

**FROM ANTISEMITISM TO PHILOSEMITISM**  
**Myths of the Cursed Soldiers and Righteous Among the Nations**

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## Abstract

The thesis addresses issues of contemporary memory politics in Poland – cult of the cursed soldiers and the Polish Righteous Among the Nations in the context of the debate on the antisemitic violence and Jedwabne debate. The author examines the influence of the books published by Jan Tomasz Gross: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne*, *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz, an essay in historical interpretation* and *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* on the public debate and memory politics. The thesis reflects also on the concept of *pedagogy of shame* and interprets cults of the cursed soldiers and the Polish Righteous Among the Nations as a reaction for the Gross' findings. The author uses the category of the mechanism regulating negative emotions proposed by Michał Bilewicz.

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## Introduction

In Kępno, a town in Wielkoposkie voivodship, a memorial plaque from the Stalinist period states: *Eternal glory to the officers of the Secret Services, Militia, Internal Security Corps, Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia, fallen in the fight against the reactionists for consolidation of the achievements of people's democracy in Poland.* The inscription has been carved on the reverse of a Jewish gravestone<sup>1</sup>.

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw has been built next to the Monument to the Fighters and Martyrs of the Ghetto in Muranów, the pre-war Jewish district and the area of the former Ghetto. The square is also the place where the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out and every year a commemoration for the fallen fighters and victims is held there. In that symbolic space of mourning, a museum of life, not death, has been built. Moreover, in the space surrounding the museum's building, we can find, among many others, the commemorations of Irena Sendler and Jan Karski: national heroes-symbols of the Poles who helped the Jews<sup>2</sup>.

These examples come from different times, different political systems, and different regions of Poland. However, I believe that together they illustrate well how the Polish politics of memory instrumentalizes the history of Polish Jewry and Holocaust in order to achieve both internal and external political goals. The repertoire of mechanisms can be drawn from the spectrum between antisemitism – nourished by the myth of “Judeo-Communism” in particular – and philosemitism expressed by idealization of the pre-war and war-time Polish-Jewish relations. In this thesis, in order to describe the logic behind this instrumentalization, my aim is to approach the two exemplary cases of the phenomenon: the myth of the cursed soldiers

<sup>1</sup> BAKSIK, Łaksik. *Macewy codziennego użytku / The Matzevot for Everyday Use* (Wolowicz: Czarne, 2012), 68.

<sup>2</sup> JANICKA, Elżbieta “Zamiast negacjonizmu. Topografia symboliczna terenu dawnego getta warszawskiego a narracje o Zagładzie.” *Zagłada Żydów* 10 (2014): 209–256.

(together with their assumed opposition to Judeo-Communism) and the myth of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations. I am going to argue that the enormous popularity of both cults is a reaction to the broadly understood debate around the Jedwabne pogrom and the publication of *Neighbors* in 2000 by Jan Tomasz Gross.

I will focus on the twenty first century, starting from the publication of the Gross' book on the Jedwabne massacre, which sparked a large and intense discussion among scholars, politicians, and journalists in Poland and abroad. Up until today, the debate around *Neighbors* is considered to be one of the most vocal ones in Polish history after the 1989. Reaction to *Neighbors* goes far beyond the debate on Polish pogroms and antisemitic violence, it also caused a strong reaction in new memory politics, glorifying new heroes and evoking "old" enemies.

I will analyze the dominant trends in memory in the context of particular political goals, and also look at them as a revisionist attempt to create a counter narrative against the so-called *pedagogy of shame* [*pedagogika wstydu*]. The expression comes from the public debate and is often evoked in the context of the state memory politics. It is commonly understood as a liberal strategy of acknowledging and apologizing for the dark past. This approach to Polish history is strongly criticized by the current government and the far-right. The core example of the *pedagogy of shame* is the case of the reception of Jan Tomasz Gross' book *Neighbors* on Jedwabne and the following debate.

I will analyze the activity of the *Foundation Good Name Redoubt - the Polish League Against Defamation* [*Fundacja Reduta Dobrego Imienia – Polska Liga Przeciwko Zniesławieniom*], an institution founded to stand up for the good image of the Polish state abroad. The foundation has been established in order to fight against the *pedagogy of shame* and is highly controversial due to its questionable methods of operation.

I would like to examine antisemitism as a component of the myth of the “cursed soldiers.” I believe it is present in many ways. Firstly, the “cursed soldiers” are considered heroes despite many controversies around some of the formations, notwithstanding the fact that some units collaborated with the Nazi army and openly expressed antisemitic views. Secondly, the mainstream narration about the cursed soldiers uses the stereotype of Judeo-Communism to support the claim of the national (and ethnic) unity against the foreign enemy (its government, police, and secret services) and turns anti-communism into a national feature. Thirdly, I am convinced that the narration about “Polish heroism” has become so popular as a reaction to the social debate about Polish participation in Shoah and responsibility for pogroms. The myth of the “cursed soldiers” as a source of national pride replaces the shame for the darkest pages in Polish history.

I would like to show how the model of the enemy (the past and the present one) in case of both the cursed soldiers and Righteous Among the Nations is being shaped and how close it is to the stereotype of Judeo-Communism [*Żydokomuna*]. The cursed soldiers and Poles who saved Jews are a source of national pride pertaining to a period of time when we have to confront some horrifying facts about the participation of Poles in the Shoah.

I would like to analyze the role of cursed soldiers and the Polish Righteous Among the Nations myths in the Polish collective memory and their impact on modern Polish nationalism in the first two decades of the twenty first century. With regard to Polish Righteous Among the Nations, I will especially focus on the two cases: Irena Sendler, as a unique and iconic example of a heroine (and an individual) from Warsaw, and the Ulma family commemorated by the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in the Second World War in Markowa, as an example of a peasant family from the periphery. I will also reflect on how the number of Poles awarded with the title of Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem Center functions as a figure of speech in the Polish debate on antisemitism (as a proof for the lack of it).

In my analysis, I use the term “cult” to cover the popular practices of commemoration of all the historical groups I aim to describe. I believe that this expression reflects the emotional, affective, and communal aspects of those remembrances. Writing about the role that cursed soldiers and the Righteous are playing in the collective memory, I will use the term “myth” in Roland Barthes’ understanding outlined in *Mythologies* (1957), where the today’s myth is a type of speech and meaning-producing message. As Barthes describes, myth naturalizes the historical reality and organizes the world in a simplified way. In my thesis I will try to show, how both myths – Poles saving Jews during the Holocaust and the cursed soldiers – naturalize the memory of relations between Jews and non-Jews in Poland and how that mechanism is significant for the contemporary boundary-making process.

The question how to write history after 1989 and 1991 remains crucial for all the countries from the former Eastern Bloc. The problem of how to address the dark and traumatic past is included in that question. The memory of antisemitic violence – omitted and suppressed during the communist period – plays a significant role in the processes of rewriting and acknowledging history. Another issue that needs to be raised is the idea of anticommunism and its fusion with the contemporary anti-Russian sentiment. I believe analysis of the myths of the cursed soldiers, Righteous Among the Nations may lead to significant conclusions not only for the reader interested in Polish history. While my primary focus remains on the context of Polish memory politics, I am persuaded that phenomenon I aim to analyze reveals mechanism of defending the self-image in reaction for the difficult past common for many countries in the region. Therefore, I intend to provide some brief comparison of memory politics in Hungary and Ukraine. I believe that attempts to re-write the history in those countries show some significant similarities.

The phenomena I aim to describe is fairly new and is constantly evolving. The debate around the myths of the cursed soldiers, Righteous Among the Nations continues and remains



effervescent and significant from the perspective of external and internal politics. I am convinced that those issues have to be addressed, even when one lacks the time distance.

## Chapter 1: Politics of Memory or Politics of Forgetting?

Joanna Beata Michlic identifies three approaches to the remembrance of Jews and the Holocaust in Poland – *remember to remember*, *remember to forget* and *remember to benefit*. In the first case, commemoration is perceived as a way to reconcile (after admitting one's guilt), in the second example memory is seen as problematic and dangerous, and in the latter one, remembrance is being used to achieve a political or social goal<sup>3</sup>.

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir has described the inability to acknowledge the dark pages of national history as a typical Polish approach, strongly connected to the idea of Messianism. That *obsession of innocence* shapes Polish identity as a whole and influences strongly the way the Polish society tends to perceive its own history. She used this expression in an article on the debate around the *Neighbours* in 2001, therefore I believe it is justified to evoke it also here. Also, Dorota Glowacka (*Forgiving, Witnessing and "Polish Shame"*) describes how the question of shame for the past is central to the Polish identity as a whole and how it divides the society.

The expression *concurrency of memory* is very often evoked in this context. It refers to the conviction that Jewish suffering is being overrepresented while the Polish one is being forgotten. It also affects the perception of the Polish antisemitic violence during the war – it is undermined in favor of the memory of the Righteous Among the Nations. This term covers several mechanisms – the denial of Polish pogroms and antisemitism, the conviction that Poles commonly helped Jews, the idealized vision of the pre-war multicultural Poland, and, last but

<sup>3</sup> MICHLIC, Joanna Beata. "‘Remembering to Remember,’ ‘Remembering to Benefit,’ ‘Remembering to Forget’: The Variety of Memories of Jews and the Holocaust in Postcommunist Poland." *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs* (2012); <https://jcpa.org/article/remembering-to-remember-remembering-to-benefit-remembering-to-forget-the-variety-of-memories-of-jews-and-the-holocaust-in-postcommunist-poland/> (last retrieved: June 16, 2020)

not least, the strong belief that suffering of the Polish nation cannot be overestimated and compared to any others.

In the context of the Polish-Jewish diaspora situation, both the interwar Second Republic and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth are often idealized. It is portrayed as vibrant, multicultural state, and the legend of Polin is also often evoked, stating that the lands of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were the dreamed destination for the Jews to settle, offered to them by the good king<sup>4</sup>. According to Bernard Weinryb, it is a typical legend for the Jewish diaspora and it appears in different variations in many other countries. In those legends, the good king granted some rights to the Jews in the distanced past, and persecutions and inequalities come later, relatively recently. Portraying the past as a golden time for Jews served both external and internal goals – as apologetic legend meant to please the dominant group and as a onomatological midrash Judaizing the new and hostile place. The word Polin itself means Poland in Hebrew and Yiddish, but Po-lin also stands for ‘rest here’ which, as Anna Wolff-Powęska points out, after the Holocaust lost its previous meaning (resting, settling) and using it in that sense becomes tragically caricatural. Evoking the Polin myth by the Polish side makes it problematic and has been criticized by scholars for instrumentalization and oversimplification. Idealization of the past creates a false impression that pre-war Poland did not face any tensions between Christians and Jews what results in decontextualization of the antisemitic violence. Omitting the history Polish antisemitism presents antisemitic violence from the Second World War as a rootless event.

Michał Bilewicz analyzes the reaction to Gross’ publications using the terms from the psychology of emotions. He applies the concept of the mechanism that regulates emotions in order to restrain the negative ones like fear, shame, sadness or anger, or to strengthen the

<sup>4</sup> BAR-ITZHAK, Haya. *Geografia wyobraźni żydowskiej. „Po-lin” wśród drzew okrytych liśćmi z Gemary*. In. *Polskie tematy i konteksty literatury żydowskiej*. Ed. PROKOP, Eugenia et al. (Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 27.

positive ones, such as joy, pride, or love. The mechanism he describes does not have to be fully conscious. In the case of the *Neighbors* debate, Bilewicz shows how the feelings of shame (about the past) and fear (for being judged) are regulated and replaced by new myths that can become a source of pride and heroes that can become objects of worship.

The mechanism of using one narrative (arousing pride) to cover another (causing shame) has been described by Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski as a *narcissistic defense of self-image*.<sup>5</sup> The category of the *narcissistic defense of self-image* covers various reactions to the *narrative shock* caused by the publication of *Neighbors* and other occasions when Polish society was facing the ugly truth.<sup>6</sup> According to these scholars, it is one thing to forget about the guilt, but another to cover it by telling another story, preferably one that would tell about a triumph and serve as a source of national pride. Żukowski and Janicka apply that concept to the idealization of the pre-war Poland. The myth of the peaceful multicultural state of the religious freedom with the largest Jewish diaspora in Europe (it can be both the interwar Poland or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), supports the claim that antisemitism and violence against Jews during the Holocaust were unprecedented. This mechanism can be illustrated by the example of the cult of the Polish representatives of the Righteous Among the Nations and the myth of the “cursed soldiers” – a story of Polish heroism in the homogenous society.

Philosemitism is often defined in relation to antisemitism. The term is sometimes understood as the opposite of antisemitism, or rather as its variation. I will use the latter meaning. I understand philosemitism as a nostalgic sentiment based on the seemingly positive and often idealized imaginations about Jews. In a way philosemitism mirrors antisemitism, as both are built on stereotypes about Jews. In case of philosemitism on the “positive” ones, and “negative” ones when it comes to antisemitism. Both terms, having different prefixes, contain

<sup>5</sup> JANICKA, Elżbieta–ŻUKOWSKI, Tomasz. *Philo-Semitic Violence?: New Polish Narrative about Jews After 2000* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2016).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

the problematic component “Semitism” that suggests existence of such a group and refers to pseudo-scientific racist theories. According to Daniel Goldhagen, philosemites are “antisemites in sheep’s clothing”.<sup>7</sup> In that understanding, philosemitism differs from antisemitism only seemingly as it does not express hostility openly, but retains the same roots in perceiving Jews as one homogenous group that can be characterized by bunch of stereotypes.<sup>8</sup>

In the concept of *philosemitic violence*, proposed by Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski, the Jewish heritage or the memory of good Polish-Jewish relations is used to cover the dark pages of the history<sup>9</sup>. The philosemitic narrative is constructed on the grounds of antisemitic stereotypes, it mirrors them and repeats their logic, and thus strengthens antisemitism. The nostalgia for the lost Jewish community is expressed in the idealized way omitting the difficult questions of antisemitism, guilt and hostility. Janicka and Żukowski point out the problematic aspect of this phenomenon, i.e. the appreciation for the Jewish heritage after the 1989 is in fact a postmortem inclusion. The Polish majority that used to exclude the Jewish diaspora changes its attitude towards the excluded group when the group is gone. One may find the disproportion not only within this clear majority-minority relation, but also in the fact that it is a monologue of the living on the dead.

Polish philosemitism, understood as 'Jewish revival' – the rising interest in the Jewish heritage and history among non-Jewish Poles has also been analyzed by Geneviève Zubrzycki who perceives it as an attempt to reshape the understanding of the monoethnic, Catholic nation. Looking for the alternative roots in the pre-war multicultural society is, according to Zubrzycki, a mechanism serving to redefine the boundaries of the homogenous

<sup>7</sup> GOLDHAGEN, Daniel. *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 58.

<sup>8</sup> cf. KARP, Jonathan–SUTCLIFFE, Adam. *Philosemitism in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> cf. JANICKA–ŻUKOWSKI; I decided to use different spelling than the authors, analogically to the way I write the term “antisemitism”.

group defining itself on the religious and ethnonational terms<sup>10</sup>. Geneviève Zubrzycki states that contemporary Polish society – being ethnonationally and religiously homogenous – seeks for establishing boundaries and marking the identity of the group and finds some sort of solution in philosemitism. I will also reflect on how both of the aforementioned myths are associated with boundary-making and vision of the nation (homo- or heterogenous).

That last component leads us to the idea of Polish messianism and victimhood. The conviction that Polish history is unique and should be defined by victimhood is strong and supported by opinion polls: in one of them, 74% of the respondents claimed that the Polish nation has suffered the most in the entire world's history. That kind of perception of the past influences Polish-Jewish relations and hampers the acknowledgement of the importance of the Shoah and the recognition of the dark pages in Polish history. The cult of the Righteous Among the Nations perfectly fulfills the ideal of Polish messianism, as an example of the selfless sacrifice with a great risk.

Contemporary Polish antisemitism is often referred to as magical antisemitism or antisemitism without Jews. Both terms refer to the specific situation of the society being prejudiced towards a group that does constitute any large minority anymore. Magical antisemitism – an expression coined by Adam Michnik but applied by scholars – expresses the mechanism of the reversed logic of that prejudice. Instead of stating that someone is a traitor (or anything else) through being a Jew, in case of magical antisemitism, being a traitor implies that someone is a Jew<sup>11</sup>. Jewishness means otherness, and everyone that does not belong to the dominant group, can be recognized as a Jew. Also, the conception of the antisemitism without Jews refers to the fact that antisemitism in contemporary Poland has roots in the historical pre-war prejudice but now concerns rather the memory of the diaspora or covers every otherness

<sup>10</sup> ZUBRZYCKI, Geneviève. "Nationalism, 'Philosemitism,' and Symbolic Boundary-Making in Contemporary Poland." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1 (2016): 66-98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and alternative towards the majority. The term covers the variation of the historical antisemitism in Poland adapted to the new social situation in which Jews remain rather a memory of an imaginary figure.

Antisemitism, understood as hostility and hatred towards Jews can be expressed as individual's attitude, set of cultural ideas or social practice. As such it can be measured in many ways – by interviews and social experiments or tracked in the culture and memory. In this text I will attempt to find signs of antisemitism (as well as philosemitism) in cults of the national aforementioned Polish heroes and answer the question why those components remain so significant (and efficient) for the boundary-making.

## Chapter 2: Shame

*After the collapse of the Communist rule in 1989, one could observe the appearance of a peculiar approach to Polish history, including the Holocaust, referred to as “the pedagogy of shame.” This was a way of interpreting Polish history which focused on underlining and exaggerating the negative events in the past, while downgrading or omitting the positive ones. This resulted in the warping of the actual proportions and scale of historical events, and therefore, presenting a falsified historical picture<sup>12</sup> – states the report *Poland and the Holocaust – Facts and Myths* published by the Foundation Good Name Redoubt - the Polish League Against Defamation in March 2018 (the text was translated among others to English, German and Russian).*

To say that one cultivates *pedagogy of shame* is an accusation. The term is used by politicians and publicists to allege their opponents of exposing the negative image of Poland both abroad (in the international politics) and within the country (by teaching, commemorating etc.). The expression itself has an evaluative component and downgrades the phenomenon it denominates. *Pedagogy of shame* can cover anything – a book, academic research, a movie or a museum – that contradicts the patriotic narrative based on the romantic vision of Polish heroism and victimhood. Debates around *pedagogy of shame* usually focus on the WW2, the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations.

In reaction to the growing popularity of the term, the Polish Teachers’ Union has condemned the concept of the *pedagogy of shame* for its propagandist character and its misleading usage of the term ‘pedagogy.’ The Union appealed to cease to use that term, as it “serves to justify the negation of a part of historical knowledge.”

<sup>12</sup> cf. *Poland and the Holocaust – facts and myths* (Warsaw: RDI, 2018); <http://www.anti-defamation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Poland-and-Holocaust-facts-and-myths-EN-FINAL1.pdf> (last retrieved: June 16, 2020)



*Pedagogy of shame* is not a scientific term. It derives from the political debate and already has entered the media rhetoric and the common parlance. It is used, among others, by prominent politicians of the ruling party: Jarosław Kaczyński (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* chairman), Andrzej Duda (the President of Poland), journalists connected to the right-wing media: Michał Karnowski, Jan Pospieszalski or Stanisław Żaryn. Although it is possible to find the phenomenon that this term allegedly covers (I intend to describe some of it on the following pages), *pedagogy of shame* remains a populist slogan. The term is forged in order to discredit certain tendencies in politics of memory and to question the sense of different forms of commemorating tragedies. The term has also its antonym, *pedagogy of pride* [*pedagogika dumy*] – a project of regaining the due respect and glory by focusing on the heartening moments in the history while ceasing to face its difficult parts. The process of introducing that policy is often referred to as *getting up from the knees* [*wstawanie z kolan*] and is widely present as a figure of speech in the public discourse.

Although I do not aim to apply *pedagogy of shame* as a concept to my work, I intend to describe it and use it as a central point of reference for the antisemitic and philosemitic tendencies in Polish memory I aim to analyze. I believe that the common understanding of the term *pedagogy of shame* resonates in both the myth of the *cursed soldiers* and the cult of the Righteous Among the Nations and partly stands for their enormous popularity. I will attempt to analyze various definitions or examples of usage of the term in order to show how it is being used by actors from different sides of the political scene. I will evoke definition written by *Kultura Liberalna*, a liberal weekly on culture and politics, as well as the Wikipedia page dedicated to the *pedagogy of shame*. I will also try to show how conservative and liberal media use that term by quoting articles on this issue by Michał Karnowski, a prominent conservative journalist, former Deputy Editor of the ultraconservative *Uważam Rze* magazine, publishing within the far-right private media; and by Michał Szuldurzyński, Deputy Editor of

*Rzeczpospolita*, the largest liberal-conservative daily in Poland. I will also quote the texts by Jakub Majmurek, a columnist and film critic associated with *Krytyka Polityczna*, a leftist periodical and publishing house; *Oko.press*, a liberal investigative journalist website; and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the largest liberal-centrist daily in Poland.

Definition provided by the *Dictionary of Radicalisms [Słownik radykalizmów]* made by *Kultura Liberalna* states: *pedagogy of shame (also: spitting on Polishness) - a phrase which, according to the right-wing part of the press, defines the way of talking about Polish history and Polish national characteristics typical of Gazeta Wyborcza and the elite of the Third Republic of Poland [after 1989]. The liberal and leftist circles allegedly focus exclusively on the "dark pages" of Polish history, forcing, inter alia, theses of Jan Tomasz Gross on Polish-Jewish relations and promoting films ("Aftermath", "Ida") showing Poles not as victims of World War II, but as criminals (see Grzegorz Górny, "Poles on the bench of the accused", "On the Web ", 27 April - 3 May 2015, pp. 38-41). As a result of these activities, some right-wing columnists recognized, for example, the unfortunate statement of the FBI head James Comey about the shared responsibility of Poles for the Holocaust. The "pedagogy of shame" also includes pointing to the alleged national flaws of Poles - envy, anti-Semitism, backwardness.*

*Pedagogy of shame*, according to its Wikipedia definition, is a metaphoric term covering a certain negative way of talking about Polish history. The expression ‘pedagogy of shame’ is used commonly in the media and – to some extent – in common parlance, and it covers the alleged overfocus on the dark pages of Polish history. One who represents the so-called ‘pedagogy of shame’ supposedly exaggerates crimes committed by Poles or the Polish state. In fact, the expression often refers to the liberal attempts (after 1989) to acknowledge the dark pages of history, including the history of Polish antisemitism. Such attempts are commonly received as “slandering” Poland in the Western Europe by confirming the stereotypes of Polish antisemitism and xenophobia and referred to as ‘post-communist’ to underline its foreignness.

'Shame' recalls 'pride.' *Pedagogy of shame* poses a threat to the dominant, heroic and militarized vision of history. It is also perceived as an attack on the glorious parts of history, as if acknowledging the dark past would necessarily mean erasing the memory of its bright side. As Michał Karnowski, a prominent conservative journalist, puts it: *pedagogy of shame* is "an attempt to drastically degrade the self-esteem of Poles by taking away our pride in the past"<sup>13</sup>. Similar assumption is revealed in a short article published on the website of Telewizja Republika, a far-right private television station, in which an anonymous author comments on the survey of CBOS [Centre for Public Opinion Research] on national pride. According to the author of the text, the high rate of declared pride derived from Polish roots (97%) proves that "the pedagogy of shame instilled for years by *Wyborcza* and her elite has fallen!"<sup>14</sup>. Such an enthusiastic statement shows how the narrative and counter-narrative are interconnected. Therefore, *pedagogy of shame* can be considered as a conscious and explicit problematization of the *concurrency of memory* between the two narratives on the national history – the glorious and the difficult. The conviction that the apologetic attitude towards history excludes any critical reflection and vice versa, is deeply rooted in the public debate. The famous essay *Two Homelands, two patriotisms* [Dwie ojczyzny, dwa patriotyzmy] by Jan Józef Lipski describes that division. It remains influential and shapes the political scene.

The expression has been created and is still being used by the right wing of the Polish political scene. *Pedagogy of shame* serves to call someone out and accuse of betrayal and lack of patriotism. In a way, it is a symptom of *obsession of innocence* described by Tokarska-Bakir<sup>15</sup> – *pedagogy of shame* can be easily evoked in case the innocence is endangered. It serves

<sup>13</sup> KARNOWSKI, Michał. "Pedagogika wstydu nie działa? Wielkie badania w 'Sieci' pokazują, jak kruche są podstawy prób przerobienia Polaków." w *Polityce.pl* (2014); <https://wpolityce.pl/historia/227719-pedagogika-wstydu-nie-dziala-wielkie-badania-w-sieci-pokazuja-jak-kruche-sa-podstawy-prob-przerobienia-polakow> (last retrieved: June 16, 2020)

<sup>14</sup> PMB. "Pedagogika wstydu wpajana przez lata przez *Wyborczą* i jej elity poległa! 97 proc. Polaków odczuwa dumę ze swojego pochodzenia." *Telewizja Republika* (2018); <https://telewizjarepublika.pl/pedagogika-wstydu-wpajana-przez-lata-przez-wyborcza-i-jej-elity-polegla-97-proc-polakow-odczuwa-dume-ze-swojego-pochodzenia,68917.html> (last retrieved: June 16, 2020)

<sup>15</sup> TOKARSKA-BAKIR, Joanna. "Obsesja niewinności." *Gazeta Wyborcza* 11 (2001): 22–23.

as a tool for labeling 'national traitors' and their attempts to face the past, and moreover, for preventing others from listening to them.

The name of the concept reveals a lot by itself. Firstly, the usage of the word 'shame' brings negative connotations, as shame is not a pleasant feeling. Secondly, the fact that shame is a feeling gives the term a strongly affective undertone, which brings the debate on history to another, more emotional and extremely subjective level. It also reveals – by the term's inversion – the assumption that the past should serve as a source of shared pride and a positive inspiration rather than a bitter lesson.

Moreover, the expression 'pedagogy' suggests that shame has to be artificially introduced to the society, which does not recognize it as its own, 'domestic' feeling. In this case 'pedagogy' means rather 'social engineering' than education and progress. Moreover, simply creating the concept of *pedagogy of shame* creates the impression that there is some coherent policy and strategy conducted by someone from behind the curtain. From this point, it is not far to jump into conspiracy theories. As the *pedagogy of shame* is often invoked in the cases of international relations, the 'betrayers' of Poland are accused of serving other countries' agendas. As the debate around the *pedagogy of shame* circulates around the WW2, Germany, Israel and the United States of America are usually mentioned as actors of that 'conspiratorial network' and therefore, antisemitic sentiments are also being arisen.

The conception of the *pedagogy of shame* has been criticized from various positions. Its critics from all over the political scene juxtapose its naïve conviction that the nation needs an unambiguous, simple narrative and its history should be perceived in a way that does not allow to question it. Michał Szuldrzyński, in his article for *Przewodnik Katolicki*, Poland's oldest catholic magazine focusing on socio-religious matters, defends those who challenge the dominant, heroic narration of the past, and states that "one must overcome the past in order to

become a modern European nation.”<sup>16</sup> Szuldrzyński calls this way of thinking about history a “post historic” one and claims that it is the conservatives, criticising the liberals and the leftists for “slandering the Polish name,” who are the most embarrassed and shy when it comes to talking about history. Their objection against facing the difficult past is rooted in their insecurity. Apparently, both sides of the conflict tend to accuse each other of being ashamed of something. Szuldrzyński mentions becoming “a modern European nation” as a goal and by doing so uses the discourse typical for the liberal political and cultural elites, in which Polish (post-1989) society needs to seek for a role model in Western Europe and just implement that imaginary “European normality and modernity” to its own case. He also evokes black American Cinema as an example of a nation attempting to acknowledge the history of slavery. Leaving aside the question of his judgment on the U.S. debate, the West is invoked here in its whole imaginary glory of rationality, modernity and power to set up the standards for the rest of the world. When Szuldrzyński criticizes those using the term *pedagogy of shame*, it is by reversing its concept and insinuating that they have an inferiority complex and a need for compensation. He paints his opponents as insecure and irrational, as they are unable to critically approach the history and instead seek strong emotions and easy consolation. As Szuldrzyński shames the right wing for its shame, his argumentation reveals his own distance and scorn for the non-western and non-progressive part of society<sup>17</sup>. Although Szuldrzyński supports those thinking critically about the past, he uses the expression *pedagogy of shame* as if it was an actual tendency. Not only does he not use quotation marks, but also applies the term to his reasoning.

A different approach can be found when one analyzes how *pedagogy of shame* is being described in the liberal media. In *Gazeta Wyborcza* or *Oko.press*, the expression appears as a

<sup>16</sup> Szuldrzyński, Michał. Czym jest pedagogika wstydu. Przewodnik Katolicki; <https://www.przewodnik-katolicki.pl/Archiwum/2018/Przewodnik-Katolicki-7-2017/Opinie/Czym-jest-pedagogika-wstydu> (last retrieved: June 16, 2016)

<sup>17</sup> Boris Buden in his book *Children of Postcommunism* describes how the pedagogical terminology dominated the discourse of the postcommunist transition period and normalized the idea of “chasing the West.”

quotation or as a clear reference to the language used by the right side of the Polish political scene. Jakub Majmurek in his text for *Oko.press*, *Pedagogy of shame that has never existed* [*Pedagogika wstydu, ktktdu nigdy nie byy* ], describes various examples of usage of that term; he shows his distance to that expression by applying quotation marks and questioning its existence in the title. *Wyborcza*, often associated with *pedagogy of shame* by its opponents also tends to use the term as a quote. Of course, liberal and leftist media do write about issues that could be easily referred to as *pedagogy of shame*: i.e. Jan Tomasz Gross tends to use the term in his books or the debates on Polish-Jewish relations, however, they do not designate them by that term.

Discussions on *pedagogy of shame* mostly focus on the question of Polish participation in the Holocaust and on the concurrence of Polish and Jewish suffering during WW2. Among the most frequently evoked examples of the alleged phenomenon one may find Jan Tomasz Gross' books (*Neighbors*, *Fear* and *Golden Harvest*), Jan Grabowski's publications or award-winning movies on Polish antisemitic violence: *Ida* (Paweł Pawlikowski, 2013) and *Aftermath* (Władysław Pasikowski, 2012). Although one can enumerate more examples, Gross' books and the reaction to them can be considered the first and therefore the central point of reference for the conception of *pedagogy of shame*. His figure – as a representation of a certain approach and understanding of the historian's role – is also considered to be symbolic for the debate on Polish history.

Michał Bilewicz describes what role emotions play when the society faces the truth about traumatic and shameful event from its own past. As dark pages of history cause confusing emotions, one (or the community) develops different ways to regulate its feelings. Bilewicz explains various strategies of regulating emotions to cope with the knowledge difficult to recognize. He numbers spectrum of mechanism: selection and modification of the situation, redirecting attention, cognitive transformation and modulation of expression. The opening quote of the next chapter devoted to the Gross' books reception illustrates most of the

mentioned tools. To explain the last one – modulation of expression – he evokes the concept of *pedagogy of shame* as an example of the reaction for the Jedwabne debate. When other methods fail, modulation allows to suppress the negative reaction (shame) and to replace it with a “safe” one (pride). The attempt to correct the emotional reaction is laborious and energy-consuming, yet it does not allow to erase its trigger<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> BILEWICZ, Michał. “(Nie)pamięć zbiorowa Polaków jako skuteczna regulacja emocji.” *Polska pamięć* 6 (2012): 52–67.

### Chapter 3: Fear

*The books written by Gross, who is a sociologist rather than a historian, are accused of being **partial, prejudiced, unreliable**, of their **technical shortcomings**, etc. These include erroneously interpreting source materials, omitting inconvenient facts, manipulating numbers, basing conclusions on conjectures instead of facts, generalising on the grounds of individual cases, etc. Similar accusations have been formulated in relation to the publications by Prof. **Jan Grabowski**, who researches the history of Jews in Polish rural areas during the German occupation – we read in the report<sup>19</sup> *Poland and the Holocaust – facts and myths* of the *Foundation Good Name Redoubt*. This short excerpt summarizes a very typical way of diminishing scholars dealing with Polish antisemitism. Jan Tomasz Gross and Jan Grabowski, together with Irena Gross-Grudzińska, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, and Barbara Engelking are often attacked for their alleged anti-Polish prejudice. In this chapter I will try to demonstrate the impact of Gross' publications on Polish public debate and reconstruct how his name functions in the discourse.*

Jan Tomasz Gross is not an anonymous person in Poland. Since 2000, when he published the famous book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* on the pogrom committed in 1941 in the town of Jedwabne (Eastern Poland) by the Polish part of the town, he is considered to be controversial by many. As events from Jedwabne remained silenced and unknown to the broader public until the publication of the book, he quickly became a symbolic figure for the discussion on Polish antisemitism. His book has caused a large debate both among the scholars and in the public discourse – between historians as well as journalists and politicians. Also, his following publications: *Fear. Anti-Semitism in*

<sup>19</sup> cf. *Poland and the Holocaust – facts and myths*



*Poland After Auschwitz, an essay in historical interpretation* in 2006 and *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (2012, written together with Irena Gross-Grudzińska) quickly became controversial and influential at the same time.

In *Fear*, Gross described the post-war antisemitic violence against those Jews who had survived the Holocaust and came back from camps or hiding. Survivors who had decided to come back to their cities and villages had to face the malevolence of the Polish majority who already took over the estates and properties left by murdered, deported, or fled Jews. Gross described the terror and hostility that sparked the fear from the book's title – attacks on the first returners, burning the synagogues, threatening and forcing Jews to leave the cities (in Klementynów and Częstochowa; in Klementynów those who stayed were murdered) and the Kielce pogrom.

The book *Golden Harvest* investigated how Jewish property was robbed and appropriated by the Polish majority. Although Polish Jews have lost their possessions mostly to the foreign occupation authorities -- the Third Reich thanks to its antisemitic expropriating legislation (from September 1939 to 1944/45) or the Soviet Union due to nationalization policy (from September 1939 to 1941) -- Jewish property was also seized by the Polish part of the society, robbed directly or taken from the occupying states. In some cases, the possessions have been taken after the deportations or killings. Sometimes, that process was directed or inspired by German instructions, e.g. the state would sell the property, order the transfer of inhabitants to build a ghetto. In other cases Polish individuals illegally and spontaneously would simply steal the goods or use the opportunity of having an advantage over Jews seeking help.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes Jews tried to avoid confiscation of their property by the state and asked their Christian neighbors to preserve it before the state expropriates it, in order to recover it after the occupation. Those who came back after the war often had to face their former friends

<sup>20</sup> cf. DEAN, Martin. *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 211.

disappointed to discover that they are still alive and refusing to recognize their property claims. Witnesses also testify that thieves were robbing the defenseless Jews, both dead and alive, as some would even dig through the massive graves in order to find valuables (like golden teeth or jewelry).<sup>21</sup> According to Dariusz Stola, the range of the problem, if compared with the size of the robbery performed by the Nazi part, cannot be recognized as large, but nevertheless remains very significant for those who have experienced the losses. Victims of the robberies were deprived of their last belongings and their effective chance for survival. Stola emphasizes that, even if some of those losses do not seem to have any significant value from our point of view, in the extreme danger that Jews found themselves in, their value could have been very high and decisive for one's life. What is significant, the situation of the stolen Jewish property in Poland is still unsettled and the question of how to deal with it remains unanswered.

In 2015 another scandal brought Gross' name to the press' headlines. In the article *Eastern Europe's Crisis Of Shame* published by Project Syndicate, he stated: *Consider the Poles, who, deservedly proud of their society's anti-Nazi resistance, actually killed more Jews than Germans during the war.*<sup>22</sup> The article was connecting the fact that the countries in the region (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania were named) refused to accept refugees and revealed xenophobic sentiments, while also failing to acknowledge their dark past and Nazi collaboration. Gross contrasted that attitude with Germany's willingness to help and claimed that denazification has strongly influenced it.

The article has been reprinted or quoted in many media outlets and languages. *Die Welt* published the text, which did not go unnoticed in Poland. Beside the indignation for the article's message, also the fact that he was "slandering" Poland in Germany was perceived as "especially

<sup>21</sup> Recently, in November 2019, Polish journalist Paweł Reszka published a non-fiction book *Pluczk. Poszukiwanie żydowskiego złota* (*Seekers for the Jewish gold*) about digging Jewish graves in order to find the gold – a practice that was not a secret among the community and was ongoing through the years.

<sup>22</sup> GROSS, Jan T. "Eastern Europe's Crisis of Shame." *Social Europe* (2015); <https://www.socialeurope.eu/eastern-europes-crisis-of-shame> (last retrieved: June 16, 2020)

disgusting”.<sup>23</sup> The quoted claim from Gross’ article raised many controversies and mixed reactions in the Polish public debate. The sentence was interpreted in various ways and perceived by some as an attack on the alleged heroism of the Polish nation and its contribution to end the war. Moreover, the author of *Fear* was sued by the IPN (Polish Institute of National Remembrance) for harming Poland’s reputation, but the case was ultimately dropped in 2019. Nevertheless, Gross’ claim remains shocking and controversial to many.

Gross’ subpoena became a symbolic case for the attempts of censoring a scholar but was not the only aftermath of the publication. In 2016 the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an opinion on the possibility of taking the Knight's Order of Merit from the Order of Merit from Professor Jan Tomasz Gross. Just that attempt has caused a huge scandal and sent a clear, warning message to the scholars dealing with Polish history.

As Gross became famous for his research on the Polish antisemitic violence and robbery during the Holocaust and he publishes in English, his publications often raise protests. He is widely accused of being a “national traitor” while his methodology is also questioned. Some call him “polakożerca” (a Pole-eater) or “anty-Polak” (an anti-Pole) and his Jewish roots are often underlined in an openly antisemitic way. But he is not only attacked by the far-right – he has been also criticized by the people who were close to him, such as Adam Michnik and Eugeniusz Smolar, who accuse him of provoking and inflaming the society.<sup>24</sup>

Michnik’s critique of Gross’ does not concern the accuracy of his findings. He does not question his methodology or sources, but the chosen strategy. The Polish-Jewish dialogue on antisemitism needs to be closed as soon as possible, one should heed the costs of his actions –

<sup>23</sup> WYSOCKI, Grzegorz. “Jan Tomasz Gross: niewygodny arcy-Polak. Z Wikipedii wynika, że jest trzeciorzędnym historykiem czasem budzącym kontrowersje.” *Gazeta Wyborcza* (2019); <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,24900419,jan-tomasz-gross-niewygodny-arcy-polak-na-motywach-z.html> (last retrieved: June 16, 2020)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Michnik states. In his understanding, recognizing the painful history already happened and continuous pursuing the matter will not bring any reconciliation<sup>25</sup>.

Gross' focus on the Polish antisemitism is often perceived as decontextualizing it from the Holocaust and Nazi occupation. That argument is often raised, sometimes by those who deny the Polish antisemitic violence and pogroms (by acknowledging them as a Nazi or Communist provocations), but also by those who do recognize the murderous past. It seems that for many, the history of Polish antisemitism of WW2 has to be written in juxtaposition with the Nazi antisemitism or other occupied countries. If one approaches it as an issue connected to the pre-war Polish antisemitism, it is often perceived as an attempt to blame Poland for the Holocaust. Eugenisz Smolar represents that position towards Gross and accuses him for absolutizing Polish attitude towards Jews and portraying it as a very unique case<sup>26</sup>.

At the end of the article from Project Syndicate Gross states: *Eastern Europe [...] has yet to come to terms with its murderous past. Only when it does will its people be able to recognize their obligation to save those fleeing in the face of evil.*<sup>27</sup> I believe that the last statement of the article expresses the core of Gross' motivation – not only for this text but also for his entire research on Polish antisemitism – he clearly believes that painful and often brutal process of acknowledging the dark past is necessary not only regarding the past-oriented moral obligation to apologize and ask for forgiveness, but also due to the future-oriented moral obligation to not let any terror happen again. He believes in the transformative potential of shocking history lessons and keeps trying to teach one.

The Jedwabne pogrom described by Gross in *Neighbors* became a turning point in the reflection on the position of the Christian part of Polish society toward the Holocaust and played a crucial role in questioning the conception of the bystander. The triad Perpetrators-Victims-

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> GROSS, "Eastern Europe's Crisis of Shame."

Bystanders described by Raul Hilberg tends to grasp the dynamic between the three groups: Nazi occupants, Jews and Christian majority during the Holocaust.<sup>28</sup> The expression “bystander” is understood as a specific position of the non-Jewish part of society that “witnessed” the Shoah. The concept assumes some neutrality or at least passivity of the majority and sometimes even compassion what makes it problematic even when one discusses situations in which the perpetration is without question. In case of the Polish public debate on the bystander concept, Jan Błoński’s essay *The Poor Poles look at the Ghetto [Biedni Polacy patrzą na Getto]* published in 1987 by *Tygodnik Powszechny* (a liberal-catholic weekly on culture and politics)<sup>29</sup> remains fundamental and paradigmatic. Where Błoński describes Polish experience of bystanding the Holocaust as painful and traumatic and terrifying not only because of the surrounding terror, but also because of the threat of being accused of participation in the perpetration and indifference. He also perceives Poles as kind of guards of memory of Shoah, as he states: *Our country is not a hotel in which one launders the linen after the guests have departed. It is a home which is built above all of memory; memory is at the core of our identity. We cannot dispose of it at will, even though as individuals we are not directly responsible for the actions of the past. We must carry it within us even though it is unpleasant or painful. We must also strive to expiate it*<sup>30</sup>. Błoński sees Polish guilt in the passiveness towards Holocaust. Tomasz Żukowski points out that when Błoński writes about Polish antisemitism he quotes typical antisemitic stereotypes without strong disapproval, he does not problematize divisions and prejudices pre-existing (before the WW2) in the society. He mentions crimes in a way that positions Polish society as a passive, not cooperating with the perpetrator bystander. For him Polish guilt means guilt of witnesses, he does not write about denunciations, antisemitic

<sup>28</sup> HILBERG, Raul. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Aaron Asher, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> BŁOŃSKI, Jan. “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto.” *Tygodniku Powszechnym* (1987); [https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/sites/default/files/attachment\\_85.pdf](https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/sites/default/files/attachment_85.pdf) (last retrieved: June 16, 2020)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

violence, robbery and pogroms. Creating the conception of “bystander’s guilt” covers the guilt of the Polish perpetrator and allows to perform the act of selective acknowledging the difficult past – Żukowski states.

The debate caused by the publication of the *Neighbors* and continued with *Fear* and *Golden Harvest* is often considered to be fundamental for the post 1989 national identity and defining various approaches towards national history. Despite different judgments of the Jedwabne debate meaning, it clearly became a marking point for Polish memory of WW2 and Holocaust and a symbol of revealing the murderous, dark past of the nation.

Gross’ book caused a wide debate among Polish elites that permeated – to a certain extent – to the broader public. In 2001, only one year after the publication of *Neighbors*, 90% of Poles have heard about Jedwabne. The debate was truly intense – at that time, around 100 articles per month would appear<sup>31</sup>.

The debate on Jedwabne has divided the society and is often considered to be the most crucial moment in the post-1989 debate on Polish history and national identity. Up until today, it evokes emotions and strong reactions. According to Piotr Forecki, although there is a strong conviction among the elites that Jedwabne debate was a successful past-maturity exam for the society, the majority has ignored or rather suppressed the knowledge about the pogrom.

Knowledge of that terrible crime was hard to accept for many. Moreover, Gross’ book was received as an insult to the memory of Polish soldiers who fought in the Second World War. The militarization of the Polish national discourse has been described by many scholars and publicists, alongside with its masculinization<sup>32</sup> Heroism and patriotism are mostly understood as a military struggle, and therefore national identity is built around military history. Up until today, the militarized vision of patriotism remains dominant and therefore, in the

<sup>31</sup> SHORE, Marci. “Conversing with Ghosts: Jedwabne, Zydokomuna, and Totalitarianism.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6 (2005): 345–374.

<sup>32</sup> Janion, *Bohater, Spisek, Śmierć: Wykłady Żydowskie*. Janion, *Placz Generała: Eseje o Wojnie*. Biskupski, *Independence Day: Myth, Symbol and the Creation of Modern Poland*.

common perception of the Second World War, military struggles – the Warsaw Uprising and the September Campaign - are its most important landmarks. Antisemitic violence was seemed to be contradictory and somehow threatening to this heroic memory.

Immediately critical voices appeared, also from liberal circles, which revealed the conviction that the memory of Jedwabne “threatens” other narratives. Andrzej Nowak asked in *Rzeczpospolita*: “Jedwabne or Westerplatte? “Do the murderers deserve more recognition than the righteous?” wrote Adam Michnik in a text for the *New York Times*.

When in 2001 President Aleksander Kwaśniewski officially apologized for the pogrom<sup>33</sup>, many found it controversial and opposed it. Both cases – Gross’ book and Kwaśniewski’s apology are considered to be examples of *pedagogy of shame*. Up until today, the pogrom in Jedwabne is sometimes questioned and instrumentalized for political purposes. In 2015, during the pre-election presidential debate between Andrzej Duda and Bronisław Komorowski, Duda used that tool and declared that he would like to reopen the investigation on the pogrom in Jedwabne. Objection to the recognition of the pogrom in Jedwabne is expressed not only in the denial (accusation of falsification or manipulation etc.) but also in the slogan *I do not apologize for Jedwabne* [*Nie przepraszam za Jedwabne*] that hit on T-shirts produced by Jacek Międlar, former Catholic priest and nationalist activist, openly preaching antisemitic views. He justifies his refusal to apologize by simply stating that a proud Pole does not apologize neither for Jedwabne or Kielce pogrom, nor the March 1968 events. “Apologizing is only for traitors, idiots, anti-Poles and ideological children of Soviets and German tormentors, to whom many Jews belonged” Międlar added in an article on his blog.

<sup>33</sup> cf. TOKARSKA-BAKIR

## Chapter 4: Pride

*Hundreds of thousands of Poles – at risk to their own lives – helped Jews survive the war and the Holocaust. Individuals, entire families and villages, the Polish underground movement, and special organizations, all helped the Jews. One of these was the Council to Aid Jews “Żegota” – a Polish underground organization which helped Jews on a mass scale (fake identification documents (around 50-60 thousand), financial benefits, residential and medical aid, helping children, fighting against blackmailers, etc.). This was the only such organization in occupied Europe. The Jews were also helped by the Catholic Church. They received shelter in more than 70 Polish cloisters and parsonages, Polish priests issued false baptism certificates to them, etc. During the war, Poles saved thousands of Jews from extermination (according to estimates, around 30-120 thousand Jews were saved in occupied Poland). Several to a few dozen people were involved in the saving of each Jew. It is estimated that several hundred thousand Poles provided Jews with various forms of aid (at least 200-300 thousand, and according to some historians, 1 million to 1.2 million) – the report *Poland and the Holocaust – Facts and Myths* states<sup>34</sup>. This passage also mentions that Poland has the most Yad Vashem trees and names some of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations (Irena Sendlerowa, Henryk Slawik, Antonina and Jan Żabinski) and the Ulma family.*

Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center awards the title “Righteous Among the Nations” to non-Jews who saved Jews during the Shoah. The awarding with the title is preceded by a regulated investigation, therefore the number of the Righteous is not equal with the number of rescuers, as rules of honoring the title are well-defined and not applicable to every case that – in common understanding – could be considered as helping Jews (partly because of the lack of sources, partly because of the precise definition). According to the data

<sup>34</sup> cf. *Poland and the Holocaust – facts and myths*



available on the Yad Vashem website, 6,992 Polish people have been awarded this title, out of a total of 27,362, making it the highest number for any single country. What is significant, the argument of being the country with the highest number of Yad Vashem trees can be easily refuted from various positions. Poland is on the “top” only if we consider it in absolute numbers. When we count the number of the Righteous proportionally – to the pre-war diaspora or the country’s population in total, Poland loses its lead. Nonetheless, it is very common to use the “argumentum ad Yad Vashem” to support certain historical and political claims. The Polish state funds several forms of commemorations of Poles who saved Jews during the Holocaust, among others: the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in the Second World War, the National Remembrance Day for Poles rescuing Jews under German occupation and the annual congress of the Righteous.

The high number of Poles among the Righteous Among the Nations appears often in the discussion on Polish antisemitism and serves as a quasi-counterargument. In many cases when one recalls Polish Righteous it is intended to be a proof contradicting claims on Polish antisemitism. The memory of Poles who saved Jews during the Holocaust plays significant role in the common perception of WWII and serves as an evidence for Polish heroism and the so-called Christian mercy and compassion towards Jews.

Such an interpretation is being challenged, as the title Righteous Among the Nations is meant to award the outstanding heroism of individuals. Therefore, some distinctiveness from the majority is a substantial part of the Righteous’ concept. With that being said, exceptional heroism of some cannot be generalized to the whole society without diminishing their merits. Moreover, the Righteous’ testimonies show that hostile attitude towards Jews and those hiding them was dominant in the Polish society during the war. People saving Jews have been often perceived as a threat to the majority (because of the potential persecutions) but also their heroism was not supported, as the antisemitic sentiment remained to be strong during the

Holocaust. In this case Jan Karski, famous for informing the Allies about the Holocaust, is often quoted on his report for the Polish government-in-exile in London in which he states that antisemitism is very strong in the occupied Poland and Germans' attitude towards Jews constitutes some agreement between them and the Polish majority<sup>35</sup>.

Jan Karski and Irena Sendler became known to the broader Polish public at the beginning of the twenty first century, when both had already gained significant recognition in the Western world. Karski became known after his interview for the Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), while Sendler was 'rediscovered' by American female students that made a theater piece about her.<sup>36</sup> The recognition gained abroad attracted public attention to their figures, and also gave an opportunity to create a new myth during the time of identity crisis caused by the *Neighbors* debate. *After Jedwabne a hero is needed*, stated critically Irena Sendler about her sudden popularity.<sup>37</sup>

Irena Sendler, Jan Karski and Żegota (Polish Council to Aid Jews) became symbols of the city-based network for helping Jews. Both Sendler and Karski were brave individuals from the Polish intelligentsia, standing against Nazi terror and antisemitic sentiments in the Polish society. In a way, their cult supports the common association between peripheries and antisemitic violence, in contrast to the image of the clandestine help in big cities. In the popular imagination, pogroms and robbery happened in villages, while city dwellers were rescuing Jews and supporting the clandestine. But there is no proof to support such image. This stereotype can be viewed as a classist sentiment associating brutality and hatred with peasantry, which happens to be convenient for the local elites as antisemitism of the peripheries can be explained by the lack of education and therefore recognized as a reminiscence of the past, not a social issue to be addressed.

<sup>35</sup> Gross, *Fear*.

<sup>36</sup> Janicka, 'The Square of Polish Innocence', 208.

<sup>37</sup> Aq. *Matka dzieci Holocaustu. Historia Ireny Sendlerowej*. Ed. MIESZKOWSKA, Anna (Warszawa: Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza SA, 2004), 29.

The Ulma family represents another, very different example of Poles saving Jews. During the Nazi occupation, the couple of farmers, Wiktoria and Józef Ulma sheltered two Jewish families: Saul Goldman and his four sons, together with Chaim Goldman's two daughters and a grand-daughter – Lea (Layka) Didner with her daughter (name unknown) and Genia (Golda) Grünfeld. They were most probably denounced by Włodzimierz Leś, a Polish Blue Policeman (police functioning in the occupied Poland). German gendarmes accompanied by the Blue Policemen executed the hiding Jews and the whole Ulma family, killing seventeen people (Wiktoria Ulma was pregnant and went into labor during the execution, the newborn baby also died). The Ulma family constitutes a different model of the Righteous than Irena Sendler or Jan Karski. Coming from the periphery, providing help by giving the shelter in their own house, they differ from the educated individuals from the clandestine network. A farmer family from southern Poland hid their Jewish neighbors and has been denounced by another neighbor.

The Ulma family was honored with the Righteous Among the Nations title, the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta and their process of beatification in the Catholic Church is underway. They are often being referred to as: *God's servants Victoria and Joseph Ulma with their children*<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, in Markowa (the village they lived), the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II has been opened in 2016.

The museum's website opens the quotation from the Christian Bible, the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel According to Luke. Usage of that quote is justified by the fact that this passage was underlined in the family's Bible, but it tells us much more than that. Evoking that parable – the story of one man (Samaritan) helping another man (Jew) despite the different religion and in contrast to the other Jews that ignored the one in need – show how

<sup>38</sup> Grabowski, 'Distorting and Rewriting the History of the Holocaust in Poland The Case of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews During World War II in Markowa', 10.

saving Jews is perceived. The passage emphasizes the difference between the helper and the Jew and underlines that the help came from the other ethnic group. It also brings categories and values like sacrifice of life, mercy and help to the fellow men in the terms typical for Christianity. As Ulma family died together with the families they were hiding, their fate is perceived as a fulfillment of Christian ideals of sacrificing life. The death of Goldmans, Didner, Grünfeld, and Ulmas becomes dominated by Christian rhetoric. Such mechanism, called the *Christianization* of the Shoah has been criticized for forcing Christianity-based narrative into commemorating the Holocaust.<sup>39</sup> *Christianization* covers the usage of Christian symbols and rhetoric to illustrate the tragedy of Holocaust. On one hand, this mechanism is a form of appropriation, as it replaces Judaist symbolic, and on another hand, evoking the figure of Christ, whose death for Christians is a source of hope and redemption, it imposes that logic on Holocaust and therefore suggests that it is possible to find sense and some consolation in it. That mechanism can be found in Jan Błoński's essay *The Poor Poles look at the Ghetto*<sup>40</sup> from 1987 as well as in *Ida* (2013), movie by Paweł Pawlikowski.

The Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II commemorates not only the Ulma family, but all Polish people who helped Jews. The museum's building is surrounded by the fruit trees forming the Orchard of Remembrance referring to the Yad Vashem Garden and to the Józef Ulma's passion for fruit trees. In the Orchard we may find plaque with names of the places with names of cities, towns and villages located in the territory of Poland in 1939 where Poles risked their own lives to save Jews during the German occupation<sup>41</sup>. This particular choice of words stresses how much more important is Polish heroism than Jewish suffering.

<sup>39</sup> IDA NIEZGODY - Żydowski Instytut Historyczny'. 'Martwa natura, czyli polska historia według „Idy”'.

<sup>40</sup> 'The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto | Tygodnik Powszechny'.

ŻUKOWSKI, Tomasz. "Wytwarzanie 'winy obojętności' oraz kategorii 'obojętnego świadka' na przykładzie artykułu Jana Błońskiego Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto." *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 423-451.

<sup>41</sup> 'Building – Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II'.

Elżbieta Janicka, analyzing topography of the former Warsaw Ghetto, shows how the memory of Poles saving Jews (and sometimes simply Polish memory, not connected to the Holocaust) dominates the space of Muranów. Monuments and names of streets mark the space of the former ghetto. She points out how the mechanism of *polonisation* of the history of Polish Jewry shifts the focus towards the nation-based narrative<sup>42</sup>.

Jan Grabowski depicts the Ulma Family Museum and points out that the number of Jews saved in the Podkarpacie region (where the museum is) stated on the exhibition is far too high, as it is based on the rosters of those who reported themselves to the Jewish Committees after the war. It is not a number of Jews saved by Poles, but a number of Jews who survived the Holocaust<sup>43</sup>. The exhibition also portrays the Blue Policeman Leś (who denounced the family) as a man of Ukrainian origins, which serves to preserve the message of Polish heroism and inability to commit such an atrocity<sup>44</sup>. Grabowski also shows how Markowa, being a national symbol of saving Jews, is also a place where Jews were robbed and murdered by their Polish neighbors. That part of the local history is not included in the museum's narrative.

Portal *Życie za życie [life for life]* run by the National Institute of Remembrance also commemorates Poles who rescued Jews. On the website one may find following sections: Poles' help, Repressions, Testimonies, Documents scans and Commemorations. The aspect of repressions is one of the most emphasized. Description of the situation of the Polish majority is much more detailed than that on the Jewish minority. The section *Repressions* shows us the *Index of the repressed* – a list of Polish people who helped Jews and were repressed for it. Also, the name of the portal reveals the focus on the persecutions for hiding Jews. Emphasizing specifics of the Nazi occupation in Poland (death penalty for helping Jews, repressions towards

<sup>42</sup> JANICKA, 'The Square of Polish Innocence'.

<sup>43</sup> GRABOWSKI, 'Distorting and Rewriting the History of the Holocaust in Poland The Case of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews During World War II in Markowa', 35.

<sup>44</sup> GRABOWSKI, 33.

the Polish society) is often used as a mechanism serving to raise the rank of the Polish Righteous.

The instrumentalization of the “argumentum ad Yad Vashem” is clearly present in President Andrzej Duda’s speeches. During the ceremony of awarding the Poles who saved Jews during the Holocaust in the Łańcut castle he said that the number of the Polish Yad Vashem trees is a great source of pride and claimed that during the war, hundreds of thousands of people *did not refuse to help Jews*<sup>45</sup>. Duda did state the approximate number of the Polish Righteous (“over 6 000”), but then mentioned the exaggerated and unsupported estimation. He also spoke, in idealized terms, about 1000 years of Polish-Jewish “symbiotic” shared history and added that *thanks to the hundreds of thousands of Polish people who saved Jews during WW2, the Polish nation survived with dignity. Thanks to them, Poland can be proud today*<sup>46</sup>. Instead of focusing on the Survivors, he stressed the survival of the *national dignity*. His statement shows how commemorating the Poles who saved Jews is focused on the Polish perspective.

Polish philosemitism is a fantasy on the lost multicultural society. It is a narrative on the lost pre-war diversity, neighborhood and symbiosis. According to Zybrzycki, it is used as an alternative to the monoethnic, Catholic vision of the Polish nationhood<sup>47</sup>. She claims that in this context philosemitism lacks derogatory meaning of the original, 19<sup>th</sup>-century German term (she uses the quotation marks for “philosemitism” to emphasize the differences)<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, Zubrzycki shows how Polish philosemitism, understood as a fascination in Jewish culture developed by Poles not having any Jewish roots, serves to negotiate the boundaries and

<sup>45</sup> ‘Duda Odznaczył Polaków Ratujących Żydów. “Nasz Naród Przetrwiał Godnie”o[FOTO] - Polityka - Wiadomości z Kraju i Ze Świata - Dziennik.Pl - Wydarzenia i Fakty - Dziennik.Pl’.

<sup>46</sup> [Dzięki setkom tysięcy Polaków, którzy ratowali Żydów. “Nasz Naród Przetrwiał Godnie”o[FOTO] - Polityka - Wiadomości z Kraju i Ze Świata - Dziennik.Pl - Wydarzenia i Fakty - Dziennik.Pl’.ydów w czasie II wojny światowej, naród polski mógł przetrwać godnie. Dzięki nim Polska może być dziś dumna]

<sup>47</sup> ZUBRZYCKI, ‘Nationalism, “Philosemitism,” and Symbolic Boundary-Making in Contemporary Poland’.

<sup>48</sup>As cited in: ZUBRZYCKI.

definition of the nation (from homo- to heterogenous). I will argue that even Zubrzycki's understanding of Polish philosemitism - is in most of the cases instrumentalizing that vision, and by doing so, objectifying and tokenizing the Jewish diaspora. The cult of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations is also an example of that mechanism. The heroism of Poles who saved Jews is justified by the pre-war symbiotic neighborhood and the main focus is on the "saviors", not the Survivors, and both sides are being fetishized as a statistic.

The philosemitic violence consists of the mechanism of constructing the narrative on the symbiotic Polish-Jewish neighborhood from the perspective of the dominant group and including only the positive voices that do not problematize the history of prejudices and hostility. The memory is guarded by the Polish witnesses that tell the story from their side, creating the tale on the imaginary lost Polish-Jewish harmony. The myth of the Righteous Among the Nations is one of the very last chapters of that story and serves as a proof of the Polish-Christian mercifulness and heroism.

## Chapter 5: Dignity

*In the times of the Polish People's Republic it was impossible to talk about them, while a few years ago, in the Third Polish Republic this topic did not even exist. In this way, the Communists snatched from us a piece of our history, our tradition; our patriotic spine. The insurrectionary and heroic tradition, because what happened after 1944 must be clearly defined – it was the last Polish military uprising. An uprising aimed at the Soviets. The last anti-communist uprising so far. That is why the PRL so methodically destroyed the memory of it. The Indomitable were to disappear forever - as if the war for Poland ended in 1945, as if no resistance against the second Soviet occupier existed at all.*

*(...) priority must be given to changing the school curricula. So that Polish youth can learn most of all about our contemporary heroes. (...) Thus young people will be able to understand what the post-Round Table Third Polish Republic is. They will see the drama of the Polish elite murdered by the commune, which illegally seized power and is influential to this day - we read in the article “the Indomitable Soldiers Cursed out by the Communists” published by Foundation Good Name Redoubt online magazine. This short excerpt shows well what role the myth of the *cursed soldiers* plays in Polish memory politics – it has huge revisionist potential, as well as anticommunist and antiliberal message. It is also a great example of the regaining dignity heroes of memory policy, *getting up from the knees*.*

The “cursed soldiers” is a popular term standing for the military post-war opposition fighting against the Polish government between 1944 and 1963. Although most of the clandestine activity ceased in the Stalinist period, the year 1963 when, the last partisan Józef Franczak “Lalek” died, is often considered as a symbolic closure of the cursed soldiers age. The term covers a very diverse and unstructured group consisting of various combat organizations standing for different political visions and allied with different sides.



Among cursed soldiers one may include forces of Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe, Wolność i Niezawisłość and Ruch Oporu Armii Krajowej (House Army). Those organizations have been created in different historical moments and contexts and also their relations with Polish Government on Exile varied. Therefore, from the historical perspective, the cursed soldiers cannot be considered as one army or movement and it is hard to precisely designate who is to be regarded as a cursed soldier and who is not. To some extent, one can argue that the cursed soldiers are not a historical phenomenon, but exclusively a memory-related one – they have never existed in a way that their name and the common narration imputes. Even the “curse” in their name refers to their memory (to the lack of it), not to their deeds<sup>49</sup>.

As the term cursed soldiers covers much and tells a lot itself: it suggests that their cause was lost and assumes that Polish society has forgotten about them. The poetic title poses challenges in tracing (from the historical point of view) the boundaries of the phenomenon of the cursed soldiers. The main indication of who can be considered a cursed soldier is his or her attitude, that is the anticommunist and unfaltering character, which is a very subjective and controversial category. Historian Rafał Wnuk highlights that using one term to cover very different military forces and political options simplifies the multidimensional post-war situation. It also creates the impression that there was some sort of a shared political vision among partisans. That false unification depoliticizes the Stalinist period by turning it into a black and white battle between the anticommunist patriots and the communists.

The cursed soldiers are sometimes also referred as „indomitable soldiers”<sup>50</sup> and considered to be a one army or an uprising. Evoking the term “uprising” has significant consequences in the Polish context, as uprisings play the major role in the history of struggle for the independence and constitute a huge symbol in Polish tradition. Therefore, calling the

<sup>49</sup> KOŃCZAL, ‘The Invention of the “Cursed Soldiers” and Its Opponents’.

<sup>50</sup> The “cursed soldiers” are also known as “doomed,” “accursed,” or “damned” [*Żołnierze wyklęci*] or “indomitable soldiers” [*Żołnierze niezlomni*].

cursed soldiers combat an uprising inscribes their struggle into tradition and history and presents it as its continuation. Using the word “army” allows to charge higher numbers of soldiers that we would have if we would divide them into separate armies and battalions accordingly to their structure. Such simplification leads even to stating that cursed soldiers have constituted “the largest anticommunist army in Europe”<sup>51</sup>. What seems to be significant, often while mentioning cursed soldiers one does not enumerate any specific organizations.

That oversimplification reveals also another complication. Among formations fighting against the antidemocratic order and having some political visions, other combat forces have consisted of the post-war bandits and murderers. Even though some historians, together with the Institute of National Remembrance proved some of the forces to be responsible for genocides and killings, others tend to celebrate their memory and whitewash their deeds. I will elaborate more on this mechanism and logic of the used argument later in this chapter.

The cult of the armed anticommunist opposition has gained enormous popularity in contemporary Poland. The cursed soldiers are now playing a significant role in the politics of memory and are the most important heroes for the Polish nationalists. In case of the cult of cursed soldiers, the role of alternative ways of remembrance (i.e., those not organized by the public institutions) is significant. As the politics of the government during the whole Polish People’s Republic period aimed to discredit the military post-war opposition and to portray it as bandits, they did not play any important role in Polish collective memory just after 1989<sup>52</sup>.

Around 2010, when the president Bronisław Komorowski declared March 1 the Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers, the popularity of this group increased rapidly. Despite the numerous controversies and the very same commanders’ proven responsibility of genocides

<sup>51</sup> In the introduction to the album *Soldiers of Curse. Steadfast Heroes of an Unnamed Uprising* Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, plenipotentiary of the President of the Institute of National Remembrance for the search for unknown burial places of victims of communist terror, calls the “cursed soldiers” *the greatest anti-communist uprising*, and does not mention the names of specific organizations.

<sup>52</sup> KOŃCZAL, ‘The Invention of the “Cursed Soldiers” and Its Opponents’.

and collaboration with the Nazi, the cursed soldiers are considered some of the biggest Polish heroes. From the beginning, their cult was seen as an alternative towards the mainstream (because they were forgotten or referred as bandits, and it was forbidden to celebrate their actions) and their attitude (fighting alone against the greater enemy) was seen as the most radical and pure path of patriotism.

Marcin Napiórkowski, characterizing the collective memory, states that it is focused around the memory itself or its lack, instead of being concentrated on the historical events<sup>53</sup>. The form of cult is shaped by the history of its memory – by the earlier forms of remembrance and the tradition. Also, the history of forgetting the heroes or remembering them against the dominant narrative constitutes the memory and carves the cult. Commemoration, although is nominally centered around certain events and actors, is also a performative practice that sustains and defines the national identity. In the context of the cursed soldiers cult the question of being forgotten and erased from memory plays crucial role and powered the developing phenomenon.

In fact, now, ten years after establishing the Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers and several other attempts to strengthen their position as the national heroes, some voices raise proposition to relinquish the name cursed soldiers as it became outdated with their recognition. The alternative term “indomitable soldiers” refers to the strength of their spirits emphasizing the arguable "positive" aspect of their history. The change of the name would according to some, mark the end of the age of oblivion that started during the Polish People’s Republic period.

The Polish far-right values the cursed soldiers above all because they for being a symbol of the solitary fight against the communists, without any help from the “treacherous” West that according to the narrative has betrayed Polish case in Yalta. The nationalist undertone in this cult is very strong and gives an opportunity to tell the story of the “Polish heroism.”

<sup>53</sup> NAPIÓRKOWSKI, *Powstanie Umarłych. Historia Pamięci 1944-2014*.

It is pivotal to notice that the history of the cursed soldiers begins just after the Shoah. The guerillas appear in a brand-new social circumstance – a homogenous society where Jews, Roma and other minorities are gone or frightened. It is virtually impossible to find traces of hostility towards the returning Jews who survived or any hints of pogroms. One will not find any shred of what Gross and other scholars describe in their works. This oblivion is not only a denial, but also an opportunity to celebrate the vision of Polish society, where almost everyone is somehow engaged in the fight against the government viewed as foreign. Nevertheless, the Jews do appear in the history of the cursed soldiers – as the antagonists supporting the communist regime.

In the myth of Judeo-Communism or Judeo-Bolshevism [*Żydokomuna*] Jews are associated with communism (internationally) and in the consequence with the post-war communist government, militia and secret services. According to the antisemitic conspiracy theories communism is a Jewish project and therefore Jews hold the responsibility for its crimes. That stereotype clearly contradicts with another one that portrays Jews as extremely rich capitalists. Associating Jews with communism starts in 1917 and quickly becomes a common notion. Judeo-Bolshevism (as a myth) has its roots particularly in the international ideals associated with dispersed Jews. The stereotype mobilized many antisemites and was often considered to be the reason for antisemitic violence and pogroms. Among others, the Jedwabne massacre has also been justified with the claim that the pogrom was caused by the Jews' support of the Soviet occupation<sup>54</sup>.

The stereotype of Judeo-Communists is also clearly expressed in the interview of Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, vice-president of the National Institute for Remembrance conducted by Jacek Międlar. In the video with a telling title *Judeo-Communism is a historical fact* [*Żydokomuna to fakt historyczny*], Szwagrzyk claims that Jews were overrepresented in the

<sup>54</sup> SHORE, 'Conversing with Ghosts'; Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe*, 19.

secret services of the Stalinist period in Poland and calls it Judeo-Communism. In the discussion Międlar manipulates the facts by counting Bund (secular Jewish socialist party) as a communist party to overstate the number of Jew active in the communist organizations in the pre-war period. Moreover, in the written summary of the interview Międlar states *Jews had the largest share in building Stalinist, criminal apparatus of repression, at the hands of which the greatest heroes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Poland died*. The alleged overrepresentation of Jews in the Stalinist system is immediately connected with the claim that this system murdered those who tried to oppose – implicitly cursed soldiers<sup>55</sup>. In this case myth of Judeo-Communism is evoked plainly, but in many cases one may find claims emphasizing otherness and foreignness of the communist project contrasting them with unity and Polishness of the anticommunist opposition.

In the case of the cult of the cursed soldiers, Judeo-Communism is present in two ways – it is mentioned in some educational materials (i.e. in the Cursed Soldiers Escape Room created by the National Institute for Remembrance) or often it is suggested by emphasizing how ethnic Poles have widely opposed the communist government. The myth of Judeo-Communism has a double function here – it justifies the post-war antisemitism and shows that communism in Poland has been established by “other”, non-Polish hands and was not supported by the Polish society. That construction allows to portray communism and socialism as foreign ideas and create the connotation between anticommunism and Polish patriotism or rather Polishness.

The absence of Jews and antisemitic violence from the myth is not just a denial of the uncomfortable criminal past. It is also simply a story of the sudden homogeneity. From the pre-war multicultural and multi-ethnic Second Polish Republic where Catholics constituted 65% of the country population, almost exclusively Catholics survived (96%). As Zubrzycki points out, the dramatic rupture and transition from the hetero- to homogenous society was naturalized

<sup>55</sup> [Żydzi mieli największy udział w budowaniu stalinowskich, zbrodniczych aparatów represji, z rąk których zginęli najwybitniejsi bohaterowie Rzeczypospolitej XX wieku.] <https://wprawo.pl/zydokomuna-to-fakt-historyczny-prof-krzysztof-szwagrzyk-dla-wprawo-pl-m-in-o-ekshumacjach-na-wolyniu-oraz-czasie-wykletych-wideo>

in the People's Republic period by the state and the Catholic Church<sup>56</sup>. Up until today the monoethnic understanding of the Polish nationhood as well as associating Polishness with Catholicism remain dominant.

This vision of unity is very important for the cursed soldiers' myth. A vision of the Polish village, where peasants and *szlachta* listen to the priest ordering to help partisans. We observe a great national agreement, a huge supra-class anti-communist alliance. The cursed soldiers, called the anticommunist uprising, seem to be the heroes for every Pole. The way in which the narrative on the cursed soldiers is being told – with ignoring the dark pages of the history and creating the impression of unity (among the different partisans' formations and among their supporters) gives it a very strong nation-building potential. Simply drawn black and white divisions and group-borders provide only a one option for identification. Their memory indeed unifies a large part of the society and political scene – as Kornelia Kończal points out, *the transfer of the "cursed soldiers" from the margins of memory activism to the mainstream of the state-sponsored politics of memory was therefore one of the last instances of agreement between the two parties that have dominated Polish political life since 2005, and after a short period of declared cooperation, now co-exist in fierce competition, if not enmity.*

Positioning the soldiers from post-war military opposition as great national heroes has also another impact on the Polish memory – it becomes more and more common to call the period between 1944 (sometimes 1945) and 1989 an occupation and to compare it with the Nazi occupation. Celebrating nationalistic and military clandestine supports that claim and undermines role of the non-military forms of opposition and political activity. The whole myth gives us an impression of national, ideological and ethnic unity among the society.

Museum of Cursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners from the Polish People's Republic Period is now being built in the former prison building at Rakowiecka street in Warsaw where

<sup>56</sup> ZUBRZYCKI, 74.

many oppositionists were imprisoned and executed. Also, the permanent exhibition on the cursed soldiers in Warsaw Rising Museum's district is placed the Cells of Secret Service in former Remand Centre of the Ministry of Public Security. The choice of those meaningful and "authentic" location is significant – commemorating the partisans in the place of their imprisonment and death puts the emphasis on their executioners and not on the fight and also on the criminality of the Stalinist system. In the case of formations hiding and fighting in the forests, it "urbanizes" the character of their memory. In this light – or rather the darkness of the cell – it is hard to not perceived them as victims and rebels against the cruel authorities.

Emphasizing the Stalinist period also militarizes the narrative on history of the Polish People's Republic. Moreover, questioning the end of the WW2 opens the floor for the discussion on interpretation of other historical events which leads to questioning the meaning of transformation of the political system in 1989. The quote evoked on the beginning of that chapter is full of critical hints on the Third Polish Republic (III RP) and the Round Table Talks. The opening line *in the times of the Polish People's Republic it was impossible to talk about them, while a few years ago, in the Third Polish Republic this topic did not even exist* – suggests some continuity between the politics of memory from the Polish People's Republic and the III RP period. In that light, calling the cursed soldiers the *last anti-communist uprising so far* reveals a revisionist suggestion that still there is some unprecise communist power to oppose.

The cult of cursed soldiers serves as a tool to renegotiate the understanding of what constitute the nation and who can be considered to be a traitor (communist) or a patriot (anticommunists). It also has another function – as and a cult of heroes of the monoethnic, Catholic society – it is a source of the national pride and therefore a great replacement for the shame and fear caused by Jedwabne debate. My argument is not based only on the message the myth sends, but mostly on the function of the cult in Polish memory and politics. I believe it serves as a dignity-source replacement of the Righteous Among the Nations, it is another

chapter of the *Neighbors* response. It is a new myth with a military, masculine and anticommunist character.

In the song “For the cursed soldiers” [Żołnierzom Wyklętym] of Leszek Czajkowski we can find words *An American Jew writes about our guilt for the Holocaust, he does not know the word "shame", although he grew up in a Polish family* – this stanza is not connected to the history of the cursed soldiers, but to Jan Tomasz Gross’ research at Jedwabne and his figure personally. In this stanza, Gross is accused to have no shame, for publishing books on Polish antisemitism. He is called an “American Jew” who was raised in a Polish family, that construct makes him a foreigner and a compatriot at the same time. In this case shame is brought up as a value that prevent one from speaking loudly about the guilts of the nation. An alleged leader of the pedagogy of shame machine was accused for having no shame at all.



## Conclusions

In 2000 when Gross's book was published, it shocked many, causing fear and shame. Jedwabne massacre has been widely discussed, questioned and denied. Nonetheless, the "purifying" debate took place mostly within the elites. In the reaction to the difficult truth, Gross' and other scholars' works were assented to be the emanation of the pedagogy of shame. In consequence of creating the conception of the pedagogy of shame, right-wing politicians proposed to regain dignity by *rising from the knees*.

In my work I aimed to reveal how the two cults – of the cursed soldiers and Poles who saved Jews – can be considered as responses to the *Neighbors* debate. Both described phenomena are instrumentalized and remain in close, reactionist relation with Jedwabne debate. The cult of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations, is a first example of that attempt, but it is rather a defensive move. The case of Poles who saved Jews is a fairly clear option to deny antisemitism. Exceptional, heroic individuals are becoming exceptions confirming the rule, in the literal meaning of that expression. Statistics are being overestimated and fetishized. Nonetheless, the pride evoked by the memory of the Righteous is not strong enough to counterbalance the shame caused by the *Neighbors*. The history of mercy and heroic help is not masculine and military enough, does not fulfill its function sufficiently.

The myth of the cursed soldiers can be considered as a step forward – it is no longer a denial, rather skipping the matter – as one will not find antisemitism per se. By evoking the Judeo-Communist stereotype it supports the voices justifying the Polish post-war antisemitism. It is also a narrative of the newly homogenous society that forgets its past and sins. The vision of the homogenous society unified in the struggle against the Stalinist government and its authorities. What seems especially significant, the cursed soldiers myth has also strong revisionist potential that leads to questioning not only the meaning of the 1945 but also 1989.

This is no longer defense, it is attack, counter-narrative. Those two myths combined might be a source of positive feelings able to replace the previous negative ones according to the logic of the mechanism of downregulating emotions described by Bilewicz. What also appears to be significant, the memory of Righteous Among the Nations seems to serve both internal and external political goals, as it is used to fight against the stereotype of Polish antisemitism abroad, while the cursed soldiers myth fulfills rather internal expectations and needs.

Bilewicz deliberates on the question whether it would be possible to overcome those defensive emotions and stop the process of replacing and forgetting. He seeks potential alternative in changing the focus of the historical debate – from emotions toward facts and interpretations. It would require a major shift in memory politics.

Although the aforementioned phenomena are strictly connected to the internal Polish debate and history, they reflect also some broader regional tendencies in politics of memory. Both concurrence of memory and revisionist tendencies are widely present in other Central European countries. Also, the attempt to build the identity on the anti-communist sentiment are not exclusively Polish case. In order to provide some regional context to my analysis, I will briefly evoke two examples – Hungary and Ukraine.

Anna Manchin compares the three contemporary Hungarian museums that are addressing the memory of Holocaust and Jewish-Hungarian relations: the House of Terror Museum, the Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center, and the Jewish Museum<sup>57</sup>. She states that each of the museums treats Hungarian Jewry differently and thus differently understand the Hungarian-Jewish history. According to Manchin the Jewish Museum provides a vision of Hungarian Jews as a homogenous religious minority, while in the Holocaust Memorial “Jew” is rather a problematic legal category that burrs other identity distinctions like

<sup>57</sup> ANNA MANCHIN (2015) *Staging Traumatic Memory: Competing Narratives of State Violence in Post-Communist Hungarian Museums*, East European Jewish Affairs, 45:2-3, 236-251.

class or religion. In the House of Terror, Hungarian Jews are portrayed in two ways: either as members of the nation (and its religious minority) or as an ethnic minority that is conflicted with the ethnically Hungarian part of the society. She describes how the House of Terror's narrative is based on portraying Hungary as a victim of the two totalitarianisms – Nazism and Communism. This mechanism diminishes the responsibility of Hungarian society and the Horthy' regime for the extermination of Hungarian Jewry. Moreover, it equalizes Communism with Nazism which leads to the relativism.

In the House of Terror, the concurrence of Jewish and Hungarian victimhood is clearly present. The exhibition puts the emphasis on the Hungarian society's suffering and at the same time barely mentions the antisemitic regulations, ghettoization and the Holocaust. The disproportion in portraying two regimes is visible even in the number of rooms dedicated to them. The conception of the double occupation presents Hungary as a victim is very close to the interpretation of history expressed in *Foundation Good Name Redoubt*' publications about cursed soldiers.

The memory of UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army, Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya), Ukrainian nationalist partisan formation from the WW2 and the early post-war period, is an example of the anti-communist heroes erased from the memory in the Soviet times and rehabilitated after the system change. Again, the cult of the military anti-communist opposition opens the floor for questioning and undermining the hitherto consensus and serves the current political goals.

What is significant here, the *Foundation Good Name Redoubt* criticizes the cult of UPA in a very similar way to how in Polish debate some scrutinize the memory of the cursed soldiers. In the statement concerning Ukrainian politics of memory published by the *Foundation Good Name Redoubt* the authors point out the war crimes committed by UPA and make a strong claim that "If Ukrainians will build their own identity on falsehood, if they will worship murderers -

they will never be able to create a strong, sovereign state, a safe home for themselves”. It is rather a bold declaration for an organization supporting the idea of pedagogy of pride.

The debates described in that thesis seem to circulate around the very general question – can history – both traumatic or glorious one – teach us any lesson? Both sides of the debate seem to believe that yes, they just expect different teaching outcomes. When one side wishes to find some solace and glory in the national history, the other one seeks for a purifying consolation. Acknowledging the dark pages of history is a painful and rather brutal process, and as far as one is seeking for some emotional validation (positive or negative), one will not overcome the mechanism of subsequent emotional reactions.

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