

# Post-Jedwabne debate controversies in Poland: history, memory and their advocates.

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## Abstract

This thesis discusses selected cases of contestations of national memory-based discourses in post-Communist Poland in the framework of Polish identity narratives. It especially focuses on cultural and academic productions that challenge dominant narratives of suffering, victimhood and innocence with interventions incorporating Jewish accounts on the past. The secondary literature on Jedwabne debate is reviewed and it is concluded that a more adequate analytical conceptual framework is necessary to understand the dynamics of the debates. It is proposed to examine the debates by looking at the producers and consumers of memory and history, collective and individual actors and their interests, as well as notions of contestation and intervention. A case study of Władysław Pasikowski's film "the Aftermath" is presented to demonstrate the usefulness of the suggested conceptual framework. A variety of methods are used in the investigation: secondary literature, media accounts, opinion polls and reports were consulted and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

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## Introduction

In post-Communist Poland narratives on the Second World War and the Holocaust have been vividly discussed in the public sphere. Academic works, as well as cultural productions – theatre plays, films, art projects- provoke historical debates about the narratives and counter-narratives. Tony Judt, writing about post-1989 Europe observed:

“Since 1989 – with the overcoming of long- established inhibition – it has proven possible to acknowledge (sometimes in the teeth of virulent opposition and denial) the moral price was paid for Europe’s rebirth. Poles, French, Swiss, Italians, Romanians and others are now better placed to know – if they wish to know – what really happened in their country just a few short decades ago (...).” (2005, p.10).

A number of actors demonstrate the “wish to know what really happened” in Poland by undertaking attempts to deconstruct the dominant narrative to discover the multiple stories and perspectives involved in historical accounts. In the thesis I analyze selected cases of contestations of memory-based narratives on Jews in Poland. I especially focus on cultural and academic productions - such as scholarly publications, films or art projects - that challenge national memory-based narratives (of suffering, victimhood and innocence) with accounts acknowledging Jewish accounts on the past.

Following Judt (Ibid.): “postwar in Europe lasted a very long time, but it is finally coming to a close” – the history of Second World War and its representation in contemporary memory can be openly examined and debated not only in Western Europe, but also in its Central and Eastern part. Through the debates over history and memory, “we are able to question the canons of well-intentioned official memory” (Ibid). The questioning indeed happens in the controversial public debates, in Poland as well as in other states of the region. In the discussions, the tension is enacted between memory narratives – emotional and identity-related accounts, and history, where academics with necessary distance to the past are involved in examining and deconstructing the narratives “as figments of a self-serving collective imagination” (Assman and Shortt 2012, p.9). Various actors – politicians, media,

cultural producers, academics and intellectuals together with audiences engage in a process of (re)production of the memory-based and history-based narratives in the moments of contestations.

The public controversies around contestations of narratives in Poland have been analyzed in academic literature already. However, I argue that the conceptual frameworks used in the scholarly accounts I am familiar with are not the most suitable ones, especially: talking about collective trauma, be it cultural or societal; discussing *Polish-Jewish* relations, or the dividing actors in the debates as being part of either a group representing self-defensive or self-critical approach to national identity narratives. I emphasize the necessity to examine the debates using more analytically helpful terminology, like collective and individual actors, producers and consumers of memory and history, contestation, intervention and interests. They point at the actual agency, as ‘Poles’ do not act, ‘Poles’ and ‘Jews’ are inventions as collective agents in these cases. Collectives are invented and constructed, as Brubaker (2004) highlighted.

To examine the dynamic interaction between actors (re) producing memory and history narratives, I discuss the divide between history and memory and adopt Bourdieu’s concept of intellectual intervention and Kansteiner’s description of collective memory. My focus are some of the contestations of memory-based narratives on the Jews in Poland. By applying a Bourdieuan approach to these specific case, I am able to go further than explaining public debates about Poland’s past by the usage collective national agents (Poles, Jews,...), and point at the motives and interests of specific agents from the political and intellectual field. As I show in this thesis, the examination of the Jedwabne debate<sup>1</sup> and the Pokłosie controversy on the basis of more Bourdieuan analytical concepts could explain their

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<sup>1</sup> The discussions provoked by Jan Tomasz Gross’ publication of *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2000).

dynamics better and enrich our understanding of the contemporary debates about the contested Polish past.

In the thesis I firstly review the selected academic literature on different aspects of collective memory borrowing from the fields of history and sociology to establish a theoretical framework for my analysis. Secondly, I discuss Polish national mythology and identity narratives vis-à-vis significant external and internal others prevailing in the narratives. Jews play a crucial role in the construction of Polish collective self and ‘the Jew’ serves as Polish defining other (Michlic 2006, Cała 2000, Tokarska-Bakir 2011). Thirdly, I examine secondary literature on the debates since 1980s about (lack of) Jewish perspectives in Polish collective narratives, and argue that the controversies around intellectual interventions, such as Jan Tomasz Gross’ publications in 2000 and 2006, have been analyzed in an inadequate conceptual framework.

I propose an alternative approach to the study of debates on contested narratives in Poland by incorporating elements Kansteiner’s perspective on collective memory, which he describes as “a complex process of cultural production and consumption that acknowledges the persistence of cultural traditions as well as the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interests of memory consumers” (2002, p.179). The last chapter discusses a case of 2012-2013 controversies around Władysław Pasikowski’s film “the Aftermath”. The production provoked fierce responses from actors in the political and cultural sphere as well as engaged audience in a vivid debate on Polish identity memory-based narratives versus historical accounts. The thesis combines a variety of research methods – secondary literature is examined as well as qualitative and quantitative primary sources. I consulted a number of opinion polls, reports, printed and on-line press articles and comments and I conducted a few interviews with experts as well as individuals involved in events of contestation of the memory narratives.



# Chapter 1 Literature Review

## The origins of collective memory studies

In this chapter, I outline the developments in the field of collective memory studies and emphasize the works that I later on use as a framework in my analysis of contestations of narratives in Poland. The role of shared understandings of the past for collective identity of groups, by some described as ‘social memory’, has been a subject of an increasing fascination of academics in social sciences in the last three decades. It has been studied especially by the scholars of nationalism, historians, cultural theorists, anthropologists and sociologists. Some works are combining the study of group narratives with the field of individual and collective memories, and this brings to the picture an even wider scope of methods and approaches since memory is studied not only by social but also natural scientists. As Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins (1998) point out, social thinkers since ancient Greece were concerned with the study of memory. “Yet it was not until the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries that a distinctively social perspective on memory became prominent” (Ibid., p.106) and the interest in memory appeared simultaneously to the crisis of historicism in the early twentieth century (Ibid.). The term collective memory in social sciences refers to “practices of remembrance shaped and reinforced by the societies and cultures in which they occur” (Rossington, 2007, p.134) and has a special significance in the field of nationalism studies, as the visions of collective memories are a crucial element in constructing the nations. I depart from the examination of collective memory studies and in the following section I draw the connections of this field with the study of nationalism and identity.

In the study of memory, the groundwork has been laid down by Maurice Halbwachs, a student of Durkheim, in *Les Cadres sociaux de la memoire*, a book published in 1925. As a Durkheimian, Halbwachs is in his approach anti-individualist, arguing that *memoire*

*collective*, collective memory, is a phenomenon that is explicitly socially determined (Kansteiner 2002, p. 183). Moreover, Halbwachs locates collective memory and history in essential opposition to each other “the need to write the history of a period, a society, or even a person is only aroused when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it” (Halbwachs, 2007, p.139). Then, for him, the development of collective memory is continuous and not marked by regular boundaries, except for the boundaries of the group in whose consciousness it lives. In contrast, history divides the past into periods and “gives the impression that everything – the interplay of interests, general orientations (...) is transformed from one period to the other” (Ibid., p.142). Moreover, while there are several collective memories, history is unitary and can be characterized as “the universal memory of the human species” (Ibid., p.143).

Finally, he argues that while memory consists only of the elements that are common and remembered precisely because they are shared, history focuses mainly on disparities while the similarities are ignored. “Despite the variety of times and places, history reduces events to seemingly comparable terms, allowing their interrelation as variations on one or several schemes.” (Ibid, p.143). Scholars studying memory in the last decades have heavily relied on Halbwach’s work, yet simultaneously his distinction and conceptualizations have been criticized and replaced with some new definitions and perspectives. Nonetheless, his publication is a milestone for the academic interest in memory, which especially surged in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Memory boom**

There are various explanations in the literature of the expansion of the interest in memory in the late twentieth century. Two compelling analyzes are proposed in Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead’s publication (2007) and in the article reviewing the developments in collective memory studies by Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins (1998). I

organize my next sections following the account from the former publication, as it covers a longer period the developments in the field, up to 2000s. In the introduction to their comprehensive publication detailing the developments in the study of memory, *Theories of memory. A reader.*, Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (2007, p.5) talk about the ‘memory boom’ in the 1990s that was conditioned by multifaceted and varied factors. Among these, they discuss the emergence of key publications, developments in the academic field of Holocaust studies and post-structuralism<sup>2</sup>(Ibid., pp. 5-10). I detail three factors they point at.

Firstly, the two main works that influenced the fascination in memory were published in the 1980s, it was Yosef Yerushalmi’s *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de memoire* (1984). *Les Lieux de Memoire* was a multi-volume collaborative project directed by Nora on the national memory of France published between 1984 and 1992. In the introduction, Nora argues that there is a distinction between the understanding of time in collective memory and history and memory stands in fundamental opposition to history.

“Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. it remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation(...)”, it is “a perpetually actual phenomemon”, and it “only accommodates the facts that suit it” (Nora 2007, pp.145-146).

While history is “the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.” (Ibid., p.146). Moreover, he writes, critical approach to history is necessary, as it is an intellectual and secular production. Finally, memory is linked to one group only and history belongs to everyone and no one, thus it aspires for universal authority (Ibid., p.146).Yerushalmi in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish memory* claims that memory is at the heart of Jewish tradition and it is not historians who transmit it “the meaning of history is

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<sup>2</sup> They also add the debates about False Memory Syndrome and postcolonial critique writings by Franz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha; but these factors are less significant for the purpose of my analysis.

explored more directly and more deeply in the prophets than in the actual historical narratives; the collective memory is transmitted more actively through ritual than through chronicle” (2007, p.15).

Both authors argued against seeing memory as Halbwachs describes it – as primitive and sacred, opposed to modern historical consciousness. However, Nora and Yerushalmi position memory as an anti-historical discourse, and the implicit distinction between the two conceptualizations is problematic and misleading. In the words of Kansteiner: “there are good reasons to question such a clear epistemological divide between academic and non-academic representations of the past” (2002, p.184). Kansteiner proposes instead to characterize history rather as a specific type of cultural memory since as Burke contains “neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases this selection, interpretation and distortion is socially conditioned.” (Burke, 1989 in Kansteiner 2002, p.184). I return to the considerations on the distinction between memory and history further in this chapter. Yet, first I outline some more developments in the field of memory studies in the recent decades.

The second factor contributing to the ‘memory boom’ was the expansion of Holocaust studies. In the developments of this field, the first ones to focus on the significance of memory were the Holocaust survivors themselves, for example Primo Levi in the first parts of *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988). He recalls the Nazis’ statement: “we will ultimately win because nobody will know and remember the truth” (Levi 1988, p.1) and argues that the survivors bear responsibility to communicate their past sufferings, but he also discusses the fallacies of memory and trauma (Ibid., p.11). When memory is studied, trauma has been of special consideration in the Holocaust studies. Cathy Caruth, in a volume she edited, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) has established a model to approach trauma, where the context is provided by the connections between the individual and collective historical experiences. Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and*

*Postmemory* (1997) looks at the trauma of survivors passed on to the following generations. She coined a term *postmemory* to characterize

“the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (Hirsch 1997, p.22).

Hirsch focuses on the familial framework, but her work, and particularly the concept of *postmemory*, is referred to as a wider model for consider the effects of traumatic events on the generations after, also on collective and cultural level.<sup>3</sup>

Dominick La Capra in *History and memory after Auschwitz* (1998) and *Writing history, writing trauma* (2001) approaches the question of how traumas can be dealt with. Referring to already existing literature on the subject, i.e. the works of Lyotard and Friedlander, he discusses what trauma is and what effects it has on groups. He defines two distinct ways of coming to terms with trauma – acting out and working through. La Capra sees the first one as compulsive repetition and the second one as a desirable, but very demanding approach in which one “tries to gain critical distance on a problem and distinguish between past, present and future” (2001, p.143). He also argues that the generations that come after the event, “should neither appropriate (or belatedly act out) the experience of victims nor restrict their role to secondary witnessing, memory, mourning dead victims, and honoring survivorship would constitute an excessively limited horizon of action” (1998, p.198). La Capra’s approach provides a firm base for the study of memory through the lens of trauma, yet while discussing trauma one needs to be aware of the dangers linked to the term. As he writes (1998 in Kansteiner, 2002, p.187):

“there is a great temptation to trope away from specificity and to generalize hyperbolically, for example, through an extremely abstract mode of discourse that may at times serve as a surrogate for a certain form of deconstruction, elaborate an undifferentiated notion of all history (or at least modernity) as trauma, and overextend the concept of victim and survivor” .

<sup>3</sup> For instance *postmemory* is used by contributors to the compilation edited by Dorota Głowacka and Joanna Żylińska *Imaginary neighbours. Mediating Polish-Jewish relations after the Holocaust* (2007).

Another strand of the Holocaust studies focuses on how the event is remembered across various cultural contexts. Young in *The Texture of memory* (1993) argues that every nation remembers the Holocaust in line with its own traditions and experiences. According to his widely-quoted phrase, memory is “never shaped in vacuum; the motives of memory are never pure” (1993, p.2). As Klein noted, there is an intrinsic problem in his conceptualization of memory. Namely, Young positions the memory as “an active agent, if not a hero”( Klein 2000, p.136) . Furthermore, following Nora’s understanding Young implies ‘the nation’ plays the main role in the operation and organization of collective memory (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007, p.8). In *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (2000), Peter Novick also departs from the same assumption of ‘nation’s’ centrality for memory discourse. In his book he examines why and how Holocaust gained a crucial place in American culture. Nonetheless, what is a nation? The discourses on collective memories of a given nation are (re)produced by actors with particular interests and the dynamics involved in this process needs to be studied while considering the narratives of memory.

Post-structuralism is the last among the factors contributing to the surge in the interest in memory that Rossington and Whitehead (2007) describe. The authors describe post-structuralism as an umbrella term that allows to identify a number of critical thinkers who “challenged critical orthodoxies and took up the position that identities do not relate to essences but are events in language” (Ibid.,p.9). The impact of post-structuralists on the study of memory comes particularly from their close readings of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century texts, which drew them to argue that “the meaning is unstable and undecideable and that the past cannot be fully recuperated; the act of memory is therefore both compromised and necessarily incomplete” (Ibid., p.10). The thriving academic interest in memory, stimulated by key works of Nora and Yerushalmi and followed by developments in Holocaust studies as well as the publications discussing memory in post-structuralist framework; has been expanding further.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has been especially marked by the emergence of new approaches in memory studies, which derive from criticisms of the works belonging to the memory boom. I discuss these in detail in the following section.

### Criticisms of the memory boom and new approaches

Since the fascination has emerged from the compound intersection of diverse academic disciplines and non-academic discourses, also the criticisms of the memory boom, which became most significantly articulated in the 2000s, have been voiced by a number of actors from diverse disciplines. Yet, it should be acknowledged that memory studies have been “a dynamic and impressive contribution to recent research in humanities” but at the same time “they are flawed by attendant problems of methodology and conceptualization” (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007, p.11).

The first important critical voice has been delivered by Kerwin Lee Klein in his essay *On Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse* (2000). Klein contends that current usage of memory as a replacement for history “reflects both an increasing discontent with historical discourse and a desire to draw upon some of the oldest patterns of linguistic practice” (2000, p.145). The linguistic practice he refers to is the vocabulary of memory studies – *trauma, mourning, sublime, redemption, healing, catharsis, witnessing, testimony, ritual* are among the words he mentions (Ibid.). For him, without these religious and Hegelian meanings, as he calls them, memory would not be able to do the work we expect it to do, namely “to re-enchant our relation with the world and pour presence back into the past” (Ibid.). Klein situates the current problems with the discourse of memory between two crises as the breaking points. In the introduction he refers to the crisis of historicism in the early twentieth century which was simultaneous to the emergence of interest in social memory (Ibid., p.127) and he concludes saying that in the present day, “memory can come to the fore in an age of historiographic crisis precisely because it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical

discourse” (Klein, 2000, p. 145). Though the difference lays in the scope of interest in the study of memory. After the early twentieth century crisis, “outside the experimental psychology and clinical psychoanalysis, few academics paid much attention to memory until the great swell of popular interest in autobiographical literature, family genealogy, and museums that marked the seventies.” (Ibid., p.127).

Another significant critical voice for the memory studies came from Wulf Kansteiner’s *Finding memory in memory: a methodological critique of collective memory studies* (2002). His approach to memory studies serve me as a framework for my study of collective memory thus I devote a considerable amount of attention to analyzing its arguments of recommendations. For Kansteiner, memory studies “have not done enough to establish a clear conceptual and methodological basis for collective memory processes” (Rossington and Whitehead 2007, p.11). He writes “collectives are said to remember, to forget, and to repress the past; but this is done without any awareness that such language is at best metaphorical and at worst misleading about the phenomenon under study” (Kansteiner 2002, p.185).

Kansteiner emphasizes three points in his criticism. One is conceptual confusion between the study of individual and collective memories which results in the frequent misrepresentation of “the nature and dynamics of collective memories (...) through facile use of psychological and psychoanalytical methods.” (Ibid., p.180). He particularly points to the overuse of Freud’s theories<sup>4</sup> and quotes Irwin-Zarecka’s statement: “when speaking of social forgetting, we are best advised to keep psychological or psychoanalytical categories at bay and to focus, rather, on the social, political, and cultural factors at work” (Irwin-Zarecka 1994 in Kansteiner 2002, p.186). Following a similar vein, Kansteiner goes on to outline another criticism directed at the collective memory studies, namely too little attention that is paid to

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<sup>4</sup> As a replacement for Freud, he proposes to use Bergson’s concept of habit memory (Kansteiner 2002, p.190). Henri Bergson distinguishes between two types of memory – the past that persists as a bodily habit or as an independent recollection (Bergson, 2007)



the realm of reception both in terms of methods and sources. For him, “works on specific collective memories often cannot illuminate the sociological base of historical representations” (Kansteiner 2002, p.180). Finally, Kansteiner argues that some of the problems of the field can be tackled through “adopting and further developing the methods of media and communication studies, especially regarding the questions of perception” (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Kansteiner joins Klein (2000) in arguing that there is too much emphasis on the material artefacts in the study of collective memory and as a consequence consistent interpretative community is accentuated. “Memory studies presuppose a (...) desire for cultural homogeneity, consistency and predictability”(Kansteiner 2002, p.193) by assuming that if people have particular knowledge about the past event they would also share similar perceptions of it and thus form a stable interpretative community. Additionally, Kansteiner supports Klein (2000) in disapproving of the usage of the concept of trauma in the study of collective memories, yet Kansteiner explains his reasoning more explicitly and convincingly. For him, the concept of trauma does not contribute to clarifying the processes behind the (re)production of collective memories, even though indeed some understandings of the past may result from traumatic experiences. He argues that even if the collective memory is delayed – for instance in the case of the Holocaust, “the delayed onset of public debates about the meaning of negative pasts has more to do with political interest and opportunities than the persistence of trauma or with ant ‘leakage’ in the collective unconscious” (Kansteiner 2002, p.187). I follow Kansteiner’s critical approach to trauma by refraining from the usage of the term *trauma* to address the societal or cultural level. Even if dreadful, traumatic events leave marks upon the consciousness of individuals and communities, they only become the elements of national memory based narratives once actors begin labeling and (re)producing them on the societal level. I see the aggregated personal or communal traumas as being (re)produced by actors in the dominant narratives in the same manner as memory narratives.

Further, Kansteiner claims that collective memory should be seen as “a complex process of cultural production and consumption that acknowledges the persistence of cultural traditions as well as the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interests of memory consumers” (Ibid. p.179). In the thesis I follow his multi-leveled conception to examine collective memories in the framework of national narratives (re)production by various actors.

### Identity, nations and memories

Kansteiner points to the “relatively obvious link” between memory studies and identity politics, and the resulting coincidence of the crises of identity and those of memory - “memory is valorized where identity is problematized” (2002, p.184).<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, he writes, the connection between memory and identity has been as yet hardly studied in the field. In the thesis I want to explore this gap in memory studies by looking at the process of sustaining, re-producing and re-constructing the national identity in the framework of contestations of collective memories. In the following subsection I describe some of the works dealing with identity, belonging and groups that I intend to borrow from in my analysis.

Works from the recent narrative turn in identity theory, as Olick and Robbins (1998) write, describe identities as “ongoing processes of construction in the narrative form” (p.122). In Hall’s words: “identities [personal or collective] are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past” (S. Hall in Huyssen 1995). The concept has been broadened to include also the social level. Some authors point to the process of acquiring the personal and social identities as the connection between identity and memory (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p.123). Halbwachs emphasized the role of the family in influencing how we view the past. As Zerubavel notices, a lot of what we remember, we did not experience as individuals but we acquire it in the process of socialization in the family

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<sup>5</sup> The examples he gives is particularly the focus on memory in non-academic contexts –therapeutic circles, the judicial system, post-War ethnic conflicts (Kansteiner 2002, p.184)

and in the wider society. “Being social presupposes the ability to experience events that happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them as if they were part of our own past...” (Zerubavel, 1996 in: Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.123). Yet, for the personal or communal experiences from the past to become elements of the shared national narratives, actors need to engage (re)producing them on the collective level.

Eric Hobsbawm in *The invention of traditions* (2012) considers the process of inventing traditions by the elites as a central element of modern nation-making, he discusses traditions as “disingenuous efforts to secure political power” (Hobsbawm in Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.108). Some elements of the memories of the group’s past, as selected by the tradition-makers are incorporated into the narrative. Other nationalism scholars point to the professional history being utilized by the institutions of the nation-state. Breisbach writes:

“historians were called on to mediate between the demands for change and the equally strong desire to see the continuity of the past, present, and future preserved... presented by careful scholars with great eloquence, these histories became popular possessions rather than scholarly curiosas” (1994 in Olick & Robbins 1998, p.117).

The focus on the constructedness of nations and its memories and traditions in the cited works from nationalism studies, allows to examine the side of the ‘nation-makers’ or ‘memory-makers’, but it does not shed light on the ‘consumers’ part. Neither does it show some of the complexities and dynamics of the processes of building, sustaining and re-constructing identity, belonging and memories. Nevertheless, many of the works in the field of nationalism studies account for the disunity and the ongoing contestations of national narratives, “memory sites and memory practices are central loci for ongoing struggles over identity” (Ibid., p.126).

Contestation, as Olick and Robbins write (Ibid.) is central for memory as well as identity. Critical theorists point that states use history for their purposes and at the same time they “make history into nationalist enterprise” (Ibid.). “The hegemony of modern nation-states and the legitimacy which accrues to the groups and classes that control their

apparatuses, are critically constituted by representations of a national past” (Alonso, 1998 in: Ibid.). Foucauldian notion of counter-memory addresses the memories that do not comply with, or pose a challenge to the dominant discourse. However, “counter memory approaches often employ a rather essentialist notion of authenticity: counter-memory is sometimes seen as protected and separate from hegemonic forms” (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.127). Moreover, the primacy of national memory corresponds with the dominance of the national identity over other ones and thus the essentialism extends to the sphere of identity.<sup>6</sup> Such essentialism is problematic for the national identity, since “there is no such thing as *one* national identity (...) rather different identities are discursively constructed according to audience, setting, topic and substantive content.” (Wodak et. al., 2009, p.4) Even though I am aware of the problems with the concepts of contestation and counter-memory, I apply these terms in my analysis as challenges to national memory narratives be the focus of my work.

An important contribution to the analysis of collective memory narratives and contestations has been provided by Aleida Assman and Linda Shortt in an edited volume *Memory and political change* (2012). They adopt a novel approach by looking at the role of memory as an influential agent of change and they argue: “memory has become a central issue in our discussions about transition, as this truth is directly related to the memory of the victims, and it is the medium of a new shared narrative of the past that integrates formerly divided perspectives” (p.1). The authors look at the ethical questions around memory, and they see memory and history as two points on one continuum. The former transforms into the latter under specific conditions. Firstly, “An event becomes the exclusive property of professional historians when there are no witnesses left to tell its story, it recedes into

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<sup>6</sup>. The concept of *popular memory* has been employed by ‘Popular Memory Group’ (Johnson et al 1982) and others to provide a more comprehensive way to embrace memory in the nation-state realm. The notion describes “ongoing processes of contestation and resistance, a relatively free space of reading and reaction in which official and unofficial, public and private, interpenetrate” (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.127).

distance”. Secondly, “when historical events which once captivated the public imagination and which were rehearsed in monuments and rituals lose their emotional grip, they become the object of scholarly investigation.” And thirdly, “when historians engage with national myths, analyzing and deconstructing these as figments of a self-serving collective imagination”. (Ibid., p.9) The key concept in their distinction between history and memory is ‘distance’. Once historical ‘distance’ comes in, a critical engagement with the past and a challenge of memory-structured narratives is possible. Implied in Assman’s and Shortt’s history and memory concepts is that the ‘distance’ in this case is more than only temporal distance between the history producer and the past, it also includes aspects of what Mark Salber Phillips has called formal, ideological and cognitive distance. (M.S. Phillips, 2004) Assman’s and Shortt’s typology offers a valuable approach to identify the processes of transition from memory to history, but it is crucial to remember that history is not static and unitary, it is a subject of constant contestation and re-definition in the public sphere.

Another problematic point in the volume is the treatment of memory as if it was an active agent - Klein’s criticisms of ascribing agency to memory itself are viable while considering this book. The authors mention that “in order to yield and effects, remembering and forgetting have to be tied to *human actors within cultural, political, institutional and social frames*” (Ibid., p.5). Yet, the influence of numerous actors and forces within these frames is not scrutinized much in the volume – the authors focus on the side of memory and its power, rather than on those who exert this power. The book also points out the role of the media events in “changing memories and transforming events” Assman and Shortt write about the American TV series on the Holocaust in 1978 which “profoundly changed the attitude of Germans towards the Jewish victims by opening up their blocked imagination and tapping their resources of empathy”(Ibid., p.8). Precisely media events in the framework of collective memory is what I want to focus on in my thesis, and regardless the limitations of

the approach of Assman and Shortt, I am going to adopt their distinction between memory and history as a general framework for my considerations. Yet, the difference between the two – memory and history, requires to be conceptualized in more detail.

Chris Lorenz (2010) in *Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past* addresses some of the outcomes of the rise of memory studies for history seen as an academic discipline. He describes how academic history in its origins in the early nineteenth century was tied to nation-state. Further, he argues that the discipline was based on a particular conception of time “that of linear, irreversible and teleological time (...)” (p.70) which after Koselleck and Hartog he sees in terms of the ‘modern regime of historicity’ and continues that the “academic conception of history as the process of nation-formation is based on this ‘modern’ conception.” (Ibid.). Then, the memory boom of the late twentieth century and the simultaneous collapse of national history, he writes, “can be best explained in terms of a change of the ‘modern’ to the ‘presentist’ regime of historicity” (Ibid.), and he contends that an indispensable element of ‘presentism’ is “the recognition of historical wounds (...) and this presupposes a time conception which is not ‘erasive’ and which can explain *duration*”. (Ibid.).

He sees memory studies as a “subspecies of contemporary history because of its focus on the present experience of the past” (Ibid., p.86). Finally, he proposes the amended version of ‘presentism’ for academic history as a reflexive discipline which “does not only need to problematize its kind of (epistemological) choices of representation, but also its political and ethical investments” (Ibid., p.71). One of the consequences of the self-reflexive approach in the political point of view is for him the requirement to analyze the discipline of history as

“a ‘disciplinary field’ in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, in which the struggle for power manifests itself in the vocabulary of epistemology and of methodology. (...) This means to analyze *all* definitions of boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate statements in a discipline as ‘essentially contested’ and therefore inherently political.” (Ibid., p.94).

Thus, the concept of contestation, which is crucial for my thesis, is one of the central elements of the self-reflexive approach when it comes to studying the past. A historian analyzes the

past referring to the past with distance, yet the distance does not mean objectivity. Lorenz's conceptualization of self-reflexivity may be seen as helpful in constructing the necessary distance in the 'presentist' regime of historicity.

### My approach

In the following parts of the thesis, I examine selected contestations of national memory based narratives on Jews in Poland. The background is provided by an examination of the content of Polish national identity narratives and the constructions of defining others in the discourses in chapter two. Further, in the following chapters I examine case studies of some acts of contestation of the national memory narratives conducted by cultural producers. These contestations from the intellectual field function as truth claims aiming at a change of the dominant memory-based narrative held by actors in the political field. For Bourdieu (1991), a cultural producer can be seen as intervening in the political field as intellectual, if he fulfills specific criteria:

“on the one hand, he must belong to an autonomous intellectual world (a field) that is, independent from religious, political (...) powers, and must respect its specific laws; on the other hand, he must invest the competence and authority he has acquired in the intellectual field in a political action, which is in any case carried out outside the intellectual field proper”  
(Ibid.,p.656).

The cultural producers I selected to examine interventions of in Polish public sphere fulfill these requirements. The public debates I intend to analyze occurred in Poland between 2000 and 2013 after intellectual interventions challenging the national memory based narratives. In chapter three I focus on the discussions around Jan Tomasz Gross' books published in 2000 and 2006, and evaluate the analytical framework used in secondary literature on the debates provoked by Gross' publications to describe these two interventions. I argue for a different approach to the study of narratives' contestations, in which the links with identity and group narratives would be highlighted and the discussion of interests of various involved actors would be included, as Kansteiner's definition of collective memory proposes. According to him, collective memory is “a complex process of cultural production

and consumption that acknowledges the persistence of cultural traditions as well as the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interests of memory consumers” (2002, p.179). I intend to combine Kansteiner’s perspective with a Bourdieuan view on intellectual interventions of cultural producers in the political field.

In chapter four I examine the public debates around a fiction film “the Aftermath” by Władysław Pasikowski. “The Aftermath” tells a story of re-discovering the past in a small village where during the Second World War the local Polish population killed their Jewish neighbors. I incorporate a number of levels in my analysis – the product (the film), the producers of memory and history (filmmakers, politicians, media), as well as the consumers (responses to the on-line articles or discussions by the internet users). I hope to present a new angle for looking at the national narratives in the studied case by combining Kansteiner’s approach to collective memory with Bourdieu’s idea of intellectual intervention in interpreting the Polish public debates on the contestations of national memory based narratives.



## Chapter 2 Polish national identity

### Introduction

Collective memories do not emerge and persist in vein – they are narratives about the past which are (re)shaped in particular cultural, political and social contexts, and they are subject to influence of multiple actors. Group identity narratives are fundamental constituents of the context within which some collective memories are (re)enacted and emphasized, while others are neglected and silenced. But as Chris Lorenz has argued in a 2004 article, memory and history are also the main constituents of an identity as such, if (historical) identity is defined on the basis of change and continuity of an object over time in interaction with its environment. (Lorenz, 2004)

As a background for the analysis of contestations of collective memories in Poland, this chapter offers an overview of national identity narratives. It identifies the main themes of national narratives and discusses the changing constructions of defining others in the narratives. How has Polish national identity been defined historically vis-a-vis other groups? who are the Polish others? Why and when are they gaining relevance? How are the collective memory narratives influenced by the evolving constructions of defining others? I analyze the construction of Polishness drawing on both the ethno-symbolist framework – focusing on common myths and symbols; but also relying on the modern perspectives on nationalism– pointing to the importance of socio-political circumstances and power struggles between actors to determine the content of the prevalent narratives. Then, I describe the constructions of the historically-significant Polish external and internal others. I focus on three defining groups that are most mentioned in the academic literature (Bokszański 1995, Cała 1992, Michlic 2006, Zarycki 2011) - Russians and Germans to refer to external defining others, and Jews as the internal defining other.

## Constructing national identity

We have as much in common with *us* as we do with *them*, and yet, as human beings “we cannot *not divide*: cognitively, emotionally or in any other way” (Dalal, 2009, p.80). The conceptualisation of the other is indispensable for the construction of the self: the other embodies what the collective self is not, thus in that way it defines what it is. As Bauman argues, identities are “made almost entirely of empathic, possibly violent, acts of self-separation, which always involve naming and assaulting a certain other” (Bauman, 1998, p.154). In the performances of groups’ identities, the tension between who is included and who is excluded is constantly reproduced. The exclusion - rejection, of certain elements and characteristics, creates an impression of homogeneity and cohesion of the self-group (Dalal, 2009). In case of the present-day Polish national identity narratives, its dominant elements have been particularly influenced by the geopolitical circumstances and socio-cultural context of nineteenth and twentieth century. As Volkan writes, “the historical events of a group’s history are intertwined with the group’s self as well as self of its members”(1988,p.177) . The national myth of Poland as a chosen and innocent victim of oppressions is represented in the construction of the historical memory as well as in the identities of its members. Even though victimisation constitutes an element of every national identity narrative, as Ashley (2001, in Zarycki 2004 p.624) claims, yet not in all cases it plays a role so central as for people from Poland.

The second part of nineteenth century has been an especially formative period for the Polish collective consciousness, as it was for many other national identities in Europe. As Bartal writes (2005), the eighteenth century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was one of the first states in Europe where the modern nationalist movement emerged. Yet, as the state ceased to exist after three partitions in 1772, 1793 and 1795 only to be re-established in 1918, the nationalist movement for more than 100 years has been developing in the absence of state institutions. The content of the narrative has been forming in complex socio-political

circumstances, it was influenced by the three partitioning powers as well as the elites living in partitioned Poland, and the elites on exile in Western Europe. National belonging was to a large extent shaped and preserved in the world of literature, where Polish identity “turned into an abstract, metaphysical category with strong overtones of religious mysticism” (Gudonis 2001a, p.3), as it is demonstrated in the following sections. Two central national myths - intrinsic Catholicity and nation’s messianic martyrdom (Zubrzycki, 2013b) have also been decisively influenced by political and cultural structures and events of the partitions period.

Zubrzycki (2013b) provides a very fruitful approach to examining national (identity) narratives by pointing to the centrality of national mythology. She defines it as historically shaped, conditional and contested system of myths which “can shape national identity or mobilize toward nationalist action” (Ibid., p.111) to a degree dependent on specific historical context. National mythology is “embodied in visual and material culture, enacted in ordinary and extra-ordinary practices and is consumed in everyday commodities; ultimately structuring the understanding of the present and potentially shaping the future.” (Ibid.) Therefore, during the partitions period in Poland the myth of messianic martyrdom played a key role in the national narratives, helping to interpret the present and creating hopes for future as it supplied “a grammar for Poles to make sense of the political situation in which they lived and a vocabulary to talk about it” (Ibid., p.113). The myth has been brought to existence by the nineteenth century Romantic poets: Adam Mickiewicz, Ignacy Krasiński and Juliusz Słowacki – *the three bards*<sup>7</sup>. In their literary works Poland was the ‘Christ among nations’ sacrificed for the sins of humanity, eventually to be resurrected to save the world from Absolutism (Ibid., p.112). The writings of *the three bards* continue to constitute important elements of the

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7 The three authors – Mickiewicz, Krasiński and Słowacki; are considered as the most influential figures for the development of Romanticist vision of Polish national identity. Especially Mickiewicz is considered Poland's greatest poet and a national icon, an embodiment of the essence of Polishness (Koropeczy 2010, 39).

teaching curricula of Polish literature until present, thus influencing the process of socialization into the national narrative of messianic suffering.

The second central myth, intrinsic Catholicism originates in the pre-partitions period. It especially gained prominence in the seventeenth century due to crucial historical events: miraculous defense from Swedish invasion by Pauline monks of Czestochowa in 1653<sup>8</sup> and the following dedication of Poland to the Virgin Mary by King Jan Kazimierz in 1656 after which her cult spread particularly under the threat of conflict with non-Catholic Ottomans (Tazbir 1990 in Ibid, p.112). In 1683, King Jan III Sobieski defeated Turks in Vienna, which “‘confirmed’ the status of Poland as *Antemurale Christianitis* – the bulwark of Christendom – conferred upon it already by the mid-fifteenth century” (Ibid., p.112). It is not only the national mythology that the religiosity is embedded in, also the Catholic Church as an institution plays a significant role in the narrative. Porter (2001) claims that the present national narrative is intrinsically a Catholic one, and the period of partitions is a central point of it, as it has been „asserting for the Church, as an institution, a key role in the preservation of national identity and the struggle for independence” (p. 294). Depictions of the Church as an institution maintaining national identity in the absence of state institutions are an important element of the narratives of the periods of foreign occupation – the partitions, wars and the Communist era after the Second World War.

Płonowska-Ziarek (2007, p.311) adds the obsession with innocence as another key element of Polish national identity narrative. Myths of intrinsic Catholicism and messianic martyrdom, together with the obsession with innocence, are conveyed to individuals in the socialization process of which central actors are the state and its institutions, media, cultural producers and civil society. The role of the educational system is crucial:

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<sup>8</sup> The success of the monks was attributed to the presence of the icon of Black Madonna in the monastery

“Schools are perhaps the most important sites for developing and transmitting the content and contours of the nation (...). Their officially sanctioned curricula, conveniently packaged in textbooks, displayed in national emblems and performed in ritual practices, inculcate the students with the values, myths and norms of the nation.” (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008, p.550).

The narrative of victimhood, which is a dominant prism through which the historical events are represented in the teaching curricula, places martyrology in its centre (Cała 2000, p.12). The examination of controversies over memory in following chapters of the thesis demonstrates the dynamics involved in the (re) production of the narrative of victimhood and innocent suffering.

Looking at constitutive elements of Polishness as symbols – religiosity, messianism and fascination with innocence is one of various ways to define the group's characteristics. It could be seen in accordance with Cohen's approach (1995) to defining ethnic group belonging. *Ethnic group* here is seen as an entity of which members “see themselves as sharing cultural traditions and history that distinguish them from other groups” (People and Garrick 2010, p.389). Cohen argues to look at group ethnicity through the lens of shared symbols. For him symbols are more flexible than beliefs and values and consequently subgroups can draw a variety of interpretations from them. The central symbols in the Polish narrative - intrinsic Catholicism, myth of martyrdom and innocent victimhood indeed are interpreted in different ways by subgroups. Zubrzycki (2013a) maintains that Polish mythology endures in diverse proximities to national actors and she distinguishes between sacred and profane registers of apprehending the mythology. For some, mostly the older generations it remains sacred and directly relevant to present – “it marshals sentiments that overwhelm other interests and directs actions” (Ibid., p.125) and is potentially threatened so in the need of defense. For others, usually younger people it is understood as a profane element of everyday knowledge, yet it “may exist for them mostly in the register of “history” – a familiar script learned from schoolbooks, family narratives, and state rituals – or of a

commodity” (Ibid.). It allows for certain critical distance in which “the nation is an oft-commodified *thing* to be used playfully or even ironically by national actors, or alienable for uses by cosmopolitan consumers and various other non-nationals” (Ibid., p.126).

Zubrzycki’s typology can be one way of accounting for the differences in interpreting national symbols by subgroups. However, it differs from Cohen’s idea in pointing that if mythology-symbols- is part of the profane register for a subgroup then the *thing* that comes to represent the mythology can be also used by non-members of the in-group. While Cohen argues that distinctive and shared symbols constitute a boundary between groups and at the same time individual members are connected to each other through these symbols. Thus, adopting Zubrzycki’s idea of mythology operating in the profane sphere would result in either assuming that the outgroup members can become part of the ingroup since they share the symbols by engaging with them; or the opposite – the members of the subgroup who *use* the symbols in a way that allows for outgroup members to understand and engage with these symbols are not part of the ingroup anymore. Zubrzycki’s typology focuses on the descriptive elements by pointing to emotionally-driven responses to narratives. The boundary between the ingroup and outgroup, thus, can be delineated depending on whether or not mythology motivates strong emotional response – for both subgroups she described it did cause powerful reactions no matter how different they were. Therefore, it is necessary to move beyond Cohen’s understanding and analyze as well the responses that specific symbols arise in a given ingroup, and the boundary defining the group would be the question whether the symbols generate emotional responses or not.

A view on ethnicity, proposed by Barth(1969), can provide yet another approach to analysing group narratives. Barth argues that boundary defines the group - ethnicity is socially constructed and its content remains in flux and is dependent on both the in-group and the out-group. Inter-group boundaries are flexible:”constant work is required to keep the groupings

distanced from each other” (Dalal, 2009, p.80). The emotional responses which contestations of national mythology evoke, described by Zubrzycki, can be thus seen as an element of the continuous effort to maintain the difference between the ingroup and outgroup as well as to define the boundary between various subgroups within the ingroup. Zubrzycki wrote on national mythologies that “insofar as they continue to evoke responses, they remain ready for reactivation when historical winds shift again” (2013a, p.128). This indeed occurred in case of controversial discussions on cultural productions challenging the national narratives which is the subject of examination in a later part of the thesis. The analysis of boundary and collective narrative building in this section highlights the linkage between the reactions in the debates and the core of group identity. Yet, neither Zubrzycki nor Cohen or Barth account for the interests behind the choice that actors make between approaches to national mythology. The question *why?* to consider actors’ motivations and interests involved in adopting particular standpoint in a given situation is not considered. In my further analysis of narratives’ contestations I intend to not only examine the content of discourses but also study the interests behind them. The examination of the national identity narratives in this section provides the background for analyzing constructions of significant collective others in the next section.

### Polish identity and others

The idea of a flexible boundary and the defining not-us is linked to yet another distinction – between the internal and external others. Volkan writes “people without being aware of it, need to have large-group enemies and allies, to one degree or other, throughout their lifetime” (2009, p.7). However, what is the difference between the internal and external defining others? Both collective others can serve similar functions such as building the internal cohesion of the group and a sense of unity against a common enemy other. Though one of the distinguishing factors can be the context in which the particular other takes salience. The attitude to the people from nation-states bordering Poland, as well as to the

members of minorities living in Poland is used in a number of studies on Polish national identity when discussing Polish defining others. Zbigniew Bokszański in a study of identities of Poles of older generation conducted in early 1990s concluded that for this group Polishness is constructed, at least partly, by negating the stereotype of the German, the Russian, and the Jew (Bokszański 1995 in Gudonis 2001b, p.44). Other academics also mention Germans and Russians as groups crucial for Polish identity narratives construction (Zarycki 2008) as well as point to Jews as the internal defining other (Michlic 2006).

Though, the role of Jews and Germans in the Polish identity narrative in more recent scholarly works is contested. Studies of identity discourses from the post-communist period argue that the role of Germans (Wigura 2011 and 2013) and Jews (Gudonis 2001a and Gudonis 2001b) in defining Polishness has evolved substantially, and the two groups do not serve as significant others anymore. In the following sections I review the secondary literature discussing Germans, Russians and Jews as defining others for Polish identity discourses. Describing the way the significant others are formed in the national narratives points to the dynamics of narratives building on yet another level than cultural traditions constructed by national mythology that were examined in the previous section. The evolving ingroup narratives on defining others are an essential subject of analysis for the socio-political context for the cases of contestation that are studied in the subsequent chapters of the thesis. Understanding *why* actors adopt specific approaches to the interventions challenging the dominant narratives can be facilitated by placing the interests and motivations in the framework of changing conceptualizations of defining others.

### External others

Polish collective consciousness has been developing in the age of nationalisms under the rule of Russian Empire, Prussia and Austro-Hungary, hence the socio-political situation in the partitioned territories was a crucial context for the national identity-formation. Zarycki



(2008, p.76) argues that stereotypically the territories that belonged to Tsarist Russia are perceived as the most backward part of partitioned Poland. In the collective consciousness the policies of russification and germanization are seen as especially harsh and hostile towards Polishness – seen as an ethnic conception, focusing on language, culture, traditions, symbols; and the policies implemented in the Austro-Hungarian occupied territories are seen as most lenient and tolerant for the Poles. The collective memory of the World Wars of the twentieth century, especially the Second World War, contribute to the image of neighbouring states and its defining role for the Polish identity. As a result, looking at the historical perspective, the external others that the national identity is defined against are most importantly the Russians (or Soviets, if the War and the Communist period is evoked) and Germans (also referred to as Prussians or Nazi Germans, depending on the time under consideration). In the following sections, I point to some socio-cultural analyzes of historical evolution of the perceptions that people living in Poland hold of others, and consequently the role of these images for Polish identity narratives.<sup>9</sup> Due to format constraints, I focus on the analysis of the discourses on German people as a case study for Polish construction of external other.

### Changing position of the German other

In the collective memory of partitions, Prussian and Austrian governed territories are seen as more industrialized, modernized and developing faster than those belonging to Russia (Zarycki, 2004). Prussian rule is perceived as more harsh and hostile to Polishness from the two, and in the Prussian partition the opposition to germanization policies was inextricably

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<sup>9</sup> According to the most recent polls on the approach of Poles towards other nations (CBOS, 2013), Germans belong to one of the most liked groups - 38%, but correspondingly there is also a high level of antipathy declared -28%. In comparison, Russians are liked by 31% of respondents and disliked by 39%. Thus, the difference between the perception of the two groups may seem relatively insignificant. It must be noted though that in the poll the participants were only asked to indicate whether they feel sympathy, antipathy or indifference towards the specific national group and no more detailed questions were asked. Hence, the results obtained may obscure the understanding of the dynamics involved in shaping the attitude of Poles towards other groups – for example latent prejudice cannot be measured with such general questions. Thus, in my examination I attempt to deliver a more profound examination of the issue by looking at the evolution of perception that Polish people hold of others.

linked to the Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> Even though the partitions' period played a formative role for the Polish collective consciousness vis-a-vis the Russians and Prussians, the historical events of twentieth century and especially the World War Two and the Communist rule constitute of most vivid national memories which are depicted using the language of national mythology. The wartime occupation is recalled as a period of extreme suffering and misery, but simultaneously as the era of faithful sacrifice of Poles for their motherland (Steinlauf 1997, Orla-Bukowska 2004). The Communist era that followed is depicted as yet another period of external occupation imposed by the Soviets on Poles against their will, which ended in 1989 when independence was regained.

The post-Communist period is then seen as the time of rebuilding the state that was only existing in the interwar years (1918-1939). National holidays refer to events from the pre-partition period – one is the day of the Constitution commemorating the day of the adoption of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1789 Constitution; and the other is on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November referring to the end of World War One in 1918, when Polish independent state was established for the first time after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of eighteenth century. The post-1989 years are seen in the national narrative as a period of re-building Polish state on the grounds of neo-liberal economy and democracy. In the international sphere, re-establishing independence is portrayed as inextricably linked with Europe, it is thought of as a return to Europe (see for example Petrescu, 2011). One of the first significant steps done in the international arena by Polish politicians has been submitting an application for the European Union membership in 1994. Re-united Germany is in the

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<sup>10</sup> Trzeciakowski points out (in Porter, 2001, p.294) to the crucial role of Bismarck's linkage of Catholicism and Polishness during the *Kulturkampf* which in turn proved to be yet another way to connect Polish national identity with religiosity.

dominant discourse the crucial partner of Poland in Europe, yet still carefully monitored and treated with suspicion.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, in some context Germans are also pointed at when public actors aim to delineate the boundaries of Polishness. Leader of right-wing conservative party, Law and Justice (PiS), Jarosław Kaczyński in 2011 referred to persons identifying themselves as Silesians as supporting 'hidden German option' (Rzeczpospolita, 2011). His discourse was an attempt to discredit in general the movements advocating for the recognition of Silesian (or any other non-Polish) identity and condemn groups striving for autonomy or separation of the region. 'German', in this framework was meant to signify non-Polish, enemy-other, thus threatening. At the same time, in the public discourse the relations between Poland and Germany in the post-communist era are depicted in very favourable terms, close cooperation on various levels has been established, advocated and supported infrastructurally and financially by the state institutions and NGOs.<sup>12</sup>

### Christianity and Polish external others

Beyond the political factors favouring closer cooperation and exchange, it is important to note the position of German other within the framework of the core elements of national mythology – Catholicism and messianic suffering. German nation-state politics of acknowledging the historical guilt of the Nazis, taking responsibility for it and admitting that immense suffering has been inflicted on other nations, among these the Poles, corresponds

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, in 2006 the talks on the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline, to transport gas from Russia to Germany and Western Europe under the Baltic Sea, has been portrayed in the Polish media as a threatening attempt of Russians and Germans to cooperate together against Poland. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland – Radosław Sikorski, as well as other public actors have drawn comparisons to the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact (PAP, 2006). Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was a secret agreement between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia signed in August 1939 concerning the division of Poland between these two states once the war starts.

<sup>12</sup> For example in the field of education an organisation dedicated to enhancing exchange and cooperation, Polish-German Youth Exchange, has been organising around 3,000 projects every year and in year 2009, 22 500 young people from Poland participated (PNWM, 2009). Cooperation is also facilitated through various EU-coordinated programs.

with the image of Polish suffering and victimhood. Messianism intertwined with religiosity is also reflected in the narrative of Polish-German relations, especially in the concept of Christian reconciliation. To demonstrate the importance of this notion, I look at Wigura's analyzes (2011 and 2013) of the letter sent by Polish bishops to their German Colleagues in 1965.

Wigura discusses the letter extensively in her book from 2011 to point to the usage of forgiveness as a political strategy. In an article from 2013 she argues that the letter from the Polish Episcopate to the German Bishops was a significant first step in Polish-German reconciliation and a “first political declaration using the word 'forgiveness' after the Second World War” (Wigura, 2013, p. 401). Famous words included in the letter *we grant forgiveness and we ask for forgiveness* were a reference to Christian tradition of forgiveness, thus were linked to religiosity, the crucial element of Polishness; and simultaneously drew on commonality between the Polish and German identities – Catholic worldview as the base for both. Wigura (Ibid., p. 404) points to the Catholic idea of confession of sins as opening a possibility for forgiveness, which was evoked in the letter.<sup>13</sup>

The letter and its significance feed into Porter's approach that Polish national narrative is dominated by the Catholic narrative. Indeed, as Wigura (Ibid., p.400) writes:

„Twenty years after the end of the Second World War, in a communist Poland, where being anti-German (more precisely being anti-Western Germany) was an inherent feature of the official propaganda of the state, the Polish bishops undertook to write an alternative history of relations with the western neighbour.”

It can be concluded that Polish-German reconciliation corresponds with the crucial elements of Polish national identity, so the German other rarely gets salience and is not widely

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<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, in the response from their German Colleagues there was no declaration that they too forgive and this in private correspondence (as in the official communique the response was described positively), was seen as a disappointment by the Polish Episcopate (Ibid, p. 406). In turn, Cardinal Wyszynski, Primate of Poland, in a private letter to his Colleague in Germany explaining his disappointment did point to the difference of religions: “This is sad inasmuch as German protestants make efforts to meet Poland’s wishes in a much more evangelic spirit.” (Wyszynski in Ibid, p. 407).

accepted in the public sphere. Present-day narratives on relations with German people and German nation-state in most cases do not contradict the Polish national narratives of victimhood, messianic suffering and innocence. Therefore, if the contestations of dominant narratives of Polish memory are absent<sup>14</sup>, public actors emphasize the good relations in the political, cultural and economic sphere. This responds to the expectations of the audience in Poland which is exposed to positively-depicted German other in the socialization narratives.

Nonetheless, in the narratives on Russian people as an external other the highlighted elements differ greatly depending on the fluctuating political situation.<sup>15</sup> In moments of perceived threat, actors mobilize the mythology of victimhood and suffering while describing Russian present-day politics, and such approach matches with the dominant representations of Russia in the narratives. Yet, the external others are not the only ones defining Polishness – a crucial role is played by the constructions of internal others. Especially the image of ‘the Jew’ as a defining other is crucial for the national narratives. Examining it provides an essential context for the contestations of the Polish dominant narratives, as the cases I analyze in the following chapter directly refer to the construction of Jews as a significant other and they are linked to the distinction between ‘Jewish’ and ‘Polish’ narratives.

### Jew as the internal other

For Polish national identity, also the internal others are of crucial importance, yet their standing and role is different. They are equally meaningful in formulating the image of the self, but since they pose a possible threat *within* the group they can directly endanger the

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<sup>14</sup> Yet they do occur – for example in 2013 a vivid debate was provoked by a German TV series about lives of ordinary Wehrmacht soldiers. Actors in Polish media criticized the film for stereotypical depictions of people living in Poland and for “accusing Poles of anti-Semitism”.

<sup>15</sup> Russia is seen as nowadays less influential than in the Communist period yet still as a state that has not evolved much since 1989 and is a threat for Poland. In the first months of 2014 the anti-Russian narratives in the public discourse have gained special prominence in the context of crisis over Crimea and Eastern regions of Ukraine. Importantly, “the mainstream interpretation of Polish identity is dominated today by anti-communist paradigms” (Zarycki 2004, p.598) and Russia is depicted as embodying a characteristics of powerful, merciless state not much different from its pre-1990 predecessor, the USSR; Poland’s Eastern influential neighbour remains the most salient external other in the Polish national narratives.

cohesion of the group itself. As Volkan argues, “as long as the enemy group remains at psychological distance at least, it gives us aid and comfort, enhancing our cohesion and making comparison with ourselves gratifying” (1988, p.94). The imaginary, threatening Other for Polishness has traditionally been the Jew (Cała 1992, Michlic 2006). The Jews have been for a long time in the European culture established as the designated other against whom group identities were being enunciated (Bauman, 1998, p. 154). In the Polish national discourse, *the Jew* remains the unfamiliar, threatening and non-Christian other until present times.

This conceptualization is reflected in the realm of culture, everyday language, as well as in political and historical narratives. In a detailed and comprehensive study, Michlic (2006) examines the persistence and transformations of “anti-Jewish idioms”, as she formulates it, in Poland from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Michlic describes an extensive range of examples from political, cultural and social life in Poland, and her account convincingly supports the thesis that the Jewish threatening other has endured as an imaginary other in the Polish national narrative. However, I disagree with her interpretation of the most contemporary period, i.e. the post-communist era in Poland. Michlic argues that the civic model of Polishness, which is gaining prevalence over the ethnic model in post-communist Poland, deconstructs the image of the Jew as the harmful other (Michlic 2006, p. 280). Her presumption is that if the civic model of nationalism is embraced by the society in Poland, the image of the threatening Jewish other will be eradicated. I find such approach problematic because of the division of the actors that she establishes on the basis of her definitions of ethnic and civic nationalism.

Michlic focuses on two models: ethno-nationalism, as defined by Smith<sup>16</sup> and civic nationalism. She explains the ethnic model as “excluding the memory of ‘others’ and nurturing the narrative of unique (ethnic) Polish sufferings” (Michlic, 2006, p. 277). In contrast, she sees the civic model as a pluralistic one that is “inclusive of the memory of ‘other’ and acknowledging wrongdoings” (Ibid.). The general distinction between these models is widely used in the literature, as Brubaker (2006, p.133) mentions, and the civic model is understood as liberal, voluntarist, universalist and inclusive. The ethnic nationalism is described as illiberal, ascriptive, particularist and exclusive. Brubaker argues that such categorization of nationalism is “conceptually ambiguous, empirically misleading, and normatively problematic” (Brubaker, 2006, p.5). The conceptual framework adopted by Michlic establishes a misleading division of the society into two groups embracing contrasting models of Polishness – a civic and an ethnic one. Yet, in the everyday experience, the meanings and understandings constantly evolve, and the boundary between one group and the other is blurred.

One element of civic nationalism - plurality of narratives and identities, is accentuated by Marius Gudonis (2001a) in his study of identities of young Polish Jews. He maintains that pluralization of national identity is the most fundamental aspect of Poland’s social transformation after the communist period, and as evidence he quotes surveys that indicate that just 16% of young people in Poland agree with a statement that ‘A Jew cannot be a true Pole’ (Ibid., p.5). Thus, he argues, the concept of Polishness is evolving and influencing a change in the perception of Jews as a minority group within the Polish ingroup.<sup>17</sup> The conclusion he makes from the shifting approach to Jews and Jewish identity vis-à-vis Polish identity might be though

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<sup>16</sup> She writes: “Following Anthony D. Smith’s definition I refer to ethno- nationalism as an ideology and movement according to which national membership lies in genealogy and in common vernacular culture and history” (Michlic, 2006, p. 21).

<sup>17</sup> He explains that the changing perception of the Jews results from evolving concept of Polishness, the acceptance of the idea that Jews could belong to the Polish nation is not necessarily related to diminishing anti-Semitism (Gudonis 2001a, p.5)

misleading. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (2011) contends that in the study of what she calls *Polish-Jewish* relations<sup>18</sup> political correctness exerts a substantial influence on the answers given by respondents, thus the polls may not mirror the perceptions of the Jews by Poles correctly. The issue of *Polish-Jewish* relations and elements involved in measuring the approaches of one group to the other is, however, examined more in-depth in the following sections of the chapter. Nonetheless, for the examination of otherness narratives which are the subject of the current section, the concept of pluralization is crucial – whether or not Gudonis (2001a) is right to assume that pluralization results in changing approach to Jews, his discussion of pluralization of identities and narratives in the post-Communist Poland is a valuable insight into the interplay between the multiplicity of accounts and perspectives on past and present in contemporary Polish public and private spheres.

Polish memory-based identity narrative of victimhood and suffering, does not recognise the suffering of Jewish others as equal. It is not a hospitable narrative - it differentiates between us and them, and does not attempt to reconcile the two. Michlic writes (2006, p.279): “in recent years increasing sections of mainstream political elites, cultural elites and ordinary citizens, particularly of the younger generation, seem to have endorsed the model of Polishness that embraces every culture and faith of all those who lived in Poland and still do.” The assumption that endorsing a civic model of Polishness provides mechanisms to integrate the difficult, ‘dark’ elements of the past is deceptive, the process is much more complex than this. A more in-depth critique of Michlic’s argument is proposed in the next chapter, when analyzing the contestations of the dominant national narratives of *Polish-Jewish* relations. Thus, within the currently dominant narrative of Polishness centred on religiosity, victimhood and messianic suffering; the Jews remain a crucial internal other defining what Polishness is not.

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<sup>18</sup> In chapter three I propose a reconceptualisation of the term *Polish-Jewish relations*



## Jewish other and cultural violence

In this section I analyze the attitudes to the Jews as significant collective other in Polish national narrative as enactments of cultural violence – a phenomenon described by Galtung, which rests on a distinction between agents acting out the violence and subjects on which the violence is performed. Galtung distinguishes between three forms of violence: direct, structural and cultural<sup>19</sup>. Cultural violence, or in Bourdieu's terms – symbolic violence, allows direct and structural violence to be justified, legitimized and normalized in the everyday. It engages mechanisms of domination and power that work not directly on bodies but through them – involving symbolic interactions, behaviour, language and modes of conduct (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics). The phenomenon of 'anti-Semitism without Jews' in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, as first described by Lendvai (1971), is reflected in various forms of violence. The Jews constitute a very small percentage of the almost entirely homogenous Polish population, and these people, the familiar, *our*, Polish Jews are often seen as non-threatening<sup>20</sup>. Anti-Semitic acts are directed against the imagined Jews. The aggression is rarely articulated directly by acts of hostility, vandalism, personal attacks or likewise it seldom takes a form of structural violence implemented through established institutions or mechanisms. Most extensively, the violence against the unfamiliar, threatening Jewish other is acted out through the mechanisms of cultural violence.

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19 Galtung argues that a causal flow from cultural via structural (connected with institutions and structures) to direct violence can be identified. According to his framework, "direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a 'permanence'" (Galtung, 1977, in Galtung, 1990, p.5).

20 In a study conducted by Rothbart and John (1985) found that Contact Hypothesis – a theory stating that the best answer to prejudice is to bring together members of different groups; is effective if there is specific criteria met. One criterion states that minority members are perceived as typical of their cultural group. Precisely this requirement is not met in popular perceptions held on Jews living in Poland – the conviction is 'our Jews as non-typical representatives of Jews as a group'. An example to demonstrate this may be a statement of Czesław Bielecki, where he was explaining how he, as a Jewish person, is treated in the Polish society: "I have not experienced anti-Semitism. Quite the contrary. It often happens that I encounter someone saying to me: 'Why don't you remove the Jewess Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz from her seat!'"<sup>20</sup> Then I answer that as far as I know she is not a Jewess, but I am a Jew and you should know that. And I hear: No, this is not about that, you are a Polish Jew and we know you. In this case the word 'Jew' is used as some kind of invective" (TOK FM, 2012)

One of the most commonly mentioned examples in academic literature (Gebert, 2008; Krajewski, 2005; Michlic, 2006) are the constructions used in everyday language in Poland. Referring to someone as *a Jew* is meant as an insult - it carries pejorative connotations, and especially in the popular culture nationalist groups or football fans use it to delegitimize rival groups (Michlic, 2006, p.10). In the 1990 Presidential campaign, anti-Semitism in a form of cultural violence was overtly enacted through language used by the right-wing groups to delegitimize the political opponents (Gebert, 2008). Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who competed against Lech Wałęsa in the campaign, was labelled *a Jew* in the right-wing anti-Communist political circles.<sup>21</sup> Wałęsa, who then became the President, himself at a press conference in 1990 demanded that “persons of Jewish origin should not conceal [their] origin” (Michlic, 2006, p. 263). The instances of acting the anti-Semitic attitudes out in the discourse during the campaign were condemned by some public figures; yet engaging in the acts of cultural violence against Jews was far from becoming a decisive factor in the popular support given to Wałęsa. Mazowiecki, a widely respected and influential public figure who served as the first prime minister after the fall of the communism, received a surprisingly low percentage of support and Wałęsa won with an overwhelming majority of votes.<sup>22</sup>

In analyzing the 2000 Presidential elections Marius Gudonis (2001a) also comments on the importance of candidates’ (alleged) religious and ethnic belonging. Aleksander Kwaśniewski a post-communist and an atheist won with 53.9 per cent of votes, with almost 37 per cent ahead of his main rival, Marian Krzaklewski the leader of Catholic right-wing Solidarity Electoral Action. He sees the results as peculiar considering the religiosity and the supposedly prevailing narratives of “the traditional ‘romantic’ notion of nationhood” (Ibid., p.

21 Wałęsa and Mazowiecki were cooperating in the Solidarity movement in the 1980s, but due to a personal conflict that started when Mazowiecki was serving as a Prime Minister, in the first presidential elections in post-communist Poland in 1990, both Wałęsa and Mazowiecki decided to run for the Presidency.

22 Wałęsa received 39.96% of votes in the first round, Stanisław Tymiński was second with 23.1%, Mazowiecki gathered 18.08%. In the second round, Wałęsa got 74.25% and Tymiński 25.75% (European Election Database, 2013).

4) – these two elements he mentions correspond with Zubrzycki’s description of national mythology. Further, he writes about only 1 per cent support for Lech Wałęsa, the Solidarity hero “whose victorious 1991 presidential campaign emphasized his Catholicism and ‘real Polishness’ - as opposed to the alleged Jewishness of his rival, Tadeusz Mazowiecki”. (Ibid.). Gudonis maintains that the results of the 2000 presidential elections point to “the pluralization of Polishness and the wish to relinquish the traditional ‘romantic’ notion of nationhood”. (Ibid.) and that they confirm the demise of the national Pole-Catholic stereotype.

While I see pointing to the pluralization of Polishness as one of the possible interpretations of the results, I disagree with drawing the two other conclusions. Maybe in the given moment the actors and audience did not perceive the intrinsic Catholicity as being endangered thus religion did not play a central role in the voting patterns of the population? Or the non-Catholic candidate appealed to the voters in his program with more convincing propositions than the other ones so his religion did not matter in this case? As for the issue of cultural violence against Jews which was described in the previous paragraphs, the period in which the elections that Gudonis talks about have taken place is worth considering. According to my interviewee from Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, until approximately 10 years ago – thus around the year 2004, the word ‘Jew’ was carefully avoided in public discourse as it was considered to be derogatory. Jews would be called ‘those of Muslim faith’, ‘the chosen peoples’ etc., instead. This points to an interesting pattern of cultural violence – non-Jewish actors define calling Jews as ‘Jews’ offensive and they decide how to name the Jews as a collective and as individuals, Jews themselves are not asked to voice their opinion on the issue.

Furthermore, in the colloquial speech the noun ‘Jew’ and verbs derived from it bear derogatory meaning for some actors. Most notably the radical right-wing nationalist groups label the persons, parties or groups they seek to delegitimize – as ‘Jews’ or ‘hidden Jews’. The

phenomenon though, is now perceived as marginal and whenever an instance is reported, it is widely and harshly criticised in the public discourse. Nonetheless, cultural violence is commonly acted out on the Jews as subjects in the everyday language. Very colloquial and vulgar expressions such as *Ty Żydzie* (you Jew), or a verb made from the noun Jew - *żydzić* (to stint) are usually recognised as inappropriate, yet they remain present in the everyday language of some social groups. The perseverance of cultural violence against the Jews is normalized in the expressions used in the everyday life; pointing to the unfamiliarity of the Jews as opposed to the Polish self. Tokarska-Bakir (2009) argues that in order to objectify national narratives it is necessary to recognise the importance of “the way (...) in which people in Poland talk between themselves about Jews” ( p.317). Discursive practices account for how people see the world, in this case they are means to express cultural violence against Jews by displaying shared ideas and representations about the significant other.

## Conclusion

In Polish narrative, national and religious identities cannot be disassociated. Analysing the interlinkage, Porter (2001) maintains that the Catholic narrative “exiles non-Catholics and anti-clericals from Poland's story [and] offers us a picture that is (...) incomplete and misleading. And it is this narrative (...) that ultimately sustains the identity of the *Polak-Katolik* today” (p.298). I agree with Porter's description of the national narrative, yet there is much more to it than its Catholic elements. The present-day Polish identity and its underlying collective memory has been shaped under the influence of numerous political, cultural and social factors. The specificity of the partitions' period, as well as following World Wars and the Communist era have all left significant marks on the Polish defining narrative, and they have also had a decisive impact on the national mythology and symbolism. Moreover, as I have demonstrated in the chapter, the defining internal and external others are indispensable for the construction of the self, and in the case of Poland these are most importantly Germans,

Russians and Jews. The analysis of the evolving national mythology and the constructions of internal and external others defining Polishness provides a framework to examine the contestations of national narratives as it points to stances of various actors and interests involved, as well as it assists in outlining the influences of the changing socio-political circumstances. In the further chapters I intend to connect the Polish identity narratives on national mythology and on significant others with the interest and circumstances involved in preserving or (re)shaping the dominant collective memories.

## Chapter 3 Contestations of national narratives

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I have discussed the construction of Polish dominant identity narratives – the mythology involved as well as the constructions of defining others. The outlining of the prevalent national cultural traditions provides background for my analysis of memory contestations. In the following chapter, I use Kansteiner's divide between product, producers and consumers when looking at the dynamics of the narratives of memory and history and emphasize the interests involved in discussions over dominant memory contestations in order to go beyond identity narratives. To examine the intellectual interventions I draw on Bourdieu's concepts of field, intellectual intervention and interest. For him, intellectuals interfere in the political field "with a specific authority grounded on their belonging to the relatively autonomous world of art, science, and literature and on all the values that are associated with this autonomy – virtue, disinterestedness, competence, and so on." (1991, p.656). As for their interests – they vary depending on the way these people act in their intellectual and political fields. The interest of politicians that is the most decisive for this thesis is their need to be re-elected for the political office, and consequentially to retain power. Interests of media producers depends on the demands from their audience, to maintain (and enlarge) a group of viewers or readers, and on their rule of controlling democracy of the political scene. The interest in intervention of intellectuals in the political field implied for intellectuals is, as Bourdieu would say, their search for truth – scientific interest, obviously combined with personal motivations. Shifting the focus from the content of discourses to the dynamic process of interactions which includes motivations and interests of actors and audiences is valuable for two reasons. Firstly, it allows to establish an analytical divide between the (nationalist) object and the researching subject thus avoid the evaluation of

object's interests. Secondly, it offers a better explanatory value by addressing the dynamics of the processes of change and contestations.

In Poland contestations of the national mythology and narratives of innocent victimhood by public actors - politicians, state institutions, non-governmental organizations, cultural producers or media; keep on provoking heated discussions, in some cases lasting months or years. Discourses on Jews are among the topics that motivate strong reactions among public actors and the audience. In the dominant narratives Jews are artificially detached from 'Poles', the narratives discuss *Polish-Jewish* relations or *Polish-Jewish* memory, "the entrenched linguistic dichotomy consistently – and almost obsessively – contrasts 'Polish' with 'Jewish'" (Gudonis 2001a, p.2). Jews with their heritage, traditions, history and religion are depicted as different, separated through cultural violence in othering discourses. Some academics insist on discussing *Christian-Jewish* relations or memory instead of reproducing the linguistic construction of *Polish-Jewish* divide (Orla-Bukowska, 2007). However, most sources I analyze in the following chapter adopt the latter notion and it would be difficult for me to refrain from doing so when describing the texts. Yet, I want to avoid treating the *Polish-Jewish* divide as an analytical distinction but rather I intend to emphasize it as a linguistic construct which is an element of cultural violence exerted on the Jews in narratives. I denote this by writing the phrase in italics.

In Polish public sphere, the topics related to the Jews are rarely approached with indifference. People often have really strong opinions about 'the Jews' as a group, or about specific persons who may or may not be Jewish, but they are perceived as such and described in line with stereotypes about Jews. Especially after 1989, the bizarre co-existence of two phenomena make many discussions on past Jewish presence in Poland fierce and emotional. Namely, on one hand there is 'anti-Semitism without Jews' and on the other, the enormous

fascination with Jewish culture, traditions and history. Zygmunt Bauman (1998) described the peculiarity of this trend as *Allosemitism* and I employ his concept as I see it as the best available one so far. In the chapter I am going to outline some of the most heated national debates in Poland since the 1980s on the history of the *Polish-Jewish* relations. Why are these conversations so contentious?

I examine the secondary literature on some of these discussions and I point to the recurring themes and arguments in the following controversies. I argue that the main tension appears between history and collective memories. History is the domain in which multiple narratives are critically evaluated by academics who engage with the past maintaining the distance between the narratives and themselves. Distance is not synonymous with objectivity, but it is needed to “engage with national myths, analyzing and deconstructing these as figments of a self-serving collective imagination” (Assman and Short 2012, p.9). History is then opposed to the memory narratives prevailing in the public discourse. The memory-based narratives are shaped by an interplay of cultural traditions constituting identities and of the interests of public and private institutions, politicians, intellectuals, cultural producers, media and the respective audiences.

## Background

Before the World War Two, 3 mln people, which constituted 10% of overall Polish population was Jewish. In some cities, towns or villages there was much more of Jewish inhabitants – for example in Będzin and Białystok more than 45% was Jewish (Jewish Virtual Library, 2008). Currently there is 5,100 Jews living in Poland, less than 0,02% of the total (NSP, 2011). The physical disappearance of Jews, and consequently attempts to eradicate their legacy in the decades after the war left ineradicable marks on the cultural, socio-political and economic life of the Polish nation. The abrupt and violent loss of the multicultural society



because of the Second World War and the following period of Communist rule, also resulted in the disappearance of the narratives of various groups. In an almost-homogenous society the dominant narrative is presenting the perspective of the Polish majority, and the Jews' and other minorities' accounts are rarely described during the socialization process – in the school's curricula, media discourse, institutional policies.

In seeking to recognise the representations of the other in the present, it is crucial to identify the patterns of making the other distinct from the self in the narratives. To describe approaches to the Jews, Bauman proposes the concept of *Allosemitism*, which I see as incorporating both anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism. He writes “Allosemitism refers to the practice of setting the Jews apart as people radically different from all others, needing separate concepts to describe and comprehend them and special treatment in all or most social intercourse” (Bauman, 1998, p.143). It is non-committal, thus ambivalent: “it does not unambiguously determine either hatred or love of Jews, but contains the seeds of both, and assures that whichever of the two appears, is intense and extreme” (Ibid.). In the contemporary Polish political and cultural discourse, the Jews are set apart from all others and subsequently they are not granted recognition as agents, but they are rather treated as subjects of the narrative created by the Poles. Hence, the framework proposed by Bauman can be useful in describing the ambivalent, yet structurally alike Polish attitudes to the Jews. In the next section I describe the narratives on Jews in Polish public sphere, pointing to the actors and their interests involved in sustaining the narratives.

### **Narratives of *Polish-Jewish* relations**

For Bauman, *Allosemitism* offers a conceptual framework to describe both positive and negative approaches to the Jews. The narratives presenting Jews as a distinct group in Polish public sphere has been discussed by a number of scholars and in this section I refer to some of these works while addressing the dynamics engaged in the (re) creation of the *Jew as the*

*other* construct. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (2011) claims that Polish discourse on Jews in general follows rules where ““Objects” such as “Jews” and “Poles” are fetishised—that is, presented as autonomous and alien to one another (...)” (Ibid., p.144). In history textbooks, narratives present martyrological accounts of Polish suffering and “there is no place there for objective description of the inputs of minorities into the history of Poland, and all the more - for an truthful lecture on the Holocaust” (Cała 2000, p. 12). Media discourses also contribute to preserving the stereotypical depictions of Poles versus Jews, Tokarska-Bakir (2011) talks about “gossips about a Jewish origin of politicians that can ruin careers of those running for president with extreme efficiency” (p. 144) illustrating it with an example of a news piece published in 2010, two decades after anti-Jewish discourse was employed to discredit Tadeusz Mazowiecki in the presidential elections. In the article, Jewish origin of Anne Applebaum, the wife of Radosław Sikorski who at the time was a possible candidate for presidency, was brought up and in a very popular discussion of internet users under the article –more than 2,000 comments were added, most comments focused entirely on Jewishness of Anne Applebaum (onet.pl, 2010).

Tokarska-Bakir (2011, p.144) maintains that even though “the postulate of integration of the culture and output of the Polish Jews has been highlighted for a long time now by historians as well as literary scholars the Polish ethnicity has been stubbornly dissenting from Jewry and defining itself in an opposition to it.” Her observation supports the thesis discussed in the previous chapter that Jew serves as Polish significant other in the narratives (re)produced by public actors. Further, she postulates:

“taking into account how much has been contributed to Polish culture by people who have ever been, rightly or not, associated with Jewry or Jewishness, and having regard to how much energy the occurrence of this concept triggers in public discourse, we shall come to the conclusion that Polish culture and history are its products to an outstanding extent (...) Jewish.” (Ibid.)

The controversial reactions in public discourse on the elements of Jewishness in Polish culture that Tokarska-Bakir evokes, derive from a combination of public actor's interests and cultural traditions on national mythology and discourses on defining others. The interplay of these elements are studied in the following parts of the thesis. In emphasizing the influence of Jews and Jewishness on Polish culture Tokarska-Bakir is joined by a number of public actors, especially cultural producers, non-governmental organizations and some political groups. Anna, the director of the genealogy department in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw in the interview I conducted with her in April 2014 – argued “even if Jews constituted of 10 per cent of our [Polish] society before the war, their influence on culture, economy, was few times more significant (...)” (A. Przybyszewska-Drozd 2014, Interview, 8 Apr).

Then, according to Zubrzycki (2013a, p.102), “recovering the memory of that mosaic [of multiculturalism that Jewish presence was part of] and its tragic destruction is actively sought after by many on the center and left”, and the fascination with Jewishness observable in Poland in the last decades, she argues, to an extent explains why there is more than a dozen annual festivals of Jewish culture organized in contemporary Poland, and most of them were initiated recently, only in the 2000s (Ibid.). Zubrzycki's observation about philo-Semitism as related to the interest in (re)discovering the multicultural past by some actors in the society can be also seen in a broader framework of actor's interests. Some actors might be attracted to engaging with philo-Semitic initiatives in pursuit of symbolic capital - respect and prestige among actors in Poland and abroad who support accounts contesting Polish mythology. This hypothesis is explored further in the case study analyzed in the next chapter of the thesis.

Another phenomenon crucial for the origins of Polish philo-Semitism is the search for the narratives of Jewish communities living in Poland in the past. An art project of Rafał Betlejewski that Zubrzycki (2013b) analyzes can be seen as an intellectual intervention

challenging the national memory-based narrative. In 2009 a Polish artist, Rafał Betlejewski graffitied ‘I miss you Jew’ on a building wall in central Warsaw. The graffiti was, in Zubrzycki’s words: “the first gesture in what became a multiprolonged memorial project that aimed at remembering Jews as a way to recover the “true” Poland that has been lost with their disappearance from the national landscape, a loss increasingly experienced as phantom limb pain in certain milieux” (2013b, p.103). On the website of the project, Betlejewski wrote: “I miss you, Jew. I miss you in Poland, in all these little villages and big cities. You left a [void] there. Both in space and my heart. I just wanted you to know that.” And signed: “Pole” (quoted in Ibid.). The initiative centred around “the notion of loss and the attempt at recovering a memory of the past that has been erased” (Zubrzycki 2013b, p.107) and involved many happenings, events and meetings all over Poland.

It received positive comments in media reports and was supported by some cultural producers. Yet, a number of public actors voiced discomfort about using the word ‘Jew’, for instance “the University of Warsaw expressed discomfort with the name of the project, requesting that the word Jew be omitted from the “happening” planned on its grounds” (Ibid.,p.105). Reactions provoked by evoking the word ‘Jew’ in the project demonstrate prevalence of the mechanism of cultural violence against Jews in language practices – ‘Jew’ in the interpretations of some actors bears derogatory meaning. Nonetheless, the project itself also points to the existence of counter-mechanisms – Betlejewski provoked a public discussion about national narratives by deliberately engaging with the connotations of the word ‘Jew’ even though it was a problematic concept for some actors.<sup>23</sup>

The most controversial part of artist’s project was public burning of a barn on the sixty-ninth anniversary of Jedwabne pogrom which was “a violent and controversial

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<sup>23</sup> In an on-line article from Gzeta Wyborcza, Polish daily Monika Żmijewska writes that Betlejewski describing his project explained „the word Jew is perceived ambiguously. For some it evokes aversion, others have difficulties in saying it, and for some it brings in associations with anti-Semitic inscriptions on the walls.” And he decided to overcome this fear. (Zmijewska, 2010)

commemorative performance that was widely condemned” (Ibid.,p.107). Zubrzycki maintains that ‘Burning Barn’ “was so controversial that it did not create space for debates on collective responsibility” (Ibid., p.109) and it essentially backfired ‘I miss you Jew’ “shedding doubt on author’s intentions in the first place and it became difficult for him to pursue that initial project” (Ibid., p.109). Among various possible explanations of the reactions to the project that Zubrzycki lists, there is one I find most convincing. She writes “maybe Jedwabne is still too close to be ‘experienced’” (Ibid.). The lack of critical distance derived from the proximity of the historical event could be seen as a reason for the fierce reactions evoked by a project questioning the narratives of collective memory with the counter-narrative of history. In the contestations of dominant narratives that I analyze in the further sections and in the following chapter, the same factor - lack of critical distance to the historical event, contributes to the controversial reactions among various actors and the audience.

### **Dominant narratives in Poland on the Holocaust and Communist period, and their actors**

A number of publications discuss the Polish collective memories of the *Polish-Jewish* relations, and Holocaust is emphasized as a momentous event. Michael Steinlauf (1997) discusses *Polish-Jewish* relations before, during and after the genocide. Holocaust is the breaking point, but not the only complication that defines the relations. In the present, he writes, Polish situation is especially multifaceted, as the country was “the arena within which the encounter between the murderers and victims (...) played itself out”(Ibid., preface). Further, he argues that the memory of the War and the Holocaust, must be examined in the wider framework of “the traumatic wounds that were inflicted on the Polish collective psyche not only during Second World War but also before the War and for many decades after” (Steinlauf, 1997 in: Glowacka and Zylinska, 2007, p.2).

Other academics as well point to the role of the post-war political constellation in Poland. The period of Communism was characterized by a large degree of centralized control being exercised over the social, economic and political life of the population. As Polonsky and Michlic (2004, p.5) explain: “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.”. The narrative was to serve the particular objectives and ideology of the state, as indeed, “the motives of memory are never pure” (Young 1993, p.2). In the Polish case, one of the aims of the state was to seek unity through sameness: “The socialist regime strove to eradicate all differences. Controlled at best, or banned at worst, minority groups (...) were most often ignored or hidden from sight. So, too, would be their distinct histories.” (Orla-Bukowska, 2004, p.2) The Holocaust was in the dominant narrative an element of the Polish memory of the War, and the genocide of the Polish Jews was depicted as an element of the Polish loss. Polonsky and Michlic (2004, p.6-7) write:

“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 any other nation during this period. 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.”

After 1989 the dominant narratives of the *Polish-Jewish* relations have evolved, still it occurred in the framework of the discourse on the Polish representations of the past. The Nazi and Soviet occupations of the war and of the communist period are seen as times of foreign oppression during which Poles were the suffering victims, struggling and sacrificing themselves against external rulers.<sup>24</sup> The focus rests on the experiences of ethnic Poles and the

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<sup>24</sup> The underground Polish state and the opposition movements during the Communist era, as well as the Catholic Church, in the national memory are represented as the only actors striving to preserve Polishness.

perspectives of minority groups are excluded. The government through its institutions plays a significant role in the process of socialization of individuals into the dominant discourse, and in the case of post-Communist Poland, Anamaria Orla-Bukowska (2004) describes the strategy of the government on the narrative of *Polish-Jewish* relations as collective amnesia. Yet, the public debates that has been gradually started in the 1980s are in the post-1989 democratic system becoming a widespread discussion in the society about its past, she adds. The collective memories are (re)enacted in a process including public institutions, culture, academia and media; they are a complex phenomenon that should be examined on three levels – cultural tradition, producers and consumers. The officialized collective memories of victimhood and suffering of the nation, as they clash with the critical engagement with national narratives of the historical accounts, provoke fierce public debates. Considering the contestations of collective memories can give an insight into the dynamics engaged in the (re)production of the narrative in a specific point in time as well as its evolution in comparison to the contestations occurring in other moments.

### Memories contested

Polish collective memories prevailing in the political field are contested through the academic publications or cultural productions – books, films, theatre plays or art projects, as described in one of the previous sections. Intervening intellectuals are mostly Polish citizens, both Jewish and non-Jewish, some living in Poland and some abroad. Apart from the scientific interest, their inspirations are often family stories or personal experiences. Exploring in depth the motives and interests driving individuals to intervene in the political field by challenging the leading Polish narrative is one of the questions I deal with in this section. The accounts contesting the dominant discourses were appearing numerously in the past decades. In the public sphere a number of politicians as well as intellectuals – both cultural producers

and academics, participated in the debates on history and memory narratives in Poland. Until the end of the 1980s the debates on the contestation of the Polish narrative of innocent suffering and victimhood have been conducted on a small scale, mostly outside of the official sphere, and they were limited to small group of intellectuals.

The first often mentioned publication is Jan Błoński's "Poor Poles look at the Ghetto" from 1987. The essay pointed to the passive bystanding of some members of the Polish Catholic majority during the genocide on the Jews. Błoński appealed to the Poles that they account for the Holocaust and mourn after their murdered co-citizens. End of the Communist rule, 1989 was a breaking point in opening up the conversation which has been going on since then, intensifying significantly in some periods. Among the works that escalated the national debate in the post-communist Poland were the books published by scholars: Alina Cała's *Image of the Jew in Polish folk culture* (1987) , Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors, The Destruction of Jewish community of Jedwabne, Poland* (2000)<sup>25</sup> and *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (2006)<sup>26</sup>, Barbara Engelking's *It is such a beautiful, sunny day... The fate of Jews seeking rescue in the Polish countryside 1942-1945*<sup>27</sup> (2010) and Jan Grabowski's "Judenjagd. Hunting for the Jews 1942-1945. The study of the history of a county" (2011).

In this chapter due to format constraints, I focus only on the publications of one author, Jan Tomasz Gross. His books evoked the fiercest reactions in the public sphere and the discussions around them engaged institutions and individuals for months or even years. The controversies also served as an initial impulse for official investigations into the historical evidence and the official acts of politicians<sup>28</sup> and they were also an inspiration for cultural

<sup>25</sup> English version has been published in 2001

<sup>26</sup> Polish translation was published In 2008

<sup>27</sup> Own translation from Polish "Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień.. Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942-1945"

<sup>28</sup> The re-investigaton (it happened for the first time in the 1950s) of the Jedwabne massacre was conducted by the National Institute of Memory in 2000-2004 and it confirmed that ethnic Poles were guilty of the killings.



productions. Among those were Anna Bikont's book "We from Jedwabne" (2004), Tadeusz Słobodzianek's play "Our class – history in XIV lessons" (2008)<sup>29</sup>, Władysław Pasikowski's film "the Aftermath" (2012). These intellectual interventions as well provoked vivid discussions, but I do not analyze those in this chapter.

*Neighbors The Destruction of Jewish community of Jedwabne, Poland* by Jan Tomasz Gross (2000)

The so-called *Jedwabne debate* in 2000-2002 after J.T. Gross's publication of *Neighbors* has been the most earth-shattering controversy about Polish collective memories as opposed to history. It has been broadly debated by academics and non-academics both in Poland and abroad. In *Neighbors*, J.T. Gross described the massacre of the local Jewish population by their Polish neighbors in a village of Jedwabne in the summer of 1941. The publication has severely challenged the Polish dominant narratives of innocently-suffering nation, victims of the foreign oppression and violence and a large-scale discussion followed about the character and significance of what happened in Jedwabne. Polonsky and Michlic (2004) write that the book provoked the most widespread and intensive debate on national narratives that any post-Communist country in Central Europe experienced.

The discussions were about *Polish-Jewish* relations during the Second World War, but also *Polish-Jewish* relations in general. (Michlic 2002, p.2). Joanna Michlic proposes to divide the actors participating in the debates into two groups according to the views they presented: the self-critical camp and the self-defensive camp. (Michlic, 2007, p.27). The self-critical approach confronted the Polish national narrative of innocent victimhood and the bias

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Moreover, in the Jedwabne debate many prominent cultural figures expressed approval to the 'self-critical' view of the national history (Polonsky and Michlic, 2004, p.31). Additionally, the Jedwabne debate is "the first debate in which political figures have taken an active role, and in which some, notably, the president of Poland, Aleksander Kwasniewski, has given support to the 'self-critical' image of the Polish-Jewish past" (Ibid.).

<sup>29</sup> First performed on stage in 2008

representation of *Polish-Jewish* relations and with regards to Gross' book they accepted his main thesis about carrying out of the Jedwabne massacre by ethnic Poles (Ibid.). The self-defensive perspective "displayed both discomfort over the news of the Jedwabne massacre and major difficulty in accepting Gross's main thesis" (Ibid), focused on neutralizing the book's message and generally sought to maintain the Polish victimhood narrative and representations of *Polish-Jewish* relations.

The debate exhibited the stances of collective memory-producers, apart from the author of the publication it was media and political actors. Michlic (2002) argues that the government and political and cultural elites supporting the ruling party at the time<sup>30</sup> were representing the self-critical approach. She points to two crucial events to justify her interpretation— official re-investigation of the Jedwabne massacre by Institute of National Memory (described in footnote 7) and the official commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the killings. She claims that these occurrences "demonstrate that important segments of the Polish political and cultural elite are capable of overcoming its dark past" (Michlic 2002, p.1). Further, she states that the reactions of the right-wing nationalist political and cultural elites "reveal that the defensive approach continues to exert influence in public life." (Ibid.).

There are some problematic elements in Michlic's interpretation. Firstly, it is not only the elites that impact the memory narratives and the perspectives represented in the public life. As I argue in this chapter, collective memory involves interest and responses of various actors as well as persisting cultural traditions. Secondly, demonstrating specific approach in the public debate does not necessarily correspond with working through the past. In the case of the elites, it is rather a manifestation of particular interests of the individual or a group. Thus, an

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<sup>30</sup> The government under the lead of Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek (AWS) was formed by a coalition of Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) together with the previous main opposition party, Social Left Alliance (SLD) and the non-communist socialist Union of Labour (Unia Pracy). The coalition won 41.04 percent of the seats in parliament (Michlic 2002, footnotes). The President, Aleksander Kwaśniewski was a member of SLD.

adoption of a critical perspective in the official acts of the government and the elites might have simply been a reaction to the responses of the memory-consumers. Consumers, the audience in Poland, has also vividly engaged in the discussions – by commenting articles on the topic on-line, writing letters to media, organizing debates and demonstrations. It could have also played a role of a crucial political statement on the international arena. The discussions on *Polish-Jewish* relations have raised considerable amount of academic and non-academic interest abroad, and a conversation on critically re-examining the narratives of the past in Poland has been widely seen as a signifier of a well-developing open and pluralistic public sphere. Thus, to show support for the development of open, democratic society it could have been in the interest of the government and the elites to express critical stances in the debate in order to increase their accumulated symbolic capital.

An important contribution discussing the value of the Jedwabne debate has been offered by a volume edited by Dorota Głowacka and Joanna Żylińska (2007) *Imaginary neighbors: mediating Polish-Jewish relations after the Holocaust*. In the book academics from Poland and beyond provide an insightful analysis of the current state of *Polish-Jewish* relations in the light of the Jedwabne debate. For instance Tokarska-Bakir and Plonowska-Ziarek in their chapters show how, even after 1989, historical inquiry (in some cases) and education in Poland have been silencing specific elements of historical narratives to make sure the account presented is adjusted to the collective memories of victimhood and innocent suffering. The authors in the volume agree that Jedwabne debate has served as a reference point for various actors in the process of re-consideration of the past and in questioning the ways in which historical narratives interact with collective memories.

The depth, length and reach of the debate which the book provoked challenged the dominant narratives of Polish innocent victimhood and suffering. The collective memories of

the past (re) produced in a process of cultural production and consumption (Kansteiner, 2002), revealed powerful elements of Polish national identity which depict the group as victimized and innocent. Furthermore, the narrative presented by Gross was seen by some participants of the debate - the self-defensive camp, as the perspective of 'the Jews' as the defining, threatening other for the collective Polish self. The controversies around another book authored by Jan Gross mirrored some of the reactions to *Neighbors* and the debate on contestations of collective memory narratives through historical accounts was again very heated and polarized.

*Fear. Anti-semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: an Essay in Historical Interpretation. Jan Tomasz Gross (2006)*

In 2006, Gross published *Fear*. In there, he describes anti-Semitism in Poland as a widespread phenomenon after the Second World War. He specifically analyzes the period just after the war, looking at the Kielce pogrom and other events where hostility towards Jews escalated. Gross argues that it was plain fear for the existential threat that provoked the anti-Semitism. He claims that the occupation of totalitarian regimes, of the Nazis and then the Soviets, disturbed Polish society in a way that was unique, new and larger than ever before, and thus anti-Semitism was also of distinct kind, exceptionally hostile and dangerous. The publication has provoked similarly heated reactions as the first one in the Polish public sphere on *Polish-Jewish* relations and it was also widely discussed by academics in Poland and abroad. In the scholarly literature, the same as for the previous publication, there is a number of accounts discussing the book and the ensuing debate.

Barbara Tornquist-Plewa (2013) argues that the most crucial value of *Fear* lies in its specific rhetoric. She points to functionality and performativity that Gross employs and contends that his aim in using these is to turn his book into a call for action. She claims that

“*Fear* was written not only with an epistemological purpose but also with the aim of enabling a change of Polish collective memory and identity.” (Ibid., p.11). I see her perspective on collective memory and identity as problematic. Both constructs are not constants that would change because of an event, they are fluid and complex – collective memories are (re)produced constantly in processes involving multiple actors - in media, official sphere, cultural events. Additionally, she points out that the Polish language version of the book is written in a more colloquial style, it contains ironies, provocations and politically polemic allusions that are not present in the English-language version. The speech of the Polish version of the book is, she says, directed at the Polish nation. Her article analyzes the importance of Gross’ book in a very novel and insightful way and it can help to explain the controversies over *Fear* in Poland. Yet, she argues that:

“the facts of crimes committed by Polish people against Jews had already been related in several books before Strach [fear – pl], but this was not enough to construct cultural trauma in Polish society. Another method was needed, and Gross chose the one that seems to have succeeded in shaking up Polish society” (p.11).

Tornquist-Plewa too easily assumes, in my view, that the debate following the publication has changed something in the way that Poles see themselves and their collective narrative. She focuses mostly on the methods used by the author to provoke and enforce critical re-examination of the narratives and positions them in the framework of cultural trauma. The concept of ‘cultural trauma’ is employed, but as I pointed out in the introduction, the term is not helpful in identifying the evolution of the memory-based narratives. The author does not consider the (re)production and (re) interpretation of collective memories in the discourse, including the actors on various levels – the memory producers and the consumers.

David Engel (2007) analyzes the historical argument posed by Gross In *Fear* and compares it to the historical argument of *Neighbors*. Engel’s focus is different from the accounts analyzing the debate provoked by Gross as it engages in a discussion over the

content of the book. His article argues that there are dissimilar implications of the two books for the contemporary Polish self-understanding and that *Fear* makes a more controversial claim. Namely, he describes Gross' thesis as pointing to the second world war as a radical break in Polish history which drastically changed the behavior of Poles towards Jews. He disagrees with Gross' thesis by describing broader range of factors that influenced the hostility of Poles towards Jews after the war, as well as comparing the situation in Poland with that of other countries in the region. For Engel, there is no reason to ascribe the specificity of the behavior of Poles towards Jews after the war only to the context of Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms.<sup>31</sup> Some other academics also argue against historical arguments made by Gross, and some of these accounts were published in English for the international audience, and others were written for Polish readers in Polish.

According to Laurence Weinbaum (2008) "there are reasons to question the methodology employed by Gross, and eminent Polish scholars have done so" yet the intentions of the questioning are crucial, he writes – the primary idea should be "to advance the cause of objective scholarship" (Ibid.). Nonetheless, some scholars represented other interests in the accounts in which they were opposing Gross' work –namely they attempted to defend the dominant narratives of suffering and innocence. For instance, historian Marek Jan Chodakiewicz argued in his book *After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflict in the Wake of World War II* (2003) that Polish acts of violence against the Jews must be balanced against Jewish violence against the Poles (Weinbaum, 2008). Weinbaum, in his review of

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<sup>31</sup> An article by Timothy Snyder (2013) follows a similar vein and argues for a new approach to the situation of Central Europe in the Holocaust His main arguments deals with the danger of what he calls commemorative causality, "whereby that which is most effectively and frequently commemorated becomes that which it is most convenient to present as causal in synthetic histories" (p. 1). He also points to the history of the Holocaust that may become in this context a reflection of contemporary emotions, evoking Arendt's conceptualization.(Ibid., p. 1) He contends that a task of a historian s to find a balance between the present and the past and this "becomes impossible when the commemorative impulse of present what is easiest to represent becomes what is easiest to argue" (Ibid., p.13) Further, he claims that commemorative causality separates ideology and history and "limits ideology to what can be represented in non-textual forms" (Ibid., p.14). He continues "Without a full understanding of ideology's own claims on the world and without a lively understanding of past worlds altered by ideology, we can neither understand anti-Semitism nor prepare ourselves for its return (or for the revival of similar ideas)." (Ibid.)

Chodakiewicz's work writes that "Chodakiewicz and like-minded historians seem reluctant to forgive the Jews for Jedwabne and the Kielce pogrom, and are hard at work explaining why the murdered - not the murderers - are guilty."<sup>32</sup> The academics reacting defensively, like Chodakiewicz, were acting as memory (re)producers, rather than intellectuals. The distance in the engagement with the narratives was lacking in these accounts, and instead of attempts to deconstruct the national myths what prevailed was efforts to maintain the dominant memory-based narratives. The variety of reactions to Gross' second discussed publication demonstrates again a complex interplay of interests, cultural traditions and historical accounts that contribute to the dynamic process of (re)enacting of collective memories.

## Conclusion

In the chapter I discussed some of the public debates around publications contesting Polish dominant collective narratives of the *Polish-Jewish* relations. Since 1980s and especially after 1989 a number of books, articles and cultural productions mobilized heated discussions in the public sphere in Poland and in here I discuss the reactions to only two among these, both were books published by Jan Tomasz Gross between 2000 and 2008. Among the public actors - government, some political and cultural elites, a number of intellectuals and some media have engaged in a process of critical evaluation of collective narratives of innocent suffering and victimhood. Yet other actors, and among them also scholars, defended the national narrative and attempted to counterbalance the critical narratives.

The voices of individuals trying to protect the collective memories of suffering and victimhood from a critical examination and from acknowledging the existence of a

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<sup>32</sup> Weinbaum continues in his review of Chodakiewicz's work that the scholar is "one of a group of ethno-nationalist historians who maintains that Jews who served in Poland's notorious internal security organ, headed by Jakub Berman (a Jewish-born apparatchik), should be blamed for their acts as Jews. They contend that much of the violence directed against Jews was not anti-Semitic at all; it was simply a reaction to the transgressions of Jewish communists." (Ibid.)

multiplicity of narratives, could be analyzed as primary rather than secondary sources. Even if they were articulated by academics, the absence of the distance between the past and the present makes them objects of analysis in this case, instead of academic accounts. Therefore, in this context the typology proposed by Michlic to categorize the voices in Jedwabne debate into a self-defensive and self-critical camp should be discarded. I propose to replace it by dividing the perspectives according to the interests represented by the actors – following Kansteiner’s approach to collective memory as a field of complex exchange between cultural traditions and the inventiveness of memory producers and interests of memory consumers together with Bourdieuan ideas of intellectual interventions, interests and fields. A novel contribution to the analysis of Polish debates on the contestations of national narratives - by intellectual interventions such as Gross’ books, can be provided by examining the interplay of historical accounts and the interests of various actors in (re)enacting collective memories. The controversies around “Pokłosie” as an example of post-Gross debate is what I examine in the following chapter to illustrate how the approach I describe can be used as an analytical tool.

## **Chapter 4 “The Aftermath” as an intellectual intervention**

### **Introduction**

Many of the authors of cultural productions challenging the dominant narrative in Poland after 2000s explain that their primary motivation to engage with contestations was learning about counter-narratives from Jedwabne debate. From being members of audience during the discussions on Gross’ books, some artist shifted into a position of intellectuals intervening in the political field. Rafał Betlejewski, who during Jedwabne debate has been among memory consumers, created the art project described in chapter two as a result of



personal reflections and feelings that the discussions on Gross' books evoked in him.<sup>33</sup> For Władysław Pasikowski, the director of a Polish thriller and drama, the counter-narrative exposed by Gross served as an inspiration for the storyline of his 2012 film “the Aftermath”.

In this chapter, as a case of contestation to the national memory narratives, I examine the controversy incited by “the Aftermath” and its promotional campaign. Individuals engaged in creating the intellectual intervention – the director and the actors, as well as the sponsors and producers; were engaged in a vivid debate with memory producers – politicians, academics, journalists, and the audience. Moreover, some actors from the academic and cultural fields not connected with the film voiced their opinions from the position of intellectuals. Media were widely commenting on the film and through mass channels of communication putting frames on the audience's discussion in the public sphere. In the following sections, the analysis of the motivations and interests of various actors in engaging with the film illustrates how Polish debates on the contestations of national narratives can be examined as events where historical accounts interact with the interests of a number of actors in (re)enacting memory-based narratives.

### The film

“The Aftermath” (pl. *Pokłosie*) is a Polish thriller-drama directed by Władysław Pasikowski, who also is the author of the script. In this section I summarize the plot of the film and point to the elements that in the responses to the production were seen as especially problematic the dominant narratives. The film is set in a small village in north-eastern Poland and tells a story of two brothers, Józek (starring Maciej Stuhr) and Franek Kalina (starring Ireneusz Czop). Franek, after a long absence, returns to his hometown to learn that his

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<sup>33</sup> As Zmijewska explains discussing the origins of Betlejewski's project in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2010

brother, Józek, is living there isolated from the local community while devoting himself to collecting Jewish gravestones and seeking to investigate untold elements of the local history.

The community is very distrustful and fearful of Józek's explorations, digging into the local past seems to be treated as a taboo topic. Franek, upon discovering the hobby of his brother, is at first critical towards his brother's actions and wishes to convince Józek to give up. Eventually, though, Franek joins in the efforts to reveal the episodes of local history that the village community strives to deliberately avoid and conceal. Because of their investigation, they enter into a severe conflict with other inhabitants of the area. After a few weeks, the brothers make a horrific discovery – they encounter aggregated human bones under the ruins of a house by the river. They learn it was a site of a massacre of the local Jews who were burnt in Kalina's family house, and their father, along with other men from the village, was among the perpetrators of the murder. Józek and Franek's family afterwards moved into one of the houses previously owned by Jews that were killed. The reactions of the community to brothers' investigation of the purposefully obliterated history become more and more aggressive, and at the end Józek's corpse is found crucified at the door of his barn. The film ends with another return of Franek to the village – this time he finds a group of Jews praying in between the gravestones that his brother assembled. The gravestones are at Kalina's family field, in the same place where Józek put them. It now became a Jewish commemoration site.

In the storyline, the foreign actors – soldiers from Nazi Germany, those who in the national narratives are the main perpetrators of violence during the Second World War, are somewhere in the background – their main role situates them in stories of older generation of the village inhabitants. The seniors depict the disappearance of the town's Jewish community as an obvious fault of the Germans, and they carefully avoid questioning this dominant narrative. Thus, Kalina brothers' quest to uncover the ownership status of their family house,

which transforms into a difficult search for a deliberately obliterated story of a massive crime is treated in the local community with great suspicion and escalating psychological and physical violence. The counter-narratives that the main characters uncover is problematic not only in context of the dominant perspective on the past in the village but it can be also seen as a contestation of the Polish narrative – thus the story depicted by the film is a challenge for the national mythology.

The central focus of the narrative is the present-day interactions between people in the village – conflicts, relationships between individuals, changing influence and stances of state actors and church, anti-Semitism without Jews. Józek is perceived as a stranger by people in the village, his fascination with Jewish gravestones marked the beginning of a gradual process of his isolation from the local community. Acts of physical violence on him and his property, especially graffitied David's star derogatory statements about Jews, point that the character became the embodiment of Jewish feared other, the construction that I described in chapter two of the thesis. This motive as well may be interpreted in a wider, national context – as addressing the peculiar Allosemitic trends in Poland.

“Aftermath”, therefore, is a controversial story in many ways. Firstly, it presented a counter-narrative where Poles are perpetrators – murderers of local Jews during the Second World War. Secondly, it points to a tremendously straightforward connection between the Polish people of the village guilty of murdering the Jews seventy years back, and the contemporary inhabitants. The fathers and grandfathers of today's village community were the perpetrators of the murder and the houses many families occupy since 1940s used to belong to the killed Jews. Finally, as it primarily focuses on the contemporary life of the village, it depicts the prevalence of anti-Semitic prejudice among the community members and points to the crucial role that local priests and state institutions may play in preventing or allowing verbal or physical violence.

The film was first shown in May 2012, but its official premiere took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2012, two days before the Polish national holiday on the 11<sup>th</sup> November – the Independence Day. One of the articles wrote on the choice of the premiere day:

“it perfectly fits into the context of the film, since for a few years precisely this national holiday has converted into a battalion (and not only about viewpoints) between the camps, for which that time [Second World War], and especially Polish-Jewish relations still stand for one of the central issues for discussion and they determine the belonging to a given group”  
(natemat.pl, 2012).

Similarly as in this quote, most of the media framed the reactions to the film as a debate between two sides - the actors and audiences commenting on the film either liked the film a lot and supported the idea of making it, or they entirely did not like it and criticized the filmmakers for having produced it. In my analysis, I intend to go deeper, beyond the two-camps divide and explore the motivations of filmmakers, as well as other public actors and members of audience, who expressed their views on the production; in order to discuss the process of (re)enactment of collective memories in Poland. After discussing the content of the film – the product, I advance to examining the side of the memory producers, and in the final section I move on to memory consumers.

### Producers of history and memory

The film greatly challenges the dominant narratives, and the director with other filmmakers and the crew were aware that their intellectual intervention would raise controversial reactions. Not only “the Aftermath” was promoted as *the most courageous Polish film so far*, but also the actors, director and producers even before the film was created were faced with comments that the film is *anti-Polish*. *Anti-Polish* in this context was seen as meaning threatening, dangerous for the dominant memory-based narrative since it is focusing on ignoble acts performed by Poles. The director, producer and the crew shared the idea that even though the film is controversial, it should be created. Yet, the stances of particular people and institutions involved in the filmmaking – the director, producers, sponsors and

actors; expressed during the public debates around the film in 2012 and 2013 varied greatly and I focus on exploring these differences in the following paragraphs.

Władysław Pasikowski is a well-known Polish popular cinema director and screenplay writer, who began his career in 1990s and since the first films he made he is perceived as a controversial figure, together with his productions. His films are often brutal, vulgar and focus on male characters' stories, and the screenplays are original, inspired by authentic events occurring in Poland – they often reveal the power mechanisms involved in the operation of corrupted state institutions (Dąbrowski, 2012).<sup>34</sup> Pasikowski argued that in Poland:

“one can make any kind of films, most probably except for those which are questioning the absolute faultness of the Polish nation (...) Our nation in all its history – as it is known – did not do anything mean and even if we conduct wars, we do so only with peace forces. Thus, it is not allowed to make “anti-Polish” films which show alternative reality” (Dąbrowski 2012).

“The Aftermath”, similarly to the other films Pasikowski made, in a drastic and violent form challenges the narrative of innocent people living in Poland, so it touches on a central taboo topic for Polish cinematography that Pasikowski indicated. Further, it depicts anti-Semitism in the past and in the present, another problematic issue in the public discourse. Rather than reproducing the dominant narrative of Polish suffering, it reveals a counter-narrative in which Poles are perpetrators – murderers of local Jews during the Second World War. Furthermore, the format of the film itself is somewhat controversial, as it is the case with other productions authored by Pasikowski. “The Aftermath” as a thriller with a considerable amount of violence depicted, brutality, swearing and images of a rough life from an impoverished and unsophisticated rural village, leaves a deep and powerful impression on the viewer. Many of the fiercely critical voices referred to the form and genre of the film. The director's reputation and unwillingness to compromise his viewpoints and own moral rules

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<sup>34</sup> Pasikowski's style is compared by some film critics to Quentin Tarantino, because of the “large amount of artistically exposed violence (...) and vulgarity” (Gazdzicki 2006). Yet, others see his films as primitive, boorish and improper

has been an important background factor influencing the atmosphere in which the film was being made and the way it was received by commentators and audiences.

The idea to make the film appeared in 2000s and it took more than five years from the moment Pasikowski completed the screenplay to the stage when the production could begin. The essential aspect in the length of the process, as Maciej Stuhr (who starred Józek in the film) stated in the interview I conducted with him, was the extreme difficulty in securing funding for the project (M Stuhr 2014, Interview, 10Apr). The producer, Dariusz Jabłoński, described a conversation with Agnieszka Odorowicz, head of the Polish Film Institute (PFI) to discuss getting funds for the film: “We have heard that we want to do an anti-Polish film. Simply.” (Smoleński, 2012). It was known in the cinematography circles, explained Stuhr (M Stuhr 2014, Interview, 10Apr) that it was so problematic to gather funding probably because “nobody wanted to take co-responsibility for making a film like this (...) as the reactions could have been predicted and it was known that all who were involved in making it to any extent would be co-responsible.” PFI is a state-funded organisation, thus possibly a reason for its reluctance to contribute to the production was precisely the awareness that the film would expose the viewers to a counter-narrative which challenges the dominant narrative promoted by state institutions. Since PFI is dependent on the funding from the public sources, support given by state institutions to productions promoting contesting narratives could endanger the dominant narrative that is communicated and (re)created in the discourses of state institutions. Finally, PFI also contributed to the production<sup>35</sup> and after a long struggle, the filmmakers managed to gather the necessary funding from institutions in Poland and abroad, and the film was completed by 2012.

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<sup>35</sup> However, as Stuhr told me, even though PFI finally gave some funds for the film, the struggles about the money they contributed are still on-going until now (M Stuhr 2014, Interview, 10Apr).

## Controversies

The film raised controversies from the beginning, yet the director, producers and actors explained that they were very determined to make it. The individuals involved in the film's production were saying that they would like the film to contribute to the reconsideration of the Polish dominant narrative on the Jews, "the Aftermath" was meant to provoke discussions, lead to questioning the narrative. Individual motivations of persons involved in making the film were also important.

Pasikowski, who initially entitled the production "Kadish" - meaning a Jewish prayer for mourning of a close relative; finally decided to change it for "the Aftermath", explaining: "we will all, earlier or later, answer for what we have done" (Subbotko 2012). One of Pasikowski's motivation was to expose the viewers to the counter-narratives of Polish past, by challenging the memory-based narratives. Making the film was for him, however, a result of a few interacting factors. In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, in the only long interview related to the film he gave he described his artistic visions of some scenes and motives in the film emerging from stories he heard or events he experienced. For instance, the burning of Jewish graveyard was an image he remembered seeing from thirty years back and he said: "I stood there and knew that in a few years this image will be part of my film." (Subbotko, 2012). Another important element he mentioned was hearing a story about peasants crucifying their neighbor from another director. Pasikowski revealed:

"I was wondering for twenty years what could have been driving these peasants and I never came up with sufficient motivation, until the moment when I discovered the book of Prof. Jan Gross <on Jedwabne>. I said to myself back then – this is it. For this it is 'worth' to crucify on the door of a barn." (Ibid.)

His artistic visions and inspirations merged with the powerful counter-narratives he learned about and motivated him to make a film that shocks, challenges and questions. Furthermore, he maintained "I still naively think that it is possible to fix something. Ultimately I see the world as a little better than it was before 1989" (Ibid.).

When asked about his unwillingness to participate in the discussions about the film in the context of the fierce reactions against it, including hatespeech and anti-Semitism from the internet users, he responded: “ I made the film for them. I have an iron rule not to read comments on the internet (...). “(Ibid.). Overall, Pasikowski’s motivation was both personal – artistic visions and inspiration from Gross’ book, as well as the drive to contribute to the world becoming better by exposing the counter-narratives to a broad audience, hoping to question the national mythology and dominant narratives. Yet, importantly, Pasikowski mostly refused to explain his reasoning behind making the film explaining: “the product should defend itself. Which maybe at the beginning it does not go too well, but I believe that as the years pass it will secure itself an appropriate position in the Polish cinematography.” (Subbotko, 2012). The director refrained from giving many interviews and since the media interest was immense, the other filmmakers became spokespersons of the film.

The producer, Dariusz Jabłoński, discussed his involvement as fulfilling a moral duty. He said:

“In my opinion, no historical context, including that of the World War II – before and after the war – is a justification for burning people. I am offended by (...) the crime in Jedwabne, where the Poles murdered Polish citizens of Jewish descent, and this is why I want to speak about this aloud.” (Smoleński, 2012).

Ireneusz Czop (Franek) treated his participation in the film as an individual challenge and an occasion to broaden his view on the world. He explained “as a result of the meeting with Pasikowski < and playing in “the Aftermath”>, I began asking myself questions which before I have only approached superficially. About responsibility, courage.” (Kawczyńska, 2012).

Maciej Stuhr (Józek) explained his motivations to take part in the production as two-fold: he really liked the screenplay and he also thought of his participation as fulfillment of a moral duty. He told me:

“playing in a film like this was a dream for me – above all a brilliant screenplay (...) it was so well narrated that even put aside the topic, it would be great to play in such thriller. In addition I thought that this film should be made, it has to be made, that there is a need to



express views on that topic – I had no doubt or dilemmas whether I should accept the proposition, rather the opposite.” (M Stuhr 2014, Interview, 10Apr).

The filmmakers and the crew deliberately positioned themselves as promoters of the counter-narrative, touching the taboos, questioning the national narrative – acting as intellectuals in the political field. When getting involved in the project, they were aware of the controversy the film would evoke. Yet, the strength of some of the extremely furious and offensive reactions to “the Aftermath” turned out more cruel and hard to deal with, especially for Stuhr. In the interview, he recalled three reasons for this. Firstly, Pasikowski in promoting his films, follows the idea of not giving more than one or two interviews about the production – he says that he expresses himself through his films “the product should speak for itself”. “For this film that [the approach of the director] was pouring oil on the flame, because everyone was talking about the film and nobody was able to convince the director to participate in this discussion.”. Further, Stuhr explained that he was asked to give more interviews than Czop, so he “stood up for the struggle on a larger scale” (M Stuhr 2014, Interview, 10Apr). Additionally, he continued, “I did not want to wonder who and why, but I knew that not everyone wanted to take part in such a tussle, and to an extent I can also understand it.” (Ibid.).

The filmmakers and the crew situated themselves, and the film, as carriers of the contesting narrative to the audience. To depict the image of the interactions between the people involved in making the film and the audiences, I now move on to the analysis of media responses and framing of “the Aftermath” as well as to the comments of internet users to the articles published on-line.

### Consumers

Maciej Stuhr, who, unexpectedly for him, became a face of the film was confronted with questions not only on “the Aftermath”, but also on his private life. For instance, journalists often asked him *whether he feels like a real Pole*, in light of all the comments he

was faced with in the context of the film and specifically in connection to the behavior of Stuhr's character. Józek was sacrificing his reputation in the village and eventually his own life for discovering the counter-narratives about the murder of local Jewry, and Stuhr explained that he sees the need to depict the counter-narratives and challenge the dominant discourses of Polish innocence. Does it make him, or his character's belonging to the Polish in-group questionable? For some journalists, and audience members it did so indeed by putting him into a position of a stranger who arguing for the recognition of a contesting narrative.

The warning uttered by Franek to Józek in the film summarize the attitude of unwillingness to cross boundaries protecting the in-group "it will end badly, you will see. Why you, blockhead, are supposed to speak up for the strangers' dead?" Józek in the film answered "because, apparently, from them nobody stayed alive to be able to do it themselves" (The Aftermath). Some actors in the discussion accepted the message of the film and engaged in a discussion about (re)examining the national narratives, while others fiercely criticized the film - its content, form, actors and pointed out to mistakes. In the following paragraphs I briefly discuss the possible motivations and interests of various actors involved in the debates around the film.

Some journalists, as well as internet users posting their comments under articles published on-line, argued that the film did not reveal anything that has not been known before – implicitly making a reference to the previous discussions in Polish public sphere on historical accounts contesting the national narratives. Such opinions were voiced by the admirers and defenders of the film and equally by its fierce critics and opponents. Sobolewski, a publicist from *Gazeta Wyborcza* – the biggest daily newspaper that was an important supporter of "the Aftermath" wrote:

“Pasikowski’s film will not have much new to say to the readers of “Gazeta Wyborcza”, Jan T. Gross and Anna Bikont.<sup>36</sup> It is made having in mind those who watch Polish tv series. Those who during the mass repeat in their prayers that they believe in the communion of the living and the dead and in ‘the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body’. It is meant to incline them to think that to the communion of the living of the dead also the Jews from our village belong” (Sobolewski, 2012).

The tone and content of Sobolewski’s comment reinforces the divide between those who have acknowledged the historical accounts presented in the previous debates and those who are ‘yet to learn’, the mass audience of Roman Catholics living in Poland, socialized in the national narratives of suffering and victimhood. Drawing the line between the knowledgeable ‘us’ and the ignorant ‘them’ – the masses, serves to protect and secure the distinction, establish a differentiation.

Yet, similarly the opponents of the film argue that there is nothing enlightening in the film: “When it comes to the past, the artist [director] does not tell us anything that we had not known before from the publications of PAN [*Polska Akademia Nauk* – Polish Academy of Sciences] such as ‘Judenjagd’ or the essays of Jan T. Gross” (Kuisz, 2012). Though, for the authors of critical comments on “the Aftermath”, the statement that the film does not show anything new is in many cases followed by the considerations of historical faults in the (fictional) story and leads to a discussion whether the film should have been made at all. Some commentators write they feel offended by the film – for example Czesław Bielecki, a famous architect from Warsaw who defines himself as Polish Jew. He said:

“I really did not like the film (...) because the premiere took place just before the Independence Day, I would say, on the basis of the experiences of my family (...) and my own (...) the image of these dumb peasants hostile to Jews is a very selected fragment of the reality” (TOK FM 2012).

The viewpoint that the film is inappropriate since it challenges the national narrative, symbols and mythology in different ways was expressed in the voices criticizing the film.

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<sup>36</sup> Gazeta Wyborcza is one of the largest daily newspapers in Poland. In the Jedwabne it supported Jan T. Gross and promoted his thesis, and in the Pokłosie debate it stood on the side of Pasikowski. Anna Bikont works for Gazeta Wyborcza and is an author of one of the key texts that have been published in Poland as a reaction to the Jedwabne debate – *We from Jedwabne*.

Many maintained the film was *anti-Polish*. Right-wing daily newspapers, such as *Rzeczpospolita* discussed it as a opportunistic production made to fit in with the popular interest in re-discovering anything connected with Jewishness.<sup>37</sup> More radical conservative media, and comments from the readers, evoked the myths of Jewish communism or Jewish-German conspiracy against the Poles to discredit the film and the filmmakers (*niezalezna.pl*, 2012). By expressing harshly critical standpoints authors attempted to protect the narrative of their in-group from being challenged. Through condemning “the Aftermath” they engage in a struggle to ensure their readers that the familiar dominant narrative is still the ‘correct’ one, even though Pasikowski attempted to challenge it. Confirming the known and acknowledged narrative is also the goal of the supporters’ of the film – yet the narrative in that case is different. The readers, and the journalists of the media praising “the Aftermath” argue they are able to accept the contestations of the dominant narrative and embrace the complexity of historical accounts about the Second World War and Jewish past in Poland. What is shared by both approaches, is the relationship between the readers of the articles and comments and the authors of the reviews – media, in order to secure their position and income on the commercialized market, must examine and respond to the needs of their potential readers. It creates a vicious cycle – the media writes what the consumers want to read, so in seeking to meet the needs of its audience it re-produces the narratives that the consumers are socialized into.

An element of building a positive image of the in-group is a struggle for establishing a positive narrative both for the members of the group and also for the out-groups. Many

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<sup>37</sup> In an opinion article published in *Uwazamrze*, a right-wing weekly, Piotr Zaremba wrote: “*Pokłosie* is a conjunctural film. Instead of a bold and multidimensional image, Pasikowski preferred to make a film that is trivial. It is indeed easier and safer to expose for the hundredth time the Polish anti-Semitism, than it is to show the Jews collaborating with the Soviets. Omitting this aspect of the crime is a proof that, regardless to what he declares, he did not want to reveal the truth. He simply made a politically correct piece about the bad Poles. As a result, the director will be honoured with many awards and will receive favourable reviews in the liberal media, which will not, obviously, notice any one-sidedness in the film.” (Zaremba, 2012)

comments on “the Aftermath” discussed the reception, or possible reception – as they were written at the time when film was not yet shown abroad; of the film abroad. Often, the importance of the film for reinforcing certain images, views and stereotypes about Poland and Poles that are allegedly held by people living abroad was evoked. Many journalists in the right-wing media as well as authors of comments to the on-line articles in both right-wing and left-wing media argued that “the Aftermath” destroys the good reputation of Poland abroad. A historian Piotr Zychowicz writing for a right-wing weekly *Uważamrze*, wrote:

“On the one hand, the Polish state is fighting for a good image of Poland and Poles in the world, it is protesting when the Western newspapers (...) represent the occupation of Poland only through the prism of *szmalcownictwo*. On the other hand, Poland has funded its own black PR<sup>38</sup>. *Pokłosie*, if shown abroad, will only ground the negative stereotypes of the Poles”. (Zychowicz, 2012)

This perspective, yet again alludes to the understanding that the dominant narrative should prevail and public institutions should prevent any interventions that attempt to contest it. The account is a case of a re-production of the memory-based narrative. The author of the comment, even though he is a historian by education, does not intervene as an intellectual in the debate but rather as a memory producer since he is not interested in truth but in reputation in this case. The fact that a state-funded Polish Film Institute (PFI) contributed to the production is alluded to and criticized.

As I discussed in the previous section, filmmakers encountered a number of difficulties while trying to secure funding for the production from PFI. Institute’s director was reluctant to agree to participate in the project because she thought it was an *anti-Polish*, challenging the national mythology – she adopted similar argument as the authors criticizing the film. The interpretation of these approaches can be seen as follows: some media and state institutions promote the dominant national narrative because the consumers are most likely to be socialized into it, thus consequentially support the actors who work to preserve it. The relationship between the state actors and media (re)producing the narrative and the memory

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<sup>38</sup> The point was made as a reference to the fact that Polish Film Institute contributed to the film’s budget.

consumers resembles a vicious cycle: the actors promote perspectives based on the prevalent cultural traditions in which the consumers are socialized; the consumers internalize the narratives and use them to interpret the world; as the producers seek to ensure continuing support from the consumers they engage in (re)producing the given narrative whenever it is challenged – thus the consumers would feel safe and reward the actors for protecting them from threats contesting the familiar ways to understand the world.

The narrative that consumers are socialized into does not necessarily need to be the dominant one, it can also be a narrative in which the national understanding of the past is criticized and instead another understanding of the past prevails – as in the example from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, where the author explains that for the readers the film would not reveal anything new as they have learned about the alternative narratives from historical accounts before. Yet, even if the perspective on the past emphasized in that article differs, the vicious cycle is perpetrated in the same way – the readers are confirmed that the way they see the world is not challenged as the film is presented as a product substantiating what the consumers already know.

## Conclusion

Nonetheless, the process – vicious cycle that I described, does not always evolve in the exactly same way. Intellectual interventions that contest the dominant memory-based narratives may result in a number of reactions both from consumers and producers – it can be that a contestation of the dominant narrative is perceived by memory consumers and producers as a confirmation of the perspective that they already embrace.

It may also be the case that, as in the first described vicious cycle, for the dominant narrative (re)producers – consumers relation, the more the contestation is perceived as threatening for the prevailing perspective, the more intensely the actors engage in opposing the challenging narrative. Some consumers join the struggle to protect the familiar

understandings of the world and for others engaging with the contestation results in a change of their own approach into an appreciation of the contesting narrative as new and complementary way to see the world. The consumers who begin to question the vicious cycle of the dominant narratives usually face criticisms from the ones who preserve the prevalent perspective as a way to understand reality. Among the individuals who embark on questioning the collective narratives, some decide to attempt convincing others to join their perspective. In the case analyzed in this chapter, the director, producer and the crew have fulfilled the role of agents of contestation who were striving to become also the agents of change through their intellectual intervention. One of their motivations in creating the film was to intervene in the process of collective memory narratives (re)production and advocate towards a recognition of a multi-layered and complex historical accounts instead of one-sided understanding of the past. Undoubtedly the intervention did not pass unnoticed– the fierce controversies it caused in the public sphere point to the pervasiveness of the dominant collective memory-based narratives and the on-going struggle between history and memory.

## Conclusions and questions for further research

The thesis proposed a novel approach to examining the debates on memory-based in narratives in post-Communist Poland. I combined the considerations on memory-history divide with the study of collective memory as a compound process of interactions between a number of actors pursuing differing interests bases on their position in a certain societal field. The analysis of the construction of Polish national identity narratives in the second chapter pointed to the recurring elements in the cultural traditions – victimhood, suffering, innocence and intrinsic Christianity. These components were alluded to in the discussions on intellectual interventions challenging the memory-based narratives about the Second World War, the Holocaust and Jews in Poland. Yet, whether and how they were evoked depended on their usefulness for the interests of actors involved in given cases.

Therefore, in the consideration of one of the most controversial intellectual interventions after 1989, ‘Jedwabne debate’ in the third chapter, I have argued that the the conceptual framework used in the existing academic literature analyzing the discussions has little analytical value. The identity narratives that actors are socialized into does not play a primary role *per se*, it only operates triggered by interests relevant for individuals or groups in specific situations. Thus, talking about *Polish* or *Jewish* perspectives or narratives does not provide a useful analytical category to understand the reasoning behind the prevalence of particular approaches adopted by actors. I proposed to emphasize the interests motivating individual and collective actors to get involved in debates over memory and history.

In the fourth chapter I examined the public debates on narratives of the Holocaust and the ‘Jews in Poland’ provoked by Pasikowski’s fictional film “the Aftermath”. I discussed the film as an intellectual intervention in the political field, which motivated various responses in the cultural, academic and political field, both from the producers and from the consumers of



memory and history. The analysis of the stances presented in the debate demonstrated similarities of some actor's interests. The resemblance did not result from the identification of the actors as belonging to specific (i.e. national or religious) group; but it was linked with the field the actors were part of and the corresponding interests intrinsic to the field. Media actors preoccupy with the meeting the needs of their audience, politicians wish to secure their re-election, cultural and academic actors seek to create and research independently from the political field.

However, in each field there are multiple individuals with their own needs and motivations and these also gain prevalence in some instances. Yet, it would be a difficult task to investigate and address some of these interests. Certainly it is rather unattainable to gather personal accounts from all of the engaged persons. Even if it could be done, a lot of work would be required to find suitable methods to obtain the required information and analyze the data. Furthermore, the researcher's bias is a crucial factor to be considered. As Lorenz (2010) stated, history should be a reflexive discipline that "does not only need to problematize its kind of (epistemological) choices of representation, but also its political and ethical investments" (Ibid., p.71). Yet, academics are also subjects socialized into memory-based narratives, and even though they must attempt to be self-reflexive, it is not possible to avoid bias.

The study of debates on "the Aftermath" revealed the complexity of the processes involved in the (re) production of memory and history in the narratives in post-Communist Poland. The discussions in other states provoked by the intellectual interventions into the official narratives on the twentieth' century totalitarianisms in Europe could be analyzed using the same analytical tools in order to understand better the motivations involved in the re-examinations of the past. Such approach rises also a number of questions. What makes individuals question the narrative they are socialized into? Why do some individuals decide to

become the agents of change? The topic of post-1989 memory and history debates in Europe is worth researching further not only in the Polish case. It can expand our understanding of the dynamics involved in collective memory discourses, intellectual interventions and contestations of dominant narratives.

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