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Edited by Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic: The Neighbors Respond

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INTRODUCTION

“We were taught as children”—I was told by a seventy-year-old Pole—“that we Poles never harmed anyone. A partial abandonment of this morally comfortable position is very, very difficult for me.”

—Helga Hirsch, a German journalist, in
Polityka, 24 February 2001

THE COMPLEX and often acrimonious debate about the character and significance of the massacre of the Jewish population of the small Polish town of Jedwabne in the summer of 1941—a debate provoked by the publication of Jan Gross’s *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny, 2000) and its English translation *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001)—is part of a much wider argument about the totalitarian experience of Europe in the twentieth century. This controversy reflects the growing preoccupation with the issue of collective memory, which Henri Rousso has characterized as a central “value” reflecting the spirit of our time.¹ One key element in the understanding of collective memory is the “dark past” of nations—those aspects of the national past that provoke shame, guilt, and regret; this past needs to be integrated into the national collective identity, which itself is continually being reformulated.² In this sense, memory has to be understood as a public discourse that helps to build group identity and is inevitably entangled in a relationship of mutual dependence with other identity-building processes. As John Gillis has written, “The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.”³ Consequently, memory cannot be seen as static and unchanging. Rather, it is a representation of past reality, revised and modified according to the changing demands of present-day identity, something that is itself subject to modification.⁴

¹ Henry Rousso, *La hantise du passé: Entretien avec Philippe Petit* (Paris, 1998), 14. English translation: *The Haunting Past: History, Memory and Justice in Contemporary France* (Philadelphia, 2002).

² The “dark past” is a commonly used term in studies of collective memory. Similar recurrent locutions are the “difficult past” and the “troubling past.”

³ John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, 1994), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

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The retrieval of the “dark past” is further complicated by a problem that has been highlighted in the work of Franklin Ankersmit,⁵ who maintains that the only point when the past truly exposes itself to us is at the moment of trauma, which causes shock and pain. Trauma causes our convictions, categories, and expectations to shatter, and history is composed of traumatic collective experiences. The “traumatic past” is a record not of past events but rather of the impact of experiences that cannot be assimilated or accepted. It has a paradoxical character because it can be neither forgotten nor remembered. “Normal” history can be acquired, adopted, domesticated—traumatic history cannot. The traumatic past, whether private or national, exists within us like a foreign body of which we cannot rid ourselves. Yet, at the same time, there is a marked disinclination to confront these painful memories. Ankersmit argues that the only way to cope with such traumas is to accept that there is a conflict among different memories of the past. The discourse of the historian, which, he claims, merely examines the past but does not try to explore or penetrate it, must be replaced by that of traumatic memory.

Central to the recovery and understanding of the “dark past” have been the debates that have taken place in many countries in Europe about the origins and character of the genocide which the Nazis attempted to inflict on the Jewish people during the Second World War. These debates have been possible only in situations where the political culture has permitted a public reckoning with the more dubious aspects of the national past, and where there is a high level of acceptance of the practice of national self-criticism.⁶ Not surprisingly, they have gone furthest in Germany, first in the Federal Republic and subsequently in the united Germany that was established in 1989. Starting with the controversy over Germany’s responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War, aroused by the publication of Fritz Fischer’s *Griff nach der Weltmacht* in 1961, German historians have undertaken a thorough and complex reexamination of their country’s past, which culminated in the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s and the debate over Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. This has greatly clarified the problems of how the Nazis came to power, the nature of the regime they established, and how they came to adopt and implement their anti-Jewish genocide. A similar wide-ranging debate has also devel-

⁵ F. Ankersmit, “Remembering the Holocaust: Mourning and Melancholia,” in *Reclaiming Memory: American Representations of the Holocaust*, ed. P. Ahokas and M. Chard-Hutchinson (Turku, 1997).

⁶ The importance of the practice of self-criticism for the process of reckoning with the “dark past” is raised by Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance* (New Brunswick and London, 1994).

oped in France, although it started somewhat later, over the character of the Vichy regime, the nature of the antisemitic policies it implemented, and its responsibility for the deaths of perhaps a quarter of French Jews in the Holocaust. Analogous attempts to “overcome the past” have been undertaken in Austria, Switzerland, and elsewhere in Western and Central Europe, although the extent to which they have modified attitudes is debatable.

The question of local populations’ responsibility for the fate of the Jews in the Nazi genocide in East-central Europe began to be seriously discussed only after the collapse of communism in the area in 1989–1991. This was the case both in the states that were allied with the Nazis during the Second World War and in those occupied areas where no state-level collaborationist regimes were established by the Nazis, as in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Since then there has been considerable dispute in Romania about the role of General Ion Antonescu, and in Slovakia of Father Tiso, and of the conduct of the Nazi satellite regimes in Hungary and Croatia. There has also been a good deal of debate in Lithuania and Latvia, and rather less in Ukraine, about the participation of local militias in the mass murder of Jews.

The debate in Poland goes back somewhat further than in its neighboring countries. Poland, home of the largest Jewish community in Europe in 1939, was one of the principal areas where the Nazis attempted to carry out their planned genocide of European Jewry. It was here that the principal death camps were established, and that Jews were brought from all over Nazi-occupied Europe to be gassed, above all in Auschwitz, where probably one million lost their lives in this way. Over 90 percent of Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust, a death rate exceeded only in the Baltic states. Most of them died in the period before the end of 1942, when Nazi power was at its height, when there was little possibility either within Axis-occupied Europe or outside of halting their genocidal activities. But this has not stilled criticism of the response of Polish society. To the small group of Jews who survived in Poland or who returned from the USSR, Polish behavior during the war seemed to have confirmed their worst suspicions. It was clear to them that they were not wanted on Polish soil, and even that it was dangerous for them to remain in Poland. In their eyes, the Poles had stood aside while the Nazis had implemented their murderous plans. The small amount of assistance provided was, in their eyes, outweighed by the activities of the denouncers and blackmailers, while the attitude of the majority was, at best, indifferent. This feeling of alienation was strengthened by the postwar insecurity and the outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence that culminated in the Kielce pogrom of July 1946, in which at least forty Jews were murdered.

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Under these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that the assessment by the surviving Jews of the behavior of Polish society during the Holocaust should have been negative. According to Mordechai Tenenbaum, commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Białystok ghetto, whose memoirs were published shortly after the war:

If it had not been for the Poles, for their aid—passive and active—in the “solution” of the Jewish problem in Poland, the Germans would never have dared to do what they did. It was they, the Poles, who called out “Yid” at every Jew who escaped from the train transporting him; it was they who caught the unfortunate wretches, who rejoiced at every Jewish misfortune—they were vile and contemptible.⁷

A somewhat more moderate but still strongly critical view was expressed by Emanuel Ringelblum in his *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, written in hiding on the “Aryan” side in 1944:

The Polish people and the Government of the Republic of Poland were incapable of deflecting the Nazi steam-roller from its anti-Jewish course. But the question is permissible whether the attitude of the Polish people befitted the enormity of the calamities that befell the country’s citizens. Was it inevitable that the Jews, looking their last on this world as they rode in the death trains speeding from different parts of the country to Treblinka or other places of slaughter, should have had to witness indifference or even joy on the faces of their neighbors? In the summer of 1942, when carts packed with captive Jewish men, women and children moved through the streets of the capital, did there really need to be laughter from the wild mobs resounding from the other side of the ghetto walls, did there really have to prevail such blank indifference in the face of the greatest tragedy of all time?⁸

These views are echoed in the most important scholarly investigation of the problem, that by Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski,⁹ and are shared by the doyen of Holocaust historians, Yehuda Bauer. He has written:

⁷ Mordechai Tenenbaum, *Dapim min hadelekah* (Bet lohamei hageta’ot, hakibbutz ha-meuhad, 1947), 49–50.

⁸ Emanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, ed. Joseph Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski (Evanston, Ill., 1992), 7–8.

⁹ Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews during World War Two* (New York, 1968).

The picture that finally emerges is not a very pleasant one. There were some Poles who helped; there were groups of Poles who helped, too . . . [b]ut the majority, and that included the official underground linked to the Government-in-Exile in London and its armed forces, were either indifferent or actively hostile.¹⁰

Until recently, most Poles have rejected these charges and have attempted to explain the conditions that determined Polish behavior, and to assert that in no way could more assistance have been provided to the Jews. This response soon became an integral part of the wider process by which the postwar Communist regime attempted to transform all aspects of Polish society. During the Communist era, the memory of the Holocaust was subordinated to a far-reaching process of reworking and manipulation, which served the authorities' political and ideological needs. As a result, a specific representation of the Holocaust was constructed that became the paradigm for remembering this event in the Polish collective memory, and that was expressed and cultivated in a strictly controlled cultural scene, commemorative sites, official speeches, and historical narratives.

The process of reworking the memory of the Holocaust started during the Stalinist period (1948–1953). At this time, the genocide came to be perceived as an inconvenient subject for the newly established Communist regime, as well as for other Eastern European communist states such as East Germany. It could not easily be fitted into the obligatory Soviet narratives of the antifascist front of the working class and of the “Great Patriotic War.” Stalin’s growing obsession with Jewish matters, which culminated in the liquidation of Soviet Yiddish culture and the execution of the main Jewish cultural figures in the USSR, along with attempts to provide the Communist regime in Poland with a degree of national legitimation, also played a role in the official evaluation and presentation of the fate of the Jews during the Second World War. As a result, as Michael Steinlauf has described in the classic work on the subject, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, the Holocaust became marginalized and was repressed in public memory.¹¹ An illustration of this marginalization was the fate of the sites of Holocaust commemoration, such as the monument to the Warsaw ghetto fighters designed by Nathan Rappaport, which was unveiled in Warsaw in 1948.¹² Commemorations staged at that site were

¹⁰ Introduction to *ibid.*, iii.

¹¹ Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, 1997), 63–74.

¹² See, for example, Marcin Zaremba, “Urząd zapomnienia,” *Polityka*, no. 41 (13 October 2001): 72.

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designed not to emphasize its Jewish character and meaning. Indeed, one could argue that from its inception the site was transformed from a place of collective remembrance to one of ritual forgetting, a “collective amnesia” that was to be its chief characteristic until the 1980s.

The regime’s attitude toward the discussion of this aspect of Poland’s “dark past” also reflected the widespread conviction of its ideologues that “one should not stress Jewish matters.” The questioning of Polish attitudes and behavior toward Jews during the war was no longer allowed, and the postwar debate of 1945–1947 on Polish-Jewish relations and Polish antisemitism, which had been begun by a small group of intellectuals, was abruptly silenced in 1948.¹³ The discussion of these issues in literary and historical works also became taboo.

The reworking of the memory of the Jewish genocide was completed in the second half of the fifties and throughout the sixties when Władysław Gomułka was first secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR). It was part of the gradual process of the ethnonationalization of communism, in accordance with the frequently observed phenomenon that “all communism tends to become national communism,” and of the resurfacing of the “Jewish question” within the Party itself.¹⁴ This was also the period in which communist narratives became increasingly acceptable to and accepted by the general public. Michael Steinlauf has convincingly argued that this acceptance was possible only because “the official way of dealing with the memory of the Holocaust reflected, after all, a popular need.”¹⁵

As in the previous Stalinist period, the specific features of the Holocaust were subsumed by the “internationalization” of its victims. This was nowhere more apparent than in the commemorative rituals at the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site, where the word “Jew” was hardly mentioned and the Jewish victims were encompassed in the nationality of the countries from which they came. At the same time, the Holocaust was integrated into the specific national framework of the Polish collective memory of the war. The genocide of Polish Jews was usually presented as an integral part of the ethnic Polish tragedy, as in the statement that “six million Poles died during the war,” which also strengthened the popular belief that the Poles had suffered more than

¹³ On the first postwar debate on the “dark past” in Polish-Jewish relations, see, for example, Joanna Michlic, “The Holocaust and Its Aftermath As Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals, 1945–1947,” in *The Return of Jews to Europe, 1945–49*, ed. David Bankier (forthcoming Jerusalem, 2004).

¹⁴ On the development of the patterns of remembering the Holocaust during the communist era, see, for example, Lucy Davidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 88–124; and Steinlauf, *Bondage*, 62–88.

¹⁵ Steinlauf, *Bondage*, 74.

any other nation during this period.¹⁶ This, in turn, led to the presentation of the Holocaust as an event somehow parallel to the ethnic Polish tragedy of the war: Jewish deaths were described as numerically equivalent to ethnic Polish deaths, and the distinction between the fate of Poles and Jews was blurred.

In addition, the memory of the Polish “dark past” continued to be neutralized and silenced in the public sphere. If negative Polish behavior was mentioned at all, as in the case of the blackmailers who preyed on Jews attempting to hide on the “Aryan side,” this was presented as a marginal social problem, limited to a small and unrepresentative group, a phenomenon that was paralleled in other European countries. Discussion of such issues was also generally confined to a small number of publications, usually of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Warsaw, which were not intended for mass circulation. Official history emphasized the solidarity of Polish society with the Jews and the widespread support for attempts to rescue and hide Jews. It clearly served the Party’s attempt to present itself as a national body representing the interests of the Polish people. This was part of a process, which was particularly marked in the Gierek years (1970–1980), of stressing the “moral and political unity of the nation” and avoiding controversial topics or issues that could highlight negative aspects of its citizens’ behavior. It evoked a largely positive response, since it catered to the universal human desire to avoid confrontations with the less creditable aspects of the past.

It should be stressed that these narratives were not constructed by the Polish United Workers’ Party but appropriated from the anticommunist opposition. During the war, as David Engel has demonstrated, the Polish government-in-exile, embarrassed to learn of antisemitic views among Poles under Nazi occupation, attempted to protect the country’s “good name” by promoting such conceptions.¹⁷ This response can be seen even earlier. For instance, when accounts of anti-Jewish violence after the First World War emerged in the West, many Poles reacted defensively, convinced that Poland’s “honor” and “reputation” were being attacked by unnamed forces who wished to under-

¹⁶ Polish studies carried out since the fall of communism have established that a maximum of 2 million Polish Christians were killed during the war. These studies have corroborated the figure of 3 million Polish Jews killed. The studies, by Prof. Krystyna Kersten and others, were published in 1994 in the Warsaw journal *Dzieje Najnowsze* 26, no. 2. Estimates of Polish casualties at Soviet hands have also recently decreased and are probably around 200,000.

¹⁷ See D. Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1987) and *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993), *passim*.

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mine the country's newly won independence. In the fifties and sixties, such views were also frequently disseminated in Polish émigré circles and by individuals in Poland who had themselves been victims of Stalinist repression. "Official history" narratives have also been a feature of the debate about *Neighbors*.

In the late sixties, the "Partisan" faction within the Party, led by General Mieczysław Moczar, undertook a further tendentious reworking of the memory of the Holocaust, which resulted in the construction of a radical version of the dominant paradigm embodying strongly anti-Jewish elements.¹⁸ This version became an integral part of the official antisemitic campaign, which culminated in the "anti-Zionist" purge of 1968.

The Partisans represented the ethnonationalist faction within the Party, and their ideological position was an eerie reincarnation of the views of the prewar National Democratic Party (Endecja), which had seen in "the Jew" a major threat to Poland and its people.¹⁹ Indeed, they even at times exploited the traditional stereotype of Judeo-communism (*Żydokomuna*). The Partisans' acceptance of this antisemitic stereotype inevitably led to a mind-set that saw the Holocaust, with its specifically Jewish character, as a threat to their emphasis on Polish wartime martyrdom and suffering, as well as to their use of their own partisan past to establish a degree of legitimacy for the unpopular communist regime. In turn, this led to the replacement of the previous official narrative of the "parallel" fates of Jews and Poles during the war with a more radical version that *equated* the fates of Jews and Poles, stressing that the two groups were similarly persecuted by the Nazis. A good illustration of this shift was the revision in 1968 of the entry "Nazi concentration camps" in volume 8 of the 1966 *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna* (Great universal encyclopedia). The editors of the original article had distinguished between the annihilation camps, in which almost all the victims were Jews, and the concentration camps, in which many of the prisoners were ethnic Poles. In the Partisans' amended version this distinction was explicitly repudiated, and the

¹⁸ Mieczysław Moczar was a leading figure in the communist underground in Poland during the war. Demoted together with Gomułka in 1948, he returned to office after 1956, first as deputy minister of the interior and then as minister of the interior. As leader of the "Partisans' Group" within the PZPR, he hoped to establish a firmer base for communism in Poland by making it more nationalistic and populist.

¹⁹ The Endecja, the commonly used acronym for the National Democratic Party, was a prewar nationalist movement that enjoyed wide public support. Its leader Roman Dmowski is known as the father of Polish ethnic nationalism. The Endecja was characterized by various anti-Jewish views and practices.

editor responsible for the original article, who was of Jewish origin, was dismissed.

The Partisans' concept of the equal fate of Poles and Jews under Nazi occupation can be viewed as a manifestation of the peculiar and distasteful competition over "who suffered most," a competition that has remained an integral element of the Polish apologetic position and has been a feature of the debate over Jan Gross's *Neighbors*. It has a "non-suffering" variant, which claims that whatever wrongs the Poles may have committed against the Jews, these are equaled, if not outweighed, by the wrongs that the Jews committed against the Poles. In his diary in 1970, the historian Witold Kuła commented acidly, "In the past the Jews were envied because of their money, qualifications, positions, and international contacts—today they are envied because of the crematoria in which they were burned."²⁰

Alongside this concept of the equal fate shared by Poles and Jews, the Partisans developed another theme that has since become firmly established in the apologetic arsenal, the argument that, in the West, Polish martyrdom was being downplayed, because of Jewish "antipolonism," a prejudice similar to antisemitism. This idea developed at a time when critical accounts of Polish behavior toward the Jews during the war appeared in the West. The Partisans seized on simpleminded presentations that described the Poles as "eternal antisemites" and accomplices to the Nazi genocide. Given that Polish-Jewish relations were often presented in Western Europe, North America, and Israel in a highly superficial and biased manner, this struck a chord. The Partisans exploited resentment of these stereotypical images among Poles both in the country and in émigré circles to advance their political ends, hoping to portray the West as "anti-Polish" and themselves as the defenders of Polish national honor. Any investigation into the negative aspects of the Polish past was also labeled "anti-Polish," and anyone undertaking such an investigation was seen as a tool of "antipolonism."

Along with the sanitized version of the Polish past that they promoted, the Partisans also highlighted negative aspects of Jewish behavior with the aim of presenting Polish treatment of the Jews in a more favorable light. They stressed the "lack of gratitude" on the part of Polish Jews toward Poles who had assisted them, their "anti-Polish" behavior during the war, their passivity in the face of the genocide, and the collaboration of the Jewish Councils and Jewish Police with the Nazis. In this last area, they frequently cited the work of

²⁰ Witold Kula, *Rozdziałki* (Warsaw, 1996), 213.

Hannah Arendt. These motifs have also been elaborated upon during recent years.

Given the fact that by the late sixties the Partisans had managed to obtain control of a large segment of the national mass media as well as institutions of national heritage and education, their version of the Holocaust cannot be regarded as insignificant. As Michael Steinlauf has pointed out, it was at this time that the memory of the Holocaust was expelled from public consciousness.²¹ The Partisans also succeeded in sweeping the issue of the “dark Polish past” completely under the carpet. Moreover, their version of Holocaust memory was to become the basis for the “radical apologetic” position with its anti-Jewish elements, a point of view that has been held in the past two decades not only by former national communists but also by a variety of right-wing ethnonationalists. This was apparent in the acrimonious debate over the future of the Carmelite convent in the Auschwitz concentration camp, and its legacy is clearly to be seen in the debate over *Neighbors*.²²

Indeed, it is striking that one of the most characteristic articulations of the apologetic point of view on the Polish-Jewish past should have been set out, not by one of the national communists, but by the late Władysław Siła-Nowicki, a prominent opposition lawyer and former resistance fighter. In a 1987 article he attacked those who voiced a harsh assessment of the Polish record during the Second World War in relation to the Jews, arguing that such views played into the hands of Poland’s enemies and lent credibility to “anti-Polish propaganda.” He then rehearsed the arguments already described as characteristic of the apologetic position. For centuries, he asserted, when they were expelled elsewhere, Jews were able to settle in Poland and their numbers increased remarkably. The hostility they aroused before 1939 was moderate considering their privileged position. They “dominated” certain professions and controlled a “disproportionate part” of wealth in Poland. The prewar quota on university admissions (the *numerus clausus*) for Jews was justified since “it is natural for a society to defend itself against the numerical domination of its intelligentsia.” During the war, no European nation did more to assist Jews than Poland, where the risk of such assistance was the greatest, the normal penalty being death—and death not only of the individual but of his or her family as well. Polish suffering during the occupation was enormous, second only to that of the Jews. There were, he argued, no quislings in Poland, and the Polish underground sentenced to death those who betrayed

²¹ Steinlauf, *Bondage*, 75–88.

²² See Władysław T. Bartoszewski, *The Convent at Auschwitz* (London, 1990).

Jews to the Nazis. It was the passivity of the Jews, more than anything else, that led to their destruction. Habits of accommodation, presumably different from those of the rebellious, insurrectionary Poles, caused them to go to their deaths without offering resistance. He concluded defiantly (and inconsistently):

I am proud of my nation's stance in every respect during the period of occupation, and in this I include the attitude toward the tragedy of the Jewish nation. Obviously, attitudes toward the Jews during that period do not give us a particular reason to be proud, but neither are they any grounds for shame, and even less for ignominy. Simply, we could have done relatively little more than we actually did.²³

There was, however, a persistent minority position that took a much more critical view of the Polish-Jewish past and of Polish behavior during the Holocaust. In the immediate postwar period, before the imposition of a rigidly Stalinist and Soviet-dominated regime, there were several efforts to come to terms with these issues. It was at this time that Michał Borwicz and his colleagues at the newly established Jewish Historical Commission (the precursor of the Jewish Historical Institute) initiated a very valuable attempt to document the events of the Shoah and to preserve the testimony of the survivors. Several courageous Polish voices also castigated the evil of antisemitism. They included the writer Jerzy Andrzejewski who observed in 1947:

For all honest Poles, the fate of the perishing Jews must have been exceedingly painful, for the dying were people whom our people could not look straight in the face, with a clear conscience. The Polish people could look straight in the face of Polish men and women who were dying for freedom, not in the face of the Jews dying in the burning ghettos.²⁴

The Kielce pogrom provoked the sociologist Stanisław Ossowski to write:

A more far-sighted, cynical or wily person, or someone with greater historical knowledge, might have recalled that sympathy is not the only reaction to the misfortune of others; that those whom the gods have singled out for extinction easily become re-

²³ Władysław Siła-Nowicki, "Jan Błoński w odpowiedzi," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 22 February 1987. For an English translation, see Antony Polonsky, ed., *'My Brother's Keeper?' Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (London, 1990), 59–68.

²⁴ J. Andrzejewski, "Zagadnienia Polskiego Antysemityzmu" (The problem of Polish antisemitism), in *Martwa fala* (The dead wave) (Warsaw, 1947).

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pugnant to others and are even removed from inter-human relations. He might also recall that if one person's tragedy gives someone else an advantage, it often happens that people want to convince themselves and others that the tragedy was morally justified. Such persons as the owners of former Jewish shops or those who harass their Jewish competitors can be included in this group. And perhaps by citing a whole array of historical examples, I could express my doubt as to whether the reaction against the Nazi achievements will, in the short run, root out the influences of the Nazi spirit which, within the course of a few years, attained so much and which led human awareness to become inured, because of their frequent repetition, to certain offensive slogans.²⁵

However, the political climate exercised a baleful effect on these attempts to "overcome the past," and it was only in the late 1970s and the 1980s that a new willingness began to develop to look again at the thorny and difficult problem of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. This was an inevitable consequence of the growth of interest in the Polish-Jewish past that was a feature of those years. It was increasingly realized in Polish oppositional circles that Poland had been for nearly seven hundred years one of the main centers of the Jewish Diaspora, and from the early 1980s, the importance of the development of this community for Polish life was widely recognized. Departments of Jewish history were created at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the University of Warsaw, the University of Lublin, and a number of other centers. Interest in the Jewish past became widespread. Books on Jewish subjects disappeared rapidly from the shops, plays on Jewish themes were sold out, and performances of visiting Israeli dance companies or orchestras were greeted with rapturous applause. Jewish history and culture were also among the subjects studied by the underground "flying university" in the late 1970s. Similarly, at that time the Catholic Church and the opposition began to sponsor "Weeks of Jewish Culture" in a number of cities, during which schoolchildren and university students attended lectures on Jewish topics and participated in the restoration of Jewish cemeteries. Catholic monthlies like *Znak* and *Więź* devoted entire issues to Jewish topics, a phenomenon that has continued since the end of communism in 1989. One of its most striking manifestations has been the enormously popular annual Festival of Jewish Culture in Kraków.

This interest is partly nostalgic in character. Poland today is practically monoethnic and monoreligious (although this homogeneity

²⁵ Quoted by Yisrael Gutman in "Ethical Problems of the Holocaust in Poland," in Polonsky, *My Brother's Keeper?*, 205.

should not be exaggerated), and there is a genuine sense of loss at the disappearance of the more colorful Poland of the past, with its mixture of religions and nationalities. It does, however, have a deeper character. The experiences of the Solidarity years also gave the Poles a greater sense of self-esteem. In sharp contrast with the traditional stereotype of the Poles as quixotic and impractical political dreamers, in these years Poland astonished the world by its political maturity. A nonviolent movement challenged the might of the Soviet Empire for nearly a year and a half, and though it was finally crushed, it paved the way for the negotiated end of communism less than ten years later. Under these conditions, there was a greater willingness to look at the more controversial aspects of the Polish past and to consider again more critically how the Poles had treated the other peoples alongside whom they had lived, above all the Jews and the Ukrainians.

Increasingly, too, particularly among the younger generation, there was a growing feeling of shame over the events of 1968. At the time, the prevailing mood had it that this was merely a settling of accounts among the communist elite, and that all the Party factions fighting for power were equally tainted. By the late 1970s, however, the realization emerged that one of the consequences of those years had been to deprive Poland of most of what remained of its Jewish intelligentsia, and that society had allowed itself to be manipulated by the crude use of antisemitic slogans; this led to an increasing feeling of anger. The role of the 1968 crisis in depriving the communist regime of political legitimacy has, in general, been greatly underestimated.

A further factor stimulating a more critical look at the Polish-Jewish past and, in particular, at Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust was the series of Polish-Jewish historical conferences that began at Columbia University in spring 1983 and culminated in the conference in Jerusalem in February 1988. All points at issue between Poles and Jews were extensively aired, and the discussions were often acrimonious, painful, and difficult. Of one such discussion at Oxford in September 1984, the literary critic Jan Błoński wrote:

I recall one moving speech at the Oxford conference, in which the speaker started by comparing the Jewish attitude to Poland to an unrequited love. Despite the suffering and all the problems which beset our mutual relations, he continued, the Jewish community had a genuine attachment to their adopted country. Here they found a home and a sense of security. There was, conscious or unconscious, an expectation that their fate would improve, the burden of humiliation would lighten, that the future would gradually become brighter. What actually happened was exactly the oppo-

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site. "Nothing can ever change now," he concluded. "Jews do not have and cannot have any future in Poland. Do tell us, though", he finally demanded, "that what has happened to us was not our fault. We do not ask for anything else. But we do hope for such an acknowledgement".²⁶

Błoński correctly understood this to be a call for Poles to accept some responsibility for the fate of the Jews during the war, and it was one of the spurs that led him to write his pathbreaking article, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," from which this quotation is taken.

A final factor in provoking discussion of these thorny issues was Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. When it was first shown in Paris, it was bitterly attacked by the official Polish press as an anti-Polish provocation, and the Polish government even delivered a note of protest to the French government, which had partly financed the film. When *Shoah* was finally shown in Poland, as a result of a change of heart on the part of the authorities, reactions were more complex. Most Poles rejected Lanzmann's division of European society during the Holocaust (particularly in Poland) into the murderers, their victims, and the bystanders, largely unsympathetic to the fate of the Jews. Yet many were shocked by his interviews with Polish peasants living in the vicinity of the death camps, which revealed the persistence of crude anti-semitic stereotypes in the Polish countryside. For Catholics, which of course meant the overwhelming majority of Poles, Lanzmann's argument that Nazi antisemitism was the logical culmination of Christian antisemitism was also unacceptable. But it, too, forced a reexamination of many strongly held attitudes.

The most characteristic expression of the more critical attitude toward the Polish-Jewish past was set out by Jan Błoński in the article referred to above. In it, he observed that any attempt by Poles to discuss Polish reactions to the Nazi anti-Jewish genocide, whether with Jews or with other people, very quickly degenerates into apologetics and efforts to justify Polish conduct. The reason for this, he claimed, was the Poles' fear, conscious or unconscious, of being accused either of participation in this genocide or, at best, of observing it with acquiescence. This fear cannot be easily evaded, even if it is shared by the Poles with the rest of Europe. The only way to deal with it, he asserted, was for the Poles to "stop haggling, trying to defend and justify ourselves. To stop arguing about the things that were beyond our power to do, during the occupation and beforehand. Nor to place blame on

²⁶ Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na ghetto," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 11 January 1987. Taken from the English translation in Polonsky, 'My Brother's Keeper?', 45.

political, social and economic conditions. But to say first of all, 'Yes, we are guilty'."

This guilt did not consist, in his view, of involvement in the mass murder of the Jews, in which he claimed the Poles did not participate significantly. It had two aspects. First, there was the Poles' "insufficient effort to resist," their "holding back" from offering help to the Jews. This was the consequence of the second aspect, that the Poles had not in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created conditions in which the Jews could be integrated into the Polish national community.

If only we had behaved more humanely in the past, had been wiser, more generous, then genocide would perhaps have been "less imaginable", would probably have been considerably more difficult to carry out, and almost certainly would have met with much greater resistance than it did. To put it differently, it would not have met with the indifference and moral turpitude of the society in whose full view it took place.²⁷

These Jewish "accusations" and Polish "apologetics" and "apologies" are, above all, concerned with how one should respond to the past and deal with a shared but divisive memory. This divided memory is very difficult to overcome. For both Poles and Jews, memory is a key element in the public discourse that helps to build group identity. Thus it is not surprising that Father Edward Orłowski, the Catholic priest in Jedwabne, should say without any sense of embarrassment, "The Jews have their memory [of the massacre that took place in the town] and we have ours."

The controversy over Błoński's article revealed that the desire to come to terms with the more problematic aspects of the Polish-Jewish past was to be found only within a minority of the Polish intelligentsia and was certainly not shared by the society as a whole. Błoński's position was rejected by most of the two hundred individuals who participated in the debate. Characteristically similar criticism was voiced by people with very different ideological backgrounds ranging from Communist official circles to the right wing of Solidarity. Many accused Błoński and the editors of *Tygodnik Powszechny* of playing into the hands of Poland's enemies and of endorsing anti-Polish propaganda, and some even called for Błoński to be prosecuted under the Polish criminal code for "slandering the Polish nation." These reactions were a clear indication of how little public acceptance there was of the

²⁷ Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na ghetto," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 11 January 1987. Taken from the English translation in Polonsky, 'My Brother's Keeper?', 34-52.

need to come to terms with the Polish “dark past” or to reevaluate the memory of the Holocaust.

The years since the negotiated end of communism in Poland in 1989 have been followed by a series of set-piece debates similar to that aroused by Błoński’s article. The first of these was the controversy initiated by the publication in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 29–30 January 1994 of an article by a young (non-Jewish) journalist, Michał Cichy, entitled “Poles and Jews: Black Pages in the Annals of the Warsaw Uprising.” In it, Cichy discussed anti-Jewish attitudes and actions on the part of Polish military organizations and the civilian population during the sixty-three-day Warsaw Uprising launched against the Germans on 1 August 1944. In particular, he described individual and group murders of several scores of Jews, by the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne), and by some units of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa [AK]). Although Cichy’s revelations were confirmed by three leading historians of the Second World War in Poland—Andrzej Paczkowski, Andrzej Friszke, and Teresa Prekerowa—a majority of discussants (including Tomasz Strzembosz, who has played a large role in the discussion of *Neighbors*) refused to accept them. In addition, groups of ex-soldiers of the Home Army and “representatives of the Polish intelligentsia” signed protests objecting to the publication of the article and accusing *Gazeta Wyborcza* of “anti-Polish” and “anti-goyish” prejudice (this latter remark was an antisemitic reference to the Jewish origin of the paper’s principal editor, Adam Michnik). The controversy also brought to the surface old claims that communism was a Jewish phenomenon (*Żydokomuna* or Judeo-communism), and that the Jews had been responsible for the vicious postwar propaganda campaign against the AK and had played a key role in the security establishment of the postwar communist regime. Cichy’s assertions, it was argued, were merely a repetition of discredited Stalinist propaganda against the Home Army. One could not understand attitudes toward the Jews if one did not take into account Jewish “collaboration” with the Soviets in eastern Poland between 1939 and 1941. When talking about alleged Polish crimes against the Jews, one needed also to remember the role of Jewish communists in the post-1944 regime and the crimes they had committed against Poland.²⁸

²⁸ The debate, including publication of letters and phone calls received by *Gazeta Wyborcza*, was published on 2, 3, 7, 11, and 12–13 February 1994. The responses by the historians Andrzej Friszke, Andrzej Paczkowski, and Teresa Prekerowa, and Włodzimierz Borodziej and Tomasz Strzembosz, were published in the issue dated 5–6 February. See *Intelligence Report—Article on Warsaw Uprising Touches Raw Nerve in Polish-Jewish Relations*, no. 8 (April 1994), 1–2, published by the Institute of Jewish Affairs (London, 1994),

On this question, Andrzej Paczkowski of Warsaw is conducting pioneering research. He and Lech Głuchowski have assessed the nationality of functionaries in the *Urząd Bezpieczeństwo* (UB), the political police in Stalinist Poland, making use of a confidential study prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1978. According to this study, between 1944 and 1945, 287 individuals held leadership positions in the UB. The number of those listed as having “Jewish nationality” totaled 75. This meant that Jews made up 26.3 percent of the UB leadership, while the figure for Poles was 66.9 percent. The remaining 6.8 percent were Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. The proportion of Jews at lower levels of the organization was considerably less. In another document, Stanisław Radkiewicz informed Bolesław Bierut that in November 1945 the Security Office employed 25,600 personnel, and that 438 (1.7 percent) of them were Jews. Furthermore, the rapid increase in the number of UB functionaries in 1945 occurred in a political framework that placed the political orientation and class origins of the candidate above almost all other considerations. To quote Paczkowski and Głuchowski:

The great majority of candidates actually consisted of young—and very young—political transients, with no professional experience and mixed reasons, if not questionable motives, for joining the UB. There was a constant movement of lower-level cadres in and out of the UB between 1945 and 1946. At this time, approximately 25,000 employees left the UB: about the same number that were employed by the UB at the end of 1946. The majority had been released from the UB for drunkenness, theft, abuse, or for a lack of discipline.²⁹

Similar debates were provoked by the exchange in the pages of *Tygodnik Powszechny* in late 1997 between Fathers Stanisław Musiał and Waldemar Chrostowski on the reaction of the Polish hierarchy to the antisemitic utterances of Father Henryk Jankowski,³⁰ and by the article “The Disgrace of Indifference” (“Hańba obojętności”) by the sociologist Hanna Świda-Ziemba, which appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 17 August 1998 and which repeated in sharper form the arguments set out by Błoński.

and J. Michlic, “The Troubling Past: Polish Collective Memory of the Holocaust,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 29, nos. 1–2 (1999): 79–80.

²⁹ Letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 March 1997. See also Paczkowski’s article in *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 16 (2003): 453–64.

³⁰ This debate was translated into English in *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (2000): 303–28.

What is striking about these debates is their moral character. It is no accident that several of them took place in a progressive Catholic periodical. They have mostly been conducted by theologians, philosophers, and literary critics (the Cichy debate constitutes something of an exception, although the responses to his very specific analysis were also characterized by the retreat into vague generalizations). However, as was pointed out by Jerzy Turowicz, the veteran editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny* who died in 1998, the argument between the two sides was “conducted on totally different planes.”³¹ What was at issue here, according to the Polish-Jewish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who was forced to leave Poland in 1968, is what he describes as the “rationality of evil.” The process of mass murder rested on persuading all involved, both victims and bystanders, that it was more sensible to cooperate than to resist, whether by false claims that what was occurring was merely resettlement, by holding out the hope that some would survive, or by stressing the penalties for noncooperation:

Siła-Nowicki and Błoński do not argue with, but past, each other. Błoński wrote of the moral significance of the Holocaust, Siła-Nowicki responded with an investigation of the rationality of self-preservation. What he failed to notice was the ethical meaning of the very form such rationality took (or, rather, was forced to assume): the very fact that the Nazi regime set the logic of survival against the moral duty (as a value superior to ethics) was simultaneously the secret of the technical success of the mass murder, one of the most sinister horrors of the event called the ‘Holocaust’, and the most venomous of its consequences . . .³²

In fact, as Bauman correctly states,

. . . the issue is not whether the Poles should feel ashamed or whether they should feel proud of themselves. The issue is that only the liberating feeling of shame—the recovery of the moral significance of the joint historical experience—may once and for all exorcise the specter of the Holocaust, which continues to haunt not only Polish-Jewish relations, but also the ethical self-identity of the Poles and the Jews alike, to this very day. The choice is not between shame and pride. The choice is between the pride of morally purifying shame, and the shame of morally devastating pride.³³

³¹ Jerzy Turowicz, “Polish Reasons and Jewish Reasons,” in Polonsky, *My Brother’s Keeper?*, 138.

³² Z. Bauman, “On Immoral Reason and Illogical Morality,” *POLIN: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies* 3 (1988): 296–97.

³³ *Ibid.*, 298.

A cynic might argue that what has also been characteristic of these debates is that the apologies have been made by those who have had no need to apologize, while those who need to reexamine their attitudes have adopted an intransigent stance, which has often had antisemitic overtones. Unquestionably such exchanges are necessary and have done something to change attitudes. But it must be doubted whether they have had a large resonance outside the Polish intelligentsia, where debate about moral dilemmas has long been a major preoccupation. One is reminded here of the eponymous hero of Joseph Conrad's very Polish *Lord Jim*, whose whole life is an attempt to atone for a single moral lapse at a critical time.

There have also been a number of other developments since the end of communism that have stimulated a more open approach to the "dark past" and have attempted to dispel antisemitic and xenophobic stereotypes in Poland. As demonstrated by controversies such as that provoked by the "Papal Cross" in Auschwitz or that over *Neighbors*, these sentiments are easily aroused. One important development is the increased commitment of the church to taking a stand against the manifestations of antisemitism. Of key significance here was the pastoral letter of the Polish bishops of 20 January 1991.³⁴ This was the first unequivocal condemnation of antisemitism by the clerical hierarchy, and it was read in every one of Poland's twenty thousand parishes. It began by affirming:

With the Jewish nation, we Poles are linked with special ties, and since as early as the first centuries of our history Poland became another homeland for many Jews—the majority of Jews living all over the world at present derive from the territories of the former and present Republic of Poland. Unfortunately it is exactly this land that became the grave of several million Jews in our century, not by our will nor by our hand. This is what, not long ago, on 26 September 1990, the pope, the Holy Father, said about our common history: "There is one more nation, one more special people, the people of the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets, the legacy of the faith of Abraham. These people lived with us for generations, shoulder to shoulder on the same land, which somehow became the new land of the Diaspora. Horrible death was inflicted on millions of sons and daughters of this nation: first they were branded with a special stigma; then they were pushed into ghettos and separated districts; next they were transported to gas chambers and killed only because they were children of this nation. The murderers did this on our soil perhaps in order to defile it." But earth

³⁴ *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 January 1991.

cannot be defiled by the blood of innocent victims; earth becomes a holy relic owing to such deaths.

Many Poles, according to the bishops' letter, saved Jewish lives during the war, and they go on to rehearse the number of Polish trees in the Avenue of the Righteous at Yad Vashem. Nevertheless they continue:

Despite such a large number of examples of heroic assistance on the part of Christian Poles, there were also people who remained indifferent to that inconceivable tragedy. We particularly suffer because of those Catholics who were in any way instrumental in causing the death of Jews; they will forever remain a pang of conscience for us, also a blot on our society. If there was only one Christian who could have helped a Jew in danger but did not give him a helping hand or had a share in his death, we must ask our Jewish brothers and sisters for forgiveness.

We are aware that many of our compatriots still nurse in their memory the harm and injustice inflicted by postwar communist rule, in which people of Jewish origin participated as well. But we must admit that the source of inspiration for their actions cannot be seen in their Jewish origin or in their religion but came from the communist ideology from which Jews, too, suffered much injustice. We also express our sincere regret for all cases of antisemitism that have occurred on Polish soil. We do this because we are deeply convinced that all signs of antisemitism are contrary to the spirit of the gospel and, as Pope John Paul II has recently underlined, will remain totally contrary to the Christian vision of human dignity . . .

We Christians and Jews are united by the belief in one God, the Creator and the Lord of the whole universe who created man in his own image; we are united by the ethical principles that are embodied in the Decalogue, which may be reduced to the commandment of the love of God and the love of one's fellow man. We are united by our veneration for the Old Testament as the Holy Scripture and our common traditions of prayer. And we are united by the hope for the final coming of the Kingdom of God. We wait together for the savior, the Messiah, although we believe that he is Jesus of Nazareth and we await not his first but his second coming in might and glory . . .

There have also been attempts to introduce in Polish schools more satisfactory textbooks dealing with Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century. An analysis of history textbooks for primary and second-

ary schools conducted by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw in May 1997 demonstrated that the dominant paradigm for remembering the Holocaust, which developed prior to the political transformation of Poland, continued to prevail in the postcommunist educational system.³⁵ For the most part, there was still little in the current textbooks on the Holocaust, although individual teachers had begun to introduce the subject separately from the “World War II” unit that has always been included. A Polish-Israeli commission to remove negative stereotypes from textbooks was also set up and reported in 1995.³⁶ Since then some progress has been made, though it is painfully slow. On 27 January 2000 the Polish government signed the Stockholm Declaration, by which it committed itself to teaching the subject of the Holocaust in schools. This was followed by the preparation by Robert Szuchta in Warsaw and Piotr Trojański in Kraków of a curriculum guide for teachers on how to teach the Holocaust, which appeared in the summer of 2000. They are at present, at the behest of the Ministry of National Education (MEN), working on a textbook to go with it. The eminent historian Jerzy Jedlicki is also preparing a short text for schools on Polish-Jewish relations, in which the Holocaust will assume a central place.

However, the most important developments stimulating a rethinking of attitudes toward Jews and the “Jewish Question” in the last decade have been neither the big set-piece debates nor the attempts to deal frontally with the problem of antisemitism in Poland. They are, rather, first, the large mass of new historical material that has provided a much fuller picture of Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century, and, second, the emergence of a new generation of Polish-Jewish writers who have brought a new and unique voice to the debate.

Let us start by saying something about recent historical scholarship. We must consider four periods here, that before the First World War, the years between 1918 and 1939, the years of the occupation, and the postwar period; what follows can only be fragmentary and highly selective. For the period before 1914, we have Jerzy Jedlicki’s very important work on the pervasiveness of antisemitism in the last years before the First World War and on the poisonous effect of Dmowski’s exploitation of the nationalist issue in the 1912 election to the Duma in Warsaw; Stephen Corrsin’s work on ethnic conflicts in Warsaw before

³⁵ Important articles on the representation of the Holocaust in history textbooks in Polish schools of the 1990s were published in the *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, nos. 3–4 (1997). See also Hanna Węgrzynek, *The Treatment of Jewish Themes in Polish Schools* (New York, 1998).

³⁶ See Shevach Eden, “Attempts to Use Historical and Literary Textbooks in Poland and Israel to Foster Mutual Understanding,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 14 (2001): 306–14.

the First World War; the important monograph by Brian Porter on the protofascist character of the *Endecja*; and the work of Robert Blobaum, Ted Weeks, and Tadeusz Stegner on the development of antisemitism at this time.³⁷ For the interwar years, there are works in Polish by Jan Józef Lipski and Anna Landau-Czajka and in English by Ron Modras on the increasing dominance of anti-Jewish views in the Catholic Church.³⁸ Monika Natkowska has documented the desire of the nationalist right to exclude the Jews from universities, and Olaf Bergmann has given a not wholly satisfactory account of the *Endecja* in the 1920s.³⁹ Szymon Rudnicki has given us a devastating picture of one of the more extreme fascist offshoots of the *Endecja* in the 1930s, while Jolanta Żyndul has thoroughly documented anti-Jewish violence in 1936 and 1937.⁴⁰ Czesław Miłosz's *Wyprawa w Dwudziestolecie* (Kraków, 1999) documents the increasing strength in Poland in the 1930s of chauvinistic and near-fascist attitudes. There is a mass of material on the war, which includes Tomasz Szarota's work on anti-Jewish violence perpetrated by "bystanders" in the first stages of the war, the examination of the policies and attitudes toward Jewish issues of the Polish government-in-exile by David Engel and Dariusz Stola, and the very important work by Jan Gross.⁴¹ For the postwar period, we have a

³⁷ J. Jedlicki, "The End of Dialogue: Warsaw 1907–1912," in *The Jews in Poland* (Kraków, 1999), 2:111–24; S. Corrsin, *Warsaw before the First World War: Poles and Jews in the Third City of the Russian Empire, 1880–1914* (Boulder, Colo., 1989); B. Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland* (New York, 2000); Theodore R. Weeks, "Fanning the Flames: Jews in the Warsaw Press, 1905–1912," *East European Jewish Affairs* 28, 2 (Winter 1998–1999): 63–81; Tadeusz Stegner, "Liberałowie Królestwa Polskiego wobec kwestii żydowskiej na początku XX wieku," *Przegląd Historyczny* 80, 1 (1989): 69–88; Theodore R. Weeks, "Polish 'Progressive Antisemitism,' 1905–1914," *East European Jewish Affairs* 25, 2 (1995): 49–68; Robert Blobaum, "The Politics of Antisemitism in Fin-de-Siècle Warsaw," *Journal of Modern History* 73, 2 (June 2001): 275–306, and "Criminalizing the 'Other': Crime, Ethnicity and Antisemitism in Early Twentieth-Century Poland" (unpublished).

³⁸ J. J. Lipski, *Katolickie Państwo narodu polskiego* (Warsaw, 1994); A. Landau-Czajka, *W jednym stali domu . . . Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce katolickiej lat 1933–39* (Warsaw, 1998); R. Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism—Poland, 1933–1939* (Chur, Switzerland, 1994).

³⁹ M. Natkowska, "Numerus clausus", "ghetto ławkowe", "numerus nullus": Antisemityzm na uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1931–39 (Warsaw, 1999); O. Bergmann, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec problematyki żydowskiej w latach 1918–1929* (Poznań, 1998).

⁴⁰ S. Rudnicki, "ONR czyli antysemitizm totalny," *Biuletyn ŻIH*, no. 3 (1991): 29–57; J. Żyndul, *Zajścia antyżydowskie w Polsce w latach 1935–1937* (Warsaw, 1994).

⁴¹ T. Szarota, *U progu zagłady: zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie* (Warsaw, 2000); Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz*; idem, *Facing a Holocaust*; Dariusz Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada: Ignacy Schwarzbart—żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP 1940–1945* (Warsaw, 1995); Dariusz Libionka, "Kościół w Polsce wobec zagłady w świetle polskiej publicystyki i historiografii," *Biuletyn ŻIH*, no. 3 (2000): 329–41, and idem, "Pol-

much clearer picture of the difficult position of Jewish survivors and their ambiguous relationship with the communist regime from the work of Krystyna Kersten, Bożena Szaynok, Anna Cichopek, Andrzej Paczkowski, and Jaff Schatz.⁴² On 1968, there are important new books by Jerzy Eisler and Dariusz Stola.⁴³

This is not a complete list, and much other notable research is being undertaken, but a clear and unambiguous picture is emerging. This was set out in an important review article by Maria Janion in *Tygodnik Powszechny* on 22 October 2000. She points out that although Goldhagen's work *Hitler's Willing Executioners* has many flaws, his concept of "eliminationist antisemitism" is a useful analytical tool. She argues that there are several stages before a society adopts such a stance. Jews are first seen as undesirable and to be denied some rights. Then comes a demand for the voluntary or compulsory removal of most Jews from the society. Only then does the move to mass murder occur. Janion argues persuasively that the majority of Polish citizens and of Polish political parties had come by the 1930s to the position that the "solution" of the "Jewish problem" was the voluntary or compulsory removal of most Jews from Poland by emigration. This view had earlier been articulated by Jerzy Tomaszewski, who, after pointing out that this was not a feasible course in the late 1930s, makes the following observation:

A lasting solution of the social and economic problems of the Jews had thus to be sought in Poland, in close association with the whole range of problems faced by the country. It is difficult today to reach a conclusion on the chances of finding such a solution, because the outbreak of the war made a breach in the normal evolution of the country. If one takes into account the situation that prevailed at the end of the 1930s, the prospects for lasting solutions must seem doubtful.⁴⁴

skie duchowieństwo katolickie wobec eksterminacji i zagłady Żydów" (unpublished); Jan Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i Komunistów 1939–1948* (Kraków, 1998) and *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny, 2000).

⁴² K. Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm. Anatomia półprawd 1939–68* (Warsaw, 1992); B. Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946* (Wrocław, 1992); Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie* (Warsaw, 2000); Andrzej Paczkowski, "Wstęp do 'Raporty o Pogromie'," *Puls* 50, 3 (1991): 103–10; idem, "Żydzi w UB: próba weryfikacji stereotypu," in *Komunizm. Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. T. Szarota (Warsaw, 2001); J. Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley, 1991).

⁴³ Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec 1968. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warsaw, 1991); Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska w Polsce 1967–1968* (Warsaw, 2000) and "Fighting against the Shadows: The Anti-Zionist Campaign of 1968" (unpublished).

⁴⁴ *Najnowsze Dzieje Żydów w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1993), 215.

These are conclusions that it is hard for Poles to accept. However, we are faced here not with moral imperatives but with hard facts, which, one hopes, will in the long run prove much more convincing. These are tragic developments that are part of the more general tragedy of the twentieth century. They cannot be changed—accepting them will be a sign of political and social maturity. As the eighteenth-century French writer Alain-René Lesage put it, “Facts are stubborn things.”

A second important development was the emergence in the 1990s of a new group of Polish-Jewish writers and the more widespread distribution in Poland of the works of already established Polish-Jewish authors. It is a paradoxical fact that the waning of Poland after 1939 as one of the great centers of the Jewish world has been accompanied by a flourishing of what has been described as a “Jewish School of Polish Literature,”⁴⁵ a group of writers who have explored the key dilemmas faced by Polish Jewry, above all how to record and memorialize the Holocaust, and how to go on living in a country where it took place and where the attitude of the majority of the population to the genocide raised serious and difficult questions. The word “school” perhaps overstates the unity of this group, which falls into two divisions: an older generation, of whom the most important members were Julian Strykowski, Adolf Rudnicki, and Stanisław Wygodzki, who came to maturity before the war; and a younger group, of whom the most notable are Ida Fink, Henryk Grynberg, Bogdan Wojdowski, and Hanna Krall, who grew up during the war.

These Polish-Jewish writers have great significance in the shaping of Polish attitudes. Polish-Jewish dialogue initially began to make progress, as was pointed out by the former Polish foreign minister Władysław Bartoszewski, himself one of the founders of the wartime Council for Aid to the Jews (Rada Pomocy Żydom, cryptonym *Żegota*), when Poles started to criticize Polish behavior and Jews to criticize Jewish behavior. Yet there is no doubt that the testimony of Jews on how they experienced Poles and Poland is crucial if there is to be an advance beyond worthy moral platitudes. Many Poles have been resistant to Jewish testimony, seeing it as one-sided and excessively subjective. For example, Wojciech Wierzewski, in his review of Michael Steinlauf’s *Bondage to the Dead* in the pages of *Nowy Dziennik*, the principal Polish daily in the United States, after perfunctorily praising the author, went on to ask why a Jew was writing about Polish reactions to the Holocaust, rather than focusing on the reactions of Jews—partic-

⁴⁵ Jan Błoński, “Is There a Jewish School of Polish Literature?” *POLIN: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies* 1 (1986): 196–211.

ularly of those in the United States, who, in his view, did not speak out strongly enough against the mass murder. In his view, Steinlauf should have observed the principles of “fair play” and “displayed his cards” only after a “reliable and competent Polish author” had dealt with the subject.

It is much more difficult to make such tendentious arguments against Jews writing in Polish. The nineties were marked by a new explosion of creativity by authors such as Hanna Krall and Henryk Grynberg and also saw the emergence of important new writers, such as Wilhelm Dichter, and the publication of new works by authors like Michał Głowiński, in which they dealt extensively with their previously concealed Jewish backgrounds. All had a common background in that they had experienced the war as children hidden on the “Aryan” side and grew up in the complex postwar years. Their work gave a graphic and largely negative picture of what it was like to be a Jew in a hostile environment both during the war and under communism.⁴⁶

Although he comes from a different generation and a somewhat different background, Jan Gross can also be considered part of this group. Indeed, he can be seen both as a Polish-Jewish writer and as one of the historians whose work has helped to reshape our understanding of the Polish-Jewish past since 1989. He was born after the war—his grandfather was a well-known Jewish liberal in Kraków and deputy in the Austrian Reichsrat of the Klub Niezawisłych Żydów (Club of Independent Jews), and his father headed a prominent legal practice. His mother was not Jewish, and the family was thoroughly assimilated. He became caught up in the Polish student unrest of 1968 and after a brief imprisonment was forced to leave the country and settle in the United States. Here he established himself as one of the leading historians of recent Poland and of the complicated ethnic relations in that country since 1939. His *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouv-*

⁴⁶ Henryk Grynberg made his reputation with a lightly fictionalized version of his own life. Among his recent works are *Drohobycz, Drohobycz* (Warsaw, 1997) and *Memorbuch* (Warsaw, 2000), which deals with the vexed question of the Jewish relationship with communism in the form of a lightly fictionalized biography of a Jewish communist, Adam Bromberg. Wilhelm Dichter’s first novel, *Koń Pana Boga* (God’s donkey) (Kraków, 1996) describes his wartime experiences, while the second, *Szkola bezbożników* (The school for atheists) (Kraków, 1999), describes his adolescence in the Warsaw of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Michał Głowiński is one of Poland’s leading literary scholars and has written extensively both in *Tygodnik Powszechny* and various literary periodicals, including those of the “alternative” press (*drugiego obiegu*). Yet it was only in his memoir *Black Seasons* (*Czarne sezony* [Warsaw, 1998]) that he revealed his Jewish background.

ernement, 1939–1944 (Princeton, 1979) is certainly the best account in English of the complex questions raised by the Nazi occupation of Poland. In *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, 1988) he shed much light on one of the most important “blank spots” in twentieth-century Polish history and showed the falsity of some of the stereotypes that had been current in communist Poland in connection with the Soviet annexations of 1939. In recent years, he has begun to address Holocaust issues directly and in Polish. His *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i Komunistów 1939–1948* (Cursed decade: Three essays on stereotypes about Jews, Poles, and Communists) (Kraków, 1998) is a major contribution to our understanding of the events of the Holocaust and the immediate postwar period in Poland.

Even more important has been his *Neighbors*, the subject of this volume, which is unquestionably one of the most important books of the last decade both on the general question of the mass murder of the Jews during the Second World War and on the more specific problem of the reaction of some segments of Polish society to that genocide. From the point of view of larger Holocaust historiography, the massacre in Jedwabne raises significant questions about the wave of anti-Jewish violence that accompanied the first weeks of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. General Walter Stahlecker, commander of *Einsatzgruppe A*, reported at the time that Lithuanians had killed as many as 1,500 Jews in one night in Kaunas at the end of June 1941.⁴⁷ Other sources estimate that in the Kaunas massacre as many as 10,000 Jews were murdered, and that pogroms broke out in at least forty Lithuanian towns.⁴⁸ A recent study of western Ukraine by Marco Carynnyk has described how pogroms erupted in as many as thirty-five places after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and resulted in the deaths of between 28,000 and 35,000 victims.⁴⁹ A more cautious figure has put the death toll at 12,000.⁵⁰ Within the ethnically Polish area, there were fewer such incidents. Such evidence as we have, both Polish and Jewish, suggests that the Łomża region in northeastern Poland where Jedwabne is located, an area that had long been a stronghold of the extreme right, was the only area in which collective massacres of Jews

⁴⁷ Tomasz Szarota, *U progu zagłady: Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie* (Warsaw, 2000), 239.

⁴⁸ Dov Levin, “Kovno,” in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman, vol. 1 (New York, 1990), 825; Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim* (Warsaw, 2000), 198.

⁴⁹ Marco Carynnyk, “Furious Angels: Ukrainians, Jews and Poles in the Summer of 1941” (unpublished), 5.

⁵⁰ Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim*, 198.

by civilian Poles took place in the summer of 1941—when the region, previously occupied by the Soviet Union, was reoccupied by Nazi Germany. Massacres of the Jewish population by ethnic Poles also took place at the beginning of July 1941 in Radziłów and Wąsosz. Other places where ethnic Poles were involved in killings of the Jewish communities are Goniadz, Kolno, Knyszyn, Stawiska, Szczuczyn, and Suchowola. Information about these latter crimes first appeared in Szymon Datner's "Eksterminacja Żydów Okręgu Białostockiego," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 60 (October–December 1966): 1–29. Datner referred to these cases as massacres conducted by the local population ("miejscowa ludność"), and not explicitly by ethnic Poles. The terminology was undoubtedly dictated by communist censorship.

Massacres were also committed by the Romanians.⁵¹ These were somewhat different in that there was a Romanian state that was allied with the Germans and took part in the invasion of the Soviet Union. The first massacre took place in Jassy, three days after the invasion of the USSR. The Jews were accused (falsely) of aiding the Red Army, and in a series of massacres that took place over several days, thousands of Jews died at Romanian hands. German diplomats estimated the number of victims at 4,000, a figure accepted by Raul Hilberg. The Italian writer Curzio Malaparte, who was in Romania during the war, gives a figure of 7,000 dead. Perhaps the most reliable figures are those collected by the Romanian Ministry of the Interior, which numbered the dead at 8,000. These killings were followed by a series of "spontaneous attacks on Jews by the local population after the departure of the Soviets and before the entry of the German or Romanian forces."⁵²

A major role in subsequent atrocities was taken by the Romanian army, which was instructed by General Antonescu to assist the gendarmes and police in "cleansing the land of its 'Yids.'" In particular, he was eager to expel the Jews from the areas of Bessarabia and Bukovina reconquered from the Soviet Union. As Antonescu put it:

I am in favor of expelling the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina to the other side of the border . . . There is nothing for them to do here and I don't mind if we appear in history as barbarians . . .

⁵¹ See Randolph Braham, ed., *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry* (New York, 1994). Ilya Ehrenburg and Vassili Grossman, eds., *The Black Book of Soviet Jewry* (New York, 1981), 77–91; Dora Litani, "The Destruction of the Jews of Odessa in the Light of Romanian Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies* 6 (1967): 135–54, and Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago, 2000).

⁵² See Jean Ancel, "The Romanian Way of Solving the 'Jewish Problem' in Bessarabia and Bukovina, June–July 1941," *Yad Vashem Studies* 19 (1988): 187–232.

There has never been a more suitable time in our history to get rid of the Jews, and if necessary, you are to make use of machine guns against them.⁵³

In the resultant massacres more than 300,000 Jews died at Romanian hands.

None of these massacres was carried out by the Germans, although they certainly encouraged such actions and, in some cases, may have coordinated them. This raises important questions about the thin line between the desire to expel an unwanted minority and a small-scale genocidal project under sanctioned conditions. Further investigation is needed not only to investigate what actually happened but to contextualize it within the evolution of Nazi policy toward the Jews. There has been a great deal of argument in recent years on when the Nazis actually initiated the policy of genocide against the Jews. Most scholars accept that the move to mass murder was part of the radicalization of Nazi policy that accompanied Operation Barbarossa. The majority view is that its final adoption accompanied the euphoria of victory in September and October 1941. A minority hold the opinion, most recently advanced by Arno Mayer and the Swiss historian Philippe Burin, and earlier by Uwe Adam, Martin Broszat, and Wolfgang Mommsen, that it was a response to the first check to the Blitzkrieg and the consequence of the view that the Jews should be punished for the failure of the Nazi war effort. They still disagree as to whether a policy of mass murder had been adopted before the invasion of the Soviet Union or was the consequence of the progressive radicalization of Nazi policy during Operation Barbarossa.⁵⁴

The policy may have been decided upon somewhat earlier, as there was inevitably a time lag between its adoption and implementation, caused both by technical problems inherent in carrying it out and by efforts to ensure that it would achieve its objectives. The view that it was adopted earlier is held by the biographer of Heinrich Himmler, Richard Breitmann. It is clear, for instance, that there were considerable doubts within the Nazi leadership as to whether genocide was feasible, and that this accounts for the many arguments as to how it should be implemented.⁵⁵

During the first phase of the genocide, the SS, the body entrusted with carrying out policy toward the Jews, was not sure how to pro-

⁵³ Avigdor Shachan, *Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria* (New York, 1996), 51.

⁵⁴ For a description of this process, see C. Browning, "Hitler and the Euphoria of Victory: The Path to the Final Solution," in *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarani (London, 1994), 137–47.

⁵⁵ There is a useful summary of these issues in Cesarani, *The Final Solution*.

ceed. They had had a number of failures, most notably the scheme for a Jewish reservation around Nisko, between Lublin and Rzeszów, and the project to send Jews to Madagascar, to which a great deal of effort had been devoted. They were eager to exploit anti-Jewish resentments among the local population and to see whether these could be harnessed to their purposes. Thus Reinhard Heydrich, a key figure in the SS, instructed the commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* after the invasion of the Soviet Union to “trigger” pogroms by the local population against communists and Jews, and to “intensify them if necessary and channel them properly . . . without leaving any trace” and without giving the perpetrators any opportunity to plead later that they were following instructions.⁵⁶

Dr. Walter Stahlecker, one of the commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen*, reported in October 1941:

It was unwelcome that the *Sicherheitspolizei* should be seen to be involved with actions which were in fact exceptionally harsh and which were bound to create shock in German circles. It was necessary to demonstrate that the indigenous population had taken the first measures on its own initiative as a national reaction to decades of Jewish oppression and communist terror.⁵⁷

The wider context of the Jedwabne massacre has not so far figured prominently in the discussion of *Neighbors*. One of the important future tasks of historians, not only in Poland, will be to investigate, using newly available Soviet and other documents, this wave of anti-Jewish violence and its relation to the larger issue of the way the Nazi genocide was initiated and implemented.

The Polish debate has concentrated rather on the question of Polish participation in the massacre in which the great majority of the Jewish population of Jedwabne were murdered by their Polish neighbors. This event remains appalling even if there are disputes as to how much German incitement there was, how many of the inhabitants of Jedwabne actually participated in the murder, and how many victims there were. The murder is graphically described in *Neighbors* on the basis of testimony, given shortly after the war, that is almost unbearable to read. In addition, Gross draws important and controversial conclusions from the event, relating it to a number of other key issues in the history of

⁵⁶ Heydrich’s operation orders of 29 June, 1 July, and 2 July 1941: Bundesarchiv R 70 SU/32. Quoted in Christian Streit, “Wehrmacht, Einsatzgruppen and Anti-Bolshevism,” in Cesarani, *The Final Solution*, 104.

⁵⁷ Nuremberg Documents, 180-L, IMG, vol. 37, 672. Quoted in Streit, “Wehrmacht, Einsatzgruppen and Anti-Bolshevism,” 104–5.

twentieth-century Poland: the reception of the Soviets who occupied the eastern part of Poland in September 1939 and the vexed question of Jewish “collaboration” with this occupation, the way Polish society responded to the Nazi attack on the USSR in July 1941, and the mechanics and character of the Communist takeover in 1944. He thus directly confronts the Poles’ image of themselves during the Second World War as “victims and heroes.”

The debate about Jedwabne is probably the most profound on any historical issue in Poland since 1989. As the historian Marcin Kula has observed, even the assessment of the legacy of communism has not evoked such intense interest.⁵⁸ It has also had considerable resonance in Western Europe, Israel, and North America. To borrow a term from the French historian Pierre Nora, the arguments set out in *Neighbors* represent a clear “counter-memory” to the canonical Polish memory of the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations, the most articulate expression of the “self-critical” view of the Polish past.⁵⁹ Far more than earlier exponents of this point of view like Błoński, Gross does seem to have forced significant elements within the political and cultural elite, as well as parts of the wider society, to rethink their views on these topics. The debate has also stimulated a reconsideration of other questionable aspects of the Polish past, such as the forced resettlement after 1945 of the Ukrainian population of southeastern Poland to the west of the country in “Operation Wisła” and the abuses that accompanied the expulsion of the Germans from what is today western Poland. At the same time, it has stimulated a powerful restatement of the “apologetic” view of the Polish past. Indeed, the debate over *Neighbors* can be viewed as a battle over memory, a battle to establish a more accurate understanding of Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century and especially during the wartime period. This is a battle in which the “counter-memory” of the Holocaust has confronted the prevailing Polish orthodoxy in the most confident and sharpest way, exposing its distortions, omissions, and internal inconsistencies.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Marcin Kula, “Refleksje na marginesie dyskusji o Jedwabnem” (unpublished), 1. We would like to express our thanks to Prof. Kula for making this article available to us. Kula has also made a contribution to the debate in the article “Ludzie Ludziom,” published in *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 March 2001, A5.

⁵⁹ For reflections on history, memory, and counter-memory see Pierre Nora, “General Introduction: Between Memory and History,” in the English translation *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 1, *Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. Laurence D. Krizman (New York, 1997). This article first appeared in English translation as “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 13–25.

⁶⁰ In this introduction, the Jewish reactions to the massacre at Jedwabne and to Gross’s book are not discussed. For interesting reflections on this subject, see Laurence Wein-

Neighbors challenges the widely accepted view that during the Holocaust the Poles were, at worst, mostly hostile bystanders, unwilling or unable to assist their Jewish neighbors and profiting materially from their destruction: Gross provides a concrete case of active Polish involvement in the process of mass murder, even if it is on a lesser scale than similar occurrences in Ukraine, Lithuania, and Romania. The controversy also differs from the earlier debates in a number of ways. Whereas they all lasted for only a few months, the argument over *Neighbors* has continued at varying levels of intensity for nearly two years and shows no signs of abating. Unlike earlier debates, that over *Neighbors* has been conducted in a wide range of national and local papers. It has also reached other mass media—television, radio, and the Internet; it has been accompanied by the broadcasting on Polish television of Agnieszka Arnold's documentary film *Neighbors* and various commemorative events, including the Day of Repentance and Mourning conducted by the Catholic hierarchy on 27 May 2001 for the Jewish victims of the massacre and the unveiling of a new monument outside the town on its sixtieth anniversary.

This is also the first debate in which political figures have taken an active role, and in which some, notably the president of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, have given support to the "self-critical" image of the Polish-Jewish past.⁶¹ The "counter-memory" has also been effectively expressed by a large number of influential cultural figures and is now much more widely dispersed. Certainly, one main consequence of the debate has been a significant undermining of the previously dominant mode of remembering the Holocaust.

The debate has undoubtedly brought the subject of the Holocaust to the center of public attention and has led, among a significant sector of society, to its regaining its significance as one of the key events of the twentieth century with both particular and universal messages for humanity.⁶² In these circles, the genocide of Polish Jews is being inte-

baum, *The Struggle for Memory in Poland: Auschwitz, Jedwabne and Beyond* (Jerusalem, 2001), 35–38.

⁶¹ See, for example, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, "Polska szlachetność i polska hańba. Z prezydentem Aleksandrem Kwaśniewskim rozmawiają ks. Adam Boniecki i Krzysztof Burnetko," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 15 April 2001, 8–9; and Aleksander Kwaśniewski, "Co to znaczy przepraszam," *Polityka*, no. 28 (14 July 2001): 13.

⁶² The debate certainly exposed the absence of appropriate educational tools for an unbiased presentation of the subject of the Holocaust in schools. Its timing coincided with the discussion of the first unbiased Polish Holocaust textbook, which is being written by Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański. It is possible that the debate helped to speed up the process by which the textbook was accepted by the educational authorities. One of the events that accompanied the controversy was a seminar on the Holocaust for thirty schoolteachers from the province of Podlasie, organized by the Institute of Na-

grated into the narrative of Polish history. This is an important development involving the inclusion of the Polish-Jewish past in the post-war Polish collective memory, which for the last fifty years has been largely concerned with the Polish ethnic collectivity. The degree to which Polish memory of the Second World War has been polonocentric has emerged strikingly in studies by Barbara Engelking and Anita Shapiro, although it should be mentioned that the Poles are hardly unique in this respect.⁶³

The dispute has also raised the vexed question of the emotional and moral remoteness of Polish society from the Jewish genocide. Thus Archbishop Józef Zyciński of Lublin in his article "The Banalization of Barbarity" called for an expression of mourning and grief for the Jewish victims, asserting, "[T]oday, we need to pray for the victims of the massacre, displaying the spiritual solidarity that was missing at the hour when they departed from the land of their fathers."⁶⁴

One can tentatively argue that this long-awaited mourning has to some degree begun to occur with the various commemorative events dedicated to the victims of the Jedwabne massacre. Unfortunately this grief has proved to be only partial, since the local population of Jedwabne, guided by its parish priest, Father Edward Orłowski, refused to take part in the official commemoration staged in Jedwabne on 10 July 2001. They seem unable at present to come to terms with the town's "dark past" and cling to the "apologetic" version of Polish history, often in its radical form.⁶⁵

In an article that appeared in late April 2001 in the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, the historian Andrzej Paczkowski set out a tentative typology of the discussion, which, as he rightly observed, is concerned less with the massacre as such than with the "range, intensity, and nature of Polish antisemitism."⁶⁶ He identified four categories: first, the "affir-

tional Memory. See Adam Szostkiewicz, "Powiedzcie to synom," and Piotr Pytlakowski, "Historia pewnego podręcznika," both published in *Polityka*, no. 16 (21 April 2001).

⁶³ Barbara Engelking, *Zagłada i Pamięć. Doświadczenia Holocaustu i jego konsekwencje opisane na podstawie relacji autobiograficznych* (Warsaw, 1994); and Anita Shapiro, "Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memory," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, 2 (1998): 40–58.

⁶⁴ Józef Zyciński, "The Banalization of Barbarity," in *Thou Shalt Not Kill: Poles on Jedwabne* (Warsaw, 2001), 257.

⁶⁵ On the responses of the local population of Jedwabne to the news about the 10 July 1941 massacre of Jedwabne Jews and to Gross's book, see a number of important articles by Anna Bikont, "My z Jedwabnego," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 March 2001, 10–15; "Proszę tu więcej nie przychodzić," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 March–1 April 2001, 10–12; and "Mieli wódkę, broń i nienawiść," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 June 2001, 10–14. See also Jarosław Lipszyc, "Sąsiedzi i ich wnuki," *Midrasz*, no. 6 (June 2000): 41–44; Stanisław Przechodzki, "Szatan wstąpił do Jedwabnego," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 April 2001, 18; and Adam Wilma, "Broda mojego syna," *Gazeta Pomorska*, 4 August 2000.

⁶⁶ See Andrzej Paczkowski, "Debata wokół 'Sąsiadów': próba wstępnej typologii," *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 March 2001.

mative," which upholds Gross's basic premises and is particularly concerned about their moral ramifications; second, the "defensive open" genre, which accepts some of Gross's conclusions but raises questions about his research priorities and methods and stresses, in particular, the issue of German participation in the atrocity; third, the "defensive closed" position, which argues that the murder was the work of, at the worst, a small number of the Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne who were unwitting dupes of the Nazis, and who were largely motivated by a desire to retaliate for the wrongs perpetrated against them by the Jews who worked for the Soviet authorities between 1939 and 1941; finally, there are those who reject the arguments of Gross's book *tout court*, in the process often resorting to stereotypical accusations, from Jewish deicide to Jews' having mounted perfidious conspiracies against Poland.

This is a helpful analysis, although the terms "self-critical" for the first category, "moderate apologetic" for the second, and "radical apologetic" for the third and fourth might be preferable. It should also be stressed that there are legitimate points of debate raised by Gross's book, and the term "moderate apologetic" should not be taken to mean that the views expressed by people in this group are not worthy of careful consideration. In the debate, the "self-critical" position has mainly been presented in the national dailies *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, and the progressive Catholic journals, the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* and the monthly *Więź*. The "radical apologetic" position is mainly to be found in *Myśl Polska*, *Nasz Dziennik*, *Niedziela*, *Najwyższy Czas*, *Tygodnik "Solidarność"*, *Głos*, and *Życie*.⁶⁷

If the viewpoints of the two sides are examined in more detail, it can be argued that Gross's analysis of the Jedwabne massacre had as one of its aims the deconstruction of the cherished Polish self-image as heroes and victims. The lack of any significant response to his *Upiorna dekada* may have led him to the view that a more frontal assault on Polish complacency was necessary. He certainly believes that the deconstruction of what he sees as the distorted and partial self-image that is common in Poland is necessary for healthy political evolution, since the country has long swept its "dark past" under the carpet and fostered a sanitized view of its history. This has, in turn, led to pathological reactions when the image is challenged: Poles have been quick to defend Poland's "good name" and blame "others" for any attempts to

⁶⁷ We have probably underrepresented in our selection articles that deny or justify the massacre. We make no apology for this—the deniers offer little nuance or subtlety in their arguments. For a fuller account of their views, see Joanna Michlic, "Coming to Terms with the 'Difficult Past': The Polish Debate about the Jedwabne Massacre," *Acta*, no. 21, Vidal Sassoon Centre for the Study of Antisemitism, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 2002.

tarnish it. Gross is well aware that this form of collective defense is not peculiar to Poland. He calls for it to be overcome through the rewriting of Polish history in a more balanced and truthful manner, arguing that “like several other nations, in order to reclaim its own past, Poland will have to tell its past to itself anew.”⁶⁸

Gross’s call for a “counter-memory” of the collective past has been accepted in the self-critical camp. Many voices within the intelligentsia have called for a new Polish self-image, which would include not only the heroic and suffering past but also the darker side of the national story. Thus a leading figure of the progressive Catholic intelligentsia, Jarosław Gowin, in his article “Naród—ostatni węzeł?” (The nation—the last knot) argued that “[w]e have the responsibility to pass on our heritage to future generations: transmitting the memory of ourselves as heroes is our duty; transmitting the memory of Polish crimes against others should constitute a warning for the future.”⁶⁹

In her article “Zbiorowa wyobraźnia, wspólna wina” (Collective imagination, common guilt), the psychologist Krystyna Skarżyska has described the psychological roots of the inability to come to terms with the “dark past” and its negative consequences. Like Gross, she calls for the deconstruction of the dominant collective self-image:

It is understandable that we feel psychological discomfort when our own community is blamed for serious sins. The inclusion of cruelty toward others in national collective memory is completely at odds with our self-image. Its acceptance is almost impossible for people who are convinced that they have usually been victims and solely victims . . . What is urgently required is a debate about our collective memory and social identity and an attempt to deconstruct our past self-image.⁷⁰

Individual voices within the Catholic Church and within some political parties, such as the Union of Freedom (Unia Wolności), have also embraced this call.⁷¹ In the case of the postcommunist Social Democratic

⁶⁸ Citation from the English translation, Gross, *Neighbors*, 169.

⁶⁹ Jarosław Gowin, “Naród—ostatni węzeł?” *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 January 2001.

⁷⁰ Krystyna Skarżyska, “Zbiorowa wyobraźnia, wspólna wina,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25–26 November 2000.

⁷¹ Examples of the representatives of the liberal wing of the Polish Catholic Church are Rev. Michał Czajkowski, “Czysta Nierządnicza. Dlaczego należy przeproszać Jedwabne,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 27 May 2001, 1, 5; Rev. Adam Boniecki, “Bronię księdza Michała,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 27 May 2001, 4; Rev. Wojciech Lemański, “Chrystus w zgliszczach stodoły,” *Więź*, June 2001, 78–85; Father Stanisław Musiał, “Jedwabne to nowe imię Holokaustu,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 July 2001; Bishop Henryk Muszyński, “Biedny chrześcijanin patrzy na Jedwabne,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Kontrapunkt, nos. 1–2, 25 March 2001, 13; Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, “Prawda Jedwabnego,” *Wprost*, 13 May

Alliance (SLD), its General Council, in March 2001, issued a letter to its members and supporters with the telling title "We Are Not Inheritors of Glory Alone" ("Dziedziczymy nie tylko chwałę"). President Kwaśniewski has also accepted the need for a more critical attitude toward the recent Polish past, most strikingly in the speech he delivered at the ceremony on the sixtieth anniversary of the Jedwabne massacre on 10 July 2001:

Thanks to the great national debate around this crime of the year 1941, much has changed in our lives in this year 2001, the first of the new millennium . . . We have come to realize that we are responsible for our attitude toward the black pages of history. We have understood that those who counsel the nation to deny this past serve the nation ill. Such an attitude leads to moral self-destruction . . . We express our pain and shame; we give expression to our determination in seeking to learn the truth, our courage in overcoming an evil past, our unbending will for understanding and harmony.⁷²

The challenge to the one-sided Polish self-image has also undermined some other popular myths, including the view that Poland was always tolerant and hospitable toward the other religious and national groups that once dwelled within its borders.⁷³ Its main emphasis has inevitably been on the events of the Second World War. Here Gross and other representatives of the self-critical position have attempted to show the complexity of events and the need to reject the one-sided view of the solidarity of the majority of Poles with their Jewish co-citizens.⁷⁴ *Neighbors* is only part of this attempt, which is also one of the main objectives of Gross's *Upiorna dekada*.

At the same time, the debate has stimulated a strong response from the adherents of the "apologetic" position, frequently in its more radical manifestations. In these circles, from the start, the massacre was

2001, 8. Among the members of Unia Wolności, who participated in the debate, were Jacek Kuroń and Henryk Wujec. Kuroń and Wujec, together with Rev. Michał Czajkowski and Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, issued an appeal calling for active participation in repentance prayers in Jedwabne on 10 July. The appeal was published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 22 April 2001, 5.

⁷² Excerpt from the official speech of Aleksander Kwaśniewski of 10 July 2001 at the commemorative ceremony in Jedwabne. The speech was published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 10 July 2001.

⁷³ See, for example, Janusz A. Majcherek, "Ciemne karty polskiej historii," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Kontrapunkt, nos. 1–2, 25 March 2001, 16.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Obsesja niewinności," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13–14 January 2001, 22–23; and idem, "Nasz człowiek w Pieczarach. Jedwabne: pamięć nieodzyskana," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 31 March 2002, 1, 4.

understood as a crime committed by the Germans and not by the Poles. This “radical apologetic” position has widespread support in the right wing of Polish politics and is also well represented in the conservative part of the Polish Catholic Church.⁷⁵ In their view, the stress on Jewish suffering during the Second World War is unbalanced—a quest by the Jews for “ultimate victimization”—and is a means of devaluing Polish suffering. Radical apologists frequently cite the Polish version of Norman Finkelstein’s *The Holocaust Industry* as confirmation of the correctness of their views, which are here upheld by a “leading Jewish-American scholar.”⁷⁶ The term “the Holocaust business” (“the Holocaust *gesheft*”) which in Poland has clearly antisemitic connotations, has been incorporated into the narratives defending the canonical memory of the Holocaust and criticizing *Neighbors*.⁷⁷

Various snippets of information about the investigation into the massacre that is being conducted by the Institute of National Memory (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej) have been seized upon as “proof” of direct German participation. For example, the news of the discovery of German bullets in the barn where the Jews were burned and where a partial exhumation of bodies was carried out in late May–early June 2001 was presented as definitive evidence of German responsibility. Subsequent forensic analysis of the bullets showed that they came from completely different periods of time.⁷⁸ Jewish support for the Soviet regime between September 1939 and 1941, as well as during the postwar period, is stressed to minimize the criminal nature of the massacre. Some “radical apologists” have fused the concept of German responsibility with the idea of “Judeo-communism,” arguing that the genocide was part of an anti-Bolshevik crusade. Thus both Father Orłowski and the Łomża senator Jadwiga Stokarska have asserted that the Germans

⁷⁵ See, for example, Antoni Macierewicz, “Oskarżam Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego,” *Tygodnik Głos*, no. 14 (17 April 2001); Klub Konserwatywny w Łodzi, “Stanowisko w związku ze sprawą Jedwabnego,” *Tygodnik Głos*, 7 July 2001; Rev. Jerzy Bajda, “Przepraszają? Kto kogo?” *Nasz Dziennik*, 14 March 2001; Rev. Prof. Waldemar Chrostowski, “Kto utrudnia dialog? Rozmowa Pawła Paliwody,” *Życie*, 10 April 2001.

⁷⁶ For critical analysis of Norman Finkelstein’s *The Holocaust Industry* (London, 2001), see David Cesarani, “Is There, and Has There Ever Been, a ‘Holocaust Industry?’” in *The Issues of the Holocaust Research in Latvia* (Riga, 2001), 83–100. See also Jerzy Sławomir Mac, “Czerwona podszewka. ‘Przedsiębiorstwo Holocaust’ to połączenie nazistowskiej i komunistycznej propagandy,” *Wprost*, 23 September 2001, 78–79.

⁷⁷ For example, the bishop of Łomża Stanisław Stefanek, Bishop Józef Michalik, and Rev. Edward Orłowski of the Jedwabne parish have used the term in their sermons and comments. The right-wing journalist Henryk Pająk has published a book entitled *Jedwabne Geszeft* (Lublin, 2001), 2d ed.

⁷⁸ See the report “New Evidence on Polish Massacre,” *BBC News*, 19 December 2001. The bullets came from the First World War and from after 1942.

killed the Jews because they were Communists and fought against the Germans on behalf of the Soviet Union.⁷⁹

In the “radical apologetic” camp, Gross’s book has been dismissed as a “lie aiming to slander the good name of Poland.” It has also been categorized as another Jewish or Jewish-American conspiracy against Poland and as confirmation of the “truth” that “the Jew” always wants to harm “the Pole.”⁸⁰ At the same time, this group stresses both the large amount of assistance provided by Polish society to the Jews during the war and Jewish “ingratitude” for these sacrifices.

An assessment of the “moderate apologetic” position is more complex. Gross’s book is clearly not the last word on the subject, and there are many issues that are the subject of legitimate debate, including the strength of Polish antisemitism before the war, the impact of the Soviet occupation in widening the gap between Poles and Jews between 1939 and 1941, and the actual character of German involvement in the massacre. Certainly dispassionate historical investigation is a better way forward than well-intentioned moral statements and apologies. But the actual historical debate about the Jedwabne massacre has thus far been a disappointment. Many of those who have espoused what Andrzej Paczkowski describes as a “defensive open” stance in the controversy have come to adopt quite extreme positions, as has been the case, for instance, with Tomasz Strzembosz. They seem to have great difficulty in abandoning the self-image of the Poles as heroes and victims and often use strongly apologetic arguments. To a number of them, the imperative of defending national honor, Poland’s “good name,” also appears to play a large role.⁸¹ These factors seem to make it difficult for them to analyze the national self-image in a detached, objective, and critical manner. This has often led to a blurring of the line between legitimate criticism of Gross’s book and the “radical apologetic” position, with its clearly antisemitic overtones.⁸²

⁷⁹ Jadwiga Stokarska, “Kampania oszczerstw,” *Nasz Dziennik*, 19 March 2001, and Edward Orłowski “Niech zwycięży prawda. Conversation of Rev. Pawel Bejger with Rev. Orłowski,” *Tygodnik Młodzieży Katolickiej “Droga”*, 13 March 2001.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Leon Kalewski, “Opowieści niesamowite. Part 1 and 2,” *Nasza Polska*, 21 November 2000 and 19 December 2000; Jerzy Robert Nowak, “Kto fałszuje historię,” *Nasz Dziennik*, 13 May 2000; Piotr Gontarczyk, “Gross kontra fakty,” *Życie*, 28 February 2001; and Jan Engelgard, “Antynarodowa histeria,” *Mysł Polska*, 30 March 2001.

⁸¹ On the positive correlation between national honor and reputation and absence of self-criticism in collective cultures, see Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames*, 8–82. See also Michlic, “The Troubling Past,” 81–82.

⁸² In his short typology of different positions within the debate, Andrzej Paczkowski was the first to indicate that in some cases the borders between the positions are not clearly defined.

Why is the self-image of Poles as heroes and victims so powerful in collective memory? This is a complex question and can be understood only in the context of Poland's tragic history in the last two centuries. It became established in Polish collective self-awareness in the first half of the nineteenth century, when it was rooted in the romantic national myth of the Poles fighting "for your freedom and ours" (*Za waszą i naszą wolność*), and was an important element in shaping the modern Polish national consciousness throughout the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth—the long era of the partitions and struggle for independence. During the Second World War it again became a powerful myth in the Sorelian sense, enabling the Polish people to resist both Soviet and Nazi attempts to destroy their national existence. The experience of this war strongly reinforced the Polish consciousness of being solely heroes and victims. Certainly Poles have much to be proud of in their participation in the Allied war effort and in their record of resistance in occupied Poland. The Polish armed resistance movement was the second largest in Europe after Tito's partisans, while Poland was the only occupied country in Europe that had an organized underground civilian administration, as well as an underground education system and an extensive underground press. The Poles also suffered appalling losses—Nazi terror was much more brutal here than in Western Europe, and it has been estimated that nearly 10 percent of the ethnic Polish population died as the result of the war.

The war itself was widely perceived as an embodiment of Polish collective martyrdom and heroism, and this made any meaningful discussion of the black pages of Polish attitudes and behavior toward the Polish-Jewish minority seem out of place. This view of the war continued to exert a powerful hold on the collective self-image under communism, and it was intensified during the Solidarity period and particularly in the period of martial law after the crushing of the first Solidarity. It was at this time that the wartime image of "fighting Poland" (*Polska walcząca*) resisting the Nazis was transformed into the image of "fighting Solidarity" (*Solidarność walcząca*) resisting the communist regime.⁸³ Under these conditions one can fully understand why it is so hard, even at present, for many Poles to accept the "dark past" as an integral part of the Polish self-image.

Has the debate changed attitudes in Poland significantly? Judging by the opinions expressed in letters and Internet group discussions

⁸³ On the perception of the Second World War in public memory of the 1980s and 1990s, see Tomasz Szarota, "Wojna na dobre samopoczucie," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6 September 1996.

published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Polityka*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and *Wprost*, the “self-critical” version of Polish-Jewish relations is now more widely accepted, particularly by young people. But it has not gone unchallenged. Public opinion polls show widespread confusion on the subject and difficulty in reaching firm conclusions.⁸⁴ Thus in a poll held in early April 2001, 48 percent of those surveyed did not believe that Poles should apologize to the “Jewish nation” for the crime of Jedwabne, while 30 percent were in favor of an apology. Eighty percent did not feel—as Poles—any moral responsibility for Jedwabne, while only 13 percent felt such a responsibility; 34 percent believed that the Germans were solely responsible for the crime, 14 percent that Germans and Poles were jointly responsible, and 7 percent that Poles were solely responsible.⁸⁵

An opinion poll conducted in August 2001, after the memorial service and the extensive television coverage of the massacre, showed only small changes in attitude: 28 percent of respondents still believed that the Germans/Nazis were solely responsible for the massacre of Jedwabne Jews; 12 percent claimed that a few Poles together with the Germans participated in the massacre; 4 percent stated that Poles forced by the Germans committed the massacre; 8 percent stated that Poles alone were responsible for the massacre. Thirty percent were not able to say who was responsible for the murders. What is clear is that knowledge of what happened in Jedwabne is now widely disseminated in Poland.

Even after the publication of the report of the Institute of National Memory in October 2002, 50 percent of those polled were unable to say who was responsible for the massacre. This answer was most frequently given by people without higher education, among those who lived in the countryside or who declared they had no interest in politics. Three percent held that the murders had been committed by the local Polish population without the participation of the Germans; 17 percent held that those responsible were the local Poles incited by Germans; 28 percent by Germans with the help of Poles; 34 percent by Poles compelled to do so by Germans; and 18 percent by Germans without Polish help. Asked what sort of Poles participated in the mas-

⁸⁴ Opinion poll, conducted by Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej (CBOS) on 28 August 2001, *Report of CBOS*, Warsaw, September 2001.

⁸⁵ According to opinion polls conducted by Pentor, one of the leading Polish survey organizations, 23.3 percent of Poles between the ages of 15 and 25 stated that they felt “satisfaction that the truth about the massacre of Jedwabne Jews had been revealed and that the victims were honorably commemorated.” On the whole, 68 percent of the respondents felt that the revelation of the participation of Poles in the murders was an important event. This opinion poll was published in *Wprost*, 22 July 2001, 26.

sacre, 50 percent responded “ordinary people, like everyone else,” while 32 percent believed that they were “marginal people.” Eighty-three percent held that it was good that the crime at Jedwabne had been brought to light. Forty percent approved of the president’s apology; 35 percent disapproved. Forty-four percent thought such an apology necessary against 35 percent who did not. The body that carried out this poll (OBOP) concluded, “Those who refuse to acknowledge guilt for Jedwabne are primarily older people, those with less education, who live in the countryside and in small towns. Those who are in favor of such an acknowledgment are mostly younger, more educated, and town-dwellers.” It may be that, as in Germany, the long-term impact of the controversy will be very different from its first reception, as is suggested by this last poll.⁸⁶

How is one to interpret the significance of the debate? Those who have attempted to do so can be categorized either as optimists or as pessimists. The optimists have paid particular attention to the development of the “self-critical” aspect of the debate. They see it as a cathartic discussion that will transform the Poles’ way of remembering the Holocaust, Polish-Jewish relations, and their own wartime self-image.⁸⁷ In their opinion, the debate has broken the taboo on discussing the more painful aspects of Polish-Jewish relations. The pessimists have stressed rather the strength of the “radical apologetic” position that has attacked Gross’s book as an “anti-Polish lie aiming at the extortion of billions of dollars from hapless Poles.” They also take a critical view of the “moderate apologists” and have underlined the common ground between them and the radicals. Their conclusion is that the debate has confirmed the firm grip of the past on the present and the inability of Polish society to undergo a process that would lead to the “modernization of its mentality.” In their opinion, the shock of Jedwabne will “soon be forgotten” by the public and “antisemitism will become a part of the daily norm of life.”⁸⁸

However, these interpretations reflect primarily the position of the observer rather than the debate itself. It seems more sensible to view it as a reflection of the inevitable process of democratization of political and social life in Poland that has been possible only since 1989.⁸⁹ It is

⁸⁶ Public opinion survey conducted by CBOS on 6–9 April on 1,036 persons, Polska Agencja Prasowa (PAP), 1 May 2001, CBOS, 23–25 November 2002 on 1,008 persons.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Krzysztof Darewicz, “Debata o Jedwabnem zmieni Polaków,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2–3 May 2001, 3; and opinion of Marian Turski cited by Tony Wesolowski in “Jedwabne, Poland,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2001.

⁸⁸ See the opinions of the editors of the journal, Marcin Król, Paweł Śpiewak, and Marek Zaleski, in the discussion in *NowaResPublica*, no. 7 (July 2001).

⁸⁹ Ewa K. Czaczkowska, “Byłem sam, będą nas setki,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 July 2001.

also a product of the emergence of a pluralistic culture in which two competing visions of Poland, harking back in a strange way to the earlier conflict between Piłsudski and Dmowski, are competing for dominance.⁹⁰ The first concept of Poland is based on the civic pluralistic model—it is inclusive of the memory of “others” and acknowledges the wrongs done to them. The second is the ethnic nationalist model—it is not interested in the memory of “the other” and seeks to foster a vision of the past that stresses Polish suffering and the wrongs done to the Poles. These points of view also differ about how the country should develop in the future and whether its identity is threatened by globalization and entry into the European Union. Although the outward-looking and pluralistic vision of the Polish future still seems dominant and is represented both in the postcommunist and parts of the post-Solidarity camps, the integral nationalist and populist camp seems to be growing in strength, as was demonstrated by the strong showing of groups like the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodziń) and Self-defense (Samoobrona) in the parliamentary elections of September 2001.⁹¹

These two broad groups use very different language to address Jewish issues. Those who espouse a civic and pluralistic vision of Poland generally talk of “the Polish Jews,” “our co-citizens,” and “co-stewards of this land” (*współgospodarze*—the term used on the new monument in Jedwabne), language that reflects their rejection of ethnonationalism.⁹² In contrast, for those who favor an integral nationalist view of Poland, the Jew is still referred to as a Jew (*Żyd*, sometimes lowercased, *żyd*), a term that demarcates the Jews from Poles and that in present-day Poland has a pejorative tone (except when used by Jews).⁹³ This

⁹⁰ This has been, for instance, the view of the late Jerzy Giedroyc, the long-standing editor of *Kultura*.

⁹¹ The Liga Polskich Rodzin, which was founded just before these elections, adopts a conservative nationalist position. Its leader, Roman Giertych, comes from a prominent National Democratic family, and it has the support of a significant part of the conservative element within the Polish Catholic Church, most notably Father Tadeusz Rydzyk of Radio Maryja. It is strongly opposed to Polish entry into the European Union. So, too, is the Przymierze Samoobrona, which was created in 1992 as the militant political representative of the radical farmers’ trade union of the same name. Its leader, Andrzej Lepper, is notorious for his aggressive and xenophobic statements.

⁹² The former prime minister Jerzy Buzek, president of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and chairman of Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) Leon Kieres have used such terms. For example, in an interview for *Dziennik Bałtycki*, 15 June 2001, Kieres stated, “I treat ‘Polishness’ as a civic category and thus treat the Jews of Jedwabne as my compatriots.” Cited in *Polityka*, no. 26 (30 June 2001): 88.

⁹³ It should be mentioned that prewar integrationists and assimilationists lowercased *żyd* to stress that the Jews were a religious and not a national group. Today, however, this usage is clearly antisemitic.

linguistic difference is indicative of the former group's willingness to adopt a critical stance in relation to the history of Polish-Jewish relations and reflects their desire to integrate the Jews posthumously into the community of Poland and into the Polish consciousness, a desire that is clearly lacking in the second group. In this sense, the debate should be seen as part of the struggle between two concepts of Poland that entail significantly different and conflicting memories of the Holocaust and constructions of the Polish self-image.⁹⁴

The conflict between these two visions of Poland is not yet decided, and its outcome will have major implications for the country's future. The debate about *Jedwabne* is only a part of this conflict, but it is a significant part. Writing about developments in Poland between 1989 and 1995, Michael Steinlauf observed that it was still not possible to foresee what Poles would do with the memory of the Holocaust, and how it would shape Polish history and consciousness.⁹⁵ He expressed the hope that this memory "would be used in the service of renewal rather than repression." The dynamics of the debate over *Neighbors* suggests that renewal has definitely taken place, but that it is accompanied by repression. Time will tell whether this repression is a significant or a marginal phenomenon. Jews, both in Poland and outside, clearly have some role to play in affecting the outcome of this process. Popular Jewish perceptions of the Poles are preponderantly negative and underplay Polish resistance to the Nazis (and Soviets). Some recognition on the Jewish side of the level of Polish resistance and suffering would clearly strengthen those in Poland who are struggling to come to terms with the negative aspects of Polish-Jewish relations.

At the same time, although the debate among historians has so far been both acrimonious and disappointing in its results, it is this debate that seems to offer the best chance of forward movement. In this context, the debate about *Neighbors* is part of a general process, which has only really begun since the end of the communist system, of coming to terms with many neglected and taboo aspects of the Polish past. Among these are the history of Poles beyond the borders of present-day Poland, above all in the former Soviet Union, and relations between Poles and Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Germans, and Russians. For too long, these topics have been the subject of much mythologization. The first approach to such issues has to be from a moral point of

⁹⁴ We borrow the concept "transmission of memory" from the leading sociologist of memory, Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs originated the contention that memory is an activity deeply affected by its medium of transmission. See Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York, 1980).

⁹⁵ Steinlauf, *Bondage*, 144.

view—a settlement of long-overdue accounts. In the case of Polish-Jewish relations, we are now beginning to enter a second stage, where apologies and apologetics will increasingly be replaced by careful and detailed research and reliable and nuanced firsthand testimony.⁹⁶ Franklin Ankersmit has argued that since what we are dealing with here is not “normal” but “traumatic” history, this Polish-Jewish past is not susceptible to the discourse of the historian, which in his view merely examines the past but does not try to explore or penetrate it. This is too pessimistic. It should be possible to move beyond strongly held, competing, and incompatible narratives of the past and to reach some consensus that will be acceptable to all people of goodwill and will bring about a degree of normalization both in Poles’ attitudes toward the past and in Polish-Jewish relations, while also increasing awareness in the Jewish world of the complexity of the Polish situation between 1939 and 1945. Some have questioned whether normalization is a desirable or realizable goal. The past is too near and painful for that. Perhaps the aim should be for both Poles and Jews (insofar as these are mutually exclusive categories) to strive for a “tragic acceptance” of those events which have united and, so often, divided them in the past century. That, at least, is owed to the millions of victims of the totalitarian systems of the last century.

⁹⁶ Indeed, the debate about *Neighbors* does seem to have facilitated a serious debate about relations between Poles and Ukrainians. In a recent issue of *Więź* (April 2002) entitled *Z Ukraińcami po Jedwabnem* (With the Ukrainians after Jedwabne), there is an extended discussion of Ukrainian ethnic cleansing directed against Poles in Volynia during the Second World War and the postwar “Operation Wisła” in which the Ukrainian population of southeastern Poland was forcibly resettled in the north and west of the country.