1942 only such fragmentary information was available), it became possible to form, inductively, an overall picture of the lethality and totality of the Shoah in the Polish lands. It took time, even for those who were most interested in the process and had access to diverse sources of information, such as the leaders of the Jewish underground in Warsaw. Only gradually did they come to realize they were watching fragments of an unprecedented crime—a crime that since late 1941 was an *Endlösung* (“Final Solution”) aiming at the systematic killing of all the Jews, not simply large numbers of Jews or those Jews unfit for labor or those in towns but every Jew in Poland and every Jew in German-controlled Europe.¹⁶

It was also far from obvious how non-Jewish witnesses were to react to the crime. Opinions varied greatly as to what kind of reactions were moral and justified, and what were possible and rational. Reports from the Polish underground, clandestine publications of the time, as well as diaries and memoirs offer diverse interpretations of the German anti-

Jewish actions. For example, some authors of clandestine reports relatively quickly realized the radical, total nature of Nazi anti-Jewish actions, while others continued to claim that news of the mass killing of Jews was exaggerated, or that the persecution of Jews and the treatment of ethnic Poles under the Nazi yoke were equally bad. Some voices in the Polish underground and in the Polish government-in-exile depicted Nazi anti-Jewish policies as a particular case of German crimes against Poland specifically, while others understood them as a part of a wider strategy against the Jews of Europe in general.

There was even greater variation among opinions as to how non-Jewish Poles could and should react to the crimes against the Jews. Thanks to substantial research on the topic in recent years, we know much more about the wide spectrum of these reactions. For example, some diarists noted expressions of horror and pity for Jewish suffering, while others expressed satisfaction that the Germans were solving the “Jewish question.” Some people risked their lives to help the Jews, while others saw such assistance as unnecessary endangerment of family and neighbors, who could, and in many cases did, suffer from German collective reprisals. Some underground publications called for aid to the Jews, while others protested against the crimes but claimed nothing could be done in the face of German domination and terror. Still others actively discouraged assistance to Jews, claiming the Jews had been enemies of Poles and Poland—especially under the Soviet occupation—hence, Poles had no obligation toward them. Some members of the Polish underground lobbied its leaders and the government-in-exile in London to issue a general call to the Polish population to come to the aid of the Jews, while others advised against it. Similarly, some of the exile leaders wanted to alert the free world of the mortal threat facing the Jews and demand action to stop the killing, while others were afraid of a Jewish “competition of victims” that might divert the attention among the public abroad from the suffering of ethnic Poles.

By 1943, it may have been clear to many Poles that nearly all the Jews in occupied Poland had been killed, but there was hardly a consensus over this fact or how to respond to it. For example, estimates from the Polish underground of the number of Jews still alive varied greatly, and those estimates from underground organizations of the nationalist right tended to be excessively high, as if their authors could not accept the scale of Jewish tragedy or that their long-held dreams of Poland without Jews materialized in such a horrible way. Neither was there any consensus about extending help to the tiny minority of Jews

who remained alive in hiding nor on the desirable postwar policies toward Jews. The official position of the Polish government-in-exile and its representatives in Poland was that all Polish citizens were to be considered equal, and that all decrees of the occupier, including those discriminating against any group, were null and void. Some voices in the underground warned, however, that full restoration of Jewish property and positions in the economy would be undesirable and would meet with resistance from those many Poles who had taken such property and assumed such positions. Not surprisingly, empathy with the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution—or the lack of such empathy—usually correlated with prewar positions on the “Jewish question.”¹⁷

Controversy about reactions to the Holocaust did not end in 1945. In the early postwar years, when the communists dominated the government but had not yet introduced a full-scale communist regime, Poland enjoyed some freedom of the press, which allowed for debates about the dramatic events of the recent past. A number of leading intellectuals, such as Jerzy Andrzejewski, Mieczysław Jastrun, Paweł Jasienica, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Maria Nałkowska, Stanisław Ossowski, Stefania Skwarczyńska, Stanisław Stomma, Jerzy Turowicz, and Kazimierz Wyka engaged in soul searching about the Polish behaviors toward the Jews during and after the war, especially after the bloody 1946 pogrom in Kielce, when forty-two Jews were killed. Facing the dark mystery of violent hatred against survivors, they investigated its roots in the prewar rise of antisemitism on the nationalist right, in anti-Judaism taught for centuries by the Catholic Church, and in the influence of Nazi propaganda during the war. They also discussed various forms of active and passive complicity in the murder and material gains made as a consequence of the genocide. One of the earliest debates over the Holocaust and antisemitism in postwar Europe, it unfortunately ended abruptly with the accelerated Sovietization of Poland beginning in 1948. Interestingly, some of the issues and arguments associated with these debates reemerged fifty years later—a theme this chapter will address below.¹⁸

Communist Poland was not a good place for any open debate, and especially not any debate about the recent past. While World War II was widely discussed and analyzed in the government-controlled media and school textbooks, the crimes against the Jews were blended into broader categories of Nazi crimes or marginalized, as were the histories of Jews and other ethnic minorities in general. While the marginalization of the genocide of Jews in public memory in these years was a much broader

phenomenon transcending the Cold War divide, in communist countries it had specific features. One was the internationalist distortion claiming that fascists had persecuted all peace-loving peoples of Europe and categorizing their victims by citizenship as, for example, Soviet, French, or Polish citizens. In the official narrative there had thus been “six million Polish victims,” with the fact that more than half of them had been killed for being Jewish gradually falling into oblivion. Holocaust research developed, however, in some pockets of Polish academia, especially after the destalinization of the mid-1950s, while writers and artists produced a surprisingly large number of books, poems, films, and paintings that confronted the horrible past, making at least some aspects of the Holocaust imprinted in Polish high culture. This past gradually acquired the name *Zagłada*—a Polish word for “annihilation” or “extermination,” close in meaning to the Hebrew *Shoah*. Scenes from *Zagłada* were also present in private narratives told and retold to relatives, neighbors, and friends, but many troubling memories were clearly suppressed or did not have adequate forms of expression.¹⁹

A sudden revival of public interest in the Holocaust and Polish reactions to it emerged, paradoxically, in 1968 during the so-called “anti-Zionist campaign,” an anti-Jewish hate campaign organized by the ruling communist party following the Six-Day War and responding to youth rebellion in Poland in March 1968. The propaganda claimed that student protests were orchestrated by a conspiracy of hidden Zionists and Jewish Stalinists, who were to be properly condemned and denounced. In a further paradox, it combined methods of Stalin-era mass hate campaigns with antisemitic tropes that had been developed and deployed by the nationalist right. Responding to Western criticism of the campaign, which often made references to the history of Polish antisemitism, propagandists emphasized the work of wartime Polish rescuers, brought to the fore stories of Jewish passivity and collaboration, and claimed that Israel had made a deal with West Germany to blame the Poles for Nazi crimes.²⁰ The campaign and its consequences—especially the mass emigration of thousands of Jews, including many scholars, writers, and artists—had a devastating impact on research and reflection on the Holocaust. The cultural liberalization of the 1970s made some room for the development of new Holocaust-related literature, but it was not until the 1980s, with the Solidarity revolution, expansion of non-conformist attitudes, and growth of free speech, that a gradual revival of public interest in this past and a growing readiness to discuss it became visible.

Debates in the 1980s and 1990s

Contemporary debates surrounding the Holocaust in Poland began with the controversy over Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, released in 1985. Consisting of interviews with Holocaust survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders, many of them filmed in eastern Europe, this powerful film brought to the fore the attitudes of the latter. The Polish government objected to the film as anti-Polish but permitted it to be shown in a few cinemas.²¹ In fact, Poland was the only European communist country to release it. Moreover, Polish television broadcasted in prime time a selection of excerpts from the film—in particular, fragments likely to be controversial for a Polish audience, such as those showing Poles expressing anti-Jewish prejudice or displaying a lack of empathy with the victims. To many Poles, these scenes came as a shock and brought the question of Polish attitudes toward the Jews to the public stage for the first time in years, both in the legally published media and in the bulletins of the Solidarity underground.²² The controversies surrounding *Shoah* were, however, quite limited in comparison to the debates in the years to follow.

Much greater debate erupted in 1987, with the publication of an article by Professor Jan Błoński, a literary historian, in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, one of the few legally published Catholic periodicals that were censored but not controlled by the communist party. Basing his analysis on two poems that Czesław Miłosz, the 1980 Nobel laureate, had written in response to the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, Błoński asked painful questions about Polish reactions to the Holocaust and Poles' responsibility—not for the killing, which Błoński put on the Germans, but for the failure to help and lack of empathy. Furthermore, he called on his compatriots to engage in a moral reckoning for the “indifference, which condemned Jews to much lonelier and more solitary deaths than they would otherwise have suffered.” He also exhorted Poles to accept a “shared responsibility” for the crime against Jews despite, as he insisted, that the Poles as a nation had not participated in the crime: “our responsibility is for holding back,” he argued, “for insufficient effort to resist.”²³

Błoński's voice sparked a heated national debate, involving both the legal and underground press, with dozens of articles appearing and hundreds of letters written to the editors. “The reaction [to the article] was greater than anything known in the course of the forty-two years during which I have edited the paper,” wrote the editor of *Tygodnik*

Powszechny Jerzy Turowicz. Most of the reactions were critical, following arguments of, for example, Władysław Siła-Nowicki, a respected lawyer and soldier of the underground Home Army during the war, who emphasized that non-Jewish Poles had also been subject to brutal Nazi rule and that they offered heroic help to the Jews despite the harshest of reprisals, including the death penalty and collective punishments that the Nazis applied to families and neighbors of helpers.²⁴

Two aspects of this debate stand out in particular. First, Błoński explicitly addressed and broke the unhelpful and discouraging pattern of a Polish–Jewish “dialogue of the deaf,” that is, mutual recriminations between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles, and a tendency of the latter for taking defensive and apologetic attitudes, which had been a barrier to sincere discussion and coming to terms with this past. Błoński proposed that the Polish public put aside the apologetics and defensive measures and engage in a frank and open debate about the responses to the Holocaust, including those most shameful or controversial. More importantly, it showed that the dividing lines in the discussions did not follow ethnic boundaries: the debate sparked by Błoński’s article, and the debates in the 1990s and 2000s over Polish responses to the Holocaust, were Polish–Polish, that is, among and between non-Jewish Poles. In this regard, it is significant that the journal in which Błoński published his article was a Catholic journal, and that the discussion it started was, to a large extent, a debate between Catholics of different perspectives. In the debates that followed, two parts of the Catholic Church played especially active roles. *Tygodnik Powszechny* represented the so-called “open church” of the liberal or progressive Catholic intelligentsia, which called for revision of apologetic narratives of the Polish–Jewish past. On the other end of the Catholic spectrum was the nationalist and socially conservative part of the Church, often defensive and unwilling to admit any antisemitic past. Its leader in the 1990s became Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, whose media conglomerate, led by the broadcaster Radio Maryja, was the main platform for the opponents of the “open church” and its positions on the Holocaust and Jewish–Polish relations.

Divisions among Polish Catholics were soon evident again in the next Holocaust-related debate, which began in 1989. It was sparked by criticism, coming mainly from Jewish personalities and organizations abroad, of the establishment of a Catholic Carmelite convent in a building next to the former Auschwitz concentration camp. The controversy revealed conflicting opinions on how the victims of the

camp should be commemorated, as well as ignorance and confusion, both in Poland and abroad, about the history and purposes of the camp (more on which below). For most non-Jewish Poles Auschwitz had become a symbol of Polish martyrdom, where many thousands of Poles suffered and perished, including Father Maksymilian Kolbe, who was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1982. The implosion of the communist regime made room for Christian symbols and ways of commemorating Polish (non-Jewish) victims—commemorative forms that were natural and unproblematic for the Polish public. For much of the Jewish and Western public in general, however, Auschwitz was the largest death camp and Jewish cemetery in Europe, and *the* symbol of the Holocaust. From this perspective, the location of the convent and growing presence of Christian symbols caused suspicions of a “Christianization” or “Polonization” of Auschwitz. Following protracted and difficult negotiations between Catholic and Jewish delegations, vitriolic and conciliatory statements for and against moving the convent to another location, and foot-dragging by the superiors of the nuns, the convent was relocated in 1993 due to the personal intervention of Pope John Paul II.²⁵

The conflicts over the Błoński article and the Carmelite convent subsided, but they did not resolve all the issues at stake. Rather, they raised essential questions—questions that remained unanswered and repeatedly ignited controversy in the years to follow. The subsequent debates can be categorized in two groups with related yet distinct themes, and with differing chronologies. One group, like the Błoński debate, has focused on the moral judgements and contemporary implications that have arisen in response to Polish reactions to the Shoah. These were, as noted above, generally Polish–Polish discussions. Debates in the other group have focused on Auschwitz—on commemoration at the site of the former camp, on what forms of commemoration are appropriate or inappropriate, and on what kinds of activity are permissible in the vicinity of the camp in general. Most of these disputes were Polish–Jewish or Christian–Jewish, with important roles played by actors from beyond Poland’s borders.²⁶

The debates over Auschwitz were concentrated in the 1990s, and culminated in 1998 with a heated controversy over a large wooden cross erected on the grounds of the former Carmelite convent and left standing after the nuns’ departure.²⁷ This, and many other controversies over Auschwitz, usually resulted from differences in Jewish and Catholic

approaches to commemoration of the dead and differing theological interpretations of the Shoah. To the surprise and shock of most Catholic Poles, who mark graves with crosses and associate redemption with suffering, many Jews found it highly insensitive to put the symbol of a religion that had persecuted Jews over many centuries in or adjacent to the world's largest Jewish cemetery, a symbol of genocide and a place stained by the blood of innocent victims.

No less important were differing perceptions of what Auschwitz had been. Auschwitz was the largest Nazi concentration camp complex, where some 150,000 Polish non-Jewish prisoners were deported, half of whom perished, as well as thousands of other prisoners, from Soviet POWs to Roma families. Beginning in 1942, with the construction of large gas chambers and crematoria in Birkenau, it became the largest killing center of the Nazi "Final Solution": of more than 1.1 million European Jews deported there, nearly 900,000 were killed immediately upon arrival, and some 200,000 were selected for slave labor, most of whom also perished. Throughout the years of Polish communism, Auschwitz was consistently represented as the most significant site and symbol of the martyrdom of Poles and "prisoners from many nations," yet this anti-fascist narrative rarely acknowledged the role of Auschwitz in the genocide of the Jews. Nearly an opposite interpretation held true for much of the Western public: Auschwitz was the most significant site and symbol of the Holocaust, and the Holocaust alone.²⁸ Given such differences in interpretation, the debates became highly politicized and came to revolve around basic questions: Whose Auschwitz is it? Who is the legitimate owner and custodian of the place? Who has or should have the right to make decisions about the site and its landscape? Some Jewish leaders issued calls to put the camp area under international control, while many of their Polish Christian opponents vehemently defended Polish sovereignty over the site and aimed to deny Jews any rights to it whatsoever.

The solutions to the controversies over Auschwitz that gradually emerged were not theological or based in new historical interpretations. Rather, they were practical, legal, and political. While hundreds of wooden crosses brought by self-styled "defenders of the cross" to the field next to the former Carmelite convent were removed, the large wooden cross remained, but it has become less visible behind the trees planted around the property. In legal terms, the Polish government introduced legislation that established special protective zones around the sites of Nazi death camps defined as "Holocaust Memorials"

(*pomniki zagłady*), according to which any public gathering, construction, or business activity required the special permission of provincial governors.²⁹ An effective political solution was the establishment of the Auschwitz International Council as an advisory body to the Polish Prime Minister. The council advises the Polish government not only with respect to matters of the Auschwitz memorial site and museum but also on matters relating to other former Nazi camps. It includes representatives of foreign organizations and institutions such as the World Jewish Congress, Yad Vashem—The World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and in this way, it has helped to internationalize the management of the camp area. These solutions appear to have been effective: after heated conflicts about Auschwitz in the 1990s, few emerged in the decades that followed.³⁰

The other line of debates that centered on Polish reactions to *Zagłada* erupted in 1994 when *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the main national daily, published an article by Michał Cichy about the killing of several Jews by the insurgents in the Warsaw uprising of 1944.³¹ Because the article was about specific events that were generally unknown to the public and were unclear, historians were called upon to verify Cichy's account.

Scholars used factual arguments, referred to archival documents and memoirs, and brought the methodology of historical investigation to high-circulation newspapers. Unlike the Błoński controversy, which was about a broad social phenomenon and was mainly of a moral character, this debate called upon historians to play an especially important role.

On the other hand, it also opened way to a perverse form of intellectual distortion: the detailed critique of any fact in order to demonstrate that nothing in the historical record can be claimed with certainty and to cast doubt upon any assertion. Such distortion was deployed in debates that followed and served as a substitute for the simple denial of facts.

Contemporary Debates

Controversy over Polish reactions to the Shoah culminated in the years 2000–2002 in the most significant and most intensive public historical debate ever experienced in Poland. It followed the publication of Jan T. Gross' book *Sąsiedzi: historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka (Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland)*,³² an account of the mass killing of Jews in the small town of

Jedwabne in July 1941, when at least 400 (the book claimed as many as 1,600) Jewish men, women, and children perished, most of them burned alive in a barn, at the hands of their Christian neighbors. The crime, vividly depicted in the book, became the topic of hundreds of articles in Polish newspapers and magazines, as well as innumerable reports and commentaries on television and radio. If one lived in Poland during those years, it was difficult *not* to hear of Jedwabne. As public opinion polls confirmed, nearly all adult Poles heard about the controversy, although opinions on key aspects of the crime remained divided.³³ Many public figures took part in the debate, including Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek and Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who issued a formal apology. For their part, the conference of Catholic bishops held a special service of penitence. The Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), which had been recently established with a primary mission to undertake research on the communist past, launched a major research project on the massacre and controversy surrounding it, which produced a monumental, two-volume publication *Wokół Jedwabnego* (“On Jedwabne”). Instytut Pamięci Narodowej also launched a formal investigation by the public prosecutor, who presented his findings in 2002 and issued his final report in 2003. The investigation confirmed that while German officers ordered and likely orchestrated the killing, its direct perpetrators were a few dozen Poles from Jedwabne and vicinity.³⁴

The Jedwabne debate was too complex to present it fully here; readers may easily find extensive analysis of it in other publications.³⁵ Worthy of emphasis here are, however, two of its features. First, in comparison to the Błoński debate, the Jedwabne controversy marked a dramatic shift in terms of Poles’ understanding of responsibility for and participation in the Holocaust. The discussion was no longer about passivity in face of German crimes or insufficient empathy with the victims but about active and willing participation in the killing. Moreover, Gross insisted that participation of Jedwabne Poles in the killing was widespread, if not universal, and that half of the adult men of Jedwabne were among the participants. Or, as the English edition of the book succinctly states: “the Polish half of a town’s population murders its Jewish half.”³⁶ Thus, for some participants in the debate, the killers were seen as representatives of the non-Jewish population of the town as a whole, and the town was seen as representative of Poland in general.³⁷ This contributed to the debate’s emotional intensity and impact, but it also exacerbated an

unfortunate tendency initiated by Jan Błoński in his 1987 essay discussed above.

Błoński began his article with Miłosz's poem "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto," but titled his article "Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto." Miłosz had articulated a problem that was both individual and universal—a challenge to each Christian (or non-Jews in general). Błoński made it collective and national—a challenge to the Poles. Articulating the challenge in such terms shifted the debate, and the debates that followed, from a universal into a particular, ethno-national framework. This not only hindered efforts to convey the lessons derived from the past to a broader, international public, but also hindered proper and nuanced analysis of the role of ethnicity and religion in shaping the reactions to the Shoah. Many of the participants in the debates assumed unreflexively that the key, if not the only factors shaping the reactions of Polish Catholics to the Shoah were their ethnicity, religion, and perhaps political orientation (especially for nationalists), while they largely neglected factors such as class, gender, level of education, position in the local community, and so on—factors that one would normally consider when analyzing any social phenomenon, including reactions to crimes or participation in them.

Historians, facing unprecedented demand for their knowledge and analysis, played key roles in the Jedwabne debate. Their articles as well as interviews with them appeared in mass circulation newspapers, and soon became themselves the object of analysis. The first such analyses appeared already in 2001 and grouped the scholarly interventions in the debate into four categories, depending on their degree of acceptance of Gross' claims and their assessment of the range, intensity, and nature of Polish antisemitism—two factors that, in fact, correlated.³⁸ The debate lasted more than two years, divided into a few stages of varying intensity. Its participants, both those who basically agreed with Gross and those who opposed him, showed a variety of positions and modes of argumentation, focusing either on factual analysis, moral analysis, or contemporary implications of the debated past. The debate and its international echoes strengthened the historians' status as experts and made their names and views known to a mass public. As a result, in the early 2000s academic historians enjoyed unprecedented authority in Poland.

The Jedwabne debate also contributed significantly to the development of Holocaust research in Poland, including the establishment in 2003 of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research in

Warsaw. The center and its periodical *Zagłada Żydów: studia i materiały* (“The Holocaust: Studies and Materials”) became the leading Polish outlet for research on the Holocaust and academic discussion of it. Over the course of only a few years, the center’s high research standards and critical approach earned international respectability. At the same time, however, the Jedwabne debate encouraged among some historians a certain entrenchment of positions that, in the long run, made their voices highly predictable. The controversy also provoked a backlash of denial, distortion, and vicious attacks on Holocaust historians—regrettable developments that would only escalate in the following years.³⁹

With the publication of Jan T. Gross’ next two books—*Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*, published in Poland in 2008, and *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, written with Irena Grudzińska-Gross and published in Poland in 2011⁴⁰—a radically apologetic camp, which loudly rejected Gross’ theses, became increasingly assertive. The first book addressed the postwar wave of anti-Jewish violence, culminating in the infamous pogrom in Kielce in June 1946. The second investigated the practices of “gold-diggers” who after the war penetrated the mass graves in former death camps in search of valuables. The debates surrounding these two books were similar to the Jedwabne controversy in terms of topics and positions taken, such as the question of the prevalence of antisemitic prejudice and its role in shaping Polish attitudes during and after the war, or the systematic attempts of Gross’ radical opponents to compromise him as a scholar.

Despite the efforts of some of the media to revive the intensity and scope of the discussions of 2000 to 2001, debates over *Fear* and *Golden Harvest* never elicited the same level of interest from the public, which by that point appeared to have reached a saturation point with respect to issues relating to Polish responses to the Holocaust and the frequently repetitive arguments associated with the controversies.

Meanwhile, various artists were reacting to the debates on Polish behavior during the Holocaust with novel, inspiring approaches. Among them were three works of art that reached wide audiences and sparked discussions themselves: the 2008 drama *Nasza klasa* (“Our Class”) by Tadeusz Słobodzianek, the 2012 film *Pokłosie* (“Aftermath”) by Władysław Pasikowski, and Paweł Pawlikowski’s masterful film *Ida*, which appeared in 2013 and won an Academy Award in 2015. All three offered powerful, visual narratives of Polish–Jewish relations during and after the war, evoking emotional responses among diverse publics, including the younger generation, and were strongly criticized by the

apologetic camp, which could not offer artistic productions of comparable quality or impact. Notably, *Nasza klasa* and *Ida* both won international acclaim and were widely perceived as addressing universal, rather than specifically Polish–Jewish questions, thereby challenging the “nationalizing” tendency in the debates discussed above.

The most recent controversy over Polish responses to the Holocaust erupted in January 2018, when the Polish government suddenly rushed to pass legislation (known as the “IPN bill” in Poland and the “Holocaust bill” abroad) that penalized certain statements about the past. The legislation stated: “Whoever publicly and contrary to the facts attributes responsibility or co-responsibility to the Polish Nation or the Polish State for Nazi crimes . . . or for other felonies that constitute crimes against peace, crimes against humanity or war crimes, or whoever otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the true perpetrators of said crimes, shall be liable to a fine or imprisonment for up to three years.”⁴¹

The bill had been prepared by the politicians of the Law and Justice (PiS) party, which won the 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections on a populist and nationalist ticket. An important part of its message was the claim that the liberal and left-leaning political and intellectual elites had neglected the heroic history of Poland and engaged in a “pedagogy of shame,” while Poles and Poland were objects of systematic defamation abroad. The bill and international criticism of it (the strongest coming from the Israeli government) generated a lively and often vitriolic controversy in Poland. Many historians of the Holocaust, World War II, and Polish–Jewish relations publicly opposed it as a threat to academic freedom that could hinder discussion of the past and intimidate scholars. They were joined by the Polish Historical Association, Polish Society for Jewish Studies, and university history departments. Proponents of the bill stressed the allegedly international aspects of the controversy, framing it as a conflict between Polish patriots, or Poles in general, and Israelis or “the Jews.” Both the public media, by then firmly under government control, and the media of the nationalist right supported the legislation as the proper way to defend the good name of Poland and national honor against slander and historical falsehoods, such as statements referring to “Polish death camps,” which repeatedly appear in media abroad. Under international pressure, the government eventually amended the act, removing the most controversial fragments in June 2018. In the meantime, however, the Internet in Poland was flooded with antisemitic posts and memes, fabricated reports, and conspiracy theories. In particular, the rhetoric that

had been deployed in opposition to Jan T. Gross' books was again mobilized and radicalized.⁴²

It is significant that most of the debate over the legislation took place online. One cannot understand the dynamics of the controversy without taking into account the dynamics of online social networks. The expansion of Internet access and social networks over the course of the last decade paralleled the decline of printed media, and all this has radically altered the ways in which Poles exchange opinions in public life. The Błoński debate took place mostly in weekly journals, allowing for longer articles and analyses, and imposing a relatively slow pace on the exchange of ideas. Contributions to the debate over *Jedwabne* appeared mainly in weekly and daily newspapers and magazines, with television and radio echoing and spreading their content.⁴³ Such printed media had editorial policies that aimed at a relatively diverse readership and wide circulation, and therefore tended to avoid extreme positions.

By contrast, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were the main platforms for the exchanges about the IPN bill. They favor short and quick messages, are often visual, and allow users to publish nearly anything while maintaining anonymity. Moreover, their secret algorithms favor highly emotional and controversial content. In sum, changes in the media infrastructure have essentially changed the rules and character of public debates, and consequently their outcomes. It is probably not coincidental that in recent years participants in various Polish public discussions seem to be losing the ability to find a common ground. Such discussions were once marked by efforts to convince others and reach a common conclusion. Today, they drift toward the model of political competition, as they attempt to attract those yet undecided and demobilize or exclude opponents.

We are thus witnessing a new phase of Polish debates on the Holocaust. The first took place under the German occupation, when fragmentary information spread slowly by word of mouth, secret reports, and underground publications. The second took place in the early postwar years, when limited freedom of speech allowed for the first, relatively open debate over Polish behavior toward Jews during and after the war. Then, throughout the four decades of communism, the media was under party control and the regime blocked open debate until the 1980s, when the gradual erosion of the regime's rigidity allowed for the controversy sparked by Jan Błoński. The democratic Poland of the 1990s and 2000s provided pluralist media—printed, and then electronic—for the subsequent debates discussed above. In the last decade these have

been replaced by the new media of the Internet, which shape communication in ways we are only beginning to understand. This means a partial but important shift in power to shape the debate: from Polish editors and media managers to impersonal (but human-engineered) algorithms and AI engines that decide what we are or are not provided online.

I have proposed the above chronology to stress the importance of political and material conditions for social communication regarding the character and outcomes of the debates; however, the passing of time brought not only changes in political conditions and media infrastructure but also generational changes. In the wartime and postwar debates, nearly all the participants were actual witnesses to the recent horrors.

They still played a role in the debates of late 1980s and 1990s, when personalities such as Władysław Bartoszewski, honored as a “Righteous among the Nations” and an outspoken public intellectual, and Marek Edelman, a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, were recognized by many as moral and historical authorities. Yet most of the participants in the 1990s and 2000s developed their opinions on the basis of second-hand knowledge, which sometimes originated directly from the communicative memory (i.e., the personal recollections of the witness), but increasingly came from publications, films, exhibitions, performances, and other cultural products that are the carriers of cultural memory.⁴⁴

Polish debates on the Holocaust do not appear to be exhausted, and we may expect another round in the not-so-distant future. We do not know what may spark it, but we do know that many of its stakes, terms, and arguments will draw upon previous debates, while the algorithms of the Internet media will influence its course and outcomes. This future debate will likely take place in a world without living witnesses of this past, which will make it different from previous discussions. Its participants, especially those of the younger generation, will derive their knowledge from Polish cultural memory or memories, which in turn have been shaped by the debates outlined above.

Notes

1. Most comprehensive among such publications is Piotr Forecki, *Od "Shoah" do "Strachu": spory o polsko-żydowską przeszłość i pamięć w debatach publicznych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), and in English: *Reconstructing Memory: The Holocaust in Polish Public Debates* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013). Other relevant analyses include, in alphabetical order, Jacek Borkowicz, Israel Gutman, and William Brand, eds., *Thou Shalt Not Kill: Poles on Jedwabne* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo "Więź," 2001); Sławomir Buryła, Dorota Krawczyńska, and Jacek Leociak, eds., *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady (1939–1968)* (Warsaw: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna / Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2012); Paweł Dobrosielski, *Spory o Grossa: polskie problemy z pamięcią o Żydach* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2017); Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski, *Przemoc filosemicka? Nowe polskie narracje o Żydach po roku 2000* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2016); Robert Jankowski, *Jedwabne: spór historyków wokół książki Jana T. Grossa "Śsiedzi"* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2002); Bartłomiej Krupa, *Opowiedzieć Zagładę: polska proza i historiografia wobec Holocaustu (1987–2003)* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2013); Marek Kucia, ed., *Antysemityzm, Holocaust, Auschwitz w badaniach społecznych* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011); Marcin Kula, *Uparta sprawa – żydowska? polska? ludzka?* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2004); Lech M. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci: esej socjologiczny* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008); Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak, *Niechciana debata: spór o książki Jana Tomasza Grossa* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Sedno, 2017); Antony Polonsky, ed., *"My Brother's Keeper?": Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 1990); Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, eds., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Rzeczy mgliste: eseje i studia* (Sejny: Fundacja Pogranicze, 2004); Robert Traba, *Przeszłość w teraźniejszości: polskie spory o historię na początku XXI wieku* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009); Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Tomasz Żukowski, *Wielki retusz: jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów* (Warsaw: Wielka Litera, 2018).
2. Dariusz Stola, "Reactions to the Holocaust: Poland, Fifty Years Later," paper presented at the Eighteenth International Congress of Historical Sciences, Montreal, August 1995.
3. On the number of Polish-Jewish survivors see Dariusz Stola, "Jewish Emigration from Communist Poland: The Decline of Polish Jewry in the Aftermath of the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 47, no. 2–3 (2017): 169–88.
4. On the close distance between the victims, local perpetrators, and observers in eastern Europe see, for example, Natalia Aleksiuń, "Intimate Violence: Jewish Testimonies on Victims and Perpetrators in Eastern Galicia," *Holocaust Studies* 23, no. 1–2 (2017): 17–33; Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).
5. Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992).

6. Recent studies of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research emphasize and show in detail various active roles of “bystanders.” See, for example, Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, eds., *Dalej jest noc: losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2018). See also Tomasz Frydel, “The Devil in the Microhistory: The ‘Hunt for the Jews’ as a Social Process, 1942–1945,” in *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, ed. Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 171–89.
7. Barbara Engelking et al., *Zarys krajobrazu: wieś polska wobec Zagłady Żydów 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011); Karolina Koprowska, *Postronni? Zagłada w relacjach chłopskich świadków* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2018); Justyna Kowalska-Leder, “Niewidoczni świadkowie Zagłady—biedni Polacy patrzą na Polaków,” *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2018): 324–35; Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak, “Świadkowie Zagłady—Holocaust jako zbiorowe doświadczenie Polaków,” *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 49, no. 2 (2000): 181–206; Roma Sendyka, “Od obserwatorów do gapiów: kategoria bystanders i analiza wizualna,” *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2018): 117–30; Roma Sendyka, “Poświadek, przeciw-postronny i (niczyja) trauma,” *Widok: teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* 18 (2017): 75–88.
8. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 57. See also Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
9. Robert J. Lifton, “The Psychology of the Survivor and the Death Imprint,” *Psychiatric Annals* 12, no. 11 (1982): 1011–20.
10. Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit, “Remembering the Holocaust: Mourning and Melancholia,” chap. 6 in *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 176–94.
11. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
12. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 57.
13. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 58.
14. Dariusz Stola, “Review of *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, by Michael C. Steinlauf,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 3 (1997): 426–30. For an opposing perspective see Elżbieta Janicka, “Pamięć przyswojona: koncepcja polskiego doświadczenia Zagłady Żydów jako traumy zbiorowej w świetle rewizji kategorii świadka,” *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 3–4 (2015): 148–227.
15. On the gradual emergence of total killing as the “Final Solution,” see Christopher R. Browning and Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Mark Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution* (London: Penguin, 2003).
16. Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?: Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 285–87; Dariusz Stola, “Early News of the Holocaust from Poland,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 1 (1997): 1–27.
17. See, among others, Dariusz Libionka, “‘Kwestia Żydowska’ w Polsce w ocenie Delegatury Rządu RP I KG ZWZ-AK w latach 1942–1944,” in *Zagłada Żydów: pamięć narodowa a pisanie historii w Polsce i we Francji*, ed. Barbara Engelking (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie Skłodowskiej, 2006), 41–56; Dariusz Libionka, “Polska hierarchia kościelna wobec eksterminacji Żydów—próba krytycznego ujęcia,” *Zagłada Żydów: studia i materiały* 5 (2009): 19–69; Dariusz Libionka, “ZWZ-AK i

- delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich,” in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945: studia i materiały*, ed. Andrzej Żbikowski (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006), 15–208; Dariusz Libionka, “Polska konspiracja wobec eksterminacji Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim,” in *Prowincja noc: życie i Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, ed. Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak, and Dariusz Libionka (Warsaw: Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2007), 443–504; Adam Puławski, *W obliczu Zagłady: Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na kraj, ZWZ-AK wobec deportacji Żydów do obozów Zagłady (1941–1942)* (Lublin: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009); Adam Puławski, *Wobec “niespotykanego w dziejach mordu”: Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na kraj, AK a eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej od “wielkiej akcji” do powstania w getcie warszawskim* (Chełm: Stowarzyszenie Rocznik Chełmski, 2018); Paweł Szapiro, *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka: polska prasa konspiracyjna o powstaniu w getcie Warszawy 1943–1944* (Londyn: Aneks, 1992); Alina Brodzka, Dorota Krawczyńska, and Jacek Leociak, eds., *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000); Dariusz Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada: Ignacy Schwarzbart–żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP (1940–1945)* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1995); David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
18. Joanna Michlic, “The Holocaust and Its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals, 1945–1947,” in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin after WWII*, ed. David Bankier (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 206–30; Dariusz Libionka, “Antysemityzm i Zagłada na łamach prasy w Polsce w latach 1945–1946,” *Polska 1944/45–1989: studia i materiały* 2 (1997): 151–90; Maryla Hopfinger and Tomasz Żukowski, eds., *Lata czterdzieste: początki polskiej narracji o Zagładzie* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2019). A selection of the articles from the period can be found in Adam Michnik, ed., *Przeciw antysemityzmowi 1936–2009*, vol. 2 (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2010).
 19. On communist Poland’s policies on the Holocaust, see Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945–1979* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory: The Politics of the Second World War in Communist Poland*, trans. Simon Lewis (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2015); Zofia Wóycicka, *Arrested Mourning: Memory of the Nazi Camps in Poland, 1944–1950*, trans. Jason Tilbury, *Warsaw Studies in Contemporary History*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).
 20. Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysemityzyczna w Polsce 1967–1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2000); Jacek Leociak, “Instrumentalizacja Zagłady w dyskursie marcowym,” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 4 (2008): 447–58.
 21. Forecki, *Od “Shoah,”* 132–48.
 22. Martyna Grądzka-Rejak and Jan Olszsek, *Holokaust, pamięć, powielacz: Zagłada Żydów i okupacyjne stosunki polsko-żydowskie w publikacjach drugiego obiegu w PRL* (Warsaw: Więź, 2020).
 23. Jan Błoński, “Biedni Polacy patrzą na Getto,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2 (1987).
 24. Turowicz is quoted in Antony Polonsky, “Introduction,” in Polonsky, “*My Brother’s Keeper?*,” 13. The volume features Błoński’s article and contributions from other major voices in the debate.

25. Władysław T. Bartoszewski, *The Convent at Auschwitz* (New York: George Braziller, 1991); Huener, *Auschwitz*, 235–37.
26. A third debate topic related to the first: the problem of the Holocaust victims' property and its restitution. This was the topic of a debate in 1999 in reaction to a complaint against Poland filed in a New York court regarding Poland's failure to compensate for the nationalization of Jewish property during the communist period. The issue repeatedly surfaced in other debates, usually raised by opponents of the critical approaches to Polish attitudes to Jews, who claimed that such criticism serves or could serve the unjustified property claims of foreign Jews. See Dariusz Stola, "The Polish Debate on the Holocaust and the Restitution of Property," in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, ed. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 240–58.
27. See the excellent analysis of this controversy by Zubrzycki, *Crosses of Auschwitz*.
28. Huener, *Auschwitz*; Wójcicka, *Arrested Mourning*. The camp received inmates of various status, from political prisoners and "reeducation prisoners" to hostages and victims of the euthanasia program. The largest group of deportees were Hungarian Jews, most of whom were killed shortly after arrival, without registration as prisoners.
29. "Ustawa z dnia 7 maja 1999 r. o ochronie terenów byłych hitlerowskich obozów zagłady," accessed 10 August 2023, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19990410412>. The restriction on business activity was a response to criticism of initiatives to open a supermarket close to the Auschwitz memorial site. Together with a similar controversy about a planned opening of a dance club in the town of Oświęcim (the German name of which is Auschwitz), they formed a separate part of the Polish debates about Auschwitz. Unfortunately, space constraints make it impossible to present fully these controversies here.
30. "Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau: Former German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp," Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, accessed 19 June 2023, <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/auschwitz-council/>. Between the end of the term of the Council in 2018 and mid-2022, the Polish government did not appoint new members (i.e., the Council in practice no longer existed), while the Auschwitz Museum and its director have been the objects of public attacks by the Polish far right.
31. Michał Cichy, "Polacy–Żydzi: czarne karty powstania," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29 January 1994.
32. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi: historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
33. Antoni Sułek, "Pamięć Polaków o zbrodni w Jedwabnem," *Nauka* 3(2011): 39–49.
34. Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 1, *Studia* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002); Machcewicz and Persak, *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 2, *Dokumenty* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002); Radosław Ignatiew, "Postanowienie o umorzeniu śledztwa," 30 June 2003, accessed 5 May 2019, <https://ipn.gov.pl/download/1/66087/SledztwowsprawiezaboojstwawJedwabnem.pdf>.
35. Polonsky and Michlic, *Neighbors Respond*. See also Forecki, *Reconstructing Memory*; Dariusz Libionka, "The Debate around the Jedwabne Massacre," in *Jewish Presence in Absence: The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland 1944–2010*, ed. Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2014), 847–96; Maciej

- Janowski, "Jedwabne, July 10, 1941: Debating the History of a Single Day," in *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, ed. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 59–90.
36. Gross, *Neighbors*, 9.
 37. For my criticism of this claim see Dariusz Stola, "Jedwabne: Revisiting the Evidence and Nature of the Crime," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 139–52.
 38. Andrzej Paczkowski, "Debata wokół 'Sąsiadów': próba wstępnej typologii," *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 March 2001; Joanna Michlic, "'At the Crossroads': Jedwabne and Polish Historiography of the Holocaust," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 31, no. 3 (2017): 296–306.
 39. Piotr Forecki, *Po Jedwabnem: anatomia pamięci funkcjonalnej* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2018); Bartłomiej Krupa, "Historia krytyczna i jej 'gabinet cieni': historiografia polska wobec Zagłady 2003–2013," *Zagłada Żydów: studia i materiały* 10 (2014): 721–67.
 40. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Strach: antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie: historia moralnej zapaści* (Kraków: Znak, 2008); Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote żniwa: rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach Zagłady Żydów* (Kraków: Znak, 2011). "Ustawa z 26 stycznia 2018 r. o zmianie ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej," accessed 10 August 2023, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20180000369/T/D20180369L.pdf>, quoted and translated in Rafał Pankowski, "The Resurgence of Antisemitic Discourse in Poland," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 12, no. 1 (Jan. 2018): 22.
 41. Michał Bilewicz et al., "Marzec w lutym? Studium stosunku Polaków do Żydów i historii Holocaustu w kontekście debaty wokół ustawy o IPN," *Nauka* 2 (2018).
 42. Zubrzycki, in *Crosses of Auschwitz*, correctly notes the influence of visual material spread by television channels on the debate about the crosses in Auschwitz in 1998.
 43. Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 109–18.

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