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# The Jedwabne Village Green?

## *The Memory and Counter-Memory of the Crime*

SŁAWOMIR KAPRALSKI

This article is a critical response to the views presented in Ewa Wolentarska-Ochman's article, "Collective Remembrance in Jedwabne: Unsettled Memory of World War II in Postcommunist Poland." In particular, it argues that mythological narratives are very far from being a genuine remembrance of what happened in Jedwabne and that it is an oversimplification to oppose the allegedly genuine remembrance of the "insiders" to the manipulation of memory by the "external world." Instead, the article outlines a model of memory inspired by Richard Sennet, in which a genuine memory of a traumatic event is possible only in a de-centered memory space, in which no standpoints are privileged a priori and remembrance becomes possible through the interaction of various perspectives.

The thrust of the argument in Ewa Wolentarska-Ochman's article, "Collective Remembrance in Jedwabne: Unsettled Memory of World War II in Postcommunist Poland," can be summarized as follows: (1) the massacre of Jedwabne's Jews on 10 July 1941 "remained very much alive in local oral tradition" (p. 156) and was a subject of a "genuine communal recollecting" (p. 173); (2) there was a local initiative, which took the form of a "memory project," aiming "to achieve a genuine re-remembering of the tragic events" (p. 173); and (3) the initiative was unsuccessful because of the incorporation of Jedwabne into the national debate, the politicization of the remembrance, and the character of the mass media coverage, which managed "to disturb local remembrance and prevent a genuine rethinking of the past" (p. 175).

I will argue here that there is no convincing evidence to support these claims; that they are based on a rather arguable theoretical foundation; and that they may have troubling ethical implications.

DOES JEDWABNE REMEMBER?

COLLECTIVE MEMORY BETWEEN HISTORY AND MYTH

According to Wolentarska-Ochman, the memory of the 1941 massacre apparently remained in the memory of Jedwabne's inhabitants and has been present in the local discourses. To put it simply: people in Jedwabne remember, talk and "genuinely" recollect the events of 10 July. However, on the basis of the evidence provided by the author, we may say that people in Jedwabne "remember, talk and recollect" only when asked by an outsider such as a journalist or a filmmaker. What is missing here is an account of how Jedwabnians actually communicate about the massacre among themselves when "left alone": in what way they construct their own, local discourse of memory. The author gives an account of a very specific form of memory, which exists among Jedwabnians. It is a mythologized remembrance, a narrative that takes the form of a myth and is associated with "sites of memory": specific places in the town that symbolize the tragedy to the locals. We are thus dealing with two forms of memory: one located in everyday knowledge, the other in the sphere of myth. The existence of the first is doubtful, and the second can hardly be called "genuine" remembrance.

It is striking that according to various recollections of Jedwabne's inhabitants they learned about the events of 1941 in an atmosphere of secrecy, indirectly and only partly. Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, a historian born in Jedwabne to whom Wolentarska-Ochman frequently refers, admits that she learned about the murder when she was in first or second grade, from a fellow pupil who shared with her the "great secret that in Jedwabne Poles burned Jews."<sup>1</sup> Stanisław Michałowski (then chairman of the town council) learned about the crime from a conversation he overheard, but he did not comprehend its meaning at that time. Stanisław Przechodzki (the Jedwabne-born head of the local branch of the Public Health Center) was told about the events by his parents but, as he recalls, they "did not want to tell us everything; they did not want to damage us emotionally." Moreover, that knowledge was not particularly important to them: "I did not," Przechodzki says, "find them [the events of 1941] all that interesting. For most young people here, they were so remote that they seemed to have occurred hundreds of years ago." Michałowski echoes this idea: "I did not identify myself with the events."<sup>2</sup> For both

of them, the “knowledge” of the past became meaningful and important only later in their lives, and not because of the presence of the subject in everyday conversations but because of their personal interest or because of the emergence of the external, public debate in which Jedwabne has been located after the publication of Jan Gross’s book, *Neighbors*. All participants in the discussion organized by the Catholic monthly *Więź* in April 2001, Jedwabne inhabitants themselves, agreed that “[t]hose who live here [in Jedwabne] and come from here will never be the same people that they were a year ago.”<sup>3</sup> If the people of Jedwabne had “genuinely” remembered what had happened in 1941 such a radical change would not have taken place.

Another issue is the gradual disappearance of the “bearers” of memory: those Jedwabnians who indeed remembered and for whom that memory did matter. In some cases this is due to natural reasons, i.e. the witnesses of the crime have passed away. It is significant that at the funeral of one of them, Stanisław Ramotowski, none of the locals, including the priest who gave the customary eulogy summarizing the virtues of the deceased, referred to what Ramotowski had done in July 1941 and later during the war. It was only a Warsaw journalist who reminded the Jedwabnians that it was Ramotowski who, “when some inhabitants of the town were murdering Jews and some others hid so as not to be witnesses to the crime, saved the life of a Jewish family.”<sup>4</sup> It is not that they did not know: they did. But they did not want to remember what they knew for this was a piece of knowledge about themselves that they were not ready to accept. When Kurkowska-Budzan claims that the “murder of the Jews was not unknown” in Jedwabne,<sup>5</sup> it does not mean that it was publicly and meaningfully talked about. It was vague knowledge based on gossip, rumors and overheard conversations; a mixture of remembrance, indifference, amnesia and various defensive rationalizations of what had been remembered. It was a memory without a discourse in which it could be fully expressed: a mute memory, not a “genuine” one.

Those who tried to give this memory a voice are no longer in Jedwabne. Their stories, Bikont comments, do not have a happy ending:

After they started to talk to me, the local society chased them away. I have been traveling [there] to give support to the elderly ladies who were woken up at night by anti-Semitic calls and were afraid

to go out: the Dziedzic family.... Krzysztof Godlewski is no longer the mayor, he works in the US. The Dziedzic family emigrated to the US too.... What a pity that such fantastic, righteous people left Poland.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that not only do Jedwabnians not have a “genuine” memory of what happened but they also resist “memory work,” i.e. the remembrance of 1941 is that segment of local knowledge from which they prefer to disengage. And this is the attitude an anthropologist may understand or even expect: a collective memory of a group, Jack Kugelmass writes, “should be understood less as a thing that can be passed intact from one generation to the next ... than as a continual process of engagement and disengagement, of remembering and forgetting propelled in either direction by overarching social, political, and economic forces.”<sup>7</sup> The people of Jedwabne are no exception: they do not remember events as they happened and do not pass on memories intact to their heirs. What they remember and what they want to pass on depends largely on the “changing equilibria between sets of mental activities,” which, according to Norbert Elias, determine the nature and degree of our involvement-detachment in/from any cognitive process.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to Wolentarska-Ochman, I claim that the genuine memory of the crime in Jedwabne is something that Jedwabne society detaches itself from, and it is only when an external stimulus changes the “equilibria,” when the social framework of their memory changes, can local people, or at least some of them, become involved in the activity of remembering. This of course does not mean that the whole of “Jedwabne” remembers or does not remember. It means that in any form of collective memory, which is a constant coexistence of remembrance and forgetting, there are moments, in which—mainly due to external influences—some people become for some time more involved in remembering than in forgetting. As a rule, though, this is only for a short time.

I have argued that the “genuine” remembrance of the crime in Jedwabne does not exist on the level of Jedwabne’s collective memory, partly because there is no public discourse that would “give voice” to various private recollections, secret remarks and half-repressed images. In this sense the memory that exists in Jedwabne is a “mute” memory, a voiceless remembrance that cannot find cultural expression on the level of group discourse. However, there seems to be a kind of public narrative in which

the inhabitants of Jedwabne can allegedly express their remembrance of the past. This is, according to Wolentarska-Ochman (who actually repeats here the argument of Kurkowska-Budzan), a mythological narrative associated with certain sites in the town (“sites of memory”) where the events described in the legend are believed to have happened. One of those sites, which condenses and symbolizes local memory, is a few square meters of the market square where a mother with a child was murdered in July 1941 and where, after the war, “the weeds between the cobblestones ... grew in the shape of a cross.”<sup>9</sup> Apparently the locals gather there for prayer and it is important for them to determine the exact location of the place. Another “site of memory” in Jedwabne is a pond, in which—according to the local legend—a Jewish man was drowned by his murderers. As the story goes, the Jew in the moment of his death

called out to heaven, “Mary! St. Joseph! Stand by me!” When the perpetrators attempted to pull the corpse out so as to rob it of expected jewelry and clothing, a “real miracle happened,” as people tell it: “the Jew was as naked as God had created him.” Since that time all those who dove into the pond in search of lost Jewish gold met with divine punishment—they all drowned.<sup>10</sup>

These two sites, together with several mythologized stories about punishment and misfortune that became the fate of those active in the murder, constitute for Kurkowska-Budzan the “real” Jedwabne and are juxtaposed to the “symbolic” Jedwabne: the Jedwabne as appropriated by the media, the nationwide commemorative practices and narratives of contrition, centered around the other set of “sites,” i.e. the monument and the barn in which Jews were burned alive.

What is striking in this argument is that the “real” Jedwabne is very much the reality of a myth: the crime has been inserted into a tradition of repeated miracle stories in which immanent justice is reinstituted through the affirmation of the moral order expressed in religious belief. The reality of the crime has been made congruent with the affirmation of faith and thus dissolved in the “hyperreality” of the myth. Now, if this means “real”, then I wonder what word could be used to describe the hypothetical case in which the society of Jedwabne confronts the reality of the crime without mythological help. It seems that we are dealing here

with a reversal in which the word “real” is reserved for that reality which really matters to the locals. While I do agree that this sort of reality actually exists and perhaps deserves its “thick description,” I would hesitate to call it “genuine memory.”

For Wolentarska-Ochman, however, the “two memory sites, with their mythologized narratives of events, enabled the community to express collectively what could only be acknowledged privately. By locating the tragedy in the Christian narrative tradition of the sinful man and punishment by God, the Jedwabnians could work through the tragedy and the two sites could accommodate the community’s feelings of guilt and contrition” (p. 173). Perhaps these feelings could indeed be accommodated in myth, and perhaps the Christian narrative is the only framework in which the locals can conceptualize the meaning of what happened. Perhaps a murdered Jew had to call out to Mary and St. Joseph in the last moment of his life to create a general feeling that murdering him was wrong and that evil had indeed appeared in Jedwabne. Still, I would argue that myth is not “genuine memory”; it merely signifies a belief that certain norms have been transgressed and moral order must be reintroduced by the divine punishment of those guilty. Furthermore, it concerns a symbolic, mythological Jew with no apologies to the real Jews who were murdered, with no attempt to punish real murderers and without a sense of individual or collective responsibility. The evil appeared, was punished and disappeared without a trace and without any real involvement of the town’s inhabitants.

Myth is one of those cultural constructs that give meaning to reality, and from this vantage point one perhaps should not object that the murder becomes in this way meaningful in Jedwabne. However, myth is an exit from history; myth transcends historical reality and operates in the ahistorical realm of meanings, values and symbols. For many, the transcendence of history in search of meaning may too easily turn into an escape from history to avoid difficult questions about the cause, the course and the consequence of the crime. Even such a critical anthropologist of Polish-Jewish relations as Joanna Tokarska-Bakir wants to see an element of rapprochement in the Jedwabne mythologies: “In today’s Jedwabne,” she writes, “truth and conscience appear in disguise, in the hallucinations of dying murderers ... in the stories of God’s punishment they met.... They sneak in through the legends....”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this is the way that truth

and conscience may appear in today's Jedwabne, and perhaps it is good that they appear at all, even if in disguise. However, from the perspective of ethically oriented anthropology, I would expect more emphasis on a possibility that truth and justice appear stripped of symbolic disguises and through the main door of secular public behavior and everyday language, rather than sneaking in, even through powerful legends.

#### THE MEMORY PROJECT

Wolentarska-Ochman argues that there was a “genuine,” local “memory project” in Jedwabne to commemorate the victims of the crime and to work toward reconciliation. This authentic local initiative was interrupted by the “national debate and the extensive media presence in the town,” which “set the town’s inhabitants against the mayor and other individuals prepared to remember through action” (p. 174). To the best of my knowledge, it is rather difficult to use the word “project” here, which suggests a plan of integrated, deliberately prepared activities to be implemented with large popular support, while in fact we are rather dealing with the noble reactions of several people and a bunch of vague ideas, without a clear notion of how to accomplish them, that were conceived, not exactly among the locals, but in the interaction between some members of the town council and external institutions (the Cabinet, the Union of Jewish Religious Congregations).

To give one example: Wolentarska-Ochman mentions that “[o]n the fifty-ninth anniversary of the massacre the Jedwabne mayor, Krzysztof Godlewski, and the chairman of the town council, Stanisław Michałowski, laid a wreath at the site where the Jedwabne Jews had been burnt, bearing the inscription ‘To the murdered inhabitants of Jedwabne of Jewish nationality, in memory and as a warning—[from] society’” (p. 158). This, according to her, indicates that in the summer of 2000, before the national debate allegedly divided the town and caused defensive reactions, there was a genuine wish to remember the tragedy. As a matter of fact, Krzysztof Godlewski later recalled that he and Michałowski went to lay the wreath as the representatives of town’s authorities, but had paid for the flowers with their own money because, as he states, “[w]e somehow got a feeling that the Council would not agree to that expense.”<sup>12</sup>



Another initiative of Godlewski—to name the local school after Antonina Wyrzykowska, a Polish woman who had saved seven Jews during the German occupation of Poland—was also not well received by the Council.<sup>13</sup> In the debate organized by *Więź* in 2001, Godlewski commented on this situation: “The school is not yet ready for it. Remember that the school is an organism consisting of the Teachers’ Council, the Parents’ Committee, and the pupils. The new name cannot be imposed by an administrative decision. Internal changes have to occur first.”<sup>14</sup> To put it simply, the complex organism of the school did not want to have anything in common with the Jews, even in the form of a Polish woman who rescued Jews. We may guess that the “educational program” (that is supposed to be a part of the “memory project”) would have to wait a long time for the “internal changes” mentioned by Godlewski.

Another example of the “project” is that Jedwabne’s parish priest, Father Orłowski, prayed for the victims, “for those who had lost their lives during the war because of the ‘uncontrolled greed of their neighbors’” (p. 158). This was indeed a nice gesture, especially if we take into account the strong anti-Semitism of Father Orłowski. But, first, this is rather an obvious act for a Catholic priest, as Father Orłowski admitted in the discussion organized by *Więź*: “Ever since I became parish priest, I have been praying for all [Jedwabne’s] residents living and dead, regardless of their creed.”<sup>15</sup> Second, the prayer contains a rather arguable interpretation of the main motive of the crime, which may be used to minimize the moral importance of the tragedy. As far as the Jewish cemetery is concerned, in the same discussion Father Orłowski suggested that Jedwabne’s unemployed could tidy up the cemetery if they were paid by the Jewish community. Asked whether the parishioners could perhaps do it for free as a “community gesture,” he replied that “at this moment, that is perhaps impossible.”<sup>16</sup>

What Wolentarska-Ochman calls a “memory project” is perhaps not much more than a dream of the mayor<sup>17</sup> and a couple of ad hoc ideas, which never had broad communal support in Jedwabne, nor any concrete agenda for their implementation. It is a crucial mistake to build on the alleged existence of the “project,” the juxtaposition of the “good” Jedwabne, which authentically remembers, and the “bad” external world, which manipulates the remembrance to achieve political goals. Jedwabne is not a pristine village green, and evil does not always come from the outside.

The very distinction between the “local” (allegedly more authentic) remembrance that apparently might have led to reconciliation and the “ritualized” and highly politicized nationwide commemorative ceremony should be questioned. Even Cardinal Glemp, whose attitude has been rather close to contextualizing Jedwabne, in a radio address of 4 March 2001 echoed the words of Rabbi Schudrich that “the murder of innocent people in Jedwabne was not a local tragedy but the tragedy of the whole world.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, with all due respect to the sensitivities of the local people in Jedwabne, we (and they too) must admit that what happened there in 1941 was not just a local event that could be redeemed by a local act of remembrance, but that the evil of the world had condensed and resurfaced through the cracks in a small Polish town. It was thus a peculiar “localization of evil” that simultaneously transgressed the boundaries of any particular locality.

I use the concept of “localization of evil” to describe the situation in which a concrete name (“Jedwabne” in our case) begins to stand for a whole complex of events—a name that we refer to when we are unable to fully understand or even name the events themselves. Thus, in the case of the Holocaust—the event that makes us voiceless, for which we do not have proper words—we localize its evil by using the names of particular localities, for example “Auschwitz.”<sup>19</sup>

The phenomenon of localization means that the moral questions that Jedwabne forces us to ask cannot be answered in Jedwabne, even if we assume that there has been a common will there to find such answers. The efforts to answer the questions, probably never-ending, must be placed within broader discourses than the local one, which must include the national level and even more general, universal moral discourse. For “Jedwabne,” as noted in the title of Father Stanisław Musiał’s article in the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, is “a new name for the Holocaust.”<sup>20</sup>

Jedwabne is a process of dealing with a wound in the moral consciousness in which the ideas, conceptions and activities of the locals do not seem to have a privileged position. But we can also look upon Jedwabne from the point of view of more mundane theories of collective memory. In the conditions of a contemporary, democratic state we are dealing with the phenomenon of the pluralization of memory and commemorative activities. The construction of a unified public memory by the state is very difficult these days, and any concrete form of commemoration is

a “struggle or negotiation between competing narratives,”<sup>21</sup> in which the local narratives may have a chance. As John Bodnar observes, public memory “emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions.”<sup>22</sup> If the people of Jedwabne had really wanted it, their vernacular would have been included in the form of public memory that the rituals of commemoration created.

On 19 May 2000 a meeting called by Professor Jerzy Holzer, the head of the Institute of Political Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences, took place in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs manor house on Foksal Street in Warsaw. At the meeting, attended by the officials of the Ministerial Committee for Prosecuting Crimes against the Polish Nation, and by journalists and historians, the outcomes of the book by Jan Gross (who also participated in the meeting) were discussed as well as the official strategies to be employed in the expected debate, including various forms of commemoration. The result of the meeting was a list of recommendations, beginning with a postulate that the “active participation of Poles in searching for and revealing the truth of the events in Jedwabne would help the Polish *raison d'état*.” Such activities “would follow the moral imperative and would be an important factor in deepening the historical consciousness of Polish society.”<sup>23</sup>

The participation of the inhabitants of Jedwabne in the commemorative ceremonies was also discussed, as reported in point 5 of the minutes: “One should refer with particular attention and care to the positive involvement of the local community of Jedwabne in the activities aiming to commemorate the tragic events of July 1941.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, there was good will on the “official” side, and if something went wrong as it did, it was not just because of the manipulative official strategy that neglected the local efforts to remember. The strategy was certainly manipulative, as the invocation of *raison d'état* clearly indicates, but in fact this manipulation helped, as far as it could, to reveal the truth and to adopt the appropriate moral standpoint in face of the revealed truth. This could only help the citizens of Jedwabne who, by and large, did not seem ready to undertake the difficult moral and practical task of confronting the 1941 crime. Instead, they preferred not to participate in the official ceremonies at all, not because those ceremonies made the “genuine” local remembrance impossible, but because there was by and large no genuine local wish to remember.

Or, to put it more precisely, the people of Jedwabne did participate in the official ceremonies in a very specific way: they watched them from behind the curtains and blinds on their windows. John Bodnar is right: public memory is a synthesis of official and vernacular cultures. In this case, the vernacular cultural expression was a withdrawal. It is interesting that according to Bodnar it is the official discourse that, as a rule, “promotes a nationalistic, patriotic culture” and presents reality “as it should be” from the point of view of national interests, while the vernacular discourse is more open to the reality of how the past really was.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, public, official culture is usually more prone to manipulations of the kind described by Tzvetan Todorov, who claims that

when we hear appeals to the “duty of memory” or “against forgetting,” most of the time it is not a task of recovering memory we are asked to do ... but rather the defense of a particular selection from among these facts, one that assures its protagonists of maintaining the roles of hero or victim when faced with any other selection that might assign them less glorious role.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of Jedwabne, we seem to be dealing with a role reversal: it is the official discourse that calls for genuine remembrance and the vernacular that resorts to various defensive strategies. And it does not matter that in the official discourse the call for remembrance may stem from a conscious strategy of “improving the image” of the country. Truth may emerge as a result of strategies that have other goals than producing the truth, and lies may well be a result of spontaneous and “authentic” processes that apparently aim at achieving nothing but the truth.

#### US AND THEM

I have argued that Wolentarska-Ochman is wrong to assume that it was the media that divided the town by producing a “bipolar picture” of its inhabitants (p. 161) and that the “insensitive attempts made by intellectual elites to utilize local experiences and efforts to work through the communal past as a means of debating nationwide collective guilt and responsibility can disturb local remembrance and prevent a genuine rethinking of the past”

(pp. 174–75). The problem of Jedwabne is not that the media presented a bipolar picture of it but that its society has been so polarized between a tiny fraction who really want to remember and an indifferent and hostile majority. The “elites,” traditionally blamed for all Polish misfortunes, did their duty, rightly assuming that the crime in Jedwabne was not a local, isolated event but had a universal meaning that called for nationwide debate and a proper place in the official, public discussion.

Wolentarska-Ochman *implicitly* assumes a theoretical paradigm of memory, which Richard Esbenshade calls the “Kundera-paradigm,” referring to the Czech writer who popularized such a vision of memory as describing the situation in the communist states. According to this paradigm, there is a radical gap between the official, state-sponsored memory, which actually tries to erase the authentic (what Wolentarska-Ochman calls “genuine”), unofficial memory of the nation. The latter resists external manipulation and becomes a depository of the truth, of real history as lived through by the real people.<sup>27</sup>

In opposition to the “Kundera-paradigm,” Esbenshade posits the “Konrad-paradigm” (this time using the name of a Hungarian intellectual), according to which “there is no pure, pristine memory beneath the state’s manipulation, for its subjects are caught up in the process and themselves become guilty of mis-remembering; of manipulation of others’ memory.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the collectively remembered past as evoked in the Kundera-paradigm, which opposes the manipulative tendency of the official memory, is a mere fiction.

After 1989, as Esbenshade rightly observes, both “nations” and “states” of East-Central Europe started to conspire together within the Konrad-paradigm in order to present the national pasts in a way that could produce national unity and pride.<sup>29</sup> This has led to the extraction of the most uncomfortable historical moments as not belonging to the “real” history, to the “true” national life. This process has particularly affected the memory of certain episodes of World War II, which become repressed in both the official and vernacular discourses of the past.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it makes little sense to oppose the genuine memory of the village green to the manipulative tendencies of the state, media or elite.

The case of Jedwabne shows, however, that the model presented by Esbenshade simplifies the processes of “memory work.” Since the publication of the famous essay by Jan Błoński, “The Poor Poles Look at the

Ghetto" (1987), Polish elites have become engaged in confronting their uncomfortable past.<sup>31</sup> This confrontation went through several stages, from debating the indifference of many Poles to the fate of the Jews to facing the unpleasant truth that some Poles actually participated in the murder.<sup>32</sup> The Jedwabne debate has been a stage in the process of reclaiming memory from the silence imposed by the Konrad-paradigm, a very important stage, in which issues previously debated by elites only were brought "to the grassroots level."<sup>33</sup> The history of the Polish reexamination of the past shows that there are segments of the official discourse that successfully managed to liberate Poles from the domination of the collusion of state, elites and the people in imposing silences, which indicates the emergence of a new, multicentered pattern of public memory in Poland.

What is the reaction of vernacular discourses to the polyphony of the public memory? Surprisingly, sociological research conducted in Poland shows that the crime in Jedwabne is rather distant to many Poles and that the "mass media debate and the contents related to the ceremony commemorating the 60th anniversary of the crime are not represented in the consciousness of the Poles. The history of Jedwabne seems to be the rejected history."<sup>34</sup> Laurence Weinbaum's optimistic assertion that the problem of Jedwabne has been brought to the grassroots level therefore seems to be exaggerated. A problem "brought to the grassroots level" does not mean that the problem is seriously debated at the grassroots level. Vernacular discourse may defend itself against the unpleasant truth because it may threaten a positive image of the group, and this seems to be precisely the case of the Jedwabne debate and its consequences.

Various strategies may be used within vernacular discourses to defend self-image and the memory associated with it. One of them is the so-called "ultimate attribution error," which describes a process whereby we refer to internal conditions and motivations when "explaining" the positively valued actions of our own group, and to external or contingent factors when dealing with our negative behavior. By contrast, when describing the behavior of other groups we attribute the negative aspects to internal factors, and the positive ones to external influences. Thus, in the case of Jedwabne, Jews, according to widespread belief, "collaborate with the Soviets because they hate the Poles ... and the Poles murder the Jews because they are forced to by the Germans."<sup>35</sup> Wolentarska-Ochman's argument seems to suffer from something dangerously close to the ultimate

attribution error: when the people of Jedwabne remember, it is because they always preserved the memory of the past, which has been passed from one generation to the next. When they do not want to remember, it is because of the media, politicians and elites.

In order to remember well, we all, in Jedwabne and outside, need to eliminate the attribution error from our reasoning. A conscious dialogue between the vernacular and public discourses of memory is indispensable in this process. Some acts of remembrance deal with such painful memories that they resemble the reopening of wounds and, as Richard Sennet claims, “[r]emembering well requires reopening wounds in a particular way, one which people cannot do by themselves; remembering well requires a social structure in which people can address others across the boundaries of difference.”<sup>36</sup> It is only when we relinquish the opposition between “genuine” local memory and “manipulative” public acts of remembrance that we will be able to remember well.

In the psychoanalytic therapy of neurosis, the goal is to make the neurotic person face the burden of the past. But this is not done through an exit from history into the realm of myth, and not through the construction of various defensive visions of history. As Norman O. Brown writes in his classic work, the “method of psychoanalytical therapy is to deepen the historical consciousness of the individual (‘fill up the memory-gaps’) till he awakens from his own history as from a nightmare.”<sup>37</sup> In the “social therapy” of group memories this goal can be accomplished only through “filling up the memory gaps” so that we can understand that we lived through a nightmare. This requires in the first place a synthesis of collective efforts, both inside and outside the group. As the case of Jedwabne indicates, groups who live in the shadow of a crime are not the best therapists of their own memories.

## NOTES

1. Anna Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego* (We from Jedwabne) (Warsaw, 2004), 228.
2. “We Are Different People: A Discussion about Jedwabne in Jedwabne,” in *Thou Shalt Not Kill: Poles on Jedwabne* (Warsaw, 2001), 292–93.
3. Ibid, 293.
4. Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego*, 229.

5. Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, "Imaging Jedwabne: The Symbolic and the Real," *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 1 (137) (2002): 114.
6. Anna Bikont, "Trucizna z Jedwabnego: Rozmowa z Anną Bikont" (A poison from Jedwabne: Conversation with Anna Bikont), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 Sept. 2005, 17.
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