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ISOLATED ISLANDS? MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

THE CASE STUDY OF POST-COMMUNIST POLAND¹

ABSTRACT The conflicts associated with the memory of the Holocaust in Poland reflect educational gaps in the Polish education system (lack of bad memory). Comparison with other similar studies in Europe and beyond allows one to reveal affinities and divergences in patterns of behaviour in various states in relation to the historical past, social identity and collective memory. This text looks at the consciousness of young Poles, in terms of attitudes toward Jews, the Holocaust and memory of the Holocaust. The data presented are the preliminary results of the author's longitudinal study "Attitudes of Young Poles toward the Jews and the Holocaust". Quantitative and qualitative studies include field studies and participant observation of educational projects in Tykocin, Treblinka, Warsaw, Lublin, Bodzentyn and Kielce. The number and scope of initiatives in Poland attempting to bring back the memory of Jewish neighbours

¹ Parts of the paper were based on the research project: J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, "Attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust among Polish Youth" which was conducted in 2008-2012 at the Centre of Holocaust Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, supported by grants from the International Task Force for Holocaust Education Research and Remembrance (currently the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance), La Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

indicate that civic institutions and individuals are intensifying their efforts to teach their fellow citizens about the Holocaust, however their impact should be assessed in detail.

Keywords: Holocaust, Jews, education, memory, attitudes

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The Holocaust is the historical fact of the unprecedented mass murder of Jews, including their initial isolation, discrimination and persecution between 1933 and 1945 which has affected, and continues to affect, some individuals, and groups as big as nations, until the present day. Why is that so? The Holocaust makes states, national groups and individual groups uncomfortable, revealing dark pages of national histories and family memories. The examples are numerous: Vichy France, Antonescu's Romania, pogroms carried out by some Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Poles. Also some Slovaks, and Hungarians were willing collaborators. New archival research in Poland provides more evidence to challenge the category of a morally neutral bystander. Robbing, the seizing of property and the beating, raping and murdering of Jews, is eliminated from the collective memory of many European communities. Works of art, which often address the most difficult topics of bystanders and/or victims killing victims, sometimes are a part of the public debate. This issue has been seldom considered in the field of formal education in Poland, a situation that is mirrored in other countries with the exception of Sweden.

In Poland, the epicentre of the Holocaust, education about the Holocaust should be the basis of the curriculum in humanities. The 2008 major reform in school education, excluded the topic of the Holocaust from the history curriculum of secondary schools, where it remained in the Polish literature and civics curricula, and moved it to the level of high schools. Therefore the topic of the Holocaust is mandated but is not taught in a systematic way and without cross-curricula coordination. It becomes more and more dependent on the motivation of individual teachers who lack systemic support and traditionally seek in-service teacher training on their own initiative, motivated by various factors which will be discussed later.

SETTING THE SCENE

Rev. Romuald Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel, a Catholic priest of Jewish origin, noted that it is possible that the settlement of some Jewish families on Polish lands was earlier than that of many ethnic Polish families,² a comment on Polish hospitality many centuries

² This comment was heard during the History and Reconciliation seminar organized by the Carnegie

ago. He was given by his Jewish mother to a Polish peasant woman. His adoptive mother only told him of his origins in 1978 – a complex example of Polish-Jewish relations and identities. Poland is a land where Jews made a significant contribution to the national history and culture, but also a land of about 1200 Jewish cemeteries, some of which are taken a good care of, some destroyed and still neglected and some being cleaned by the youth, such as the one in Bodzentyn. Poland is also the land seen as a painful landscape in Claude Lanzmann's seminal film *Sboab*,³ empty shtetls and numerous visible and invisible killing sites. Poland can be depicted as a site of Jewish absence when we look at the ruins of synagogues or those, such as Kraśnik, in the process of restoration, or restored synagogues such as those in Zamość, Szczepleszyn or Bobowa. Poland can also be seen through the lens of the archival research of new generations of Polish historians challenging the image of Poles sealed in stone since the loss of Polish independence at the end of the 18th century.

As the former Israeli Ambassador to Poland Szewach Weiss has said many times, antisemitism in Poland, before, during and after WWII, conceals one thousand years of Polish-Jewish history. This complex history remained unknown, forgotten and distorted when the fresh memory immediately after the memories of WWII faded.⁴

In August 1939 the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed and it divided Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union and marked the Polish collective memory as a victim of two regimes. But for both Poles and Jews, the memory of WWII and the memory of the Holocaust respectively are important components of national identity. WWII is a core element in the formation of Polish ethnic identity and this is also true for younger generations as revealed in the studies in 1998.⁵

For Poles, the German occupation and the German-Soviet Non-aggression Treaty, the Soviet occupation of the Eastern part of Poland and the communist system implemented after 1944 are crucial markers of collective memory.

Council for Ethics and International Relations, the Jagiellonian University and the Grodzka Gate – Theater NN in 2001 in Lublin.

³ Lanzmann knocked on Henryk Gawkowski's door in Małkinia and this engineer who drove locomotives that pulled trains carrying Jews from Europe to Treblinka was happy that after 35 years or so he could finally recount what he experienced because no one had asked him about it beforehand. C. Lanzmann, 'Rachunek krzywd po Auschwitz', interview by M. Nowicki, *Newsweek*, 27 January 2011, at <<http://spoleczenstwo.newsweek.pl/rachunek-krzywd-po-auschwitz,71020,1,1.html>>, 17 February 2011.

⁴ Crucial books by Polish scholars remain hardly noticed, for example that by A. Landau-Czajka, *W jednym stali domu... Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej lat 1933-1939* analyzing antisemitic content in the press and actions, such as Doboszyński's march on Myślenice, or *Syn będzie Lech... Asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej* analyzing barriers against Jews who wanted to assimilate in interwar Poland. The volume published by the Institute of National Remembrance in 2006 *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939-1945*, presenting and commenting on documents depicting the fact that the Holocaust was not a primary issue during WWII, "our issue", has not been debated. For the underground resistance movement in occupied Poland the main objective was to aim at internal cohesion against the Germans.

⁵ J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *Me – Us – Them. Ethnic Prejudices and Alternative Methods of Education*, Cracow 2003.

After WWII the participants of non-Communist resistance movements were persecuted by the new regime. The nation's own losses became predominant in collective memories and the lack of acknowledgement of Polish suffering along with the consequences of the Yalta Treaty felt like a betrayal by the Allies. The imposition of the Soviet regime in Poland by the wider world contributed to the sense of victimization of Poles. The Cold War made this separation real in a sense of space and contact, including also the isolation of intellectuals. A sense of rivalry or competition of suffering is also present, as depicted in current empirical studies⁶ among the Polish young people.

Poland has started on a journey towards the unveiling of the darkest parts of its history but has a long way to go. There are deep wounds from the past, many unhealed, and the scars covering them, if at all, are sensitive. The self-knowledge of Poles has become a topic of public debate. National histories and identities in Polish education after 1989, nonetheless, still depict the history of Poles rather than that of Poland with the focus on victimhood and suffering. Jedwabne is present in only a few textbooks written after the last reform of 2008. And many Polish students are still not aware that Warsaw was the biggest Jewish community in Europe and the second, after New York, in the world.

One of several steps taken to change mutual stereotypes of Jews and Poles was the work of the bilateral Polish-Israeli Textbook Commission established as a result of a 1991-1992 agreement concerning the co-operation in culture and education between Israel and Poland. According to the teachers gathered at the International Faculty Seminar "Teaching for Reconciliation: Can Tolerance Towards Former Enemies Be Taught?" organized by the Carnegie Council for Ethics and International Affairs and the Jagiellonian University at the TheGrodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in Lublin on June 3-5, 2001, the textbook commissions, in general, have proved to be relatively unimportant for the work of history teachers, textbook writers and historians.⁷

The results of empirical studies unfortunately prove that the evaluation of education in reference to the Holocaust in Poland and in the wider world, and the examination of "good practices" in this field, lead to the reflection that so many initiatives in the field of education about the Holocaust are initiated out of the good hearts of concerned individuals, occasionally supported by local or state authorities. The individual teachers often work with limited knowledge of the discourse or in many instances the discourse itself does not exist. There is a limited capital of methodology on the subject. This statement is valid despite the fact that there is increasing effort in the intergovernmental community which have joined forces to educate, commemorate and research the Holocaust.

⁶ The studies of the author conducted in 1998 and in 2008 had a quasi-experimental character. The survey was filled out by students selected as a national sample as well as by students from classes where a specific educational stimulus was introduced, namely programs concerning tolerance in general and the educational components about Jewish culture and history. This group, within this quasi-experiment, made up the so-called "experimental group", while the national sample made up the "control group".

⁷ See the report on the seminar written by L. Cole, at <<http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/viewMedia.php/prmTemplateID/8/prmID/111>>, 2 April 2012.

At the same time there is a lack of empirical data on whether and how the educational projects of NGOs affect local attitudes toward the Holocaust and memory of the Holocaust. It is assumed that Polish local and regional government institutions make an impact on attitudes. The examples of such institutions are the Grodzka Gate – Theater NN in Lublin and the Myślenice Community Association which initiated the unveiling of the plaque commemorating deportations of Jews from Myślenice, a town south of Kraków. It took two years to put this project into practice. In 2012, however, representatives of various institutions felt proud to be invited to take part in the annual ceremony to commemorate the Jewish inhabitants of Myślenice. The progress in some communities is visible.

REMARKS ON MEMORY AND TABOOISATION

Maurice Halbwachs has paved the way to the constructivist manner of thinking that social memories are constructed intentionally to consolidate identities. Individuals are thus shaped by social groups. The concept of collective memory, however, did not emerge as a topic of academic debate until the mid-1970s, carried forward by historians focusing on the relativity of knowledge in history and on the conflict of interpretations. Le Goff,⁸ referring to Pierre Nora and *La Nouvelle Histoire*, recalls new ways of historical study through research on sites of collective memory: museums, archives, libraries, cemeteries, architectural sites, pilgrimages, anniversaries, textbooks, biographies.

Memory provides us with knowledge about who we are, who we want to be, who we are not, and who we do not want to be. In post-WWII Central and Eastern Europe and in the Baltic countries the myth of victimhood has dominated. In Western Europe the core post-WWII myth was a myth of resistance. In Sweden and Switzerland the myth of neutrality was dominant. Since the 1990s we face myths being deconstructed, i.e. in the Netherlands (Nanda van de Zee), in Latvia (Andrew Ezergailis), even in countries which were for a long time cited as “neutral” such as Switzerland or Sweden. Complicity in the Holocaust was for a long time a taboo topic, avoided, ignored and suppressed. Austria’s and Italy’s alliance with Nazi Germany was not examined for many years after the end of WWII. The founding Dutch national myth after WWII was one of heroic and united anti-Nazi resistance and victimization.⁹ This myth was essential for post-

⁸ J. Le Goff, *Historia i pamięć*, transl. by A. Gronowska, J. Stryczyk, Warszawa 2007, *Communicare*.

⁹ M. Kronemeijer, D. Teshima, ‘A Founding Myth for the Netherlands: The Second World War and the Victimization of Dutch Jews’ in J. Zarankin (ed.), *Reflections on the Holocaust*, New York 2011, pp. 106-117. The TV series *The Occupation* was broadcast between 1960 and 1965. *Odergang* (Downfall), the first book by Jacques Presser depicting the destruction of Dutch Jews was published in 1965 (followed by the English edition *The Destruction of the Dutch Jews* three years later). Nanda van der Zee demythologized the Netherlands in his chapter ‘The Recurrent Myth of “Dutch Heroism” in the Second World War and Anne Frank as a Symbol’ published in the book *The Netherlands and Nazi Genocide* (eds. J. Colijn and M. S. Littell) in 1992.

-war national unity and identity. The exhibition organized in the Anne Frank House until 2010 still did not contain information about Dutch collaboration.

The book *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, edited and with an introduction by John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic, is a valid contribution to studies of memory of the Holocaust in postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe and national collective identities affected by “the dark past”. The basic assumption, and one that I completely agree with, is that “the dark past” is hard to accept “on a larger social scale” because it threatens collective self-esteem and spoils both the identity and national myth. In Ukraine, Slovakia, Moldova, Belarus and Bosnia-Herzegovina – according to Himka and Michlic¹⁰ – unbiased educational programs about the Shoah are absent. The discourse on *Holodomor* in Ukraine (the 1932-1933 famine intentionally induced by Stalin with about 3 million victims) “also steers attention away from the Holocaust” and emphasis is put on Ukrainian victims as Johan Dietsch states.¹¹ After the fall of communism, the marginalization of the Holocaust as a topic in the history of the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia presented in the Czech Republic continued. The stressing of Slovak collaboration in the Holocaust was, however, disproportionately presented. New Czech textbooks were written in 1992-1995, the Holocaust, however, was better incorporated in the context of WWII European history than in Czech history itself. There remained a visible inclination to present resistance and anti-Czech policies.¹² In Croatia the collaboration with Nazi Germany was presented as forced on the Ustaša regime. The textbooks, improved after 2000, still do not deal with attitudes towards Jews during the Holocaust. Resistance toward anti-Jewish laws seems overestimated. In some textbooks (Vesna Djurić, *Udžbenik za osmi razred osnovne škole*, 3rd edition 2002) the Ustaša regime is presented in a relatively positive way.¹³

Refusal to admit that the Holocaust was a distinct historical fact is present in Serbia. The Nazi occupation is focused on the Serbians suffering at the hands of the Nazis and Ustaša. The “comparative martyrdom” of Jews and Serbs has emerged. The collaboration of General Milan Nedić, head of the Serbian government between 1941 and 1944, was presented as an attempt to protect Serbs in a new secondary school history textbook published in 2002. The Chetniks and general Nedić are presented as contributing to survival of Serbs.¹⁴ The alleged complicity of the Albanian Skanderberg SS Division in the Holocaust is mostly rejected in Albania. In Albanian representations of the Holocaust *Albanians*

¹⁰ J.-P. Himka, J. B. Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, Lincoln 2013.

¹¹ J. Dietsch, ‘Conflicting Histories: The Case of Genocides in Ukrainian History’, *Canadian Diversity*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2009).

¹² M. Frankl, ‘The Sheep of Lidice: The Holocaust and the Construction of Czech National History’ in J.-P. Himka, J. B. Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past...*, pp. 167, 182-185.

¹³ M. Biondich, ‘Representations of the Holocaust and Historical Debates in Croatia since 1989’ in J.-P. Himka, J. B. Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past...*, pp. 131, 135-136, 141, 148-149, 163.

¹⁴ J. Byford, ‘Between Marginalization and Instrumentalization: Holocaust Memory in Serbia since the Late 1980s’ in J.-P. Himka, J. B. Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past...*, pp. 517, 527, 531, 538-539, 548.

and Jews share a common history as persecuted nations throughout modern history.¹⁵ This romanticized image is present in recollections of the defense of all Jews. A triple victimhood of Albanians suffering from fascism, communism and Serb nationalism is present in the rhetoric of the politicians and the victims of communism are commemorated during Holocaust Remembrance Day.¹⁶ Belarusian collaborationist battalions included between 50,000 and 70,000 men in 1941-1945. The above examples illustrate how official memory conceals violent, disturbing, dark history of the Holocaust in Central Eastern Europe.

“MEMORY WORK”

Harold Marcuse defines “memory work” as *individual and group efforts to acquire and disseminate information about the past*¹⁷ and distinguished between “personal memories” which can be experienced and learned and “recollections”, an *explicit and public [...] social process of sharing information about the past among members of the collectivity*. Sharing includes public circulations, public commemorations, intentionally managed by governments and non-governmental institutions. The difference between “recollections” and “collective memories” is that, according to Marcuse, “collective memories” are common for “memory groups” and “may remain unarticulated”. Moreover, for Harold Marcuse those unarticulated feelings are important. Intuitively, I have believed that the failure of many Polish students and teachers to give an answer when asked the question “why are you interested/involved in Holocaust related issues” is relevant here.

A violent past long concealed, as is the case of Poland, haunts the generations to come. We know that violent histories are durable and trans-generational,¹⁸ but after more than half a century of research we still do not have satisfactory explanations of how exactly the posterity inherits the subconscious memories of their ancestors.¹⁹ Repressed memories remain active and their outcomes, as we know from the studies of Harald Welzer²⁰ and many surveys worldwide (for example *Antisemitismus in Deutschland...* from 2011²¹), bring undesirable effects for the education about the

¹⁵ D. Perez, “Our Conscience is Clean”: Albanian Elites and the Memory of the Holocaust in Postsocialist Albania’ in J.-P. Himka, J. B. Michlic (eds.), *Bringing the Dark Past...*, p. 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁷ H. Marcuse, ‘Memories of World War II and the Holocaust in Europe’ in G. Martel (ed.), *A Companion to Europe 1900-1945*, Malden 2006, p. 488, *Blackwell Companions to European History*.

¹⁸ G. Schwab, *Haunting Legacies. Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, New York 2010, p. 7.

¹⁹ T. Bilczewski, ‘Trauma, tajemnica, translacja’, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 10 July 2011, 11. dodatek ‘Conrad Festival 2011’.

²⁰ H. Welzer, S. Möller, K. Tschuggnall, “Opa war kein Nazi”. *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, Frankfurt am Main 2002, *Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Eine Buchreihe*.

²¹ *Antisemitismus in Deutschland. Erscheinungsformen, Bedingungen, Präventionsansätze*, Berlin 2011, at <http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Themen/Politik_Gesellschaft/EXpertenkreis_Antisemitismus/bericht.pdf;jsessionid=1615B770CDEA41ECB3F9C74FF63A12AA.2_cid165?__blob=publicationFile>, 3 November 2012.

Holocaust. How can facts and events that are repressed or dismissed from the individual and collective memory be reintegrated into consciousness? The memory work resembles the work with trauma.²²

The memory of traumatic events, researched intensively since the end of WWII and which developed with particular intensity after the Vietnam War, is especially vital for binding members of social, political, religious, and ethnocultural groups, but also may create divisions within and between nations, communities and political entities. John R. Gillis²³ reminds us [...] *that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena*²⁴, thus [...] *highly selective, inscriptive rather than descriptive, serving particular interests and ideological positions*²⁵ and [...] *we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities*²⁶. Post-WWII trauma in Poland, however, did not include Jews murdered on Polish lands. With the process growing after 1960 remembrance of the Holocaust, the symptom of rivalry in suffering emerged full of resentment that Polish suffering was forgotten and Poles are perceived, with time and new scholarship, as “worse than Germans”. It is worth underlining the effort required to work with myths, taboos and trauma in some European countries, as the myth of neutrality dominated, for example, in Sweden for decades after WWII. Similar obstacles were present in other countries, and complicity in the Holocaust was for a long time a taboo topic.²⁷

Holocaust memory (both individual and collective) was distorted and denied in Poland until the mid-1980s. German-Jewish relations after WWII were easier to deal with because they were clearer in terms of the categories of oppressor and victim. They later became more confused and conflicts between political history, collective memory and family stories were also present as revealed in Harald Welzer’s study.

Polish-Jewish relations were painful and memories of those relations were also painful for generations of Jews. Poland is a home, a foreign country and a cemetery at the

²² In Greek *trauma* means “a wound”. The pioneering work in the field of traumatic memory was initiated by Pierre Marie Félix Janet (1859-1947), who anticipated Sigmund Freud in connecting past events to present moments in life and in the usage of the term “the unconscious”. Traumas, similar to norms, values, myths and behaviors, are transmitted from generation to generation. Transmission includes feelings of guilt, delegated to the next generation as a result of a defense mechanism and lack of working through (see: S. Marks, *Dlaczego poszli za Hitlerem? Psychologia narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech*, transl. by A. Gadzała, Warszawa 2009, p. 133, *Biblioteka II Wojny Światowej*). Franklin Ankersmit emphasized that traumatic events from the past are traumatic because they cannot be accepted and assimilated.

²³ J. R. Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship’ in idem (ed.), *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton 1996.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁷ This myth was challenged in the nineties by an American historian Steven Koblik (*The Stones Cry Out. Sweden’s Response to the Persecution of the Jews 1933-1945*, 1987), Paul A. Levine (*From Indifference to Activism. Swedish Diplomacy and the Holocaust 1938-1944*, 1996), Sverker Oredsson (*Lund University during the Second World War*, 1996), journalists Maria-Pia Boëthius, Bosse Schön, Maciej Zaremba and others.

same time. For many Jewish survivors hurt in the past, Poland is an object of love and hate. As long as Polish and Jewish memories are not reconciled, the attitudes of Poles towards Jews and towards the past will remain polarized and vice versa.

Indifference during the Holocaust has caused a fear of the accusation of compliance which was, and still is, covered by silence and/or other defensive mechanisms. The books of Polish scholars: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Alina Skibińska, Adam Puławski, Jakub Petelewicz, Andrzej Żbikowski reveal the darkest pages of history of a Poland occupied by the Germans where Jews were afraid of their neighbours as well as where some ethnic Poles made the decision to risk their life and help. The help itself was also diverse. Passivity against evil results in moral guilt and metaphysical guilt. Even the impossibility of helping those who were persecuted does not erase the guilt of being a witness. Despite the fact of the introduction of the term “collective responsibility” by Jaspers, a notion of “collective guilt” is still present in many debates in Germany.

When in 1945 it became evident that there was a lack of Jewish neighbours, this fact was not noticed in the collective consciousness as a painful loss and as damaging to the national culture. *There were enough Polish graves for years of mourning and recollections, to leave room for the loss of someone who was not really known.*²⁸ Stanisław Krajewski²⁹ asked the question whether anyone in Poland feels sorry for Jewish victims? Witnessing the Holocaust marked Polish collective memory and culture but was erased from institutionalized education for several generations. It began to be present as a topic of historical education in new textbooks published after 2000. Students who participated in the projects evaluated by the author in 2008, which included a field trip to Tykocin and Treblinka, workshops in a high school in Warsaw, the annual project for writing letters to Henio Żytomirski created by the Grodzka Gate – Theater NN in Lublin, the rededication of the Jewish cemetery in Bodzentyn and meetings between Israeli and Polish young people in Kielce, are more and more frequent. Today the Holocaust in Poland is taught by many means outside the classroom, developed and implemented by NGOs and even non-formal groups. There are hundreds of such projects all over Poland. Guidelines for in-class and out-of-class follow-up learning have been tested in practice. These activities include co-operative learning, independent student research in a library or archives, thematic seminars and workshops, project work using museum collections, school exhibitions with photographs or art, theatre presentations, oral history projects, articles, poems, and film scenarios. Students may participate in restoration and maintenance work at memorial sites.

WHAT THE STUDIES TELL US?

One local case study could shed some light on the nature of non-memory in Poland. In 2003 the local kirkut in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki was still a devastated place, with unmarked graves. In total 23 of 39 high school students from the town, when asked

²⁸ H. Szlajfer, *Polacy-Żydzi. Zderzenie stereotypów. Esej dla przyjaciół i innych*, Warszawa 2003, p. 14.

²⁹ S. Krajewski, *Nasza żydowskość*, Kraków-Budapeszt 2010, p. 107.

in a short questionnaire what they knew about the inhabitants of their town before WWII, answered “nothing”. About 50% of the population of Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki were Jews (in 1939 the figure was almost 80%). In total 24 of the sample surveyed did not know anything about the fate of the Jewish population in their town during WWII, 12 knew something and only 3 students had any significant knowledge. Only 5 out of 39 indicated history classes as a source of their knowledge. Those who had knowledge indicated literature and the family as its sources, not the school and their history classes. Only 9 students knew how to define the term “Holocaust”, although not every definition was satisfactory. For 9 students from the sample the term was incomprehensible. Every fourth student did not understand the term at all. But the majority of students connected discrimination against the Jews with the Holocaust. This small but significant study also revealed that the older generation does not transmit knowledge about the past of the town to its youth, or perhaps young people do not have enough interest to learn about the past. Nonetheless they themselves evaluated their own knowledge as insufficient (31 respondents). An important factor is that the MA student who conducted the survey made her own observation that they felt embarrassed that they knew so little about the past of their town.³⁰

Perhaps the low level of knowledge about the Holocaust among Polish young people can be attributed to reluctance to learn about the suffering of Jews. The survey questionnaire used in the author’s study made in 2008 contained questions permitting a comparison of the level of knowledge about the Holocaust to be made between two groups of students: control and experimental. The percentage of those students who in their definitions included the terms genocide, mass killings or murder of Jews in reference to the Holocaust was much higher in the experimental group (59%) than in the control group (33%). A distinctly higher percentage of students from the experimental group was likewise able to indicate the total number of victims of the Holocaust. The answer “6 million” was chosen by 34% of the respondents from the experimental group, while only 14% of the control group surveyed made the same response.

On 1-3 February 2008 the polling institution PBS DGA conducted a survey of a random sample of 1056 adult Poles for *Gazeta Wyborcza*. In total 525 of the respondents knew about the publication of *Fear* by Jan Tomasz Gross, 33% of those surveyed believed that it was good that such a book had been published while 34% had the opposite opinion. In total 41% of the respondents believed that the book was an unjustified anti-Polish attack and only 19% disagreed with this statement. More young people (37% of 18-24 year olds) than older people (14% of those 60 years old and over) believed that such self-examination is needed by Poles. In general, the Poles surveyed did not feel responsible for a lack of sufficient help to Jews during WWII, post-war pogroms and contemporary antisemitism. The thesis of *Fear* that Poles were helping Germans to murder Jews was rejected by the majority of those surveyed (85% of the respondents considered that no one collaborated or only a small part of society). At the

³⁰ D. Szumska, *Nieobecni w świadomości współczesnych. Żydzi Nowego Dworu Mazowieckiego a dziesięć lat później o nich wśród miejscowych licealistów*, Warszawa 2003 (manuscript).

same time, 65% of respondents had the opinion that Poles who were hiding Jews were afraid to talk about it after the war, which contradicts the opinions about the lack of antisemitism after the war. Poles do not want to accept the fact of post-war antisemitism and refuse to take responsibility for that antisemitism.

A careful look at the distribution of responses to questions relating to the Holocaust, both in 1998 and ten years later,³¹ indicates persistent conflicts between a realization of the need to teach about the Holocaust, on the one hand, and indifference toward anti-Jewish graffiti on the other, and between the perception of Polish assistance for Jews and the competitive juxtaposition of Polish and Jewish suffering during the War. The percentage of respondents who believed that Poles helped the Jews during the war “as much as they could” rose between 1998 and 2008 by 6%. The percentage who believed that Poles “could have done more” (11%) and “did not help at all” (2%) did not change significantly (in 1998 the responses were 9% and 2%). In 2008, 7% fewer of those surveyed believed that Jews should not get special treatment and care because of their wartime losses and suffering (41% in 1998 compared to 34% in 2008). The number of hesitant answers increased – 52% of respondents chose the answer “I don’t know” in 1998, and ten years later this rose to 60%. The percentage agreeing that Jews should get special treatment due to their losses and suffering during the war decreased, but not significantly – from 7% to 5%.

In 2008, 38% of students responded “I don’t know”, and 34% responded affirmatively to the question “Did Jews live in your town before the War?”. One in five students answered that they were not interested in this subject, and about 50% claimed that Jews once lived in their town and left various things behind. A considerable proportion knew nothing about or was not interested in the topic.

As the most recent research demonstrates, there are some positive changes in the knowledge about and attitudes toward the Holocaust. However, there is a danger that students’ consciousness with regard to the Holocaust may become limited to bare historical facts or repetition of certain general statements without deeper understanding of the essence of the phenomenon and the losses to Poland and Polish culture. Despite numerous initiatives in local communities, a considerable proportion of young people did not seem to realize that Holocaust victims, apart from the Jews deported to death camps in Poland from other European countries, were also Polish citizens living in Polish cities, towns and villages.

We know from the survey conducted in 2008/2009³² that, when asked, 38% of young Poles confirmed that the memory of the Holocaust is personally important to them (more for younger and lyceum students (46%) than for older and those attending vocational schools). The responses also showed that 13% of the total disagreed with the above statement and 47% of respondents answered “hard to say”. More than one

³¹ J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *Attitudes of Young Poles toward the Jews and the Holocaust*, Cracow 2009 (manuscript of the report from the study conducted in 2008-2009 with the support of the International Task Force for Holocaust Education, Research and Remembrance, La Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków).

³² *Ibid.*

third of young Poles seem to understand that Poland lost its Jewish citizens and this fact affects some students. Regional civil society institutions are very committed and effective in their educational endeavours and are doing grassroots work helping Poles to understand the significance of the loss of Jews and Jewish culture and to commemorate it properly.

The Grodzka Gate – Theatre NN Centre in Lublin, (founded in 1990) is a local government cultural centre working to preserve the cultural heritage and to promote education. In its programs the Centre invokes the symbolic and historical meaning of its location, the Grodzka Gate (the former gate between the Christian and Jewish quarters), and of the city of Lublin, a meeting place of cultures, traditions and religions. The Centre reconstructed its headquarters, the fourteenth-century Grodzka Gate and adjoining townhouses, reinvigorating this part of the Lublin's old and dilapidated city center.

The project of the Grodzka Gate – Theatre NN Centre 'Letters to the Ghetto', has been continued since 2001. Letters sent to Jewish people living in the non-existent Jewish quarter in Lublin, were returned to the sender with the post office note "addressee unknown" and raised awareness of the loss of the Jewish people, their homes, and their culture. The former Jewish quarter was totally destroyed and a high speed road is situated on the site of the former synagogue. This project is an example of educational activity performed outside the classroom setting, going beyond learning about historical facts from the textbooks, aimed at involving participants' emotions. The oral history of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre enables the development of educational projects on the region's history aimed at enhancing a collective identity among the current inhabitants of Lublin by including the pre-war Jewish minority of Lublin into the sphere of the common history of the city. The history of Lublin as a multiethnic and multireligious city is not known to contemporary young people. The model of the Jewish quarter in Lublin, destroyed first by the Germans during WWII and later by Poles who didn't decide to rebuild this part of the city, allows young Poles to learn about the city space and culture which was destroyed and erased from the collective memory of post-war generations of Lublin's inhabitants. The multisensory permanent exhibition is more and more often also visited by young Israeli people who, after visiting Majdanek, have a chance to learn about Jewish life in Lublin prior to WWII and about what was lost during the Holocaust.

Due to the diverse methodology it is impossible to compare data between various countries. National UK research conducted by the Institute of Education (IOE) at the University of London revealed that more than 50% of teachers surveyed stated that it is difficult to teach about the Holocaust.³³ Paul Salmons (after: Jedwab)³⁴ *suggests that teaching the lessons of the Holocaust might inspire youth to work harder towards a fairer, more tolerant society that sees strength in diversity, values multiculturalism and com-*

³³ *Teaching History*, Vol. 141: 'The Holocaust edition' (2010), p. 3.

³⁴ J. Jedwab, 'Measuring Holocaust Knowledge amongst Canadians', *Canadian Diversity*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2009), pp. 12-13.

bats racism. The main objective of a longitudinal study, *Never Again! Does Holocaust Education Have an Effect on Pupils' Citizenship Values and Attitudes?*,³⁵ commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2006, is to estimate the impact of teaching about the Holocaust on a student's citizenship values and attitudes, particularly related to minorities and disadvantaged groups. The study found the following results: students who studied the Holocaust tend to have more positive attitudes and values than those who didn't study it. On the basis of Polish studies, it would be difficult to draw a similar conclusion.

In 2011 the study *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination. A European Report* was conducted by Andreas Zick, Beate Kuepper and Andreas Hoevermann for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's "Project on Combating Right-wing Extremism".³⁶ The report from the Zick et al. study revealed an interconnection between different types of prejudices, an increase in group-focused enmity with age and a decrease with education and income (self-assessed variable). Among the findings that the researchers presented is that 72% of Poles, 48% of Germans, 68% of Hungarians and 15% of Dutch believe that "Jews seek to benefit from their antecedents' suffering during the Nazi era". In total 50% of Poles and only 5% of Dutch thought that "Jews have too much influence in the country."

Sweden, along with the UK, promotes a nationwide program of research in the field of education about the Holocaust, surveying the attitudes of students and teachers. This is an example of an outstanding contribution in the area of studying Holocaust consciousness. Several Swedish studies were generated by the assumption that knowledge of the Holocaust may affect attitudes toward diversity and raise awareness of contemporary genocides.³⁷ The teachers surveyed believed that education about the Holocaust is very important, a topic more open to the examining of moral issues than other subjects. The tendency with regard to Holocaust denial in Sweden, as observed between 1997 and 2004, was that the proportion of secondary school students completely certain that the Holocaust took place was somewhat diminished from 71% in 1997 to 67% in 2001 but at the same time the proportion of students not at all sure (4% in 1997) had decreased to 2% in 2004. In Sweden the percentage of students either

³⁵ H. Maitles, P. Cowan, E. Butler, *Never Again! Does Holocaust Education Have an Effect on Pupils' Citizenship Values and Attitudes?*, The Scottish Government, 8 September 2006, at <<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/06133626/2>>, 11 November 2009.

³⁶ The main concept of the study was that of group-focused enmity introduced by Wilhelm Heitmeyer. The study was conducted in 2008 in eight European countries: Great Britain, the Netherlands, Poland, France, Hungary, Italy, Germany, and Portugal. As a syndrome of group-focused enmity, the following prejudices were studied: anti-immigrant attitudes, racism, antisemitism, anti-Muslim attitudes, sexism and homophobia.

³⁷ The study *Antisemitiska attityder och föreställningar i Sverige* (by H. Bachner, J. Ring, 2005) was funded and commissioned by the Living History Forum (LHF) and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. The LHF also commissioned a survey of 10 000 teachers (5081 respondents). The AJC study of the adult population in 2005 revealed that the highest rate of correct answers with regard to the number of murdered Jews was in Sweden (55%). The studies prove the genuine and remarkable effort of Sweden in the area of Holocaust knowledge and awareness.

completely or fairly certain about the Holocaust was at the level of 85% in 1997 and 83% in 2004 (*Intolerance. Antisemitic, homophobic, islamophobic and anti-immigrant tendencies among young people, 2004*).³⁸

BACK TO TABOO

Taboo (described in the work of Mary Douglas, Georg Simmel, Ervin Goffman, Jeffrey K. Olick, Eviatar Zerubavel) causes distortions of memory and further deformations of identity and so is close in analysis to pathologies of silence and the term of postmemory of Marianne Hirsch. Before Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbors* was published in 2000, the mass murder of Jewish neighbours by Polish neighbours was not debated in Poland but was well known locally, as revealed in Agnieszka Arnold's documentary film *Neighbors*.³⁹ Drunken villagers in Jedwabne had discussed who did what and who had gained Jewish property. When the whole of Poland debated Jedwabne, the local population, with few exceptions, stopped talking, choosing silence and non-presence at the ceremonies commemorating the victims, as a defense mechanism.

Jadwiga Plonka, the daughter of Kazimierz and Maria Zygadlewicz, the Righteous from Bodzentyn, spoke at the conference in Bodzentyn on September 2-3, 2010 "How to Teach about the Holocaust".⁴⁰ She told the story of her parents hiding Józef Rubinowicz and mentioned that he had left her parents' home in the night *because everybody knew how it was*. No-one from the Polish-Swedish audience asked what she meant. What did the silence of 2010 cover? The shame of the local Polish audience in Bodzentyn? The shame of Swedish guests, apparently well informed about the behavior of some Poles towards Jews returning to their homes after the Holocaust? The silence⁴¹ indicated that it was redundant to ask about "how it was" after WWII.

³⁸ A research symposium examining a new topic in academic research, namely the role of bystanders, deserves special attention. It was held at the Living History Forum in 2007 in collaboration with Uppsala University and accompanied an exhibition and training program for teachers and the publication of teaching materials. Earlier, in 2000, the Swedish Research Council undertook a government assignment to develop a special research program with regard to "Sweden's Relations with Nazism, Nazi Germany and the Holocaust". The program resulted in numerous studies conducted by scholars from several universities based on various disciplines and theoretical perspectives, research on empirical data designed to clarify various issues, i.e. the establishment of Nazi groups in Sweden or the relations of the Swedish Scientific Community with Nazism and Fascism or the study of Eugenics ("Racial Hygiene") in 1930-1950.

³⁹ Jan Tomasz Gross had got permission to borrow the title of his book from the film.

⁴⁰ The conference was organized by the Dawid Rubinowicz Association, the In-Service Teaching Center for educators from the Swietokrzyskie Voivodship and the Swedish Committee against antisemitism.

⁴¹ The conspiracy of silence resembles, also, the "unthought known", a term used by Christopher Bollas in *The Shadow of the Object* which, in contrast to repressed unconscious knowledge, *constitutes a dimension of the unconscious that emerges from experiences that have been lived but never fully known* (after G. Schwab, *Haunting Legacies...*, p. 7). Gabrielle Schwab in borrowing this term refers not to the experience of infants before they start to speak as Bollas originally meant, but rather to registered, yet not remembered, traumatic experiences.

What do empirical studies tell us about education about the Holocaust in Polish schools?

Challenges and best practices of education about the Holocaust should be generated by the outcomes of evaluation. An evaluation may relate to more general educational issues and more specific ones regarding teaching about the Holocaust per se. Among areas of concern are divergences between history, historiography, collective memory and education. Still another divergence emphasized by Dan Diner⁴² is between historical reality and historiography with words which seem to reflect a salient process relevant for Poland when the new historiographical studies clash with what was “known” as history. *Often the historiographical paradigm – says Diner⁴³ – does not catch up with the historical reality that preceded it until much more than a generation or so later.* Historians exploring Polish archives create historiography that was not present in Poland, with few exceptions, until 2000 when the book *Neighbors* of Jan Tomasz Gross was published which polarized public opinion, 59 years after the mass murder of Jews by Polish neighbors.

When we look at educational initiatives in Poland after 1989, we should ask whether the initiatives are reconstructing or constructing the memory of the Holocaust? After the fall of Communism, when censorship ended and the school system was decentralized, the history of the Jews in Poland and the Holocaust were topics which attracted the attention of educational policy makers, academics, journalists and some teachers. Due to major changes in the educational system, the curricula guidelines since the late 1990s have obliged Polish teachers to teach about the Holocaust.⁴⁴ We could debate whether the political will and policy reflects practice. No empirical study was conducted on the subject to confirm, for example, how many instructors of religion classes address the issue of the Holocaust, how they address it, and in what context. So we remain in the area of reflection upon what teachers “may” do, rather than what they actually do. The state’s obligation to teach about the Holocaust accords with the expectations of young people: as mentioned earlier, 88% of young people identified the need for it in 1998. After the fall of communism, the crucial non-answered questions remain: what is the place of the Holocaust in the education of young Polish people, how it is taught and, what kinds of difficulties the teachers face, and how they overcome them?

The empirical research conducted in 2008-2012 attempted to pose some research questions and seek answers related to the issues presented above. The analysis of 105 interviews conducted with students of Polish secondary schools, teachers, NGO rep-

⁴² D. Diner, ‘From Society to Memory. Reflections on a Paradigm Shift’ in D. Mendels (ed.), *On Memory. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Oxford 2007.

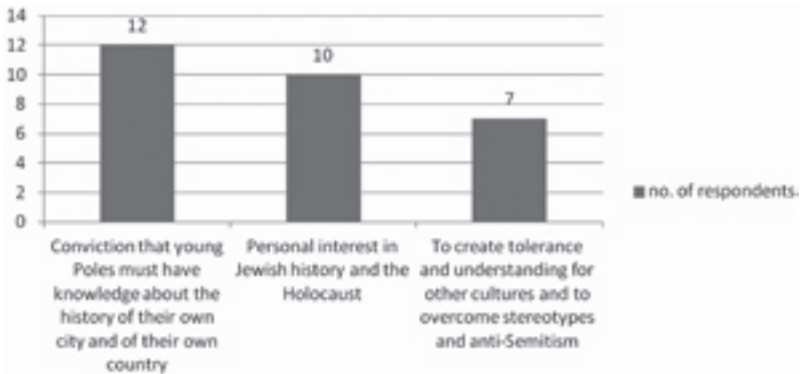
⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴⁴ As stated in the information submitted by the Polish government for the report prepared for the “Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Conference on Anti-Semitism” and on “Other Forms of Intolerance” in Cordoba on 8-9 June 2005, the Holocaust is not taught as a separate subject, although it is incorporated into the history, Polish-literature and civic-education curricula of lower and upper secondary schools.

representatives, local leaders and workshop trainers,⁴⁵ the outcomes of the focus group interviews with teacher-experts conducted in Kraków in 2008 and the evaluation of six summer institutes for teachers on the basis of a survey of former participants conducted in November 2012 are presented below.⁴⁶

Why do some teachers put a lot of time and effort – in most cases without getting paid – in extracurricular activities and projects? And if they do so, why would they pick such a painful and difficult topic as the Holocaust and the history of Jews in Poland? From the interviews, three main motivations emerge which are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. What motivates teachers to engage in additional teaching about the Holocaust?



Face to face interviews with teachers; Non-random sample N=29

The first and most often mentioned reason was the conviction that young Poles must have knowledge about the history of their own city and of their own country. Jewish heritage and the Holocaust are an important part of Polish history for some teachers: *Jews were part of the history of our village. Our students have no idea at all who they were and that people of another nationality lived here with us. Usually people do not speak about this [...]* (a teacher from Strzelce Opolskie). In particular, local Jewish history is – according to the respondents – widely unknown among young people. Knowing history is called an “obligation”, and teachers see themselves responsible to pass on knowledge about Jewish heritage and the Holocaust to the next generation. *We also must face painful and difficult moments* (a teacher from Bodzentyn).

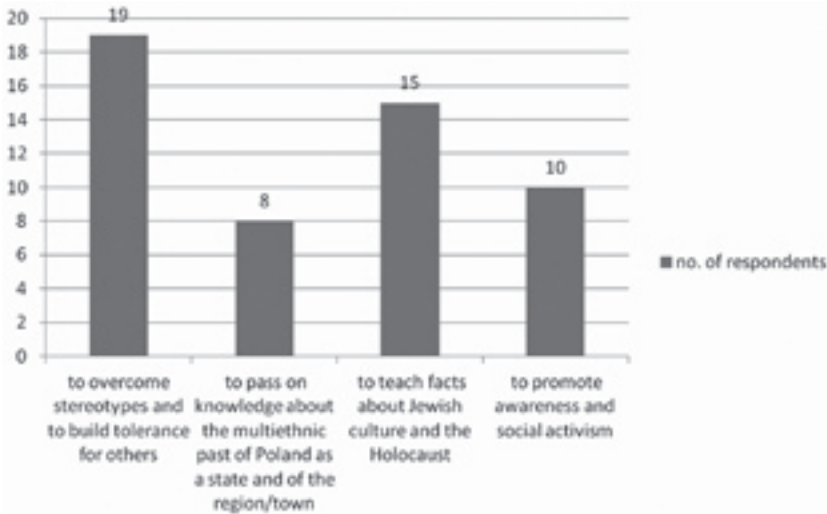
⁴⁵ The data were analyzed by Elisabeth Büttner who also created the graphs. Altogether, there are 61 interviews with students, 29 with secondary school teachers, 13 with representatives of NGOs and 2 with other people (Jakub Petelewicz, the academic secretary of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research and Father Leszek Sikorski, parish priest from Bodzentyn), who are involved in local youth projects about the Holocaust. All respondents are either participants or organizers of extracurricular projects about the Holocaust and Jewish history or participate in/organize additional lectures on Jewish history and the Holocaust during regular school lessons.

⁴⁶ Out of 367 addressees, there were 74 answers. The majority of respondents were secondary school teachers.

Another motive was personal interest in Jewish history and the Holocaust. Teachers work alone on their projects or with the help of a small number of colleagues. This finding shows the lack of general acknowledgment of the importance of teaching about the Holocaust and the lack of institutionalization. Thirdly, the aim to create tolerance and understanding for other cultures and to overcome negative stereotypes and antisemitism was repeatedly mentioned as a reason for teachers' involvement in Holocaust-related projects.

When asked about the aims of their additional activities, teachers mentioned the following points:

Figure 2. Aims of teaching about the Holocaust according to teachers



Face to face interviews with teachers; Non-random sample; N=29

The motives of fear in society and/or specifically students of talking about the Holocaust and the former local Jewish community were also revealed in the interviews. When asked about doubts of students about participating in a Polish-Israeli youth exchange, one respondent mentioned the fear of being confronted with the persecution and bad treatment of Jews by the local population of ethnic Poles.⁴⁷

The majority of respondents did not encounter negative reactions with regard to teaching about the Holocaust.⁴⁸ Although active disturbances were reported only in

⁴⁷ The respondent from Kielce, where in the 1946 Kielce pogrom around 40 Jews were killed by ethnic Poles.

⁴⁸ A significant group of respondents did not answer the question. However, there were cases of lack of understanding ("why are you doing this?", "there are a lot of more interesting topics" etc.) as well as open disapproval. One teacher reported disparaging comments about his involvement, another even encountered colleagues actively discouraging students to take part in his project. Two respondents had to deal with general disapproval at school, lack of support from colleagues and negative influen-

individual cases, a significant group of respondents complained about indifference and a lack of will to help or to join projects. Concerning the involvement of students, at each from Sobków stated that *the students see and feel that teachers are very involved; they see that nobody is pretending that we are authentically interested in what we do. Therefore they are also very willing to participate.*

If projects required a lot of extracurricular involvement and extrawork, the results were usually later presented to the public or even published on the internet or in other forms.⁴⁹ The motivation of students was higher, according to teachers, if the project involved elements of active participation with a concrete result (i.e. a film, exhibition etc.) and if the students have time to discuss their opinions and questions. As far as parents were concerned, most teachers experienced tacit approval or lack of interest.⁵⁰ It would be desirable to have a stronger dialogue between teachers and parents, promotion of their projects and attempts to convince parents of the necessity of addressing the topic of the Holocaust in schools.

Respondents who noticed a general antisemitic attitude in the local society mainly faced the question, “Why talk about Jews at all?”. Respondents from Kielce encounter an especially pronounced fear and climate of taboo regarding speaking out about the pre-war Jewish community and the Holocaust. It is important to notice here that out of all respondents, there was a large group who did not remember a single negative comment, either from students, or from teachers and parents.

There is broad consensus among the NGO representatives interviewed that the main and essential precondition for cooperation is the interest, motivation and initiative of teachers. There is no nation-wide well established system of financial support – and where grants are occasionally available, the teachers do not know about them. To sum up, the main problems are: lack of knowledge about how to approach the Holocaust and how to organize projects, where to get information and help, lack of money and time for trips, too little time for teaching about the Holocaust in Polish school curricula. Participation in projects is strongly connected to the personal interest of teachers. A systemic nation-wide strategy is lacking, projects having an occasional, and mainly local, character.

ce on students' willingness to become involved in a project. There was also one case of a teacher from Białystok being attacked by neo-fascist groups in the form of graffiti, threats, exposing personal data with a phone number and address on a website etc.

⁴⁹ A teacher from Szczekociny carried out oral history projects. Students interview elderly people (Christians and Jews) from the region about their memories from the interwar and wartime periods. These interviews were then available as films for internal use at school. In these cases in particular, teachers reported extraordinary motivation, interest and willingness to sacrifice free time, resources and effort on the part of the students.

⁵⁰ Extreme reactions (both very enthusiastic and very negative) were rare, the dominating reaction was permission to participate. In total 9 out of 31 respondents reported isolated or repeated cases of verbal anti-Semitism being uttered among students, parents, other teachers or local society. *There is hidden antisemitism. I was asked questions, if I am getting money for this [...] (teacher from Białystok). I know that parents or grandparents were wondering – I was told about that – if I was a Jew. Because I am dealing with Jewish issues, therefore I could be a Jew (teacher from Szczekociny).*

The fundamental question is what kind of projects work best? Which approaches and techniques are to be recommended to teachers who want to teach about the Holocaust? Activities/projects where participation was optional and voluntary brought the best results and involved great enthusiasm and interest on the behalf of the students. Another strategy used to motivate students is to plan an event with the objective of exposing the results of the project to the public. Some respondents had organized exhibitions of photos taken during the projects or artistic work, theatre play presentations or lectures. A very important trend is the clear preference of a personalized approach to history. Instead of showing statistics, talking about general numbers and pure facts, history (in this case – the Holocaust) is taught by focusing on individual life stories and fates. Projects which go beyond just listening to a lecture or watching films are evaluated in the most positive manner. In particular, interactive workshops with different elements (film excerpts; work with testimonies; visiting synagogues, memorial sites, cemeteries) and projects, where students could use their own creative work, were most positively evaluated. In some of the respondents' projects students conducted interviews with local Holocaust survivors and contemporary witnesses or created a "map of remembrance" describing the history of their town/village in the shadow of the Holocaust. An approach used by several teachers/organizations was setting the task for students of preparing and conducting their own guided tour around their hometown.

Most of the projects realized in Poland are amateur projects which are mainly the result of a need "coming from the heart" of the teacher and therefore they are created from a perspective of personal needs and passion. These projects are not usually preceded by a diagnosis of the situation in the community and their effectiveness is unknown because of the lack of an evaluation of the results.

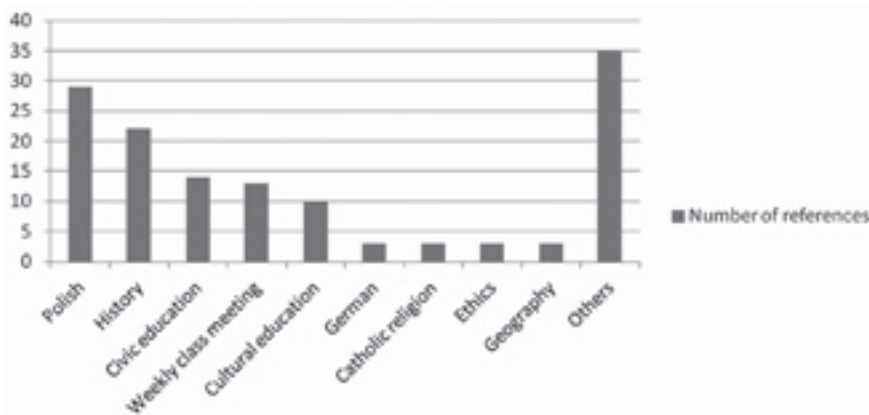
"THE INTERNATIONAL SUMMER INSTITUTE – TEACHING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST" 2006-2012

"The International Summer Institute – Teaching about the Holocaust" has taken place since 2006 and is a joint project of several Polish and international institutions: the Center of Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian University, the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie/USA, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority YadVashem in Jerusalem and the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow. The project is supported by the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim, the International Youth Meeting Centre in Oświęcim and the Jewish Centre in Oświęcim.⁵¹ The survey of teachers who graduated from the Institute revealed several pieces of information concerning education about the Holocaust in Poland.

⁵¹ The latest Institute, in July 2012, was sponsored by: Claims Conference. The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust, the Michael H. Traison Foundation for Poland, Mrs. Shirley and Mr. Yossi Sagol and the Michael Arkes Family.

The subjects in which our participants teach about the Holocaust were distributed as follows:

Figure 3. Subjects during which the Holocaust is taught

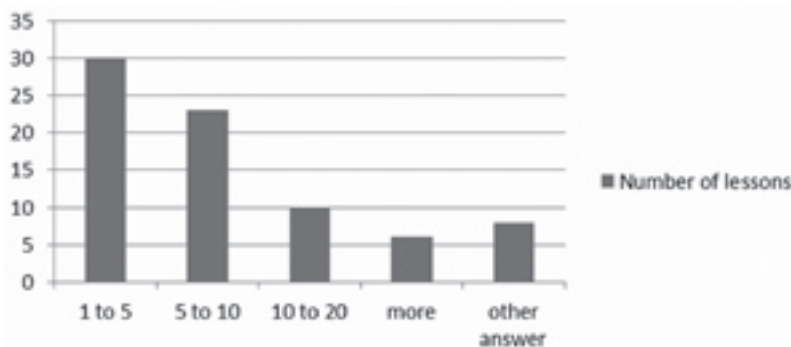


Survey of teachers, non-random sample of the Summer Institutes graduates; N=74

While history and Polish are the most frequently mentioned subjects, the column “Others” contains a whole variety of initiatives and occasions like extracurricular activities, educational projects or voluntary afternoon classes.

According to the answers received, the number of hours which our respondents have at their disposal for teaching about the Holocaust in the course of a 3-year program,⁵² is distributed as follows:

Figure 4.



Survey of teachers, non-random sample of the Summer Institutes graduates; N=74

⁵² Polish secondary school education is divided into two different school types (gymnasium and lyceum), each of which lasts three years.

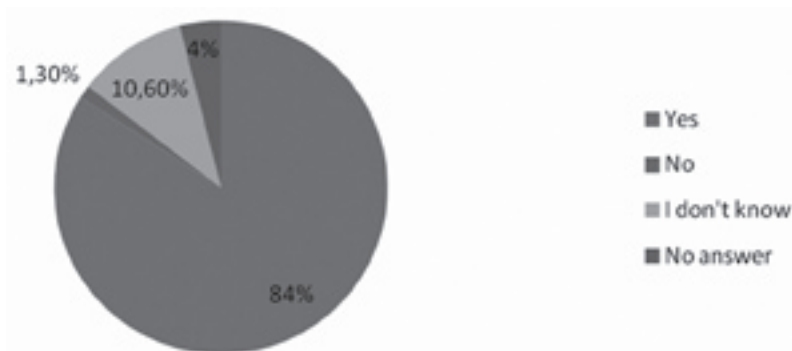
30 respondents had only 1-5 lessons (45 min. each) within a 3-year cycle at his/her disposal to discuss the Holocaust. Only 10 out of 73 respondents were able to dedicate between 10 and 20 hours, while 6 could devote even more time.

An issue mentioned among respondents (16) was the negative attitude of students towards lessons on the Holocaust. Among the problems listed were antisemitic attitudes, lack of acceptance of the co-responsibility of some Poles (especially in the local context), negative stereotypes and general lack of interest. In total 12 out of 74 respondents (16%) detected antisemitism or negative stereotypes towards foreigners (implying that the pre-war Polish Jews are counted as foreigners), mainly due to the atmosphere in the local environment and families, as a problem they face while teaching about the Holocaust. The lack of willingness among students to face up to the negative behavior of parts of Polish society towards Jews during World War II was revealed by teachers. A university teacher from Lublin was faced with statements like "Poles did all they could", "The Jews wouldn't have done even half as much for Poles, if the situation had been the other way around", "The Jews are themselves guilty of the Holocaust". Furthermore, she was occasionally accused to be "anti-Polish" when she discussed the issue of Polish responsibility. A secondary school teacher from Bydgoszcz frequently was faced with the conviction among students that the Holocaust is a specifically Jewish problem and does not concern "us" (Poles). After her lessons however, she observed a change in mindset: *Many students raised the question – it may sound trivial, but probably it is important in order to understand the problem – "and what if it had concerned me personally?"* A secondary school teacher from Tarnowskie Góry was occasionally confronted with negative stereotypes and mystification of the past and interpreted these as self-defense against uncomfortable knowledge about the past. [...] *A quite remarkable level of aversion exists, however, among the elderly, for whom heroism is an inherent part of history and everything else [...] is just seen as a provocation* (librarian/educator from Nowy Sącz). There were also different reactions: *A positive surprise was the attitude of many students who asked questions, initiated discussions and asked for definitions of unknown terms* (secondary school teacher from Starachowice). *The students' reaction is very positive, especially to lessons on site – in their own home town, which they are able to see with different eyes and search for traces of the past...* (NGO activist from Krakow).

In order to have a short and clear indication whether teachers found their participation in the Summer Institute helpful – sometimes from a perspective of several years – we asked them to answer the following question: *Did the content and didactic material offered at the Summer Institute provide you with new ideas for your daily work with students in the field of teaching about the Holocaust and Human Rights?*

The overwhelming majority of respondents (63 out of 74) were convinced to have enriched their knowledge thanks to their participation in the Institute. The outcomes of empirical studies related to teaching about the Holocaust show clearly the need for education: education, which must not be reduced to facts but needs to be embedded in a broader context of antisemitic attitudes, antidiscrimination, tolerance and respect.

Figure 5. Usability of the material offered at the Summer Institute



Survey of teachers, non-random sample of the Summer Institutes graduates; N=74

CONCLUSIONS?

There is a complex web of problems related to remembering the Holocaust in Poland, known as the principal location of the Holocaust because *most of its victims found their death there. [...] And millions of Poles saw, heard – or smelt it.*⁵³ Among the main factors determining the evolution and constraining the expression of Holocaust memory in Poland were a mass of traumatic emotions, moral challenges and the politics of communism, including censorship. In addition, fear of condemnation interplayed with a need to admit guilt. The context of Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust, i.e. the policies of the occupier, is also an important factor and often underplayed by many researchers writing on this topic. But the harsh conditions of German occupation, their own enormous losses and the false attributions and projections of Stalin's crimes onto Jews associated with communism, do not and cannot explain the murdering of women, children, elderly people and infants. Therefore cognitive understanding of the mechanisms of scapegoating and/or acting out do not, and should not, diminish moral obligations resulting from the past atrocities committed by the in-group. The reality, however, is different and collective amnesia is still present in Poland and many other countries, along with the attempt, initiated by governments and NGOs, to contribute to collective remembrance of the Holocaust.

“The resistance norm” as Dienke Hondius called this phenomenon, was developed in the Netherlands after WWII. The unwelcome return of Jews after 1945 remained a taboo.⁵⁴ The founding myth of national solidarity during WWII, where collaborators were seen as an aberration, was developed for national unity in destroyed states and societies. This is found in the Netherlands and many other European countries and is still

⁵³ D. Stola, ‘Review of “Bondage to the Dead”’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1997), p. 426.

⁵⁴ M. Kronemeijer, D. Teshima, ‘A Founding Myth...’

fuelling national identities and national narrative. A crucial question is how and why some individuals search for the truth, destroying the monolithic image of an honest/heroic/pious country? The study carried out by the author in 2008 did not bring an answer to that question, but revealed that the search for the “truth” is a significant motivation to learn and teach about the Holocaust.

In Poland, after the Jedwabne debate, there was a need for a hero, which was provided by Irena Sendler, who, together with her team, saved hundreds of Jewish children by smuggling them out from the Warsaw ghetto. The Jan Karski campaign, rightly acknowledging a forgotten man who wanted to stop the Holocaust, counterbalances individual collaborators. The curricula do not pay enough attention to the attitudes of Poles during the Holocaust. The Jedwabne case is present in only a few new textbooks written in Poland after the 2008 reform in education. National histories and identities in education about the Holocaust in post-1989 Poland and the wider world emphasise heroism and public debates. Challenging the attitudes of Polish and other societies during WWII became more a history of social relations than a component of collective consciousness.

The challenge to Poland after years of silence is to (re)construct the historical memory, not in isolation, but as the shared, often painful Polish-Jewish memory, and to acknowledge that the destruction of 10% of Poland's citizens, Poles of Jewish origin, is an integral part of our national past. There is a challenge for all of us. According to the words of the great Polish poet Czesław Miłosz from his Nobel lecture: *Those who are still alive receive a mandate from those who are silent forever. They can fulfil their duties only by trying to reconstruct precisely things as they were by wresting the past from fictions and legends.*

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