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To cite this article: Jörg Hackmann (2018) Defending the “Good Name” of the Polish Nation: Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015–18, Journal of Genocide Research, 20:4, 587–606, DOI: [10.1080/14623528.2018.1528742](https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2018.1528742)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2018.1528742>



Published online: 14 Nov 2018.



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Defending the “Good Name” of the Polish Nation: Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015–18

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ABSTRACT

Politics of History (*Geschichtspolitik*) has become a major catchword in the Polish public discourse since 2000, when the debate on the wartime murder of the Jews from the town of Jedwabne began. Since then a politicized culture of remembrance has developed in Poland, which is most visible in various new and internationally proclaimed historical museums. Since 2015, the right-wing Polish government has attempted to closely control those institutions that are regarded as crucial for shaping the national remembrance in order to implement a mnemonic policy with the aim of promoting patriotism and defending a positive image of the ethno-linguistically defined Polish nation abroad. This political strategy, however, is not limited to a narrow national vision of Polish heroism and victimhood during World War II, but also tries to connect with the commemoration of Poles as the largest group of the Righteous among the Nations. Three cases are presented and discussed in this text, namely, the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, which came under political pressure even before its inauguration in 2017; the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in South-eastern Poland, which plays a major role in the current Polish government's politics of memory; and the debate on the so-called “Holocaust law” in 2018 with the intention to prosecute the use of the term of “Polish death camps,” also internationally.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 July 2018

Accepted 19 September 2018

KEYWORDS

Poland; World War II; holocaust; remembrance; museum

Polish “politics of history” has risen to international political attention in January 2018, when a revised bill was introduced, which in media outside Poland is mostly referred to as “Holocaust law.”¹ Although this is not the official term – the act defines the tasks of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN²) – there is a seed of truth in such a shortcut, as will be shown below. This act, which met with harsh international criticism, was once again revised end of June 2018. These revisions are part of a broader strategy by the current national-conservative government led by Law and Justice (PiS³) party, which aims to impose nationally as well as internationally a specific vision, how Polish history

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¹ For instance: Alissa Valles, “Scrubbing Poland’s Complicated Past,” *NYR Daily*, 23 March 2018, <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/23/scrubbing-polands-complicated-past/> (accessed 12 July 2018). A website maintained by the Polish Ministry of Justice speaks of the “bill on Holocaust denial,” <https://www.germandeathcampsnotpolish.com> (accessed 5 September 2018).

² Full Polish name: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu.

³ Full Polish name: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość.

shall be publicly presented and commemorated, first of all with regard to World War II and the socialist period. Such a historical or mnemonic policy has been placed high on the political agenda after PiS won the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015, but seen in a broader context, politics of history has been intensively and broadly debated in Poland already since the beginning of the millennium.

This text focuses on three recent aspects of this political notion: The conflict connected to the concept and the exhibition of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, the museum commemorating the Ulma family in Markowa, who was murdered in 1944, because they were hiding Jews on their farmstead, and finally the debate on the revisions of the IPN bill addressed above. These three diverging cases highlight major elements of the Polish government's strategy concerning politics of history: First, to gain control over the public remembrance of World War II by taking over a flagship project of the previous liberal government. Second, a small and remote museum was promoted by the government and the IPN in order to become a showcase of the official vision of World War II, in which ethnic Poles figure as victims and heroes at the same time, but not as collaborators. These two museums were chosen, because they may serve as recent and at the same time opposed examples of a much broader and still developing field of historical museums in Poland.⁴ Third, the bill on the IPN intends to defend the reputation of the Polish nation internationally – this point also shapes the debates on the aforementioned museums. Due to the diverging nature of these cases, the analytical focus highlights different aspects: Regarding the museum in Gdańsk, it is the political struggle for the programme of the museum and the narrative of the permanent exhibition. As for the museum in Markowa, the main focus will be on the museum's narrative regarding the fate of the Jewish population during World War II. The discussion of the "Holocaust bill" addresses the changing stipulations and its national and international effects to date. Such a combination – the foundation of new historical museums, the adaptation of existing ones, and fighting the defamation of Poland abroad has been expressed by Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of PiS, as programmatic ideas in September 2015.⁵

My main argument is that Polish politics of history since the 1990s has covered a wide political spectrum but has become in recent years subsequently dominated by a right-wing discourse closely connect to the PiS government, which aims at defending the "good name" of Poland and the Poles in order to build a new patriotism. These attempts, however, are clearly contested, within the Polish society as well as in international relations.

In order to frame these developments, the term "politics of history" itself needs some explanation. According to Stefan Troebst, the origins of the term date back to the West-German historians' dispute (*Historikerstreit*) of the late 1980s, but has received its current relevance not least through the transfer to the Polish debate.⁶ The semantic

⁴ A full description and analysis of the whole museum landscape and projects cannot be given in this article. For further information on current developments see the list given by Andreas Etges, Irmgard Zündorf, and Paweł Machcewicz. "History and Politics and the Politics of History: Poland and Its Museums of Contemporary History." *International Public History* 1, no. 1 (2018): 1, <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/iph.2018.1.issue-1/iph-2018-0006/iph-2018-0006.xml> (accessed 28 September 2018), and the contribution to the Cultures of History Forum at Jena University, <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de> (accessed 8 August 2018).

⁵ Quotes from a speech by Jarosław Kaczyński in Poznań, 26 September 2015, in Paweł Machcewicz, *Muzeum (Museum)* (Kraków: Znak, 2017), 159–60. The video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8Ggp24Y_G0&frags=pl%2Cwn (accessed 12 July 2018).

⁶ Stefan Troebst, "Geschichtspolitik," *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 4 August 2014, <https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.590.v1>. See also the contributions in Étienne François et al., eds., *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989: Deutschland, Frankreich*

contours, however, are blurred: In the (West) German discourse the notion was predominantly referred to as shaping a democratic political culture that contributes to critical reflections about traditions and legitimacy within a polity. Besides, it is also perceived as the political dimension of collective memory, not least in shaping museums and monuments of national history. In a third perspective history politics is seen as an ideological instrument opposed to critical historical studies. In Poland, historical debates have covered a significant space of public debates for decades, and in its beginnings, the term “politics of history” (in Polish: *polityka historyczna*) referred to critical reflections of national traditions, as the contributions by Anna Wolff-Powęska or Robert Traba show.⁷ Since the early 2000s, the discussion has broadened significantly, but became at the same increasingly contested⁸ over the issue of responsibility for the murdered Jews of Jedwabne. Now the critical approach was dismissed as leading to a history of “disgrace.”⁹ Instead, politics of history has been conceived by Dariusz Gawin and others in a different manner as a means to build Polish reputation in international relations and to reintroduce national history into the public debate, what Wolff-Powęska has called “affirmative patriotism.”¹⁰ In public discourse during the last years *polityka historyczna* has received a narrower meaning of a historical policy sponsored, shaped and propagated by the state.¹¹ Nevertheless, it would be misconceiving to understand the role of history and memory in a society only with a focus on the political instrumentalization of collective memory. Thus, it will be distinguished here between a broader notion that refers to the role of history in Polish society and a narrower understanding of historical or mnemonic policy that is conceptualized by the political spectrum dominated by PiS. A first phase of such a narrow historical policy one may notice in the years between 2004, when the Museum of the Warsaw Rising was opened, and 2007 with the end of the first PiS government. Actually, the rising awareness that a new historical policy in Poland is needed has been described as a lasting achievement of this period,¹² which then received a new boost since 2015.

The institutional core of these debates is the IPN, the Institute of National Remembrance, which after lengthy political struggles effectively only in 2000 emerged from the “General Commission for Research on Fascist Crimes” in Poland established in 1945 for the legal reckoning with war crimes.¹³ For obvious reasons, Soviet crimes could not

und Polen im internationalen Vergleich (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013); Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, “A Theory of the Politics of Memory,” in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7–34.

⁷ Anna Wolff-Powęska, “Polskie spory o historię i pamięć: Polityka historyczna (Polish disputes on history and memory: Politics of History),” *Przegląd Zachodni* 63, no. 1 (2007): 3–44; Robert Traba, *The Past in the Present. The Construction of Polish History* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015).

⁸ See Rafał Stobiecki, “Mimo wszystko w obronie ‘polityki historycznej’ (Nonetheless defending ‘politics of history’),” *Więź* 61, no. 1 (2018): 113–24; Paweł Machciewicz, *Spory o historię 2000–2011* (Disputes on history, 2000–2011) (Kraków: Znak, 2012).

⁹ Andrzej Nowak, “Westerplatte czy Jedwabne (Westerplatte or Jedwabne),” *Rzeczpospolita*, 1 September 2001.

¹⁰ Dariusz Gawin and Paweł Kowal, “Polska Polityka Historyczna (Polish politics of history),” in *Polityka Historyczna: Historycy – Politycy – Prasa*, ed. Agnieszka Panecka (Warszawa: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2005), 11–14; Wolff-Powęska, “Polskie spory,” 30.

¹¹ Jan Grabowski and Dariusz Libionka, “Distorting and Rewriting the History of the Holocaust in Poland. The Case of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews During World War II in Markowa,” *Yad Yashem Studies* 45, no. 1 (2017): 31.

¹² Zdzisław Krasnodebski, “Filozofia III RP czyli od ‘antypolityki’ do ‘postpolityczności’ (The philosophy of the Third Republic or from ‘antipolitics’ to ‘post-politics’),” in *Rzeczpospolita 1989–2009: Zwykłe państwo Polaków?*, ed. Jacek Kłoczowski (Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2009), 25–49.

¹³ Dariusz Stola, “Poland’s Institute of National Remembrance: A Ministry of Memory?,” in *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, ed. Aleksei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest: CEU Press, 2012), 45–58.

be addressed publicly during the Cold War. They were then included after the end of the socialist regime, when the Commission's competences were broadened in 1990 in order to cover "crimes against the Polish nation." With the act on the IPN of 1998, this commission became a department of the IPN. Regarding the Second World War, cultural or symbolical forms of commemoration now clearly prevail in the activities of the IPN, which is in line with international trends.¹⁴

From Past to Memory Politics

After World War II reckoning with the past was, as elsewhere in Europe, first of all a matter of legal coping with war crimes, which Norbert Frei has distinguished as past politics in contrast to memory politics.¹⁵ This distinction also applies to Poland, which lost more than five million of its pre-war population of 35 million citizens, among them more than three million Jews. Although there was no Polish "Quisling," as has been underlined repeatedly, various forms of individual cooperation or collaboration with the Nazi occupation appeared, among them *szmalcownictwo* – the blackmailing of Jews for personal profit.¹⁶ Against the dimensions of genocide and crimes against humanity as well as forms of individual collaboration it is not surprising that the first years after World War II were shaped by a huge number of trials.¹⁷ Partly, incidents of collaboration and blackmailing of Jews or underground activists had been punished already by Polish underground courts during the war. After the war, verdicts as for instance the execution of the Stutthof concentration camp guards in Gdańsk in 1946, or of the Gauleiter of Wartheland, Arthur Greiser, were accompanied by symbolic punishment.

The official commemoration of the Second World War in the People's Republic of Poland then became increasingly ritualized since the years of Stalinism with ideologically one-sided forms, whereas not only taboos like Katyń or the Soviet occupation and annexation of Eastern Poland but also the politically motivated persecution of Polish fighters in the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and other underground groups, who are in recent years called "cursed soldiers," were publicly silenced. Like in the other states under Soviet domination, the official image of World War II was unambiguous: the perpetrators – the Germans, or more precisely, the fascists – were clearly distinguished from victors and heroes – first and foremost the Soviet army – and from victims and martyrs – here the Polish nation. As elsewhere in Europe, the public collective memory, thus, became frozen to rather simple schemes of the good and the bad.¹⁸

¹⁴ See in particular Jan and Aleida Assmanns' reflection on cultural memory: Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–33; and the overview by Monika Flacke, ed., *Mythen der Nationen. 1945: Arena der Erinnerungen*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2004).

¹⁵ Norbert Frei, "From Policy to Memory: How the Federal Republic of Germany Dealt with the Nazi Legacy," in *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jerzy W. Borejsza and Klaus Ziemer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 481–9.

¹⁶ Klaus-Peter Friedrich, "Collaboration in a 'Land without a Quisling': Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 711–46. The term "Szmalcownik" is based on the word "smalec" (lard) from criminal slang meaning bribe. See Jan Grabowski, "Szmalcownicy Warszawscy, 1939–1942 (Warsaw Szmalcowniks, 1939–1942)," *Zeszyty Historyczne* 143 (2003): 85–117.

¹⁷ As comprehensive overview see Włodzimierz Borodziej, "'Hitleristische Verbrechen'. Die Ahndung deutscher Kriegsverbrechen und Besatzungsverbrechen in Polen," in *Transnationale Vergangenheitspolitik: Der Umgang mit deutschen Kriegsverbrechen in Europa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Norbert Frei (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 399–437.

¹⁸ See the seminal essay by Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge

Two issues, however, shaped a specific Polish discourse on World War II: First, the Polish Jews were silently subsumed into the number of Polish victims of fascism, but at the same time excluded from the Polish nation in ethnic terms.¹⁹ This tendency had its roots already before 1939 and finally shaped the antisemitic incidents of March 1968, which drove most of the remaining Polish Jews out of the country. Second, the break within collective memory that followed the end of the Cold War was preceded in socialist Poland by a specific historical discourse within the dissent. The black holes in the Polish picture of World War II as well as the post-war antisemitism became a political argument since the 1970s. In his widely appraised essay “Two Fatherlands, Two Patriotisms”²⁰ of 1981 Jan Józef Lipski criticized Polish xenophobia and megalomania and exposed the mendacity of the public discourse on Jews and Germans in socialist Poland. Underling the fact that not only Christian Poles were victims of the war, but also Polish Jews and even the Germans expelled from historically German territories went hand in hand with dismantling the moral authority of the ruling caste and establishing a civil society independent from official structures. Such an approach Lipski understood as contribution to a critical patriotism in opposition to “national megalomania.” In his discussion of the mutual attitudes between Jewish and Christian Poles he addressed besides the Polish antisemitism also a “Jewish anti-Polonism,” but concluded that neither of them can be attributed to all Poles or all Jews.²¹ The issue of Polish-Jewish relations was also addressed by Jan Błoński in his essay “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto” from 1987.²² This text has to be seen against the background of the controversial international debate provoked by Claude Lanzmann’s film “Shoah” from 1985, whether Poles as bystanders consented to the Holocaust. Błoński reflects on the impact of these reproaches on the “good name” of the Polish society, but concludes that “instead of haggling and justifying ourselves, we should first consider our own faults and weaknesses.”²³

The re-reading of both texts reveals discourse elements that reappear in recent debates of defending the (ethnic) Polish nation and criticizing a Jewish anti-Polonism. What should not be overlooked, however, is the focus on a transnational responsibility that shapes both texts and the political circumstances, in which they were published: The crucial point of this debate before 1989 was first of all establishing an open debate in Poland about contested facts and traumatic experiences during World War II and to reject nationalist – antisemitic and anti-German – tendencies in official politics.

University Press, 2002). On Polish commemoration culture after the war see also Zofia Wóycicka, *Arrested Mourning. Memory of the Nazi Camps in Poland, 1944–1950* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2013).

¹⁹ Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1997), 14–22, 66–70.

²⁰ English version in Robert Kostrzewa, ed., *Between East and West. Writings from Kultura* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 52–71. The Polish text “Dwie ojczyzny – dwa patriotyzmy” was first published in the exile journal *Kultura* in Paris, 1981.

²¹ Lipski, “Two Fatherlands,” 65–6.

²² Jan Błoński, “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto (The poor Poles look at the ghetto)” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1987, no. 2, 11 January 1987, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/biedni-polacy-patrza-na-getto-138324> (accessed 4 August 2018); an English version with an introduction and responds to Błoński in Antony Polonsky, ed. *“My Brother’s Keeper?” Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 1990), 34–52. As instructive overview on the Polish debates and research on the Holocaust see Katrin Stoll, “Conceptualizations of the Holocaust within Polish Historical Discourse,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 44, no. 2 (2016): 147–72.

²³ Quoted from the English translation in Polonsky, *My Brother’s Keeper?*, 45.

The Debate on Jedwabne as Turning Point

Whereas it hardly came as a revelation for Polish society and politics when the Russian government in 1992 acknowledged the Soviet collaboration with Nazi Germany following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact as well as the responsibility of the NKVD for the murders of the Polish officers in Katyń, the turning point towards recent debates can be identified around the year 2000 in two aspects: First, in Jan Tomasz Gross' book on the murder of the Jews of Jedwabne and, second, in the debates on the responsibility for the forced resettlement of the German population against the initiative of establishing a central German place of commemoration, which was first promoted as "Centre against Expulsions (*Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen*)."

Gross' book was first published in November 2000 by a cultural association on the eastern Polish periphery in Sejny, which with much emphasis promotes the multicultural legacy of the region.²⁴ The impact of Gross' book was not so much shaped by the facts themselves, which had been dealt with already in testimonies and trials between 1948 and 1954, and were also addressed in a documentary film by Agnieszka Arnold "Where is my elder son Cain" from 1999. On the contrary, the dominating impact was Gross' moral and political impetus in exposing Polish antisemitism, when he spoke about "the slow dawning of Polish awareness of this horrendous crime" and saw in the public debate "a great chance for the shaping of a Polish identity that is no longer built on lies, ignorance and the suppression of uncomfortable truths."²⁵ Gross' facts and arguments have been addressed many times in Polish as well as international debates. Even if Gross gave a higher number of victims, the basic fact that at least 340 Jews were killed in the town of Jedwabne on 10 July 1941 in unquestioned. There is also evidence that similar incidents took place at the same time in neighbouring towns in the vicinity of the district town of Łomża, as for instance in Radziłów, documented by Anna Bikont.²⁶ What is relevant here are the consequences for Polish history and memory politics. The legal inquiry of responsibility for the murders of Jedwabne became the first major task of the newly established IPN. The criminal and historical investigations after sixty years, however, could not exactly identify anymore the perpetrators, but concluded that approximately forty Polish men were actively involved in the killings, which were not carried out spontaneously but had been planned in advance.²⁷

Since then, three major explanations of the murders of Jedwabne prevail: First, that responsibility has to be seen within the Polish society, as the Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski expressed during the ceremony on the fiftieth anniversary of the murders on 10 July 2001, when a new memorial stone replaced the old one from the 1960s, which

²⁴ Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000); English edition: Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Quotations from Gross, *Neighbors*, 22, and an interview with Helga Hirsch, "Befreiende Wahrheit," *Die Zeit*, 19 April 2001, 43–4.

²⁶ Anna Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego* (We from Jedwabne) (Warszawa: Prószyński, 2004); English version: Anna Bikont, *The Crime and the Silence. A Quest for the Truth of a Wartime Massacre* (London: Windmill Books, 2016); Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Around Jedwabne), 2 vols. (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002). Vol 1: *Studia*.

²⁷ The final report: "Postanowienie o umorzeniu śledztwa w sprawie zabójstwa obywateli polskich narodowości żydowskiej w Jedwabnem w dniu 10 lipca 1941 r. (Decision on the suspension of the investigation in the case of the murder of Polish citizens of Jewish nationality in Jedwabne on 10 July 1941)" is available at <https://ipn.gov.pl/download/1/66231/SledztwowsprawiezaboojstwawJedwabnem.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2018).

named Gestapo and Nazi policemen as perpetrators. Second, Adam Michnik rejected the connection between the murders and a general Polish antisemitism and tried to maintain the image of the Pole being an “innocent and noble victim of foreign violence and intrigue” by Hitler and Stalin alike.²⁸ And third, some historians upheld the thesis of ascribing the responsibility solely to the Germans, which in 2016 was repeated by the current director of IPN, Jarosław Szarek, although the final report of the criminal investigation of the same institution rejected this hypothesis. Remarkable in these debates is that the European dimension of collaboration and resistance as well as the request of a critical reckoning with the Polish past has hardly been addressed.²⁹ The symbolic meaning of Jedwabne for the Polish debate on World War II, however, was paramount. As Joanna Michlic stated, Jedwabne on the one hand, “has become the key symbol of the counter-memory of the old, hegemonic, biased narratives of the Holocaust promulgated between 1945 and 1990s.” On the other hand, Jedwabne has been regarded by the critics of Jan Gross as embodiment of “‘all the lies voiced against the Polish nation,’ and is understood as the ‘central attack’ on Polishness, Polish values and traditions, and Polish identity.”³⁰ In this context, Jedwabne has been repeatedly addressed as core feature of a “pedagogy of disgrace” (*pedagogika wstydu*).³¹

Politics of History in the Aftermath of Jedwabne

Whereas the debate on Jedwabne addressed Polish-Jewish relations and responsibility of Christian Poles for the fate of Polish Jews, the debate on the Centre against Expulsions focused on German-Polish relations and the issue of forced migration of the German population from previous East Germany. The idea for such a German centre was launched by the German Federation of Expellees (*Bund der Vertriebenen* – BdV) in spring 2000. Issues that were critically perceived in Poland and the Czech Republic were in particular the attempt to hold Czechs and Poles responsible for expelling the Germans, based on their respective nationalisms.³² Furthermore, expellee organizations tried to combine their past political interests with vetoing the EU accession of Poland and the Czech Republic. During these debates, some German and Polish voices argued that the place for such a centre that commemorates the consequences and aftermath of World War II should be placed in Wrocław – the former German city of Breslau – as an example, how the conflict over the expulsions had turned into reconciliation.³³ Meanwhile, names and

²⁸ Adam Michnik, “Poles and the Jews: How Deep the Guilt?” *New York Times*, 17 March 2001, reprinted in Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, eds., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 434–9.

²⁹ One of the few voices was the Janusz Majcherek in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 25 March 2001, here following Ruth Henning, ed., *Die “Jedwabne-Debatte” in polnischen Zeitungen und Zeitschriften* (Potsdam: Deutsch-Polnische Gesellschaft Brandenburg, 2001), 206–10. I have discussed this aspect in Jörg Hackmann, “From National Victims to Transnational Bystanders? The Changing Commemoration of World War II in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Constellations* 16, no. 1 (2009): 167–81.

³⁰ Joanna Beata Michlic, “‘At the Crossroads’: Jedwabne and Polish Historiography of the Holocaust,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 31, no. 3 (2017): 297, 299.

³¹ Examples are given by Rafał Pankowski, “The Resurgence of Antisemitic Discourse in Poland,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2018): 36.

³² As historiographical foundation of this notion see Michael Schwartz, *Ethnische “Säuberungen” in der Moderne: Globale Wechselwirkungen nationalistischer und rassistischer Gewaltpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013).

³³ On the concept of the BdV and the accompanying debate see the documentation in Peter Haslinger, K. Erik Franzen, and Martin Schulze Wessel, eds., *Diskurse über Zwangsmigrationen in Zentraleuropa. Geschichtspolitik, Fachdebatten*,

plans for this centre have changed several times, a documentation centre will now be established in Berlin without the initially intended collaboration with Polish and Czech experts. The idea of an international cooperation on these issues was transformed into a rather loose “European Network Remembrance and Solidarity,” operating in Warsaw.³⁴

An impulse on the Polish debates of commemorating World War II that is hard to overestimate was given by the Warsaw Rising Museum, which has become a major landmark in shaping affirmative politics of history. The final museum project was initiated by the then City President of Warsaw, Lech Kaczyński, twin brother of Jarosław Kaczyński, in 2003 and the museum was opened after a very short period of planning and transforming a former power station into a museum on the sixtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Rising in 2004. The museum became immediately a very popular site with approximately half a million visitors per year.³⁵ Main features of the exhibition are re-creating the atmosphere so that the visitor will relive the uprising. Focusing on individual fates shall stimulate identification with the fighters, not least among younger visitors. Finally, a central monument complex in the museum contributes to a sacralization of the fighters.³⁶ As addressed above, the museum has been promoted as a core element of national-conservative politics of history. Reviews of the exhibition have noted that the museum leaves no space for critical reflection, and in addition it spreads an ethnic notion of the Polish nation, for instance when Polish Jews are othered in the exhibition as belonging to “different nationalities” that fought in the uprising.³⁷ A contrary notion on Polish history in a similar successful museum project has been developed by Polin, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, established in 2005 and inaugurated in 2014. The central notion is to display a thousand years of Jewish history in Poland as an integral element of Polish history and not look at it only through the prism of antisemitism and genocide.³⁸ These short remarks shall underline that the spectrum of visions on Polish history and collective memory is much broader than the focus on the official policy of memory since 2015, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Museum of the Second World War

Gdańsk has been throughout the twentieth century a highly symbolic place in Polish collective memory, due to the beginning of the Second World War with the German attack on the Polish garrison at Westerplatte as well as to the success of the Solidarity movement in

literarisches und lokales Erinnern seit 1989 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008), 287–308. See also Jan M. Piskorski, *Vertreibung und deutsch-polnische Geschichte: Eine Streitschrift* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2005).

³⁴ Website: <http://www.enrs.eu> (accessed 8 August 2018).

³⁵ Paweł Ukielski, “Das ‘Museum des Warschauer Aufstands’ als Erinnerungsort,” in *Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa: Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit und Perspektiven*, ed. Matthias Weber et al. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011), 211–18.

³⁶ Monika Heinemann, “Das Museum des Warschauer Aufstands,” in *Zeitgeschichte-online*, July 2014, <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/geschichtskultur/das-museum-des-warschauer-aufstands> (accessed 8 August 2018); Monika Żychlińska, “Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego jako wehikuł polskiej pamięci zbiorowej (The Warsaw Rising Museum as a vehicle of Polish collective memory),” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 53, no. 3 (2009): 89–114.

³⁷ Cf. the text on the Warsaw Rising on <https://www.1944.pl/artukul/powstanie-warszawskie,4736.html> (accessed 8 August 2018).

³⁸ Websites: <https://www.1944.pl> and <http://www.polin.pl> (accessed 8 August 2018). On Polin see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Inside the Museum: Curating between Hope and Despair: Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 45, no. 2–3 (2015): 215–35; Zofia Woycicka, “1,000 Years in a Museum. The History of Polish Jews,” *Osteuropa* 58, nos. 8–10 (2008): 239–46; and the catalogue: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Antony Polonsky, eds. *Polin: 1000 Year History of Polish Jews* (Warsaw: Museum of the History of the Polish Jews, 2014).

1980, which since 2007 is addressed by the “European Solidarity Centre.”³⁹ First ideas for a museum of World War II in Gdańsk emerged in 2007 against the background of the German-Polish dispute on the German Centre against Expulsions, addressed above. Against such tendencies, a new museum in Gdańsk focusing on the fate of the Poles and other nations in East Central Europe proved to be a viable Polish alternative, as Paweł Machewicz, the first director of the museum, argued in his book that was published after he was removed from his position.⁴⁰ In fact, the museum was from its beginning a political project of the liberal government of Donald Tusk. The programmatic paper by Paweł Machewicz and Piotr M. Majewski, in which they outlined the concept of the museum in 2008, however, does not refer to the Polish-German controversy on expulsions. Instead, the authors argue that such a museum is missing in the Polish museum landscape.⁴¹ In fact, one may notice an implicit distancing from the Warsaw Rising Museum, when the authors write:

We do not intend to create a museum of the martyrology of the Polish nation or a museum that praises the Polish armed forces, but an institution with a universal transmission, in which events that took place in Poland will be only one part of a broader picture.⁴²

Apart from this international orientation, the pivot of the narration should be the fate of civilians, soldiers and POWs, although the further description goes beyond a focus on everyday life during the war. In methodological terms, there are, however, close connections to the Warsaw Rising Museum, when a stringent narration, reconstructions and the prism of individual perspectives are mentioned.⁴³ After the museum was officially founded in December 2008, it became immediately object of criticism by national-conservative voices, claiming that there would be too little on Poland and on Polish heroism, and the idea to put a stress on the fate of the civilian population was rejected as “socialist-type pacifism.” Furthermore, the idea of a European perspective on World War II was dismissed as serving the intentions of the BdV.⁴⁴

The museum was placed in an expressive new building with slanted walls in proximity to the centre of the historic city. The exhibition, as it was opened in early 2017, consists of three major parts, the way towards the war, the horror of the war and the long shadow of the war. A section on everyday life is placed in the connecting hallway. As announced in the conceptual paper, the idea was to develop a holistic approach towards the history of the Second World War. In the section on war horror, an attempt is made to integrate the Holocaust into a general depiction of mass killings and to include underrepresented victims as Soviet POWs and the mentally ill.⁴⁵ In contrast, the military aspect with

³⁹ Website: <https://www.ecs.gda.pl> (accessed 8 August 2018).

⁴⁰ Machewicz, *Muzeum*, 11–21.

⁴¹ Paweł Machewicz and Piotr M. Majewski, “Muzeum II Wojny Światowej. Zarys Koncepcji Programowej (The Museum of the Second World War. Outlines of the concept),” *Przegląd Polityczny* 91–92 (2008): 46; in the same issue, 52–62, there is also a discussion on this project.

⁴² Machewicz and Majewski, “Muzeum II Wojny Światowej,” 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁴ The criticism is described in detail by Machewicz, *Muzeum*, 27–44; and Daniel Logemann, “On ‘Polish History’: Disputes over the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk,” *Cultures of History Forum*, 21 March 2017, <http://www.culture-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/poland/on-polish-history-disputes-over-the-museum-of-the-second-world-war-in-gdansk/> (accessed 3 July 2018).

⁴⁵ Paweł Machewicz, “Po co mam Muzeum II Wojny Światowej? (Why we need the Museum of the Second World War),” in *Muzeum II Wojny Światowej. Katalog wystawy głównej*, ed. Rafał Wnuk et al. (Gdańsk: Muzeum II Wojny Światowej, 2016), 7–13.

battles and war technology is not in the foreground, although military objects constitute an important part of the collected artefacts.

From its beginnings the museum also set up an international programme committee including leading scholars on twentieth-century European history.⁴⁶ This fact became relevant when conflicts around the museum exploded after the victory of the PiS party in presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015. As mentioned above, the party leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, had already before announced a “determined historical policy,”⁴⁷ with special attention to the Gdańsk museum. From that time onwards, the main goal of the new government was to get control over the museum project with various attempts to dismiss the director and to prevent the exhibition from being inaugurated. Major reproaches were that there was too much about victims, but too little about Polish heroism, and the museum staff was accused of providing “disgraceful anti-polish” activities.⁴⁸

The struggle for the museum culminated, when it was announced in April 2016 that it should be connected to a newly established Museum of Westerplatte. Actually, there were already plans for a museum at this important lieu de memoire of the beginning of World War II, and in the project by Machcewicz and Majewski it was to be connected to the Museum of the Second World War. In the situation of spring 2016, however, the intention of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliński, was to use it as a means to exchange the directorate. The merging of the museums, however, was postponed due to a dispute about the donation of the plot for the Museum of the Second World War by the city of Gdańsk, and in this situation, the direction of the museum tried to finish the exhibition and open the museum to the public as quickly as possible. International support came from Timothy Snyder among others, who also appealed together with Andrzej Nowak, a leading conservative Polish historian, to have the museum opened.⁴⁹ As a result, a lengthy legal battle emerged, concentrating on the legal status of the museum and the position of the director.⁵⁰ After a race against time, the museum unofficially opened its doors end of January 2017 for a preview and was almost silently inaugurated on 23 March. Two weeks later, a court decision finally enabled the merging with the Westerplatte museum and thus provided the formal reason for the appointment of a new director and the dismissal of Machcewicz as director by the minister of culture. Further leading members of the museum staff as deputy director Majewski and Rafał Wnuk, the head of the research department, were forced to leave, shortly thereafter.

Reviews of the exhibition and its concept have been vastly positive. They highlight not only the attempt of giving an overall picture of the war including the Holocaust, but also of stimulating reflections on human behaviour in war times. Andrzej Hoja argues that the site

⁴⁶ See the Annual Report of the Museum for 2012: Among the members of the committee were Norman Davies, Ulrich Herbert, Krzysztof Pomian, Henry Rousso and Timothy Snyder.

⁴⁷ Machcewicz, *Muzeum*, 159.

⁴⁸ See the assessment of the exhibition project “Muzeum II Wojny Światowej. Analiza Piotra Semki (Museum of the Second World War. Analysis by Piotr Semka),” *Rzeczpospolita*, 11 August 2016, and the reply to the criticism: Paweł Machcewicz and Rafał Wnuk, “Muzeum zwykłych ludzi (Museum of normal people),” *Rzeczpospolita*, 7 August 2016. Quotation from the article by Machcewicz and Wnuk.

⁴⁹ Their letter is quoted in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 August 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,20541723,prof-andrzej-nowak-i-timothy-snyder-bronia-muzeum-ii-wojny.html> (accessed 15 July 2018).

⁵⁰ As descriptions of the conflict see: Timothy Snyder, “Poland vs. History,” *New York Review of Books*, 3 May 2016; Florian Peters, “Remaking Polish National History: Reenactment over Reflection,” *Cultures of History Forum*, 3 October 2016, <http://www.culture-of-history.uni-jena.de//politics/poland/remaking-polish-national-history-reenactment-over-reflection/>; Daniel Logemann, “On ‘Polish History.’”

of the museum in Gdańsk, its building and the narration of the exhibition precisely fit together and convey a convincing message.⁵¹ According to Joachim von Puttkamer the museum demonstrates that a European memory of the war is possible without ignoring the moral categories, an issue that critics of the museum deny.⁵² Anne Müller and Daniel Logemann, who both worked as curators of parts of the exhibition, conclude that the comparative approach of the museum “help to illustrate that moral ambiguities and blurred lines between the good, bad, and indifferent are universal.” Thus, the museum could urge “visitors to reflect on their own national histories and their claims to innocence.”⁵³ Under the new director, who came from the local IPN branch and did not have an international expertise nor publications on World War II, but a focus on the “cursed soldiers,” a new direction towards a Polish re-nationalization of the exhibition and exposing the Polish martyrology of being bravely fighting victims of Germany and the Soviet Union is evident.⁵⁴ Although ongoing legal battles on the copyright of the exhibition and public protest aim at preserving the exhibition in its entirety, several changes were introduced until December 2017. Priority was given to exchanging the film at the exhibition’s exit. Whereas the original one pointed with segments from newsreels at the consequences of World War II as well as to contemporary wars (including Donbass and Syria), the new film titled “The invincibles” was produced by the IPN with the inadequate aesthetics of a computer war game. It highlights Polish heroism, which finally leads to the collapse of the iron curtain in an apocalypse-like image. Building Polish patriotism is also underlying further changes to the exhibition that were carried out so far. Now national martyrs like Maksymilian Kolbe and Witold Pilecki are exposed, and the issue of Poles murdering Jews during the war, which is addressed by displaying keys of the Jewish victims from Jedwabne, is contrasted with pointing at the Polish Righteous among the Nations and the fate of the Ulma family, which will be addressed in the next section.

Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II

The rather small museum is situated in the village of Markowa in the Podkarpacie region in South-eastern Poland and based on the fate of the Ulma Family.⁵⁵ In March 1944 the couple and their six children were shot by members of the so-called “blue police,” the

⁵¹ Andrzej Hoja, “An Engaged Narrative: the Permanent Exhibition of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk,” in *Cultures of History Forum* (24 July 2017), <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/poland/an-engaged-narrative-the-permanent-exhibition-of-the-museum-of-the-second-world-war-in-gdansk/> (accessed 8 August 2018). See also Zofia Wóycicka, “Das Museum des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Danzig,” *Historie* 11 (2017/2018): 78–91.

⁵² Joachim von Puttkamer, “Europäisch und polnisch zugleich: Das Museum des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Danzig,” *Osteuropa* 67, nos. 1–2 (2017): 12.

⁵³ Anna Müller and Daniel Logemann, “War, Dialogue, and Overcoming the Past: The Second World War Museum in Gdańsk, Poland,” *The Public Historian* 39, no. 3 (2017): 93.

⁵⁴ My request to the direction of the museum to explain their new strategy remained unanswered. There are, however, voices as by the historian Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, a member of the new museum council, which no longer includes international experts, to fully change the exhibition, see: “Postmoderna precz z muzeum (Away with postmodernism from the museum),” *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 31 August 2018, <https://www.tysol.pl/a22250--Tylko-u-nas-Marek-Jan-Chodakiewicz-Postmoderna-precz-z-muzeum> (accessed 12 August 2018); see also: “Prof. Chodakiewicz: Ekspozycję Muzeum II Wojny Światowej trzeba w całości wymienić! (Professor Chodakiewicz: The exhibition of the Museum of the Second World War must be changed entirely),” <https://nczas.com/2018/06/20/tylko-u-nas-prof-chodakiewicz-ekspozycje-muzeum-ii-wojny-swiatowej-trzeba-w-calosci-wymienic/> (accessed 12 August 2018). For the position of the former director see Etges, Zündorf, and Machcewicz. “History and Politics,” 2–6.

⁵⁵ As critical assessment see Grabowski and Libionka, “Distorting and Rewriting,” 29–60; more positively: Florian Peters, “Towards a Balanced Tribute to the Polish Righteous? The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in Markowa,” *Cultures of History Forum*, 8 December 2016, <http://www.culture-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/poland/towards->

Polish Police in the General Government, together with eight members of the Jewish Goldman family,⁵⁶ who had been hiding themselves on the farmstead. In 1995, Józef and Wiktoria Ulma were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous among the Nations.⁵⁷ Some years later, a regional initiative for the beatification of the Ulma family as well as for a monument was launched, with the project for a museum of Poles saving Jews in the Podkarpacie region following in 2007. When the foundation stone for the museum was laid in 2013, the vice marshal of the Polish Sejm was as highest politician present. The political attention changed significantly since 2015, when the scope of the museum was expanded towards all of Poland by dropping the regional limitation in its name.⁵⁸ The museum was inaugurated in March 2016, with the participation of the Polish President Andrzej Duda, who declared that the museum was “urgently needed by Poland, also in terms of historical fairness.” According to him the village is “a grand place for the history of the Republic of Poland for it manifestly exemplifies why we a[s] Polish people can feel worthy.”⁵⁹ In this perspective, the individual fate steps back behind its relevance for the whole Polish society, a tendency which Joanna Michlic had already observed for the socialist period, when “the subject of rescuers was usually brought up ... predominantly to defend the good name of Poles and to silence any commentary depicting Poles in a bad light.”⁶⁰

The museum building is based on a minimalist design by Nizio architects from Warsaw, who are involved in many current museum projects in Poland. Since the opening the museum, which until 2017 was operated as a branch of the regional museum in Łańcut, has been visited by more than 95,000 people,⁶¹ which given to its remote location is a remarkable figure. Inside, the small museum displays a glass cube with the size of the not preserved hut of the Ulma family, which is filled with some original artefacts, whereas the rest of the exhibition hall contains mostly – often not easily readable – documents and video screens on black metal plates in front of concrete walls. Outside the museum is surrounded by various commemorative elements: a wall with names of Christian Poles hiding Jewish Poles in the region, illuminated glass plaques in the concrete plates in front of the museum with names of persons who were killed for helping Jews,

a-balanced-tribute-to-the-polish-righteous-the-ulma-family-museum-of-poles-saving-jews-in-markowa/ (accessed 12 July 2018).

⁵⁶ Information on the Jewish victims are partly contradictory, see: Mateusz Szpytma, “Zbrodnie na ludności żydowskiej w Markowej w 1942 roku w kontekście postępowań karnych z lat 1949–1954 (Crimes against the Jewish population in Markowa in 1942 in the context of criminal prosecutions, 1948–1954,” *Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u* 40 (2014): 12.

⁵⁷ “The Righteous among the Nations: Ulma Family,” <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4035390> (accessed 12 July 2018). The history of the Ulma family is told in many publications by Mateusz Szpytma, who was one of initiators of the museum and has now advanced to the position of a deputy director of the IPN. As English publication see: Mateusz Szpytma, *The Risk of Survival: The Rescue of the Jews by the Poles and the Tragic Consequences for the Ulma Family from Markowa* (Warszawa, Kraków: IPN, 2009). More detailed: idem, *Sprawiedliwi i ich świat: Markowa w fotografii Józefa Ulmy (Righteous and their world: Markowa in photographs of Joseph Ulma)*, 2nd ed. (Kraków: IPN, 2015), 15–34.

⁵⁸ According to the documentation by the Muzeum w Łańcut: “Muzeum Polaków Ratujących Żydów podczas II wojny światowej im. Rodziny Ulmów w Markowej (Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa),” <https://www.zamek-lancut.pl/upload/muall.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2018).

⁵⁹ “Address by the President of Poland at the opening ceremony of the Ulms Family Museum,” 17 March 2016, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,123,address-by-the-president-of-poland-at-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-ulms-family-museum-html> (accessed 15 July 2018).

⁶⁰ Michlic, “At the Crossroads,” 301.

⁶¹ Data of until July 2018, according to information by the director of the museum, obtained 7 August 2018. On the design, see Mirosław Nizio, “Muzeum-symbol w unikatowej bryle (Museum – symbol in a unique form),” <http://buildercorp.pl/2017/08/14/muzeum-symbol-w-unikatowej-bryle> (accessed 12 August 2018).

a monument to the Ulma family, and in addition an “orchard of remembrance,” in which the names of all places are mentioned, where the Polish Righteous had been living. In that perspective, the symbolical meaning of the museum is clearly dominating over the narration of the complex history of the years 1941 to 1944 in the region. As in other parts of the General Government that have been subject of intensive research,⁶² this is a history of hunting and killing Jews with great brutality. Those Jews, who managed to escape from being caught in round-ups, were seeking shelter mostly in and around villages and often faced blackmailing, threatening, and betrayal. Being denounced also was a danger for those offering shelter. Furthermore, Jews partly sought shelter even with persons, who had already delivered Jews to the Gestapo or committed murders.⁶³

Given the limited space and little number of artefacts, the museum operates first of all with texts and audiovisual material. When carefully going through the documents and the publications, the complexity of the situation can be partly perceived, not least in video interviews with eye witnesses, but the general image that the exhibition conveys is a history of innocent Polish martyrs with the religious implication of beatification. The stress clearly is on producing empathy and not on explaining the complexity of the case. This implies that the issue of *szmalcownictwo* or incidents, in which Poles were accused of killing Jews – as mentioned in the Yad Vashem database concerning the Ulma family⁶⁴ – are hard to detect. In fact, a document with the justification of a court judgment from 1952 is presented in the exhibition, although it is difficult to detect because the visitor has to pull out the text on single plates out from the wall. Based on the testimony of a surviving Jewish inhabitant of a neighbouring village, several inhabitants of Markowa were accused of hunting and murdering Jews in 1942. As Grabowski and Libionka argue, the conclusion that none of the accused was sentenced needs a careful interpretation.⁶⁵ As presented in the exhibition, however, the justification rather serves the argument of presenting the Christian inhabitants as innocent. In the case of the Ulma family, the policeman who presumably gave the hint to the hidden Jews, is questioned to be a Pole, because he was Greek Catholic.⁶⁶ The image of Poles helping Jews, where the others – German and Ukrainians – did not hide Jews, is also displayed on a map marking places in the Podkarpackie region where Jews had been hidden. The fact that it shows hardly any marks in those parts of the region with a Ukrainian majority, suggests a distorted picture that the Greek Catholic population did not participate in saving Jews. Furthermore, Jewish agency is hardly addressed in the exhibition, and the Jews of Markowa remain largely in the shadow.

On the contrary, the main stress of the museum is on the Polish role among the Righteous among the Nations, not least directed to an international auditory with support by

⁶² Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, eds., *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Night without an end: The fate of Jews in selected counties of occupied Poland) (Warszawa: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2018); Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd. Połowanie na Żydów 1942–1945: Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* (Judenjagd. The hunt for Jews 1942–1945: A study of one county) (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011); Dariusz Libionka, *Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie: Zarys problematyki* (The extermination of Jews in the General Government: Outlines of the problem) (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2017).

⁶³ Grabowski and Libionka, “Distorting and Rewriting,” 46.

⁶⁴ See above and also Jan Grabowski in an interview with Adam Leszczyński, “Na likwidację Żydów pojechałem. Kowalski Jan (I went for the liquidation of Jews. Kowalski Jan),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 July 2016: A testimony claims that on the next day following the killings at the Ulma farmstead 24 Jews have been killed by the peasants in panic, because they feared further raids.

⁶⁵ Grabowski and Libionka, “Distorting and Rewriting,” 41–2, 53–4.

⁶⁶ Szpytma, *Risk*, 77.

the Polish government, which organized several high-ranking political events at the museum, including a meeting of the Visegrád group in 2016. Beginning of February 2018, after the amendment to the IPN bill was passed, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki invited foreign journalists to a visit of the museum. Furthermore, Morawiecki demanded that the whole Polish nation deserves a tree in Yad Vashem. Such a national interpretation however was rejected by Irena Steinfeldt from Yad Vashem, explaining that Yad Vashem grants the title of the Righteous individually, not by nationality.⁶⁷

The opening of the museum was accompanied by a critical international discussion, whether the rescuing of Jews can be regarded as typical or whether it has to be regarded as an exemption.⁶⁸ Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski in their recent research estimate that two thirds of the Jews seeking shelter were killed and that “considerable and identifiable groups of the Polish population ... directly or indirectly contributed to the deaths of thousands of Jews who were seeking rescue on the ‘Aryan’ side.”⁶⁹ Against this background Grabowski and Libionka conclude:

Markowa was a village in which some Poles exhibited great sacrifice and courage in order to rescue Jews. But Markowa was also a village where some Poles murdered Jews with great zeal. Markowa was also a place where sometimes the very same people both saved and murdered Jews. In all these respects Markowa was a village like many other villages across occupied Poland.⁷⁰

The museum reacted to this criticism only indirectly, rejecting minor errors and underlining that remembering heroic activities should be seen as a normal phenomenon.⁷¹ Another aspect was addressed by Florian Peters, who sees a potential of the museum in counter-balancing the international focus on German saviours of Jews in the region, as Oskar Schindler or Berthold Beitz.⁷²

The Amendments to the Act on the IPN, or the So-called “Holocaust Law”

The act often referred to as “Holocaust law” or “Polish death camps” law is technically an amendment to the act on the IPN. Although not mentioned directly in the text, the main

⁶⁷ Irena Steinfeldt and Karolina Przewrocka, “Wciąż dostajemy wiele świadectw (We are still receiving many testimonies),” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 14 (2016), Dodatek specjalny: Ulmowie – polscy sprawiedliwi, 28 March 2016; see also Elisabeth Wassermann, “The Polish Discourse About the Righteous among the Nations between Commemoration, Education and Justification?,” *Politeja* 52 (2018): 125–44.

⁶⁸ As a response by the director of IPN see Łukasz Kamiński, “Finger weg von unseren Helden,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 April 2016, 9; English version: “Hands off our heroes! – a text by President of the IPN Dr. Łukasz Kamiński in ‘Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,’” <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/864,Hands-off-our-heroes-a-text-by-President-of-the-IPN-Dr-Lukasz-Kaminski-in-quotFr.html> (accessed 12 August 2018).

⁶⁹ Quotation from <http://www.holocaustresearch.pl/index.php?show=6&strona=542> (accessed 12 July 2018), summarizing the project “Jewish survival strategies in occupied Poland 1939–1945. Studies of selected counties;” as publication see: Engelking and Grabowski, *Dalej jest noc*.

⁷⁰ Grabowski and Libionka, “Distorting and Rewriting,” 60.

⁷¹ “Oświadczenie – Muzeum Polaków Ratujących Żydów podczas II wojny światowej im. Rodziny Ulmów w Markowej (Declaration – Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II),” 16 February 2018, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/pl/bez-kategorii-pl/oswiadczenie/> (accessed 10 August 2018); the former director of the museum, Mateusz Szpytma, however, has reacted in several interviews, see for instance: “IPN odpowiada GW po ataku na Muzeum Ulmów: ‘Historia jest o wiele bardziej skomplikowana niż wydaje się autorom tekstu’ (The IPN responds to the Gazeta Wyborcza after the attack on the Ulma Museum: History is much more complicated than it appears to the authors of the text),” <http://wpolityce.pl/historia/318823-tylko-u-nas-ipn-odpowiada-gw-po-ataku-na-muzeum-ulmow-historia-jest-o-wiele-bardziej-skomplikowana-niz-wydaje-sie-autorom-tekstu> (accessed 8 August 2018).

⁷² Peters, “Towards a Balanced Tribute.” However, I could not detect such a transnational perspective during my visit of the museum.

intention of the lawmakers is the political fight against terms like “Polish concentration camps,” which are understood in such a way that they claim Poles to be responsible for atrocities and crimes against humanity. On the semantical level there is no doubt that such a wording causes misunderstanding based on active or passive interpretation of the adjective.⁷³ The assertion that the use of “Polish” in connection with extermination camps or ghettos denotes an active Polish responsibility, however, is debatable, because the adjective can also be understood as a spatial specification. In such a perspective, the unambiguous qualification of this term as an offence on the same level as the denial of the Holocaust seems difficult to uphold. The most prominent case of using the incriminated wording occurred when President Obama during a ceremony of posthumously honouring Jan Karski with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in May 2012 used the term of “Polish death camp.” Actually, the same wording had already appeared as a headline of Karski’s report on the death camp of Bełżec in an American weekly in 1944, of course without any doubt about Nazi responsibility.⁷⁴ After being sharply criticized by Polish media and politicians, Obama apologized for misspeaking in a letter to the Polish President Bronisław Komorowski. It is obvious that this was not an intended denial of German extermination politics, but a lapsus linguae, which should be criticized, but hardly qualifies as criminal act. There is, however, a second layer in this debate, as the incrimination of “Polish camps” can also be referred to halt the debate on Polish post-war camps, which have been discussed already since the 1990s for instance regarding detention and labour camps in Potulice or Łambinowice. Recently, the journalist Marek Łuszczyna has called them “Polish concentration camps” with the intention to challenge the right-wing discourse. His argument is based on the fact that these camps used the infrastructure of earlier German camps.⁷⁵

The changes of the act on the IPN that classify the use of “Polish” in connection with “concentration camp” or “ghetto” as a criminal act, because it allegedly ascribes the Polish nation a responsibility for Nazi crimes, were first stipulated in September 2016 by the Minister of Justice and general prosecutor Zbigniew Ziobro. The rejection of the ill-formulated wording was named an attack on the “good name of the Polish nation” that should be prosecuted by means of criminal law.⁷⁶ In that perspective, the “protection of the reputation of the Polish Republic and the Polish nation”⁷⁷ was added to the tasks of

⁷³ A similar case that has been addressed already many times in previous debates is the criticism of the term “Polish partitions” instead of the accurate term “partitions of Poland” (referring to the late eighteenth century). This semantic debate should not be confused with the question, how “Polish” the Republic of Nobles was, which in recent historiography is addressed as Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, see Frost, Robert I. *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷⁴ Jan Karski, “Polish Death Camps,” *Collier’s Weekly*, 14 October 1944, 18–19.

⁷⁵ Addressed as “concentration camps” in Marek Łuszczyna, *Mała zbrodnia: Polskie obozy koncentracyjne* (Little crime: Polish concentration camps) (Cracow: Znak, 2017): 11–15.

⁷⁶ Sergiusz Kowalski and Jan Woleński, “Lex Ziobro i jego możliwe skutki (Lex Ziobro and its possible consequences),” *Polityka*, 8 September 2016, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1675054,1,lex-ziobro-i-jego-mozliwe-skutki.read> (accessed 15 July 2018).

⁷⁷ The Polish wording for “reputation” is “dobre imię” (literally: “good name”). “Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 2018 r. o zmianie ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej – Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, ustawy o grobach i cmentarzach wojennych, ustawy o muzeach oraz ustawy o odpowiedzialności podmiotów zbiorowych za czyny zabronione pod groźbą kary (Act of 26 January 2018 on changes of the act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation, of the act on war graves and cemeteries, of the act on museums, and of the act on the responsibility of collective entities for acts prohibited under penalty,” *Dziennik Ustaw* 2018, pos. 369, article 1, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20180000369/T/D20180369L.pdf> (accessed 24 June 2018); English translation following <https://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/informacje/news,10368,nowelizacja-ustawy-o-ipn--wersja-w-jezyku.html> (accessed 10 August 2018).

the IPN. Concerning the denial of war crimes, already the first version law of 1998 included in article 55 the “public denial, contrary to the facts” of “Nazi crimes, communist crimes, and other offences constituting crimes against peace, crimes against humanity or war crimes,” “committed against persons of Polish nationality or against Polish citizens of other nationalities”⁷⁸ with criminal punishment of up to three years of prison. The amendment added an article 55a containing the same regulations on punishment to someone,

whoever publicly and contrary to the facts attributes to the Polish Nation or to the Polish State responsibility or co-responsibility for Nazi crimes committed by the German Third Reich [sic], ... or for any other offences constituting crimes against peace, humanity or war crimes, or otherwise greatly diminishes the responsibility of the actual perpetrators of these crimes.

In a following sentence “perpetrators of a prohibited act” are exempted if they act “within the framework of artistic and scientific activity.”⁷⁹ Although the accusations that Poles were involved in murdering Jews are not explicitly mentioned in this act, public debate as well as media statements by the government show that this has been the leading concern. The major problem here is the connection with the “good name” of Poland, which leaves a much wider space for interpretation than the denial of Nazi crimes, as it was stipulated in the previous version. In addition, charges of violating the act cannot only be made by the IPN as state institution but also by classified nongovernmental organizations such as the “Reduta Dobrego Imienia” (Polish League Against Defamation).⁸⁰

These changes were approved by the Polish Parliament on 26 January 2018, one day before the Auschwitz Remembrance Day, and stirred an immediate international controversy and also a diplomatic crisis with Israel and the United States. Israeli politicians and diplomats demanded a change of the act, and the controversy was further stimulated, when Prime Minister Morawiecki publicly expressed at the Munich Security Conference the opinion that one may also speak of Jewish perpetrators during the Second World War.⁸¹ Despite international and internal criticism, appeals to the Polish President Andrzej Duda to veto the law remained unsuccessful, but Duda, after having signed the bill, immediately sent it to the constitutional tribunal for review.

In the public – Polish and international – discussion about the act, many problems have been addressed, starting from the question, how the provision “contrary to the facts” will be decided, how social sciences and arts will be exempted from the stipulations of the law and whether and how charges would be executed worldwide. Similar problematic are those additions of the amendment that address crimes committed by “Ukrainian nationalists” against “Polish citizens” on the eastern territories of the General Government.⁸²

⁷⁸ “Ustawa z dnia 18 grudnia 1998 r. o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej – Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu (Act of 18 December on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation),” *Dziennik Ustaw* 1998, no. 155, pos. 1016, articles 1 and 55, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19981551016/O/D19981016.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2018)), English translation following Jan Grabowski, “The Holocaust and Poland’s ‘History Policy,’” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 10, no. 3 (2016): 483.

⁷⁹ “Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 2018 r.,” article 55a, English translation following <https://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/informacje/news,10368,nowelizacja-ustawy-o-ipn-wersja-w-jezyku.html>.

⁸⁰ Pankowski, “The Resurgence,” 23, with reference to article 53o of the act. The literary translation of the Polish name is: “Redoubt of the Good Name,” the English name following <http://www.anti-defamation.pl/> (accessed 8 August 2018).

⁸¹ ProductiehuisEU, “Holocaust: Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki draws ire with claim of Jewish Holocaust ‘perpetrators,’” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpXTZZF9m4Q> (accessed 24 June 2018).

⁸² “Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 2018 r. o zmianie ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej,” article 2a, English translation following <https://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/informacje/news,10368,nowelizacja-ustawy-o-ipn-wersja-w-jezyku.html>.

Because the majority of those ethnic Ukrainians had Polish citizenship, the Polish nation in the sense of the act has to be understood as an ethnic one that excludes ethnic minorities. As a result, an implicit parallel between the Holocaust and the genocide of (ethnic) Poles and by the same token between Holocaust denial and anti-Polonism appears as motivation for the amendment.

After the amendment was passed, information circulated that members of the Polish diaspora in the West should watch abroad for expressions incriminated by the act. According to newspaper reports, until mid-May 2018 about seventy charges were submitted, in the majority, however, these were seemingly self-accusations from Polish citizens with the intention to prove the failure of the law.⁸³ As it seems, only one serious case was reported, a BBC production about Auschwitz speaking of "Polish Jewish ghettos,"⁸⁴ but it was not explained, whether it intentionally claimed that Poles were responsible for creating or overseeing the ghettos. Due to problems of deciding whether such a case is a denial of German responsibility and how to prosecute violations of the law outside of Poland, it is hardly possible to judge whether the law contributed to preventing such expressions. On the contrary, it has been argued that the discussion has popularized the term of "Polish camps"⁸⁵ and thus counteracts the very intention of the law.

The story of this act took another sudden turn end of June 2018, when almost overnight, the Polish government submitted a further amendment, no longer waiting for a decision from the constitutional court, and demanded an urgent decision, which was adopted by the Polish Sejm and signed by the president within one day. As result of the revision, the previously added article 55a with the stipulations concerning criminal prosecution but also the exemption of scholarship and arts was deleted.⁸⁶ As a result, offences of the "good name" of Poland are no longer a subject of criminal law, but can still be reported to civil courts. On the same evening the prime ministers of Poland and Israel released a joint declaration, expressing the condemnation of antisemitism as well as the "rejection of anti-Polonism."⁸⁷ The Polish government suggested that the new revision was necessary in order to remove an international conflict, which however – if there was one – has appeared on the horizon only with the amendment from January 2018. Furthermore, Prime Minister Morawiecki argued that the law has proven to weaken attacks on Poland, whereas nationalist Polish media criticized the renunciation of criminal

⁸³ "IPN: prokuratorzy nie chcą wszczynać śledztw ws. szkalowania narodu polskiego," *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 May 2018, <https://www.rp.pl/Prawo-ka-305179891-IPN-prokuratorzy-nie-chca-wszczynac-sledztw-ws-szkalowania-narodu-polskiego.html> (accessed 5 September 2018); "Obywatele RP sprawdzają, czy znowelizowana ustawa o IPN działa ('Citizens of the Polish Republic' check whether the amended act on the IPN is working)," *Polityka*, 5 March 2018, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1740478,2,obywatele-rp-sprawdzaja-czy-znowelizowana-ustawa-o-ipn-dziala.read> (accessed 5 September 2018).

⁸⁴ "Ustawa o IPN: 44 doniesienia ws. znieważania narodu polskiego (Act on the IPN: 44 denunciations insulting the Polish nation)," *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 March 2018, <https://www.rp.pl/Prawo-ka-303149911-Ustawa-o-IPN-44-doniesienia-ws-zniewazania-narodu-polskiego.html> (accessed 5 September 2018).

⁸⁵ Jan Woleński, "Nowela ustawy o IPN jest nieprecyzyjna i niedbale zredagowana (The amendment of the act on the IPN is imprecise and sloppily edited)," *Polityka*, 5 February 2018, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1736766,1,nowela-ustawy-o-ipn-jest-nieprecyzyjna-i-niedbale-zredagowana.read> (accessed 24 June 2018).

⁸⁶ "Ustawa z dnia 27 czerwca 2018 r. o zmianie ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej – Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu oraz ustawy o odpowiedzialności podmiotów zbiorowych za czyny zabronione pod groźbą kary (Act of 27 June 2018 on changes of the act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation and of the act on the responsibility of collective entities for acts prohibited under penalty)," [orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/nazwa/2663_u/\\$file/2663_u.pdf](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/nazwa/2663_u/$file/2663_u.pdf) (accessed 15 July 2018).

⁸⁷ "Joint declaration of prime ministers of the State of Israel and the Republic of Poland," <https://www.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/joint-declaration-of-prime-ministers-of-the-state-of-israel-and-the-republic-of-poland.html> (accessed 5 September 2018).

prosecution.⁸⁸ The joint press-release provoked immediate criticism from the former director of Yad Vashem, Yitzak Arad, as well as from its experts, who rejected the analogy of antisemitism and anti-Polonism.⁸⁹ Among professional historians in Poland, a criticism prevails that instead of attempting to prosecute single incidents more attention should be given to educational activities.⁹⁰

Conclusions

The cases discussed here allow the conclusion that a major interest of current historical policy by the government led by the PiS party is to put Poles and Jews upon an equal level of victimization. This may explain the various public references to the commemoration of the Righteous among the Nations in Poland, through which critical discussions concerning World War II shall be pushed into the background. The attempted symbolical parallelism following the model of localized commemoration at Yad Vashem is also visible in the idea of establishing an “orchard of remembrance” in Markowa, which seemingly refers to the valley of vanished Jewish communities at Yad Vashem.

Politics of history in Poland, however, is a much broader phenomenon exceeding the aspects presented here. It includes more museums and museum projects, among which the Warsaw Ghetto Museum⁹¹ should be mentioned. Although it would be wrong to perceive all these activities as being only controlled by the government and central institutions, there is, however, a clear tendency by the current government to implement an authoritative narrative of national history and to attack those who contradict. In such a perspective, official Polish historical policy definitely goes beyond the adaptation process that Jan Assmann has described as an anthropological phenomenon in the change from communicative to cultural memory.⁹²

My following remarks will focus on the place of the Polish government’s historical policy in internal politics and international relations and then attempt a general assessment of current trends in Polish politics of history.

In internal politics the situation seems to be clear: the main goal is taking control of institutions by PiS and marginalizing opponents through shaping a monolithic view of the ethnic Polish nation, which appears as the first victim of Nazi and Soviet rule. During World War II Poles sacrificed their lives for their Jewish neighbours and fought bravely for the victory over Nazi rule. From such a perspective the impact of the Jedwabne debate, as stimulated by Tomasz Gross, has to be competed with, because it has been

⁸⁸ “Premierzy Izraela i Polski podpisali wspólną deklarację. Morawiecki: Zmiana ustawy o IPN osłabia atak na Polskę (Prime Ministers of Israel and Poland signed a joint declaration. Morawiecki: Changes of the act on the IPN weaken attack on Poland)” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 June 2018, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,23604237,mateusz-morawiecki.html> (accessed 5 September 2018); as example of the criticism see “Pozew po noweli. Stowarzyszenie Patria Nostra zapowiada pierwszy pozew cywilny według nowych przepisów ustawy o IPN (Suit after the amendment: The Patria Nostra Society announces first civil suit according to the new rules of the act on the IPN),” *Nasz Dziennik*, 7–8 July 2018.

⁸⁹ Yitzak Arad, “Poland and Israel’s False Declaration on the Holocaust,” *Haaretz*, 16 July 2018; and “Yad Vashem historians respond to the joint statement of the Governments of Poland and Israel concerning the revision of the 26 January 2018, amendment to Poland’s Act on the Institute of National Remembrance,” <https://www.yadvashem.org/press-release/05-july-2018-07-34.html> (accessed 15 July 2018).

⁹⁰ “Statement of Polin Museum concerning a proposed amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance,” 29 January 2018, <http://www.polin.pl/en/news/2018/01/29/statement-of-the-director-of-polin-museum-concerning-a-proposed> (accessed 12 July 2018).

⁹¹ See “Muzeum trudnych pytań (Museum of difficult questions),” *Polityka*, no. 16, 18 April 2018, 22–4.

⁹² Assmann, “Collective Memory.”

motivated by an aspiration for “disgrace,” as Andrzej Nowak put it.⁹³ In a similar perspective the notion of critical patriotism, as suggested by Lipski and Błoński, was dismissed as politically naïve and harmful.⁹⁴ In addition, it has been assumed that the government’s memory as well as past politics serves as auxiliary means for securing majorities on other fields of politics.⁹⁵

In international debates, the main argument is that the suffering of the Polish nation has not received appropriate recognition, so far, because it had to step back behind the Holocaust as main signifier of World War II. This rivalry might explain the attempts to lift the commemoration of the Polish fate to the level of Yad Vashem. This symbolic strategy, however, obstructs attempts of reconciliation through sound research. This is not only an issue of Polish-Jewish relations but can also be noticed in the relations of Poland with Ukraine, Germany or Russia. In the Polish-Ukrainian case there have been many political efforts since the 1990s to start joint discussions on mutual fighting and atrocities since the end of World War I. With the intention of the revised IPN bill to prosecute “false” perspectives on the murdering of ethnic Poles by Ukrainians, it is difficult to see, how a transnational dialogue might start from such a point of departure.

The international scholarly assessment of the historical policy by PiS is widely negative and has been seen, for instance, in an “implicit alliance,”⁹⁶ with Russian memory politics. This indicates that the commemoration of World War II has changed significantly in past years regarding its political relevance. Even if such prognoses were too optimistic that ascribed the Holocaust as “the absolute evil of history” a potential to launch a transnational “reflexive mode” of re-telling the past or to become a foundational event of a new Europe,⁹⁷ the current Polish political debate clearly moves away from transnational or European frames of commemorating twentieth-century history.⁹⁸

Even though the historical policy of the PiS government faces much criticism in Poland as well as abroad, only minor changes have been made. This leads to the assumption that internal as well as international polarization is a major driving force behind the current official Polish memory policy. However, in the light of the latest events, it seems that the general goal behind this historical policy is not so much turning the wheel of time back and to revive an antisemitic discourse in the tradition of March 1968,⁹⁹ but to establish a new national vision that equals the Holocaust with the genocide of Poles, or with other words aims at “de-Judaizing the Holocaust.”¹⁰⁰ Such a tendency would confirm Tony Judt’s finding that Jews were largely excluded from East European memory

⁹³ Nowak, “Westerplatte.”

⁹⁴ Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Nędza polityki historycznej (The misery of the politics of history),” in *Pamięć jako przedmiot władzy*, ed. Piotr Kosiewski (Warszawa: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2008), 30.

⁹⁵ Mateusz Mazzini, “Poland’s Right-Wing Government is Rewriting History – with itself as Hero,” *The Washington Post*, 27 February 2018.

⁹⁶ Snyder, “Poland vs. History.”

⁹⁷ Dan Diner, “Restitution and Memory: The Holocaust in European Political Cultures,” *New German Critique* 90 (2003): 36–44; Klas-Göran Karlsson, “The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture. Theoretical and Analytical Challenges,” in *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2003), 18.

⁹⁸ Cf. Aline Sierp and Jenny Wüstenberg, “Linking the Local and the Transnational: Rethinking Memory Politics in Europe,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 3, (2015): 321–9; Ewa Stańczyk, “Transnational, Transborder, Antinational? The Memory of the Jewish Past in Poland,” *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 3 (2016): 416–29.

⁹⁹ As Pankowski, “The Resurgence,” 33, assumes.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Grabowski, “The Holocaust,” 485.

cultures.¹⁰¹ The recent political cooperation between the Polish and Israeli governments¹⁰² with the joint attempt to shape collective memory, however, seems to contradict Judt's image of the past as "positive archipelago of vulnerable historical territories, to be preserved from attacks and distortions perpetrated by the occupants of a neighbouring island of memory."¹⁰³ In fact, I would argue that a new element can be noticed in the recent debate: Based on a mutual claim of being attacked from outside, which produces a quest for protection, at least a temporary cooperation in memory politics has emerged in order to reject those attacks. A side effect of such a strategy is a deepened split within the Polish society, which could only be overcome if all subscribe to the government's vision of Polish history. This, however, is even in Catholic circles not always the case.¹⁰⁴

Against this background, it is difficult to determine what will be the outcome of recent historical policy. If one follows the argument by Aviel Roshwald that in the struggle for national dignity "the cult of past martyrdoms" is closely intertwined "with the awareness of contemporary dangers to national honour, sovereignty, and/or security,"¹⁰⁵ one should add the critical question, whether the national interest of defending one's dignity – the "good name" of the nation – might conflict with political interests on other fields as freedom and security.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on Contributor

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¹⁰¹ Tony Judt, "The 'Problem of Evil' in Postwar Europe," *New York Review of Books* 55, no. 2 (14 February 2008), <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/02/14/the-problem-of-evil-in-postwar-europe/> (accessed 10 August 2018).

¹⁰² As observed by Dariusz Warszawski (i.e. Konstanty Gebert), "Polsce coraz bliżej do Izraela, a PiS i Likud to partie bliźniacze (Poland is closer and closer to Israel, and PiS and Likud are twin parties)," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 January 2018, just before the Polish-Israeli memory conflict started. See also the bright depiction of Polish-Israeli relations in November 2017 by Minister Piotr Gliński, "Polish–Israeli Relations: Challenges and Opportunities," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 11, no. 3 (2017): 295–8.

¹⁰³ Judt, "The Past," 172.

¹⁰⁴ See for instance the critical article by Andrzej Grajewski, "Jak bronić dobrego imienia Polaków? (How to defend the Good Name of the Poles?)," *Gość Niedzielny* 2018, no. 6, 15 February 2018, <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/4496467-Jak-bronic-dobrego-imienia-Polakow> (accessed 10 August 2018).

¹⁰⁵ Aviel Roshwald, *The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 122.