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The Historicity of the Witness: The Polish Relationship to Jews and Germans in the Polish Memory Discourse of the Holocaust

If one bears witness for a crime that happened to someone else,[1] the entanglement between the perpetrator, the victim, and the witness is relevant not only for the event itself, but also for how the event is remembered. This article focuses on the Polish witnesses of the Holocaust, who reflect themselves in an act of memory in their relation to Jews and Germans.[2] Analyzing the historicity of the witness through a discourse analysis of the Polish self-image as witness in Polish memory culture provides an opportunity to understand the Polish historical experience from a Polish point of view. The analysis of the Polish self-image as witness differs from concepts or terms like "bystanders" (Raul Hilberg), or "neighbors" (Jan T. Gross), within memory discourse; since they are often used with negative implications, in Poland they are mostly rejected as being judgmental.

The historicity of the witness is explored in this article by first outlining the methodological concept of witnessing. Second, the perception and narration of ethnicity in the act of witnessing is analyzed. Subsequently, representations of Polish witnesses in Western memory discourses of the Holocaust are discussed. Fourth, Polish eyewitnesses' self-perceptions are addressed, followed by a concluding discussion of entangled and divided memory cultures.

The Concept of Witnessing

Witnesses play a very important role in memory discourses. They can inform others about what has happened to someone else. Therefore, they are different from victims and perpetrators. Those who were defined by the race policy of the German occupier as Poles in World War II became not only victims themselves but were also present when those defined as Jews were killed by Germans.

1 In this article, I focus on those who bear witness for someone else's fate. However, there are also those who bear witness to their own experience, like many Jewish survivors.

2 This article is based on research conducted for my Ph.D. project, which was published in 2015; see, Hannah Maischein, *Augenzeugenschaft, Visualität, Politik: Polnische Erinnerungen an die deutsche Judenvernichtung* [Witnessing, Visuality, Politics: Polish Memories of the German Destruction of the Jews] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

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Therefore, the figure of the witness is of general interest in Polish memory discourse. Taking into consideration the division from and the entanglement with Jews and Germans can help to understand the specificity of the Polish historical experience during the Holocaust.

From the point of view of media theory, witnesses are media themselves because they transmit what they have seen. Thus, they seem to allow a very auratic relationship to the historical event for others who come in contact with them: the trace of the event is inscribed in the witness' memory like the light on a photograph.[3] This indexical relationship, often described as authenticity, makes us forget that there is no representation without perspective and thus without interests.[4] When the person who has been there bears witness after the event has taken place, he transforms what he has seen into a testimony that possesses relevance in her view. He wants to transmit this intended meaning of the event to the person he is addressing. The index becomes a symbol in this act of transformation from history to memory. This is the crucial moment in the act of witnessing, because even though the witness has been there, he is unable to prove that what he is saying is true.[5] To make the person addressed a "secondary witness,"[6] the "epistemological gap"[7] between the witness and his account needs to be filled. To

3 In terms of representation, the trace is an indexical representation of the event inscribed in a media and therefore possesses the highest authority of all forms of representation. See Oliver R. Scholz, *Bild, Darstellung, Zeichen,* 2nd ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 2004), 17–19; W.J. Thomas Mitchell, "Repräsentation," in *Bildtheorie*, W. J. Thomas Mitchell (ed.) (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 78–97; Roland Barthes, "Es-ist-so-gewesen," in *Die helle Kammer: Bemerkung zur Fotografie*, Roland Barthes (ed.) (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 86.
4 This is as true for narration as for visualization. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik* geschichtlicher Zeiten (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 183–192; W. J. Thomas Mitchell, "Was ist ein Bild?," in *Bildlichkeit: Internationale Beiträge zur Poetik*, Volker Bohn (ed.) (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 48; Jens Ruchatz, "Fotografische Gedächtnisse: Ein Panorama medienwissenschaftlicher Fragestellungen," in *Medien des kollektiven Gedächtnisses: Konstruktivität, Historizität, Kulturspezifität*, Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.). (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 89; John Durham Peters, "Witnessing," *Media, Culture and Society 23* (2001): 716.
5 Jacques Derrida, "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text:" Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," in *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, Michael Clark (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 190.
6 For more on secondary or post-memory, see Reinhart Koselleck, "Gebrochene Erinnerung? Deutsche und polnische Vergangenheiten zum Beispiel," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* no. 220, September 22 and 23, 2001, 49; Marianne Hirsch, "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," in *Acts of Memory – Cultural Recall in the Present*, Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (eds.) (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 1999), 2–23; Marianne Hirsch, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
7 Peters, "Witnessing," 710.

be considered of “documentary” value,[8] the testimony needs to be legitimized. Thus, the communicative act between seeing, representing, and addressing is meant to enable legitimization of the witness’ account.[9] John D. Peters describes the difficulty of transmission as a struggle for legitimization: “The forensics of the trial, the pains of the martyr, and the memoirs of the survivor are all attempts to overpower the melancholy fact that direct sensory experience [...] vanishes when put into words and remains inaccessible to others [...].”[10] Analyzing the politics of memory strategies used to legitimize the witness is therefore crucial to the de-construction of the legitimization of the witness.

One of the most important criteria for the legitimization of the witness is the proximity to the event.[11] Thus, space is the central category for the analysis of the individual who is at the scene, i.e. the bystander.[12] During World War II, the German occupiers made the Polish territory the center of the annihilation of European Jews. The greatest number – and the most heinous of the war’s extermination camps, including Birkenau (Brzezinka), Treblinka, Sobibór, Bełżec and Kulmhof (Chełmno) – were erected on the territory that would come to belong to the Polish state after the war. How did this shape the national memory discourse in post-war Poland, taking into consideration that many of those who shared this experience belonged after the war to the Polish People’s Republic?[13]

8 Documentary means that it can “teach” (from the Latin “docere”) someone something. See James E. Young, *Beschreiben des Holocaust – Darstellung und Folgen der Interpretation* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 39.

9 See Aleida Assmann, “Vier Grundtypen von Zeugenschaft,” in *Zeugenschaft des Holocaust: Zwischen Trauma, Tradierung und Ermittlung*, Michael Elm and Gottfried Kößler (eds.) (Frankfurt/Main/New York: Campus, 2007), 47; Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, “Introduction,” in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (ed.) (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 12.

10 Peters, “Witnessing,” 717.

11 Ibid., 715. There can even be a kind of hierarchy of witnesses depending on who has been closest to the event.

12 Etymologically the “parastatês” (Greek) indicates, like the modern term “bystander,” the vicinity in terms of space.

13 Barbara Breysach’s work explores the textual memory discourse of those who might have become witnesses; see Barbara Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen: Die Vernichtung der Juden in der deutschen und polnischen Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015); Izabela Kowalczyk analyzes the challenges of Polish post-memory in visual media after a long time of suppression, see Izabela Kowalczyk, *Podróż do przeszłości: Interpretacje najnowszej historii w polskiej sztuce krytycznej* (Warsaw: SWPS Academica, 2010); Most authors assume that Poles are either unaware of their responsibility as witnesses and this is why they don’t bear witness (see for example Alina Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), or that they are traumatized and therefore unable to remember (see for example Michael

To call Poland a "witness' land/country of witnesses"[14] would be misleading, since the other criterion, as important as proximity, is the representation of the event ex-post. In terms of visualization or language the event needs to be narrated by the witness who is remembering what has happened.[15] When one bears witness, one embeds the event of the past in the present context of meaning. This actualization of the past event is a symbolic codification of the meaning of the event for the present age. Thus, when analyzing the Polish memory discourse, one cannot take it for granted that Poles have become witnesses because they were somehow present when the Jews were murdered in their country. One must question whether the Poles remembered what happened and became witnesses by representing this specific experience.

The Perception and Narration of Ethnicity

The narration of the witness' account has very interesting implications for a national memory discourse; this can be explored by analyzing the representations of testimony over time. Narrating what has happened to someone else implies a difference between the one who bears witness and the one for whom he does so. Thus, the concept of the witness is based on the assumption that witnessing is an act of perception: the witness perceives himself in contrast to the other.[16] The difference between the two is constructed on two levels: historically and in the memory discourse.

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

14 In comparison to professor of English and Judaic Studies James E. Young, who assigns Poland to the "victim nations," the historian Jean-Charles Szurek calls Poland a "country of witnesses" (kraj-świadek), see James E. Young, "Der Holocaust als Vergangenheit aus zweiter Hand," in *Nach-Bilder des Holocaust in zeitgenössischer Kunst und Architektur,* James E. Young (ed.) (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., 2002), 14; Jean-Charles Szurek, "Między historią a pamięcią: polski świadek Zagłady," in *Zagłada* Żydów*: Pamięć narodowa i pisanie historii w Polsce i w Francji*, Barbara Engelking (ed.) (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2006), 147; See also Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak, "Świadkowie Zagłady – Holocaust jako zbiorowe doświadczenie Polaków," *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 49/2 (2000): 181.

15 See Peters, "Witnessing," 709.

16 See Ulrich Baer, "Introduction," "Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen" – Erinnerungskultur *und historische Verantwortung nach der Shoah*, Ulrich Baer (ed.) (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 22.

When it comes to Jewish and Catholic Poles, the difference is based on the perception of ethnicity.[17] Ethnicity is thus understood as a construction made by those who perceive someone as being defined ethnically. This was instrumentalized by German racial policy during World War II.[18] Historically, the encounter between the occupier and those who were defined differently by the race policy of the occupier was a very difficult one, as Irena Kisielewska remembers. As a Polish-Jewish child, she was hidden in a monastery during the war:

> I remember how the Germans at the beginning of the occupation led Jews who were dressed in the typical manner through the streets and how we–I was one of them–stood there and looked. [...] Only one person laughed sneeringly. Only one. But it is not about him. [...] They [the Jews] might have felt better, if they had been chased through an unpeopled desert, where no one would have seen their pain and their humiliation. [...] The Germans hit, but the presence of the Poles amplified the pain. [...] For some years, Poland was just a reloading site, where every day only some of its inhabitants were singled out and sent to annihilation–this happened in front of the other residents. And maybe it was hard for these people until today to forgive the Poles, even though it was certainly not their fault. [...] On the other hand I guess, the Poles cannot forgive the Jews, that they have become witnesses of their own normal human pusillanimity. But it was not the Jews who imposed such a test on the Poles. It is not their fault.[19]

This highlights the consequences the racial definition of Jews and Poles, constructed and imposed by the German occupier, had for their relationship: becoming a witness by seeing the other's fate resulted in a felt or assigned guilt that has shaped the relationship of Poles and Jews ever since, even though, as Kisielewska emphasizes, the fault is neither that of Poles nor Jews, but of the German occupier.

This difference created by the German occupier needs to be represented and therefore explained in the narration of the memory discourse after the event

17 See Roger Brubaker, *Ethnizität ohne Gruppen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., 2007), 126.
18 See for example Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C. H. Beck, 2010), 189–260; Beate Kosmala, "Ungleiche Opfer in extremer Situation: Die Schwierigkeiten der Solidarität im okkupierten Polen," in *Solidarität und Hilfe für Juden während der NS-Zeit, vol.* 1, Regionalstudien (Polen, Rumänien, Griechenland, Luxemburg, Norwegen, Schweiz), Wolfgang Benz and Juliane Wetzel (eds.) (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 1996), 19–97; Beate Kosmala, "Der deutsche Überfall auf Polen: Vorgeschichte der Kampfhandlungen, in *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen 1939/1945/1949: Eine Einführung,* Włodzimierz Borodziej and Klaus Ziemer (eds.) (Osnabrück: fibre, 2000), 19–41.
19 Irena Kisielewska, "W dziadku – moje korzenie," in *Losy żydowskie: Świadectwo żywych,* vol. 1, Marian Turski, trans. Hannah Maischein (ed.) (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w II Wojnie Światowej, 1995), 17.

took place. By representing the difference between Poles and Jews from a Polish point of view, the Jew is represented as the other. This construction of the other contains important information about the self-image of the witness.[20] Both images, that of the other and that of the self, are constructed in order to create an idealized image of the self and to externalize aspects that have less positive connotations in the current hegemonic discourse.[21] Desires and fears shape the image of the other: "[D]escriptions of alterity are never based on a 'real' other, but on a denial of the self, of the observer's identity. [...] The other is not the description, not even an interpretation of a reality, but the formulation of an ideal, desired identity."[22] In the act of witnessing, the often binary oppositions between self and other are made explicit.[23] There are different grades of acceptance of ambivalence and naturalization of difference that can indicate how one deals with himself and his borders. Both the open concept of self-identification and the exclusionary concepts that can lead to stereotypes and fetishizations can be found in the act of witnessing.[24] Since the act of witnessing consists of a

20 On the construction of otherness and its meaning for self-perception, see for example Ernst van Alphen, "The Other Within," in *Alterity, Identity, Image: Selves and Others in Society and Scholarship*, Raymond Corbey and Joep Leerssen (eds.) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), 2; Ernst van Alphen, "Strategies of Identification," in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretation*, Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (eds.) (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 260; Daniel Tiffany, "Cryptesthesia: Visions of the Other," *American Journal of Semiotics* 6 (1989): 209–219; James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 23.

21 See for example Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Friese, "Introduction," in *Identitäten*, 2nd ed., Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Friese (eds.) (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 23; Paul Gifford, "Defining 'Others:' How Interperceptions Shape Identities," in *Europe and its Others: Essays on Interperception and Identity*, Paul Gifford and Tessa Hauswedell (eds.) (Oxford: Lang, 2010), 17 and 26; Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.) (London: Routledge 1996), 445.

22 Van Alphen, "The Other Within," 3.

23 Sander L. Gilman, Rasse, Sexualität und Seuche: Stereotype aus der Innenwelt der westlichen Kultur (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992), 16.

24 See Hall, "New Ethnicities," 445; W. J. Thomas Mitchell, "Das Sehen zeigen: Eine Kritik der Visuellen Kultur," in *Bildtheorie*, W. J. Thomas Mitchell (ed.) (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp 2008), 335; Isolde Charim, "Der negative Fetisch – Zur Funktionsweise rassistischer Stereotype," in *Typisch! Klischees von Juden und Anderen*, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek and Cilly Kugelmann (eds.) (Berlin: Nicolai, 2008), 27–33 and 36; Gilman, *Rasse, Sexualität und Seuche*, 8; Michael Jeismann, "Was bedeuten Stereotypen für nationale Identität und politisches Handeln?," in *Nationale Mythen und Symbole in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Strukturen und Funktionen von Konzepten nationaler Identität*, Jürgen Link and Wulf Wülfing (eds.) (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 90; Jochen Bonz, Karen Struve, and Homi K. Bhabha, "Auf der Innenseite kultureller Differenz:

representation of testimony, the difference constructed between Poles and Jews is an important part of the witness' account.

Polish Witnesses in Western Holocaust Discourse

The legitimization of the witness is crucial for his credibility. During the Cold War, legitimization of differing memory cultures in East and West were highly political. Because of this, Polish witnesses could not even play a minor role in the Western memory discourse.

The "Western" memory discourse was based on the political alliances after the end of the war, and aimed at legitimizing the Western democracies that were understood in contrast to the totalitarian Soviet Union.[25] When the memory of the destruction of European Jews became central for the national memory discourses in the United States of America, in Israel, and in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), starting in the 1960s, the memory of the destruction of the Jews was associated with dictatorship in contrast to democracy, enlightenment, and modernity.[26] The Cold War created the Western memory discourse and, at the same time, this strong force of legitimization was made invisible.

According to such a view, it was the horrendous Holocaust experience–and not the Marshall Plan or the incipient Cold War antagonism towards the Soviet

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'In the Middle of Differences,'" in *Kultur: Theorien der Gegenwart*, Stefan Moebius and Dirk Quadflieg (ed.) (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2001), 141; Van Alphen, "Strategies of Identification," 260; Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Subject of Visual Culture," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10.

25 Sven Kramer, "Including and Excluding the Holocaust: Changing Perceptions in German and European Identities," in *Europe and its Others: Essays on Interperception and Identity,* Paul Gifford and Tessa Hauswedell (eds.) (Oxford: Lang, 2010), 160; Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007), 259; Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13/1 (Spring 1999): 30. For a critical reflection on the terminology of totalitarianism in the Cold War see Raul Hilberg, "Die Holocaustforschung heute: Probleme und Perspektiven," in *Die Macht der Bilder: Antisemitische Vorurteile und Mythen,* Elisabeth Klamper (ed.) (Wien: Picus, 1995), 408.

26 See Klas-Göran Karlsson, "The Uses of History and the Third Wave of Europeanisation," in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (eds.) (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 42; Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter: Der Holocaust* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 28 and 211.

Union–that brought the Western victors of the war together and forced through the European integration project to create a peaceful and democratic Europe.[27]

This makes it extremely difficult for Poland to find its place in the Western narrative. The role assigned to Poland in Western memory discourse was constructed not only after the end of the war but was already created by the German occupier during the war. National Socialist memory politics (*Gedächtnispolitik*) was already structuring memory while the destruction of the Jews was still taking place: by deporting the Jews to "the East" – a terminology fundamentally vague – these memory politics were integral to the crucial goal of obscuring, to a Western audience, what was going on.[28] From a Western point of view, not only the sites of crime, but also the sites of memory, seem even today to be located far away.[29] In addition, the National Socialists made the places of annihilation invisible and tried to expunge all traces of them. This makes the places of the annihilation of European Jews in Western memory seem like sites without location; they are imagined as unimaginable places. Only in the 1980s did this space start to be filled with the voices of the Jewish survivors. The filmmaker Claude Lanzmann remembers facing 'non-memory spaces' (*non-lieux de la mémoire*) when he went to film the remnants of the German camps in Poland.[30] He called the Polish territory where he shot the images that should be formative for the Western memory discourse, a "no man's land of memory."[31] The Polish space was loaded so heavily with his imagination, that the director remembers experiencing an "extraordinary shock" when he discovered that there were concrete places with concrete names: Treblinka did exist as a real village with a real train station.[32] The same clash of imagination of an unimaginable past and a very concrete place in contemporary Poland happens to many Western tourists today when they come to see the former camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau that are very close to the Polish town Oświęcim. The visitor tries to integrate the location in his mental symbolic order.[33] Lanzmann did

27 Karlsson, "The Uses of History," 41.

28 See Avishai Margalit and Gabriel Motzkin, "Die Einzigartigkeit des Holocaust," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 45 (1997): 13; Léon Poliakov and Josef Wulf, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden* (Berlin-Grunewald: Arani, 1955), 370; Jean François Lyotard, *Heidegger und "die Juden"* (Wien: Passagen-Verlag, 1988), 36f, 40, 42.

29 See Young, *Beschreiben des Holocaust*, 276.

30 Claude Lanzmann, "Der Ort und das Wort: *Über* Shoah," in *"Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen" – Erinnerungskultur und historische Verantwortung nach der Shoah*, Ulrich Baer (ed.) (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 105.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 110.

33 See Detlef Hoffmann, "Auschwitz im visuellen Gedächtnis: Das Chaos des Verbrechens und die symbolische Ordnung der Bilder," in *Auschwitz. Geschichte, Rezeption und Wirkung: Jahrbuch*

this by combining interviews with Jewish survivors with pictures of the Polish landscape.[34] This happened to make Poland a space of memory that seemed to "speak" about the destruction of the Jews; Poland became the "landscape of the Holocaust," even though the sites testify to German crimes.[35] This is criticized as a form of outsourcing of the German complex of guilt,[36] and has culminated in the Polish condemnation of calling the concentration camps "Polish."[37] Only since the 1990s has there been discussion and reflection of how Poland was made a space of the Holocaust in Western memory discourse.[38]

The Western perspective of Polish territory also influenced the notion of the Polish eyewitness in Western memory discourse. One of the first visual representations of the Polish witnesses that would become highly influential was Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* (1985). Raul Hilberg's distinction of Germans, Jews, and Poles as perpetrators, victims, and bystanders influenced Lanzmann's concept for the movie.[39] The relationship of Polish bystanders to the Jewish victims was shown as a rather negative one: the gesture of the cutting of one's neck, made by one of the interviewees, would become symbolic of the Polish bystanders, who were consequently considered as having been cruel and indifferent.[40] This picture contributed to a negative image of Poles as antisemites.[41] Poles were almost never accepted as witnesses for the fate of the Jews in Western memory discourse.

In contrast to the Polish witnesses, the Jewish witnesses would take on a central role in the Western memory discourse with the Eichmann trial in 1961; they were thought to represent important values of Western democracies and

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1996 zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust, Fritz-Bauer-Institut (ed.) (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1996), 248.

34 See Lanzmann, "Der Ort und das Wort," 114.

35 See Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen*, 25; Magdalena Marszałek, "Introduction," in *Nach dem Vergessen: Rekurse auf den Holocaust in Ostmitteleuropa nach 1989*, Magdalena Marszałek and Alina Molisak (eds.) (Berlin: Kadmos 2010), 13.

36 See Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung: Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1998), 81; Frank Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz: Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1991), 237; Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen*, 393.

37 See for example Thomas Urban, "Populisten lassen googeln," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 17, 2010, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/medien-kritik-populisten-lassen-googeln-1.363475.

38 See Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen*, 123.

39 See Lanzmann, "Der Ort und das Wort," 117–118.

40 Ibid., 111.

41 See Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 111.

to function as moral authorities.[42] The authority of the Jewish witness is crucial for questions of representation of what the German perpetrators had planned to be an event without witnesses.[43] Since the 1990s, a different category of witness has become relevant in Western memory discourse: the (late) intervention of the forces of the United States, who liberated concentration camps, became examples and symbols of those who are neither perpetrators nor victims, but who can make a difference by intervening. These spectator-witnesses recognize their moral obligation and act to help the victims. In the course of the globalization of Holocaust memory that began in the 1990s, this ethical position has become a universal one.[44]

Only after the end of Communism did the question of how Poles treated Jews under German occupation become a point of discussion in historiography.[45] The realm of the Communist bloc, where the National Socialists had killed the Jews, came newly into sight for Western scholars, and archives were (relatively) open for research. The lack of research on this topic became evident. With the focus on Polish conduct–did the Poles help or harm the Jews?–moral questions were negotiated. In the beginning of the 1990s historian Raul Hilberg coined the term "bystanders," trying to distinguish precisely between victims, perpetrators, and spectators.[46] This made perfect sense for research that focuses on the perpetrators and the structures created by them; consequently the experience of the victims differentiated totally from that of the perpetrators.[47]

The specificity of the territory where the annihilation of the Jews took place became increasingly clear starting in the 2000s: the influence of the occupation of two aggressors, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, became an important

42 Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 147–182; Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 117.

43 Shoshana Felman, "Im Zeitalter der Zeugenschaft: Claude Lanzmanns Shoah," in *"Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen" – Erinnerungskultur und historische Verantwortung nach der Shoah*, Ulrich Baer (ed.) (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 179–181; Baer, "Introduction," 12.

44 See Levy and Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*, 155, 160, 174–175.

45 Jan T. Gross worked on this topic as early as the late 1970s. See Jan T. Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernment, 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). See works published since 1989, for example Omer Bartov, "Eastern Europe as the Site of Genocide," *Journal of Modern History* 80 (2008): 557–593; Klaus-Peter Friedrich, *Der nationalsozialistische Judenmord und das polnisch-jüdische Verhältnis im Diskurs der polnischen Untergrundpresse (1942–1944)* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2006); Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

46 Raul Hilberg, *Täter, Opfer, Zuschauer: Die Vernichtung der Juden 1933–1945*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1992), 9.

47 See Bartov, "Eastern Europe as the Site of Genocide," 566.

topic.[48] It made the situation in these territories especially complex, because loyalties could be contradictory and ethnicity could be instrumentalized in different ways. Another focus of the relatively new research on the territory where the destruction of the Jews took place is the entangled history between Jews, Germans, and the local Polish population. The relationship of the Polish population to the murder of the Jews committed by the German occupier is much more complex and nuanced than a clear-cut distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders might suggest. Poles could have been victims themselves, could murder or harm the Jews and therefore be considered perpetrators, and they could also help the Jews and therefore be remembered as heroes.[49] Finally, the Poles could profit from the annihilation of the Jews, for example by living on stolen property.[50] However, one can assume that most Poles were neither heroes nor perpetrators, but tried to accommodate, adapt, and find suitable arrangements in a grey zone of the occupations.[51]

The heated debate over Polish-Jewish-American historian Jan T. Gross' essay, "Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland,"[52] was an important impulse for more detailed research on the field of Polish-Jewish relations during the war.[53] However, it also led to a strong politicization of the topic. Today, the critical research on the role of the Poles in the German

48 Timothy Snyder called the countries of concern "bloodlands" and therewith gave a region that had been out of Western sight a catchy label; see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). The consequences for the differing memory cultures are analyzed in Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve (eds.), *Shared History – Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007).

49 See Christoph Dieckmann, Babette Quinkert, and Tatjana Tönsmeyer, "Editorial," in *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der "Kollaboration" im östlichen Europa 1939–1945*, Christoph Dieckmann, Babette Quinkert, and Tatjana Tönsmeyer (eds.) (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2003), 11; Katrin Steffen, "Formen der Erinnerung: Juden in Polens kollektivem Gedächtnis," *Osteuropa* 58/8–10 (2008): 382.

50 See Bartov, "Eastern Europe as the Site of Genocide," 572.

51 See Dieckmann, Quinkert, Tönsmeyer, "Editorial," 19; Gunnar S. Paulsson, "Das Verhältnis zwischen Polen und Juden im besetzten Warschau, 1940–1945," in *"Aktion Reinhardt:" Der Völkermord an den Juden im Generalgouvernment 1941–1944*, Bogdan Musial, (ed.) (Osnabrück: fibre, 2004), 398.

52 Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

53 A number of micro-histories were conducted in the last fifteen years, including Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd: Polowanie na* Żydów *1942–1945 – Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011); Barbara Engelking, *"Szanowny panie gistapo:" Donosy do władz niemieckich w Warszawie i okolicach w latach 1940–1941* (Warsaw: Wydawn. IFiS PAN, 2003); Barbara Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień: Losy* Żydów

destruction of the Jews is constantly flanked by a politicization of history that tries to contrast the very ambivalent image of Poles in the past with a positive one. Highlighting Polish aid for Jews is often understood as a patriotic act. Even though a historian like Gross who tries to keep in mind that Poles during the war had very limited options and alternative choices,[54] his attempts to verify the historical situation have been contested by conservative politicians in Poland, who tried to sentence Gross and to strip him of previously received awards.[55]

Looking at the historicity of Polish witnesses in Western memory discourse, it becomes evident that the image of the Polish witness was shaped over time by different interests: by the memory politics of the German occupier, by politics of history during the Cold War that were intended to legitimize the powers in competition, and by politics of history today. Altogether, the image of the Poles as witnesses is a rather negative one in the West.

The Self-Perception of Polish Witnesses: Difference, Idealization, and "the West"

The self-perception of Polish witnesses represents the visions of Polish identity in the post-war era in relation to the Holocaust and to the Jews as alterity. There is a long tradition of understanding "the Jew" as "the other" in Polish culture[56] – as in many other European cultures. Many researchers observe that the Polish

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szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945 (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).

54 Jan T. Gross, "Themes for a Social History of War Experience and Collaboration," in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath*, István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (eds.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

55 Karol Sauerland, "Ein Bedauern hat es nie gegeben," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 26, 2008, accessed February 3, 2014, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/sachbuch/antisemitismus-in-polen-ein-bedauern-hat-es-nie-gegeben-1514898.html; Piotr Kadlcik, "Die Ehre des Jan Gross," *Jüdische Allgemeine*, February 18, 2016, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/24707.

56 See for example Aleksander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture* (Evanston: Nothwestern University Press, 1988); Monica Rüthers, *Juden und Zigeuner im europäischen Geschichtstheater: "Jewish Spaces"/"Gypsy Spaces" – Kazimierz und Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in der neuen Folklore Europas* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012); Yisrael Gutman, "The Popular Image of the Jew in Modern Poland," in *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia*, Robert S. Wistrich (ed.) (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1999), 259; Maria Janion, Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, Kazimiera Szczuka (eds.), *Inny, inna, inne: O inności w kulturze* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN Wydawn., 2004); Ireneusz Krzemiński, *Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie: Raport z badań*

perception of Jews after the German occupation did not change; in contrast, others state that Poles internalized German racial policy and perceive Jews as different from those considered Aryans or Slavs as a result.[57] Many researchers understand the vacuum left by the murder of Jewish populations as a reason for why "the Jew" became some kind of projection screen in post-war Poland.[58] "The Jew" became the symbol of alterity in general, states historian Alina Cała.[59] The forms of Jewish otherness might be negative or positive, they can include forms of exoticism that might lead to commerce of kitsch labelled "Jewish."[60] Eventually, philo-Semitism without Jews resembles antisemitism without Jews–both function totally independent of a Jewish self-image and perspective.[61] They contain only information about who constructs them according to his self-image. Analyzing these forms of negotiations in order to de-construct Polish post-war identity (and alterity) allows a deeper understanding than stating a competition of the witnesses, because it can explain the conflict over memory. Instrumentalization of ethnicity in Communist Poland, like the antisemitic campaign at the end of the 1960s, can be taken into consideration to explain specific constructions of Jewish otherness as part of the witness' account.

Generally, different attitudes of dealing with entangled history can be described by focusing on the grades of acceptance of ambivalence, or naturalization of difference, inherent in the representations of witnessing. By looking at two examples of post-war visual representations of Polish eyewitnesses, different ways of dealing with the representation of Polish witnesses in Poland can be explored.

(Warszawa: Wydawn. Naukowe Scholar, 2002); Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew From 1880 To the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

57 See for example Karol Sauerland, *Polen und Juden zwischen 1939 und 1968: Jedwabne und die Folgen* (Berlin/Wien: Philo, 2004), 183.

58 See Cała, *Image of the Jew*, 21; Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 6, 9; Agnieszka Skalska, *Obraz wroga w antysemickich rysunkach prasowych marca '68* (Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2007), 280; Breysach, *Schauplatz und Gedächtnisraum Polen*, 32; Ireneusz Jeziorski, *Od obcości do symulakrum – Obraz Żyda w Polsce w XX wieku* (Kraków: Nomos 2009), 391–392.; Steffen, "Formen der Erinnerung," 367.

59 See Cała, *Image of the Jew*, 17.

60 Ruth E. Gruber has been observing for many years now an instrumentalization of things being considered Jewish. See Ruth E. Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

61 See Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*, 236–237; Paul Lendvai, *Antisemitismus ohne Juden: Entwicklungen und Tendenzen in Osteuropa* (Wien: Europaverlag, 1972); Wolfgang Benz, "Tradition und Trauma: Wiederbelebter Antisemitismus in Osteuropa," in *Juden und Antisemitismus im östlichen Europa*, Mariana Hausleitner and Monika Katz (eds.) (Berlin: Harrassowitz, 1995), 33; Jeziorski, *Od obcości do symulakrum*, 382; Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 290.

In the first years after the end of the war and before the beginning of Stalinism, the filmmaker Aleksander Ford (birth name Mosche Liwczyc) released the movie *Ulica Graniczna* [Border Street] at a time of violent conflicts between Communists and anti-Communists that approached civil war.[62] Ethnic belonging was highly instrumentalized in this phase of Poland's negotiation of its political future in the years between 1946 and 1948/49, when the movie was made. Ford, who survived the war in the Soviet Union, is one of the very few Jewish authors of visual representations of Polish witnesses. In this first movie on the relationship between Jews and Poles during the war, Ford wanted to show shades of gray and did not want to spare the Polish public images of their negative behavior.[63] But after the pogrom in Kielce in 1946, the authorities feared that a representation of Polish antisemitism by the state film production company could result in riots.[64] As a result, the filmmaker had to remove scenes depicting negative aspects of Polish behavior from his movie. After these corrections, his movie produced a generally heroic image of Polish behavior towards Jews during the war. The last scene of the movie underlines this interpretation. The movie shows Polish and Jewish families living together in a house on the street separating the ghetto and the so-called "Aryan" side of Warsaw. At the end of the movie (in which children are the protagonists), a Polish boy hands over his father's revolver to his Jewish friend, who wants to fight in the ghetto. The Polish boy had lost his father, who had fought in the Polish underground and was not only a nationalist but also an antisemite.[65] That the son changed his attitude towards the Jews did not only illustrate Polish support of the Jewish insurrection, but also suggested that Polish

62 *Ulica Graniczna* [Border Street], directed by Aleksander Ford, international release 1948, Polish release 1949, Wytwórnia Filmów Fabularnych Łódź, ŻIH K-385, Movie Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

63 This becomes evident by comparing the screenplays: see Aleksander Ford, *Ulica Graniczna: Pierwsza wersja scenariusza* [Border Street: First Version], 1946/47, S-2397, Archiwum Filmoteki Narodowej, Warsaw; Jan Fethke and Ludwik Starski, *Ulica Graniczna: Scenopis* [Border Street: Screenplay], 1946, S-4558, Archiwum Filmoteki Narodowej, Warsaw; Aleksander Ford, Ludwik Starski and Jean Forge, *Ulica Graniczna: Scenopis* [Border Street: Screenplay], S-878, Archiwum Filmoteki Narodowej, Warsaw. The last screenplay is undated; presumably it was written between the second screenplay from 1946 and the first public showing of the movie in 1948.

64 See Iwona Kurz, "'Ten obraz jest trochę straszliwy:' Historia pewnego filmu, czyli naród polski twarzą w twarz z Żydem," *Zagłada* Żydów – *Studia i Materiały* 4 (2008): 476; Alina Madej, *Kino, władza, publiczność: Kinematografia polska w latach 1944–1949* (Biała: Wydawn. Prasa Beskidzka, 2002), 190–193; Piotr Litka, "Polacy i Żydzi w Ulicy Granicznej," *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 29 (2000): 73; "Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Kwalifikacyjnej w dniach 1 i 2 czerwca 1948 roku" [Minutes of the Sitting of the Qualification Commission at June 1 and 2, 1948], A-329, Pozycja 1,5, Archiwum Filmoteki Narodowej, Warsaw.

65 See Joanna Preizner, *Kamienie na macewie* (Kraków: Wydawn. Austeria, 2012), 30–39.

nationalists were able to feel solidarity with Jews. This was a very important message in the post-war era, when most Polish nationalists understood themselves as anti-Communists and antisemitism was an optional aspect of nationalism. The state movie company produced an image of the Polish eyewitness that was cleansed of ambivalence and was supposed to show that Polish nationalists could fight together with Jews for a better future in Poland. This is very different from the filmmaker's intentions which aimed to show the negative behavior of the Poles towards the Jews. With the pogrom in Kielce in the background, this was meant to provoke some kind of catharsis.[66] Thus, because state authorities feared the Polish public's reaction, Ford's Jewish authorship and critical perspective on wartime Polish-Jewish relations were made invisible. Taking into consideration these negotiations, it becomes evident that the Polish eyewitness' ambivalence was visible at first but needed to be excluded from the public. This happened at a time when ethnic belonging was instrumentalized. A compromise between the Communist leaders and the often anti-Communist public could be attained by excluding a Jewish perspective and by tabooing negative images of Polish eyewitnesses.

The second example from the end of the 1960s shows that the tendency to exclude negative images of Polish eyewitnesses became stronger over time. When the rights of Jews were restricted with the beginning of Stalinism and after the establishment of the state of Israel, representations of Polish witnesses reappeared in the Polish public only after the beginning of the thaw. The end of Stalinism in Poland meant a reinforcement of nationalist positions, especially in the politics of history.[67] Veterans who had often been imprisoned and marginalized after the war because of their nationalism and anti-communism were rehabilitated in this period. Antisemitism was very strong in this milieu; Stalinist power was often interpreted as a secret cooperation of Jews and Communists who wanted to suppress the Poles. Finally, in the antisemitic campaign of 1968, Jews were excluded altogether from Polish society.[68] Accounts of the annihilation of the Jews during World War II by Polish eyewitnesses disappeared almost entirely from Polish discourse. Analyzing a newspaper caricature that represents Polish witnessing can explain why this topic became almost impossible to represent in this time. The newspaper caricature by Zbigniew Damski from 1968 entitled

66 See the discussion in "Protokół z posiedzenia Komisji Kwalifikacyjnej w dniach 1 i 2 czerwca 1948 roku."

67 See Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens*, 295, 306–309; Marcin Zaremba, *Im nationalen Gewande: Strategien kommunistischer Herrschaftslegitimation in Polen 1944–1980* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2011), 271–358.

68 See for example Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 61; Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 68.

"Joint Guilt" depicts the feet of a hanged person next to an SS officer.[69] On the gallows, there is a tag informing the reader that this person had been hiding Jews. We can be sure that most Polish readers of the newspaper recognized the hanged person as a Pole. The representation clearly shows who the victim is: the Pole. In this picture, Jews exist only as recipients of Polish assistance. The text above the picture explains the occasion for this instrumentalization of history. It reads: "Zionist circles have unleashed an anti-Polish campaign to accuse the Poles of a joint guilt for the assassination of millions of citizens of Jewish origin." The apology made in this picture is complex: it states that at the end of the 1960s when the antisemitic campaign took place, such a campaign was impossible precisely because Poles had a positive attitude towards Jews. In the argumentation of the picture, this is proved by the assistance Poles provided to Jews during the war. In addition, the picture shows that Poles sacrificed their lives when they saved Jewish lives. Following the reasoning of the caricature, the injustice becomes evident for the viewer: even though the Poles sacrificed their lives for the Jews they are accused of antisemitism. The result is a self-image of the Polish eyewitness as a martyr. The Poles' martyrdom is a very characteristic interpretation of national history that goes back to romanticism in Polish culture;[70] interestingly, in the 1960s the national narrative of martyrdom fused with Communist politics of history. This is one of the very scarce published visual representations of Polish witnesses from this period. The complexity of the picture indicates the difficulties of dealing with this topic in the public sphere, often described as an atmosphere of silence or muteness. The caricature shows that in 1960s Poland, not only were Jewish authors and critical approaches to Polish witnessing excluded from the public, but representations of Jews appeared only scarcely. Jews became visible only as objects of Polish aid; they were proof of Polish heroism. Therefore, the heroic image of the Polish witness was meant to naturalize an idealized vision of Polish national identity. Polish self-perception did not make room for ambivalence at this time; the exclusion of Jews from society and memory carried with it the difficulty of showing the act of witnessing.

Overall, through an analysis of the historicity of the figure of the witness in Polish visual memory discourse, what becomes evident is a strong tendency toward idealization of the self-image on one side and an exclusion of Jews on the other. Therefore, the entangled histories and memories become as if artificially divided by politics of memory. However, this division can never be fully successful and negotiations of this entangled memory cannot be halted because

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69 Zbigniew Damski, "Współodpowiedzialność," Żołnierz *Wolności* no. 73, March 26, 1968, 1.

70 See Hannah Maischein, *Ecce Polska – Studien zur Kontinuität des Messianismus in der polnischen Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Olms, 2012).

of the international dimension of this memory. Hence the Polish and the Western memory cultures are entangled to a large extent because of shared history. In Eastern Europe, the end of the war that in the Western perspective led to a democratic liberation is associated with new suppression of the Eastern bloc.[71] In Poland, the end of the war is linked with the symbol of Yalta and the delusion of the Western allies who relinquished former ally Poland to the realm of Soviet power, provoking feelings of betrayal in Poland.[72] This is why the story of Poland after the end of the war is narrated as a story of two totalitarianisms, and why the nation-state became much more important after the long period of suppression ending only in 1989.[73] Furthermore, Western memory of the Holocaust is in Poland not only seen as something not genuinely Polish, but the norms and taboos derived from a specific Western constellation of history and memory seem unfit for Poland. This is very obvious when it comes to critical self-reflection. In the Western Holocaust discourse the acknowledgement of guilt has become some kind of superior form of democratic practice in order to guarantee human rights in the new Europe and to condemn the crimes of the past.[74] This "cosmopolitan ethic"[75] is based on a "negative memory"[76] that is typical of West Germany; since 1989 this concept has also made other Europeans take into consideration collaboration and guilt rather than heroism and resistance when it comes to images and understanding of their own roles in the past.[77] These negative forms of memory

71 Stefan Troebst, "Das Jahr 1945 als europäischer Erinnerungsort," in *Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa: Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit und Perspektiven*, Matthias Weber (ed.), 287–297 (München: Oldenbourg, 2011), 294; Kramer, "Including and Excluding the Holocaust," 160.

72 See Troebst, "Das Jahr 1945," 291; Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, 255.

73 See Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, 260–262.

74 See for example Heidemarie Uhl, "Introduction," in *Zivilisationsbruch und Gedächtniskultur: Das 20. Jahrhundert in der Erinnerung des beginnenden 21. Jahrhunderts*, Heidemarie Uhl (ed.) (Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, 2003), 9.

75 See Levy and Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*, 206.

76 Reinhart Koselleck, "Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnisses," in *Verbrechen erinnern: Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*, Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei (eds.) (München: Beck, 2002), 21–32; see also Claus Leggewie, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung: Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (München: Beck, 2011), 15; Christopher Daase, "Addressing Painful Memories: Apologies as a New Practice in International Relations," in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (eds.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

77 Andreas Langenohl, "Memory in Post-Authoritarian Societies," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 169; Levy and Sznaider, *Erinnerung im gloabalen Zeitalter*, 225, 237; Michael Jeismann, "Die Holocaust-Erinnerung als Passepartout. Geschichte ohne Erfahrung – Erfahrungen ohne Geschichte: Wie das kollektive Gedächtnis der Gegenwart eine Prognose stellt," in *Erinnerungsmanagement, Systemtransformation und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen*

take place on two levels, historically and as a critical reflection of the memory discourse, its taboos, and its blank spots. Furthermore, the concept of the other has become central, and standing up for the rights of the oppressed became important in this universal memory culture. However, in Poland, as in other Eastern European countries since 1989, decades of Marxist historical narration that to some extent tried to ban national categories gave way to the nation and a specific and heroic narration. The resurgence of a memory of victimhood under the Soviet Union during the war and after its end, which had been suppressed in Communist Poland, seems to pander to a national focus.

The entangled cultures of memory also influence self-perceptions of Polish witnesses. When Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* was released in the 1980s, the Polish government reacted strongly, even threatening to break off Polish-French diplomatic relations and to eliminate French from Polish school curricula.[78] Beginning in the 2000s, new forms of problematizing the entanglement not only of history and memory but also of differing memory cultures have appeared in Polish society. Even though these forms are very infrequent, they show that the third post-war generation has a different, new sense of humor and is open to deal differently with questions of Polish national identity and the self-perception of Polish eyewitnesses. In his painting *Maus*, internationally recognized Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal adapts Western forms of memory and transforms them according to the structure of the Polish memory discourse.[79] He refers to Art Spiegelman's *Maus – A Survivor's Tale* and its very distinct iconography for Jews, Germans, and Poles in which the Jewish victims are represented as mice, the German perpetrators are depicted as cats, and the Polish bystanders are shown as pigs.[80] As early as 1987 when Spiegelman wanted to go to Poland for a research visit, he was questioned when applying for a visa to Poland about how he would depict the Poles.[81] For the publication of the book in Poland in 2011, a new publishing house was established; copies of the book *Maus* were burned in front of it.[82] Sasnal's painting *Maus* shows a pig depicted in Spiegelman's style. The painter plays with the semantics established by Spiegelman on different levels. First, he shows all three groups together in one image: the perpetrators are represented in the

Vergleich, Joachim Landkammer, Thomas Noetzel, and Walther Ch. Zimmerli (eds.) (München: Fink, 2006), 259.

78 See Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 111.

79 Wilhelm Sasnal, *Maus*, 2001, oil on canvas, 50 cm x 40 cm, Sadie Coles HQ, London.

80 Art Spiegelman, *Maus, vol. 1: Die Geschichte eines Überlebenden* (Reinbek beim Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989).

81 Tomasz Łysak, "Contemporary Debates on the Holocaust in Poland: The Reception of Art Spiegelman's 'Graphic Novel' *Maus*," *Polin* 24 (2009): 469–479.

82 Ibid.

German writing of the word “Maus”; the dimension of the victims is represented by calling it *Maus* because mice are the Jewish victims in Art Spiegelman’s codification; and the Poles are represented by the picture of the pig. Second, he stresses the contradictions of Polish memory. Sasnal seems to say that even though they call themselves mice, the Poles are pigs. They want to hide the negative aspects of their behavior (the pigs in them) under their victimhood (the mice). Third, this representation cannot be distinguished formally from the forms used in Western memory of the Holocaust.

Thus, on one side, Polish self-images are to a certain extent very specific, because of the historical experience and the nationalist interpretations of witnessing that were established in Communist Poland. On the other side, the entanglement with the Western memory discourse of witnessing has a strong influence on Polish memory. This can often be confrontational, but it also holds possibilities of dealing with the difficulties of communication in playful, more productive ways.

Conclusion

Analysis of the historicity of the eyewitness shows the entanglement and division of Polish history and memory with Jews and Germans on different levels. Starting from the historical event of the annihilation of the Jews by the German occupier in Poland, the representations of Polish witnesses in Western and Polish memory discourses show very different tendencies: while the image of the Polish witness is basically a negative one in Western memory discourse, the Polish self-image highlights positive aspects. Analyzing the historicity of this constellation, not only German memory politics of World War II, but also of the Cold War, became visible as influential forces behind these differing images. This sheds new light on the so-called competition of Jewish and Polish victimhood, which can be discussed as a competition of differing historical experiences and memory cultures created by the conflict of worldviews during the Cold War. Finally, difficulties in Poland of dealing with negative self-perceptions as stressed by representations in the historiography such as that of Jan T. Gross might be comprehensive. In contrast, visual representations like that of Wilhelm Sasnal have the advantage of alluding to differing experiences, self-perceptions, and memory cultures without assigning blame to any one side. Clearly, and understandably, this intellectual, playful, and post-modern approach is not to everyone’s taste, especially when it comes to foreign politics of memory.