Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscapes: An Inquiry into Transcultural Amnesia

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The Holocaust wiped out the world of Polish Jewry. Out of a Jewish population of more than three million in pre-war Poland, only about ten percent survived and many of the survivors decided to emigrate to the West.¹ The material traces of the centuries of Jewish presence in Poland were eradicated during, or after, the war and the socio-economic space once occupied by the Jews was soon filled by non-Jewish Poles as part of the radical transformation of Poland's social structure.

As a result, writes James Young,² the non-Jewish Poles have been left with their own, uncontested, memories of the past. Post-war Polish authorities attempted to shape the country's memory to give it a new meaning according to their communist worldview while the vast majority of Polish society, reluctantly approaching the new political system, tried to safeguard its memory of the past in the private sphere of family life, supported by the structures of the Roman-Catholic Church.

The remnants of Jewish memory were therefore located in a space controlled by two frames that are conventionally called 'nationalist' and 'communist.' For the nationalists, whose ideal was an overlap of the political and cultural boundaries,³ the presence of Jews in Poland's memory proved that the latter is heterogeneous, which subverted their national project. For the communists, the ethnic and/or religious differentiation of the memory subverted their vision of history, in which ethnicity and religion supposedly had no meaning, having been replaced by economic divisions and gradually levelled by the dominant position of the working class.

Contrary to Young, it is therefore possible to say that the postwar memory of the non-Jewish Poles has not been homogeneous and uncontested. Poland

1 Michael C. Steinlauf, "Poland," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 109.

2 James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 116.

3 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 1.

has in fact been a battlefield of different visions of the past that have mutually contested one another, although not all of them have had sufficient power to significantly control public and communicative memories. But in one thing Young was right: in spite of the differences between communist and nationalist memories, there has not been any space for the Jews in either of them. What has united these otherwise opposing forms of memory has been an act of symbolic violence: an erasure of the Jewish memory, which in a way has contributed to the annihilation of the Holocaust victims.

Memory is understood here as a synthesis of *mnéme* (the reminiscence of the past that is stored and transmitted in the acts of remembrance), and *anámnesis* (a contextually conditioned re-collection of something that not necessarily forms a permanent part of our stock of memories but could be consciously commemorated).⁴ Memory emerges therefore as a result of two processes. The first one starts with the individual remembrances or recollections of the past events that are subsequently communicated and discussed by individuals and as such form their social memory. In the second one, the cultural frames and social institutions support (and sometimes induce or even create) certain forms of social memory (and weaken or eliminate others), deciding in this way which of the individual recollections will have a chance to become a topic of conversation, what shape they may take and what will be officially and publicly commemorated as important for the group. This officially approved vision of the past, together with commemorative practices that sustain it, forms the collective memory of a given community.⁵

Therefore, the crucial segment of memory is the social memory, which is a place where two genealogies meet one another, and which serves as a space of encounter of the top-down and bottom-up memory work. Sometimes a battleground, sometimes an alliance of different tendencies, social memory is the central place in the process of collective remembering.

To catch the complex nature of social memory with one word, I employ here the concept of memoryscape that refers to a material and symbolic space, in which social memory is expressed⁶ although here the concept will be interpreted metaphorically and without direct reference to physical places.

4 Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 107.

5 Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory," *Social Research* 1 (2008): 55.

6 Hamzah Muzaini, and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "War Landscapes as 'Battlefields' of Collective Memories: Reading the *Reflections at Bukit Chandu*, Singapore," *Cultural Geographies* 12 (2005): 345.

Memoriscapes form a matrix of possible attitudes towards the past that can be activated in the commemorative actions of individuals and groups. They are spaces of coexistence of various groups' visions of the past that could be in a symbolic conflict, precisely the way their holders could be in real conflict. For this reason, the memories contained in memoriscapes constitute an important realm of the struggle for power, understood here as the right to marginalize, exclude or even criminalize those visions of the past that diverge from the sanctioned ideal. A memoriscape is therefore a 'site of concentrated cultural practice,' in which power relations are negotiated.⁷

Memoriscapes, however, is not only a result of power relations and past events: it, too, has the power to generate memories and amnesias. Consequently, memoriscape has a peculiar characteristic of being, in Clifford Geertz's terminology, both 'model of' and 'model for.'⁸ Memoriscapes are 'models of' because they become, over time, representations of the remembered past. Yet, memoriscapes may also be consciously designed to emphasize and amplify those aspects and interpretations of the past desired by those with the power to shape them. In this way, memoriscapes are 'models for': they are instructions or frames for our memories in which certain recollections are more likely to emerge than others.

It is argued here that in post-war history Jews and the Holocaust have largely been absent in Poland's memoriscape, either because they have not been present in the individual remembrance (and the memoriscape has not served as a 'model of' them), or because there has not been any institutional, public commemoration of the Jewish past in Poland and its tragic end (so that the memoriscape has not served as a 'model for' them), or both. The intention of this paper is to present an interpretation of this situation and different examples of the absence of the memory of Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's social memory, with particular emphasis on the post-communist period since the 1990s. Since then, it is argued here, there has been an increase in the number of commemorations of the Polish Jews, but they have nevertheless remained absent in the individual remembrance (in the way the terms are understood here).

Periodization of Poland's Attitude to Her Jewish Past

Michael Steinlauf has distinguished five periods in the Polish history after the Second World War, in which Jews and the Holocaust were differently

7 William H. Jr. Sewell, *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 172.

8 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90–91.

remembered/forgotten: the period of 'wounded memory' (1944–1948), of 'repressed memory' (1948–1968), of 'expelled memory' (1969–1970), of 'reconstructed memory' (1970–1989) and of regained memory (1989–1995).⁹

In the first of them, Jewish memory was represented mainly by the Jewish survivors, in particular those who had survived the Holocaust in the USSR and returned to Poland only to face the fact that their relatives had perished and that their non-Jewish neighbors were not particularly happy with their return. On the other hand, the fate of the Jews was freshly imprinted in the memory of their neighbors, although ambiguously perceived.

The time immediately following the end of the Second World War, which for many Poles only meant the replacement of Nazi-German occupation with Soviet Communism, was characterized by the psychological states of fear, anxiety and terror, accompanied by conspiracy theories developed to ease the sense of insecurity, and by the anti-Jewish pogroms that were the consequence.¹⁰

Polish communist authorities supported the program of the Central Committee of Polish Jews that aimed at the revival of Jewish life in Poland. A manifestation of this attitude was the official commemorative activity of the Polish government regarding the Jews and the Holocaust, although treated instrumentally in order to get political legitimization and Western support. Thus the commemoration of Jewish resistance (first of all) and victimization was politically used to discredit the anti-communists who were equated with antisemites and with the Nazis in general.¹¹

A good illustration of this attitude was the unveiling of Nathan Rapoport's Ghetto memorial on the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1948), while the memorial of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, led by the non-communist Polish resistance, had been allowed only in 1989 when communism was already on the decline.

Rapoport's monument stood alone in a vast field of rubble, easily read by Poles as a symbol of the new government's decision to honor the Jews, while consigning the Polish national struggle to the dustbin of history. Similarly, Polish secondary school textbooks of the early 1950s devote more attention to the history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust than any subsequent versions, but the context for this information is a narrative in which the AK [Armia Krajowa = Home Army, Polish main

9 Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead. Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

10 Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944–1947: ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak i ISP PAN, 2012).

11 Steinlauf, "Poland," 111.

non-communist anti-Nazi military organization – S.K.] is described as hindering Polish resistance.¹²

In the first years after the Second World War in Poland, the presence of Jewish survivors, together with relatively fresh memories of the Holocaust and official commemorative politics of the government, allowed for the remembrance and commemoration of Jews and their fate.

In the period of ‘repressed memory’ (1948–1968) the individual remembrance of the Holocaust by the non-Jewish Poles gradually weakened, while many Jewish survivors left Poland, together with their memories, in the wake of the wave of post-war pogroms. As for the authorities, in 1949–1956 they followed the Stalinist orientation in constructing a vision of the past, in which the entire Polish past was erased as prehistory¹³ and in the official Marxist-Leninist approach to history all ethnic conflicts and enmities were reduced to an epiphenomenon of class struggle and an interplay of the economic forces. Jews were thus excluded from the Communist vision of history in which, as in the Marxist dream, ethnic identities would dissolve in the fundamental economic dichotomy.

Together with the destalinization of the Polish communist regime after 1956, the authorities, although still formally adhering to the Marxist philosophy of history, started to gradually include the reference to the Polish national tradition in their legitimating efforts, attempting to present their rule as firmly rooted in Polish history and as a ‘return’ to the geopolitics and social homogeneity of the first Polish statehood. In the 1960s, the nationalist and often antisemitic wing of the communist party grew in importance, which eventually, together with the withdrawal of the Soviet Union’s support of Israel, resulted in the state-sponsored antisemitic campaign of 1968.

The campaign, according to Steinlauf,¹⁴ marked the beginning of the period of ‘expelled memory’, because as a consequence many Polish Jews decided to emigrate or were in various ways forced to leave their country. The sociotechnical means used in the campaign awoke popular antisemitism, constantly present as a dormant cultural code,¹⁵ usually activated in times of crisis to give its participants an illusion of being able to intellectually control the events. As a result, from 1968 Jews and the Holocaust have neither been remembered, nor commemorated.

12 Steinlauf, “Poland,” 111.

13 Steinlauf, “Poland,” 111.

14 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*.

15 Wolfgang Benz, *Anti-Semitism in Europe. Traditions, Structures, Manifestations* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2004).

The lack of remembrance and commemoration also characterized the period of 1970–1989, although relative cultural liberalization and the development of democratic opposition that established its structures in the late 1970s, and which included the attempt to reclaim memory from the communist-controlled agenda, made the Jewish past slightly more visible in Poland's memoryscape. Known as the attempt to 'fill in the blank spots' in the map of collective memory, this process contributed to the re-emergence of previously erased chapters of Polish-Jewish history. A number of official films and publications dealing with the Jewish past of Poland appeared, together with clandestine literature. Jewish history and culture became a field of study at universities. Public debates by Polish intellectuals, and the international conflict about the Carmelite Convent at Auschwitz, made a wider audience aware of the problem and helped the elites develop their arguments and revise their standpoints. In 1989 Poland entered the postcommunist period of its history with the clear knowledge, at least among the elites, that a certain part of Polish memory had been erased or manipulated and that the 'de-communization of memory' should include an attempt to re-examine Poland's Jewish past and the Holocaust. This attempt, called by Steinlauf 'reconstruction of memory,'¹⁶ has continued with greater success in postcommunist Poland.

Here, the division of postwar Jewish-Polish history presented by Steinlauf has been supplemented with two concepts: remembrance and commemoration that help convert historical periodization into sociological typology. Thus, in the period immediately following the end of the Second World War, the Jewish past and the Holocaust is individually remembered and publicly commemorated. From 1950 to 1968 individual remembrance weakens although is still present, while the state subdues public commemoration as contradicting the official vision of history constituted by a specific mixture of communist ideology and nationalism. With the antisemitic campaign of 1968, Poland enters a long period in which Jews and the Holocaust are neither remembered nor commemorated. This situation changes slightly in the 1980s when the Jewish history of Poland becomes one of the motifs of the opposition's clandestine revision of the official vision of the past. Eventually, after 1989 and the collapse of communism, the institutional framework of memory radically changes and Jews and the Holocaust are commemorated again (although differently than in the past), but this commemoration, it is argued here, does not translate into individual remembrance. In post-communist Poland, Jews and the Holocaust remain commemorated but not remembered. This thesis will be developed in the subsequent part of this article. Now, however, it is necessary to go deeper into the particular nature of the relation between remembrance and

16 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*.

commemoration to uncover less evident causes of silencing the Jewish past in postwar Polish history.

The Absence of the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscape

To interpret the disappearance of the fate of Jews as an important element in the recollections of the past by non-Jewish Poles and in their social memory, we need to say, first of all, that in spite of being eye-witnesses, they did not have an adequate knowledge of what they had actually witnessed. The non-Jewish Poles *saw* what happened but did not *know* what happened.¹⁷ That does not mean that they were not aware of the fact that their Jewish neighbors had been murdered. But the interviews collected by the Institute of Sociology of the Jagiellonian University in the beginning of the 1990s in the project 'The Memory of Jewish Culture in Southern Poland' show that although they were able to provide details of the fate of individuals they had known (and often with compassion and sorrow), most of them had problems with acknowledging that they had witnessed a horrible, inconceivable and transforming event on a scale that surpassed previous experiences. Little empathy was expressed for the fate of Jews in general and, while on the topic, many respondents started to refer to antisemitic clichés even if they did not expose antisemitic views in other parts of the interview.

One reason for this that can be mentioned here is the separation, which was often hostile, between Jews and non-Jewish Poles. The latter lived in the same physical space and historical time as their Jewish neighbors, but the two groups did not share the same social space and time.¹⁸ Jews did not form a social community with the non-Jewish Poles. The contacts between the groups were limited to economic relations, and closer ties, friendships and social encounters were very rare among adults. Both groups formed separate worlds that existed in physical proximity, but were separated by the barrier of custom, endogamy and prejudice, and their members largely ignored each other.¹⁹ This separation was deepened by the Nazi policies of segregation and

17 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*.

18 Diane K. Roskies and David G. Roskies, *The Shtetl Book: An Introduction to East European Jewish Life and Lore* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1975); Sławomir Kaprański, "People of Different Times," in *The Jews in Poland*, Vol. 2, ed. Sławomir Kaprański (Kraków: Judaica Foundation, 1999).

19 Ewa Banasiewicz-Ossowska, *Między dwoma światami. Żydzi w polskiej kulturze ludowej* (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 2007), 88–89.

separation of Jews into the ghettos, as well as by the differentiating approach of the Soviets occupying the eastern part of Poland in the first period of the Second World War.

Jews were therefore excluded from the Polish national/local communities. From the non-Jewish point of view, they were not part of the Polish 'Us' and therefore the memory of their tragic fate was not perceived by non-Jews as 'their' memory. The postwar exclusion of the Jews from the Polish 'mnemonic community'²⁰ was a consequence of their previous social exclusion. Consequently, with a significant role of traditional anti-Judaism and modern pre-war antisemitism, the non-Jewish Poles widely perceived Jews in the time of the Holocaust as having been 'beyond the Polish universe of obligation.'²¹ The postwar dissociation of the non-Jewish Poles from the memory of the Jews could show an attempt to dissolve the link between memory and continuity and, therefore, between memory and the responsibility that makes human beings capable of accountability as moral subjects.²²

Generally then, the non-Jewish Poles did not perceive the fate of the Jews as something that would affect their own collective identity. They did not identify with the memory of the Holocaust because they did not identify with its victims.²³ Moreover, the non-Jewish Poles themselves felt victims of Nazi terror and had good reasons to believe that: 'after the Jews and the Gypsies, the Poles were the most relentlessly victimized group in Hitler's Europe.'²⁴ Their loss was of course not equal to the Jewish one. The non-Jewish population of Poland was decimated while ninety percent of Polish Jews perished. 'Nevertheless,' Steinlauf comments, 'nowhere else in Europe would such a comparison be necessary; nowhere else did the murder of Jews unfold amidst such slaughter of the coteritorial people.'²⁵ If we take into account the religiously tinted, messianic mythology of victimhood and suffering that since the nineteenth century has been an important part of the Polish national tradition, we may understand that the non-Jewish Poles focused on their own, enormous suffering, and perceived the suffering of the Jews as competition, largely ignored

20 Maria G. Cattell and Jacob J. Climo, "Introduction. Meaning in Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspective," in *Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2002), 35.

21 Steinlauf, "Poland," 107.

22 W. James Booth, "The Work of Memory: Time, Identity, and Justice," *Social Research* 1 (2008).

23 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 19.

24 Steinlauf, "Poland," 81.

25 Steinlauf, "Poland," 99.

'because of the Polish self-image of Poles as victims *par excellence*.'²⁶ This perception could have been supported by the generalized experience of the first two years of the occupation when 'it may not have been entirely clear that Jews had it worse.'²⁷

Another reason for silencing the memory of the Holocaust was a morally dubious profit that the non-Jewish Poles made as a result of the persecution of the Jews.

Beyond the money to be made through smuggling to and from the ghettos as well as blackmailing and informing on Jews hidden on the Aryan side, activities that involved only a small minority of Poles, the German expropriation of the property of 3.5 million Jews amounted to an economic revolution. While the Germans took the lion's share ..., the leftovers went to Poles. Throughout Poland, ownerless stores, merchandise, workshops, raw material, land, and houses quickly found new owners.²⁸

The revolution Steinlauf writes about was, however, not only economic. It is difficult to overestimate the consequences of the expropriation for the social structure: the void in the social tissue had been quickly filled in by the non-Jewish Poles for whom this was by and large a social promotion into middle class. According to Andrzej Leder, this genealogy of the ethnically Polish middle class had a tremendous impact on social memory and identity of Polish society. Members of a large segment of society, who marched to their new social position over the corpses of murdered Jews, prefer not, for obvious reasons, to reflect on their origins. They tend to repress their own sociogenesis and replace it with mythologies, in which antisemitism often plays a role of protection and justification of their uncertain identity.²⁹

Finally, we should mention the issue of trauma that the non-Jewish Poles suffered as passive witnesses (and sometimes active co-perpetrators) of the crimes. As Steinlauf notes, '[t]he effects of witnessing murder on such a scale, at such close range, and over such a long time are of course complex. To inquire about the Polish reaction to the Holocaust is to investigate the effects of

26 Stanisław Krajewski, *Poland and the Jews. Reflection of a Polish Polish Jew* (Kraków: Austria, 2005), 212.

27 Steinlauf, "Poland," 101.

28 Steinlauf, "Poland," 101.

29 Andrzej Leder, *Prześląona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014), 90–92.

a mass psychic and moral trauma unprecedented in history.³⁰ In the concept of trauma it is assumed that those who have participated in a horrifying event are unable to adequately react to it in a psychological sense, including lack of an adequate representation of such event in memory (assuming that such an adequate reaction and representation are possible at all, which is arguable, especially in the context of the Holocaust debate), that leads to amnesia (total or selective) or such reconstructions of the past that erase the traumatizing event.³¹ The memory of the event, however, continues to exist in a hidden form and unconsciously influences psychological structures of individuals and collective consciousness of groups.

The lack of adequate psychological reaction is caused simultaneously by the nature of the traumatizing event and by the lack of appropriate cultural frame, in which this event could be interpreted.³² The former process is important in studying memory in the mode of *mnéme*, that is when we focus on how past events form the ways they are remembered. The latter is crucial for studying memory as *anámnesis*, that is when the focus is on how present conditions influence the way in which past is remembered. This second approach to trauma we can find in the work of Jeffrey C. Alexander,³³ for whom trauma is not a feature or a direct consequence of a historical event but of the way in which a community approaches it. In other words, trauma is a social-cultural construction that defines the way in which the community experiences past events: namely, as something that has threatened its collective identity.

Witnessing the Holocaust certainly threatened the identity of non-Jewish Poles, leaving them with questions regarding their positive self-image, moral integrity, audacity, human solidarity, religious values etc. Such questions cause discomfort and the forgetting of the situation that gave reason to ask them is a convenient way to avoid the answers. From a cognitive perspective, equally important is that to adequately remember the past, people need a classificatory scheme, a narrative, a concept that would organize their personal recollections, give them a meaning, and a language in which they could be expressed. This was clearly missing in the non-Jewish Poles' interpretation of the events they witnessed, partly because of the nature of their involvement, partly because of the lack of such a discourse.

30 Steinlauf, "Poland," 81.

31 Barbara A Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), 141.

32 Jeffrey Prager, *Presenting the Past. Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Misremembering* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 155–156.

33 Alexander, *Trauma*.

The lack of a discourse is crucial in the perspective of social trauma theory: if there is no language, in which a past experience can be expressed, the event associated with that experience cannot be properly recalled (or even, in fact, experienced). Therefore, the experience without a discourse that informs it is necessarily inadequate. To remember mass murder of Jews as the Holocaust, one needs first of all the elaborated discourse of the Holocaust. As Levy and Sznajder argue, '[f]or the Holocaust to be recognized as something unique, a discursive and political frame of reference needed to be put in place.'³⁴

In the first decade after the Second World War, the Polish perception was not different from the general view in Europe, the United States or Israel. 'This period was marked by silence concerning the destruction of European Jewry, which at that time did not even have a name and was broadly subsumed under the atrocities of the war.'³⁵ Of course, one cannot say that there was complete silence regarding the fate of the Jews in the years immediately following the end of the War. The memory of what had happened was retained among survivors³⁶ but it did not form part of the mainstream perception. Moreover, the survivors' message was largely rejected in a world that aimed to rebuild the sense of normality and to start history again,³⁷ with 'a stable life, a steady job, and a nice family.'³⁸

In the 1960s and 1970s we may observe a desynchronization regarding the Holocaust discourse. While in this period, and for various reasons, the term 'Holocaust' becomes commonly accepted in 'the West' as describing the crucial point of history, the social consciousness in communist Poland was already controlled by different master narratives (Marxist and nationalist), in which there was neither a place for the tragedy of the Jews, nor for any subsequent universal meaning for the whole of humanity. The 'Iron Curtain' meant, among other things, the exclusion of Poland from the developing universalist Holocaust discourse as the main narrative of world's history.

Before the fall of communism, the memory of the Jews and the Holocaust was therefore absent in Poland's memoryscapes due to a number of reasons: (1) The exclusion of Jews from mnemonic community as a consequence of

34 Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 59.

35 Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust*, 16.

36 Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, ed., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

37 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory. The American Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001).

38 Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust*, 57.

(often antisemitic) social exclusion that increased during the occupation due to the segregationist Nazi policies and Soviet differential treatment of both groups. (2) The belief that the fate of the Jews had not affected the identity of the non-Jewish Poles. (3) The belief that there was something wrong with being a passive witness of the Jewish tragedy (and sometimes collaborating with the Nazi perpetrators), leading to the erasure of the memories that caused discomfort. (4) The focus of the non-Jewish Poles on their own suffering, thus neglecting the tragedy of the Jews as a competition that challenged Polish national identity. (5) The fact that large segments of the Polish society, even if unintentionally, benefited from the murder of the Jews, which lead to the erasure of the memory of the links between the Holocaust and the post-war Poland's social structure. (6) The lack of access to the Holocaust discourse in which the fate of the Jews could be expressed.

The Perception of Jews and the Holocaust after the Fall of Communism

The decade of the 1990s was marked by further intensification of the 'revival' of Jewish memory, partly assisted by the political authorities. Michael Steinlauf³⁹ has listed a significant number of cultural and educational initiatives, publications and conferences on Jewish–Polish relations, which took place in the first years of the decade, and more recent developments have been described, for example, by Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs⁴⁰ and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska.⁴¹

Most important among these developments have been changes in the school curricula and special programs addressed to teachers in the field of education about the Holocaust. In addition, a number of commemorative ceremonies with the participation of authorities have helped to focus public opinion on the previously neglected Jewish aspects of Polish history, events which have received a substantial share of attention in the mass media. The process of

39 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*.

40 Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, "Memory and Civic Education: Holocaust and Coming to Terms with National History," in *The Religious Roots of Contemporary European Identity*, ed. Lucia Faltin and Melanie J. Wright (London: Continuum, 2007).

41 Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "New Threads on an Old Loom. National Memory and Social Identity in Postwar and Post-Communist Poland," in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "Gentiles Doing Jewish Stuff. The Contribution of Polish Non-Jews to Polish Jewish Life," in *Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future*, ed. Robert Cherry and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).

change has included the area of Auschwitz-Birkenau where the museum exhibition has been refurbished with the participation of Jewish institutions to emphasize the role of the place as the symbol of the Holocaust and to clearly indicate that it was the first of the sites of mass extermination of men, women and children, sent to their deaths because they were Jewish.⁴²

Poles started to interact more frequently with the ever greater number of Jewish visitors to Poland, which included, for example, meetings between Polish and Israeli high school students. At the same time, the revival of Jewish life in Poland includes a growing number of people who either have discovered their Jewish roots or decided to 'come out' and return to their previously repressed or rejected Jewishness. This process has been assisted by various Jewish organizations, which have become visible not only in the context of the protection of the material remnants of Jewish culture in Poland, but also as supporters of religious, cultural, and educational initiatives. Correspondingly, a number of Poles, acting out of genuine interest, curiosity or economic motives, have engaged in various initiatives, from opening a 'Jewish' restaurant and setting up a band playing Jewish music, to organizing a festival of Jewish culture, all of which have contributed to the phenomenon described by Ruth Gruber as 'virtual Jewishness': a certain form of Jewish culture produced by and addressed to non-Jews.⁴³ The intellectual debate about Polish-Jewish relations in the time of the Shoah has continued, now free from the constraints induced by censorship. It came to a peak after the publication of Jan T. Gross's book, *Sąsiedzi* ('Neighbors') in 2000.⁴⁴ In the resulting discussion of the crime committed by the Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne on their Jewish neighbors, the 'whole of Polish society was convulsed by an extraordinary self-examination.'⁴⁵ The discussion, to which I will return later, has greatly contributed to the

42 Laurence Weinbaum, *The Struggle for Memory in Poland. Auschwitz, Jedwabne and Beyond* (Jerusalem: Institute of the World Jewish Congress, 2001); Marek Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny: historia, współczesność i świadomość społeczna KL Auschwitz w Polsce* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005); Sławomir Kaprański, "The Role Played by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Public Discourse and the Evolving Consciousness of the Holocaust in Polish Society," in *Jewish Presence in Absence. The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland 1944–2010*, ed. Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Yad Vashem, 2014).

43 Ruth E. Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

44 Jan T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000); published in English as Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

45 Laurence Weinbaum, "Penitence and Prejudice: The Roman Catholic Church and Jedwabne," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 14 (2002): 3–4.

'return of memory' of the time of the Holocaust, but it has divided various sectors of Polish society and caused a backlash that hampered the reception of the Holocaust discourse.

It would seem self-evident that the continuation of the 'memory work' in the post-communist period of Polish history must bring about growing acceptance of the truth about the history of Polish–Jewish relations and of the Holocaust. However, if we take society as a whole, this does not seem to be the case and the results of the surveys are ambiguous.

If we compare the results of sociological surveys carried out by Ireneusz Krzemiński's team in 1992, 2002 and 2012, we would see that in 1992 Poles with antisemitic attitudes (in the form of modern, political antisemitism) made up seventeen percent of the population. In 2002 their number had risen to twenty-seven percent, to eventually drop to twenty percent in 2012 – still slightly higher than in 1992.⁴⁶ These results, in a country in which Jews form a tiny fraction of the population, show that in spite of the radical transformation of the cultural frames of memory, an increased educational effort, and a generational change, antisemitic beliefs still form an important part of Poland's memandscape and indicate that antisemitism and, in general, the perception of Jews, does not really depend on the stored recollection, but on the dynamic, reconstructive memory work – anámnesis – done with reference to the present concerns, rather than to the past.

On the other hand, in the same time period we have observed a steady growth of anti-antisemitic attitudes: from eight percent in 1992, to fifteen percent in 2002, and to twenty-one percent in 2012, which may indicate a growing polarization of Polish society regarding the attitude toward Jews.⁴⁷ The research by Marek Kucia and his own survey of 2010 shows a similar tendency with a more optimistic conclusion based on the fact that in that year the percentage of those with strong anti-antisemitic feelings (twenty-three percent) exceeded the percentage of strong antisemites in the modern, political sense (twenty-two percent) for the first time since such research was initiated.⁴⁸ This makes the author claim that 'in the last couple of years we

46 Ireneusz Krzemiński, "Uwarunkowania i przemiany postaw antysemitkich," in *Żydzi – problem prawdziwego Polaka. Antysemityzm, ksenofobia i stereotypy narodowe po raz trzeci*, ed. Ireneusz Krzemiński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2015), 24.

47 Krzemiński, "Uwarunkowania i przemiany," 24.

48 Marek Kucia, "Polacy wobec Auschwitz, Zagłady i Żydów w świetle badań socjologicznych z 2010 roku i badań wcześniejszych," in *Antysemityzm, Holokaust, Auschwitz w badaniach społecznych*, ed. Marek Kucia (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011), 28–29.

have become less antisemitic and are increasingly rejecting antisemitism.⁴⁹ This thesis, however, does not take into account the fluctuating nature of antisemitic attitudes and their dependency on contingent factors that do not allow us to speak about a stable tendency.

An important finding of Kucia's research is the surprisingly significant presence of 'post-Holocaust' elements of antisemitic attitudes expressed by respondents. That means that one-fifth of them agreed with the thesis that although the Holocaust was a hideous crime, it is good that it resulted in the riddance of Jews in Poland.⁵⁰ One needs to add that this form of antisemitism also has the highest percentage of opponents (sixty-eight percent), but it is nevertheless an appalling result in a country that experienced the Holocaust. Besides, a striking feature of Polish antisemitism is a relatively high proportion of educated people among the antisemites, which leads Kucia to the conclusion that an increased level of education in Polish society in the last twenty years has not been accompanied by a proportional decrease in antisemitism, and that the education about the Holocaust, introduced in Polish schools at the end of the 1990s, does not produce expected results.⁵¹

In this context it is interesting to compare the results collected by Poland's Center of Public Opinion Research regarding the changing perception of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Polish society. The results are presented in Table 8.1.

TABLE 8.1 *Changing perception of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Polish society.*

Auschwitz is for me predominantly the site of: (%)				
	The suffering of the Polish nation	The Holocaust of the Jews	Other	Difficult to say
2015	45	33	20	2
2005	37	17	43	2
1995	32	18	48	2

SOURCE: CBOS.⁵²

49 Kucia, "Polacy wobec Auschwitz," 31.

50 Kucia, "Polacy wobec Auschwitz," 27.

51 Kucia, "Polacy wobec Auschwitz," 33.

52 CBOS Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, *Auschwitz-Birkenau w pamięci zbiorowej*. Komunikat 11, (Warszawa: CBOS, 2015), 6.

It turns out that in 2015, after twenty years of educational work, radical transformation of the way Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum is presenting the Holocaust, and, generally, a substantial change of the social frame of the Holocaust memory, the percentage of those who identify Auschwitz predominantly with the suffering of the Polish nation had increased. On the other hand, we may also observe an increasing percentage of the answers pointing out the Holocaust of the Jews as the first association with Auschwitz, which indicates that the educational change and transformation of the commemorative environment had yielded some effect. Taking the decreasing figure of those who have different, more universal associations with Auschwitz (for example 'site of the crime against humanity'), we may say that public opinion has become increasingly polarized regarding the issue of the meaning of Auschwitz.

However, the thesis of polarization has been challenged by the 2010 research by Marek Kucia, who allowed respondents to mention more than one association with the word 'Auschwitz.' It turned out that more than 90 percent of those to whom Auschwitz was predominantly the site of Polish suffering, associated Auschwitz also with the Holocaust of the Jews.⁵³ It seems thus that Poles do have relevant knowledge about Auschwitz and the Holocaust and if they set aside the murder of the Jews in their enunciations it is not because of amnesia, repression or ignorance, but as a result of a conscious value-choice to focus on those with whom they identify, the people they call 'we.' Their social memory is increasingly less determined by personal recollection and transgenerational communication; instead, the external cultural frames, including education, impact the way they see the past. However, it is to a larger degree mediated by the imperatives of their attempts to build and protect their identity in difficult times, as well as by the hidden cultural codes that draw the horizon of their particular self-descriptions. Memory, at least in the mode of *anámnesis*, is a function of the social construction of identity. Referring to this concept, I will now try to interpret the increase in antisemitism in the 1990s and the value-choices that make the Holocaust discourse, now fully accessible, only a secondary frame in the interpretation of history.

Factors Influencing Poland's Memoryscape

It seems that although Polish society, liberated from communist control, was exposed to the truth in the new social frames of memory in the decade of the 1990s and in the beginning of the twenty-first century, the information about

53 Kucia, "Polacy wobec Auschwitz," 16.

the Holocaust and the Jews has not been well integrated into the existing cognitive structures.

This has partly been caused by the peculiarity of the process of 'regain-ing' the Jewish memory in Poland, partly by the widespread (especially in the older generation) existential insecurity and the perception of post-communist transformation as a threat to identity, and eventually by the peculiar features of the encounter of the Poles with the globalized Holocaust discourse.

The Progressing Threshold of Shame

The memoryscape of post-communist Poland, in which Jews and the Holocaust reappeared as objects of remembrance and commemoration, has been shaped by a number of public debates that have dominated Poland's intellectual life since the end of the 1980s. The first of them, still limited by the communist control of the media, was initiated by the presentation of Claude Lanzman's *Shoah* on Polish TV in 1985. Although the documentary was generally perceived by the Polish audience as 'tendentious,' it nevertheless constituted the first blow to the Polish mythology of the Second World War and confronted the public with the erased issue of the Holocaust. Two years later, an essay published by Jan Błoński in the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* stirred public opinion and produced a debate about the guilt and responsibility of the Poles as passive witnesses of the Holocaust who did not express compassion and often seemed to be pleased with the Nazi persecutions of the Jews.⁵⁴

The main issue debated in the years 1985–1993 was the conflict over the Carmelite convent on the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, which led to controversies regarding the organization of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the camp in 1995 and the conflict over the presence of the so-called 'Papal cross' in the area formerly designed for the convent.⁵⁵ These disputes did not only expose the incompatibility of the Jewish and Catholic approaches to commemorating the tragedy of Auschwitz, but also society's reluctance to recognize the camp as a symbol for Jewish tragedy, and, consequently, the impropriety of Catholic symbols and practices in this context. Denying the propriety of religious commemoration of the victims was a shock to many Poles, leading to a series of defensive reactions, often involving a specific mixture of traditional, religiously motivated anti-Judaism (Jews as 'enemies of Christianity') and modern antisemitism (Jewish 'anti-Polish conspiracy', depriving the Poles of the right to commemorate the past in the manner accepted by their culture).

54 Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 18 January 1987.

55 Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz. Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

The beginning of the twenty-first century was marked by the publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors* (2000), which revealed to a wider audience that in 1941 the Polish inhabitants of the town of Jedwabne murdered the Jewish inhabitants of the town. This book opened up the most heated debate about Polish-Jewish relations during the time of the Holocaust⁵⁶ and it has been fueled by other books,⁵⁷ with the result that today's Poland is a place where Jews are remembered entirely differently than in the 1990s.⁵⁸

The most striking feature of those debates has been the process, which I would call 'the progressing of the threshold of shame.' Each round of the debate has brought about more severe accusations and revealed more facts, with which it has been increasingly difficult to come to terms. If the general impression after Lanzman's *Shoah* was that some sectors of Polish society (poor, uneducated and corrupted by the time of the war) might have shown lack of compassion for the Jewish tragedy, some of the views, expressed in the 'Błoński debate', have suggested that such an attitude was far more widespread, and that it was not limited to a lack of sensitivity, but included a clear, although passive, support for the persecution of the Jews. The 'Jedwabne debate' revealed that Poles, in certain circumstances (forced or encouraged by the occupying German forces), might have been not only passive supporters of the persecutions but also active perpetrators. Subsequently, in view of the next books by Gross, the Polish readers would have to accept that after 1945 Poles did not need to be forced or encouraged by the Germans to persecute Jews.

The process of advancing the threshold of shame has two contradictory consequences. On the one hand, it has made it easier for the Poles to accept the revelations brought by the subsequent phases of the debate. A new piece of the truth has been easier to digest because of the memory work done previously. On the other hand, the gradual character of the process has also helped to develop defensive reactions. Some of those who have come to terms with the unpleasant information received at a certain stage of the debate and who have done work to revise their views might have been reluctant to accept a new challenge, treating it as an unfair continuation of demands and accusations. The rationalization which has been used in such defensive strategies could be

- 56 Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, ed., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Contested Memories. Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003).
- 57 Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006); Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 58 Piotr Forecki, *Od "Shoah" do "Strachu". Spory o polsko-żydowską przeszłość i pamięć w debatach publicznych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010).

summed up as: 'We did our job; what else do they want?' For the less engaged, the return of the issues previously debated might have been a source of irritation: 'do we need to go through that once again?', resulting in the broader audience shifting away from the debate.

In consequence, the different approaches by Polish people to the past split into critical re-examination of difficult aspects of the Polish-Jewish history and affirmative attitude. The latter is often defensive regarding the results of the critical work and usually intensifies in the periods of social crisis. This split took the form of the antagonistic binary opposition of memories.⁵⁹ Polish debates thus proved unable to develop 'polycentric memory' in the sense advocated by Richard Sennett. This kind of memory requires that the groups involved accept that none of them is at the centre of memory and that the memory process presupposes an interaction between different centres rather than the defense of the fortress of one's own memory. Polycentric memory 'requires a social structure in which people can address others across the boundaries of difference.'⁶⁰ We may argue that such a social structure has not fully emerged in the course of the Polish debates, which have resulted in the fragmentation of memoryscape that continues to deepen, most recently in connection with the historical politics of the new government elected in 2015.

The Holocaust Discourse

The fall of communism meant to Poland the opening of ideas previously blocked by the communist ideology. This included the international Holocaust discourse and coincided with the process of its 'cosmopolitanization' that Levy and Sznajder interpret as part of the effort to establish value-consensus and reorganize international cooperation. 'With the fall of the Iron Curtain ... the Holocaust has provided a political and cultural basis for establishing new sensibilities and solidarities.'⁶¹

In spite of such a practical function, the Holocaust discourse was also part of contemporary postmodern culture and shared its ambiguous status. Our era, on the one hand, is often described as a post-historical period, in which history does not matter the way it did in the past. Nevertheless, contemporary 'amnesiac societies' are believed to develop a 'passion for memory,' which manifests in the growing popularity of commemorative activities and the sites

59 Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism* (Vienna: Department of Political Science, Institute for Advanced Studies, 2000).

60 Richard Sennett, "Disturbing Memories," in *Memory*, ed. Patricia Fara and Karalyn Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22.

61 Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust*, 17–18.

with which they are associated, as well as in the proliferation of literature that evokes the past.⁶²

It seems that Holocaust remembrance shares the fate of other forms of memory in our age: it is omnipresent but its relevance may be called into question. For Eva Hoffman, the memory of the Holocaust is precisely a 'hypermemory' in the postmodern sense of hyperreality, something that makes it in fact a 'secondary amnesia' – the 'kind of amnesia in which the Shoah is in danger not so much of vanishing into forgetfulness as expanding into an increasingly empty referent, a *symbol* of historical horror, an allegory of the Real, the familiar catastrophe and a stand-in for authenticity and for history.'⁶³

This may well be one of the reasons why the Holocaust discourse has not managed to get a strong footing in post-communist Eastern Europe. The reality of the Holocaust, highly mediatized and dramatized through commemorative activities, might seem to the unprepared eye of a Polish spectator as something 'out there,' which does exist in the realm of the mass media or 'big politics,' and which may raise concern, but not for too long, as long as it does not clash with the historical narratives more familiar to the Polish audience, for example religious or nationalist narratives. Moreover, the external character of the Holocaust discourse has contributed to the feeling that the previous historical master narrative, imposed by the communist authorities, is being replaced by another one, again imposed on people who would rather prefer to avoid such impositions.

This feeling has overlapped with the widespread perception that the historical suffering of the non-Jewish East Europeans is not properly recognized in Europe (in opposition to the Jewish one). This specific form of the 'competition of victims' often corresponds with the belief that 'the focus on the Holocaust ... prevents people from investigating or taking equally seriously cases which do not appear to be exactly like it.'⁶⁴

Finally, the Holocaust discourse has contributed to political divide and unrest, augmented by the transformation of social structure. According to Levy and Sznajder, globalization does not mean homogenization of standpoints but rather 'divides each national political culture into several competing worldviews, some of which are more globalized than others. The central

62 Barbara A. Misztal, "The Sacralization of Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 1 (2004): 57.

63 Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge. A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (London: Vintage, 2004), 177.

64 Dan Stone, "Beyond the Mnemosyne Institute: The Future of Memory after the Age of Commemoration," in *The Future of Memory*, ed. Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, Antony Rowland (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 28.

characteristic of the social carriers of global memory is that their personal relationships are determined less by the nation-state than by the world of which it is a part, and this leads them to interpret the world in a different way.⁶⁵ There is also a global elite in Poland today that serves as the social carrier of the Holocaust discourse. The rejection of the Holocaust by those members of society who did not benefit from the transformation process has often taken the form of social resentment, unrelated to the actual content of what has been rejected and directed at the elites that used the Holocaust discourse to critically re-examine Poland's history and its perceptions.

In Defense of Identity

The Polish debates about the country's Jewish past and the reception of the Holocaust discourse occurred in the atmosphere of instability and insecurity that was connected with the social, political and economic transformation. They increased the 'structural trauma,' which was the response of large parts of the post-communist society to the immense change in their lives. The anxieties associated with the structural trauma of the present might sometimes have an impact on the 'historical traumas' experienced in the past and thus contribute to the deflection of memories.⁶⁶ This might be the case of the large sectors of the Polish society in the 1990s: the anxieties of that time set in motion identity-protection mechanisms which largely ruled out the chance of self-critical historical examination and identification with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Instead, Poles preferred to recall a nostalgic image of the past that would bring some comfort into their identity crisis.⁶⁷

In such a context, the attempts of the Polish intellectual elites to face the problem of the Holocaust and to include the memory of the Jews in the collective memory of Polish society did, in the eyes of many Poles, undermine the nostalgic image of the past. The attempts enforced a critical rethinking of identity, rather than the affirmation of its mythologized forms, and have thus been met with distrust. Therefore, the rejection of the Holocaust discourse by large sectors of the Polish society can be interpreted as part of the post-traumatic syndrome, bearing in mind that the trauma in question is rather the structural trauma of the post-communist transformation that evokes the historical trauma of the witnesses of the Holocaust.

65 Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust*, 18.

66 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

67 Piotr Sztompka, "Cultural Trauma. The Other Face of Social Change," *European Journal of Social Theory* 4 (2000): 284.

It is particularly important that the memory of the Holocaust brings into question two crucial features of Polish national identity: the belief that (ethnic) Poles have been the main victims of history in general and of the Second World War in particular, and the belief in national history as the continuous unfolding of the virtues of the (ethnic) Polish nation, against all odds and plots. In the context of the identity crisis that has marked the post-communist transformation of Poland, the nation needed to be re-invented, and the continuity of its past and future had to be re-created. It goes without saying that if the future is to be anticipated with hope, the past must be constructed as a glorious one, at least if we operate within a paradigm of ethnic, particularistic nationalism, and thus the process of the post-communist recovery of memory often means 'rather the defense of a particular selection from among ... facts, one that assures its protagonists of maintaining the roles of hero or victim when faced with any other selection that might assign them a less glorious role.'⁶⁸

Memory as a convenient selection that serves to establish the continuity of past, present and future, and works out the essence of nationhood as unfolding in time, often focuses on the traumas of the past to reassure the pattern of survival which gives hope in overcoming the trauma of the present. This involves the 'construction of a narrative community with the dead' and the pathos of such memory work may sometime legitimate 'expiatory violence.'⁶⁹ It seems that the memory of the Holocaust has been treated by some sectors of Polish society, mostly those affected by the trauma of transformation, as interfering with the Polish memory as the celebration of nationhood (for it has questioned both the heroism of the Poles and their self-proclaimed status as the main victims), which has largely protected it from being included in Poland's memory, in spite of noble efforts, and has divided public opinion, thus leading to the polarization of standpoints revealed by the surveys' results. The time of the transformation is not the most convenient period for a critical re-examination of the past: even if it calls for the revision of mythological views, it is usually a tiny fraction of society that advances critical memory. For the remaining part, threatened in their ontological security, memories serve as trenches and myth as a protection.

68 Tzvetan Todorov, "The Uses and Abuses of Memory," in *What Happens to History. The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought*, ed. Howard Marchitello (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 21.

69 William Outhwaite and Larry Ray, *Social Theory and Postcommunism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 196.

Conclusions

In this text the author employs Memory Studies concepts, such as memoryscape, remembrance, commemoration, *mnéme*, *anámnesis*, social and collective memory in a study of Poland's memory of Jews and the Holocaust, especially in the post-communist period. In result, Steinlauf's historical periodization has been transformed into a sociological typology, in which the period of 1944–1948 is marked by individual remembrance and public commemoration. In the period 1948–1968 individuals still keep the memory of Jews and the Holocaust alive, but they are not publically commemorated until 1956 because of the Marxist orthodoxy. Then, due to the growing nationalism within the communist party, in the period 1968–1989 there is neither remembrance nor commemoration, while after 1989 Jews and the Holocaust are publically commemorated again but with a limited impact on individual remembrance. The author's main task was therefore to explain why, in the post-communist memoryscape of Poland, Jews and the Holocaust are commemorated but not remembered.

To answer this question, the author turns firstly to the way Polish-Jewish prewar coexistence and the Holocaust have been remembered in the mode of *mnéme*, that is according to the perception that it is predominantly the nature of past events that has determining impact on people's future memories. Here the text focuses on the, often antisemitic, social and cultural exclusion of Jews from the prewar Polish community, which lead to the fact that the Holocaust did not affect the identity of the non-Jewish Poles, which in turn accounted for the postwar exclusion of Jews from the 'mnemonic community.' An additional factor was the suffering of the non-Jewish Poles during the Second World War that occluded in their memory the tragedy of the Jews. However, one needs to mention the trauma of witnesses (and sometimes accomplices) of the Holocaust. Although the Holocaust itself did not seem to affect the identity of the non-Jewish Poles, the witnessing of the Holocaust did. Some of the most important and often mythologized features of Polish collective identity might have been subverted by the memory of the Holocaust and thus this memory has been largely erased. Finally, one must refer to the issue of material and social benefits gained by the non-Jewish Poles as a result of the Holocaust. For large segments of postwar Polish society the murder of Jews offered a chance to fill in the gaps in the economic and social space for social advancement. For various reasons such genealogy of the contemporary Polish middle class is usually carefully erased from memories.

A complementary way of answering the main question refers to the circumstances in which the visions of the Jewish-Polish past have been produced, i.e.

to examine memory in the mode of *anámnesis*: a perception that it is mostly the nature of the present of the remembering subject(s) that determines the content of memory. Here the author follows Jeffrey Alexander's social theory of trauma as well as Levy and Sznajder's view on the importance of the Holocaust discourse. The lack of such discourse during and immediately after the war accounts for the lack of adequate recognition of the murder of Jews. Then, when the discourse was already developed, Poland was isolated behind the Iron Curtain and it did not have a significant impact as a factor that organized collective/social memory. Finally, after the collapse of communism Poland was exposed to the globalized version of the Holocaust discourse which contributed to its rejection in large segments of society.

In the post-communist Poland, the Holocaust discourse was often perceived as an instrument of cultural domination that replaced in this function the communist vision of history; moreover, as not corresponding with the need of many Poles to commemorate the (ethnically) Polish victims of Nazism and communism, something they were not allowed to do in communist Poland.

The discourse found, however, its followers among the elites, which contributed to the translation of the conflict of memory into social conflict between the beneficiaries of the neoliberal transformation of Poland's economy and politics on the one hand and, on the other hand, the impoverished sectors of the society. Therefore, the serious debates about Polish-Jewish past launched by intellectuals and artists caused defensive reactions as part of the social cleavage and also due to their internal dynamics presented in the text as the 'progressing threshold of shame.'

From a more general perspective the defensive reaction to the attempts to include Jews and the Holocaust into Poland's memoryscape can be understood as a mechanism of protecting the collective identity, already threatened by the radical social transformation, in which, as in LaCapra's model, structural trauma of the present finds its expression in the historical trauma of the past and the latter hardly accepts competition: in this case in the form of the murdered Jews and their destroyed world. In particular, the memory of having been witnesses of the Holocaust turned out to be incompatible with the mythology of the Polish nation and thus was largely rejected while the memory of Jews has been retained in the form of a, equally mythologized, nostalgic vision of peaceful multiculturalism of the past.

These factors may help to understand why in post-communist Poland, in spite of serious commemorative efforts, intellectual revisions and reformed education, Jews and the Holocaust remain commemorated but not remembered in the social memory of large segments of society. Taking into account the new historical politics of the government elected in 2015, we may predict

that in the near future the official commemoration of Poland's Jewish past will be systematically waning. This politics of memory has been clearly masterminded for those sectors of society, whose existential insecurity recently seems to have been anaesthetized by a mixture of xenophobic nationalism and populist economic programs, thus legitimizing the new rulers. The fact that for the last twenty-five years, various neoliberal governments have not managed to find a better alternative for these sectors is of course important but cannot be analyzed in detail in this paper.

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