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United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair  
for Holocaust Education



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY  
IN KRAKOW

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Between Non-memory and Post-memory of the Holocaust in Poland



Photo Scanpix. From the publication Excursion to the past - teaching for the future. Handbook for teaches prepared within the project:  
“Discover the Past for the Future. A study on the role of historical sites and museums in Holocaust education and human rights education in the EU.” <http://fra.europa.eu>

„To *remember* is to *interpret* the past”

Zygmunt Bauman, *Categorical Murder, or: How to Remember the Holocaust*. In: *Representing the Shoah for the 21st Century*. Edited by Ronit Lentin, New York, 2004, 28.

„Who escapes history, will be reached by history”

Janusz Korczak, DO ŻYDÓW! In: Janusz Korczak, *Pisma Wybrane*, Warszawa 1986, v. 4, 305. After: Yaron Karol Becker, „*Mieliśmy trochę szczęścia, w tym ogromnym nieszczęściu*” – *perspektywa świadka*. In: *Dzieci wojny*. Red. Naukowa Alicja Bartuś, Oświęcim 2016, 313

Which events should or should not be included as part of the national identity and education?

Europeanization of history –

Nationalizations of history?

## Three phases of memory formation related to WWII:

- I phase - “living memory” (1944/45-1949)
- II phase - “legalized memory” (1950-1979)
- III phase - attempt of “memory reanimation” (after 1980)

Robert Traba

II phase - confiscated memory (Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la Memoire*, Paris 1995)

# Public debates

- Jan Błóński (1987), *Poor Poles are Looking at the Ghetto....*, Tygodnik Powszechny
  - Jews were excluded from the community of neighbours and co-citizens
- Michał Cichy, “Polacy-Żydzi. Czarne karty Powstania” (“Poles and Jews. Black Pages of the Warsaw Uprising”), “Gazeta Wyborcza” (January 29-30, 1994)
  - An article on murdering about 30-40 Jews by Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, in the front of the passive Home Army and by some Home Army units, during the Warsaw Uprising.
  - Despite the fact that brought by Cichy facts were confirmed by three leading historians of that period: Andrzej Friszke, Andrzej Paczkowski and Teresa Prekerowa, there were fiercely rejected by majority of public taken part in the debate.
  - The debate in 1994 for the first time touched upon an active participation of Poles in the Holocaust, going further than earlier discourse on the role of Poles as witnesses only.
  - In 2006 Cichy apologized for his article and earlier overgeneralizations.

# Public debates cont.

- Jan Tomasz Gross (2000), *Neighbors*
  - 2004 – „historical politics” in Polish discourse – „patriotic” instrumental approach to the past
- Jan Tomasz Gross (2007), *Fear*
- Jan Tomasz Gross (2011), *Golden Harvest*



Post-memory is not absent memory or empty but „as constructed as memory itself”

Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997, 22.

Inter-generational transmission of memory

The history and culture of Polish Jews, from several years after the end of World War II until the 1980s was unknown/forgotten/distorted for generations of Poles.

After 2015 there is a **tendency to reverse** increasing after 1989 and dominating between 1989-2015 and in particular between 2000-2015 trend to confront with dark pages of Polish history during the Shoah

# Imagined Jewish Past in Poland by Poles

- Overemphasizing hospitality
- Diminishing pogroms, denying symbolic violence, antisemitic cultural codes and cliches
- Myth of „guests”
  - Whose family was first here? asked Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel in Lublin
- Myth of innocence
- Distortions in representations of the Righteous
- „Competition of suffering” during WWII
- Holocaust-Gulag martyrological competition ???
- *Simulacrum* and myth of „life” (Kazimierz)
  - *Jean Baudrillard – a simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right*

# Imagined Jewish Past in Poland by Jews

„demonised view of an antisemitic  
Poland”

Jonathan Webber, Making sense of the Holocaust in contemporary Poland: The real and the imagined, the contradictions and the paradoxes, „Jednak Książki. Gdańskie Czasopismo Humanistyczne. The Holocaust and the Contemporary World” 2016, no. 6, <http://cwf.ug.edu.pl/ojs/index.php/JednakKsiazki>

# Conflicts of memories

- between official state ideology and local communities (planting crosses near Auschwitz site)
- within local communities (Tadeusz Markiel in Gniewczyna)
- JCC vs. March of the Living

# New historiography in Poland

- Barbara Engelking
- Andrzej Żbikowski
- Jan Grabowski
- Dariusz Libionka
- Jakub Petelewicz
- Alina Skibińska
- Joanna Tokarska-Bakir

It is estimated that after the Holocaust survived about 250,000 of Polish Jews, mostly in the Soviet Union

New studies estimated that 10% of Polish Jews have tried to escape, 250,000 searched for help, 30,000-60,000 survived among Polish population, 10,000-15,000 survived among partisans and in forests

175,000-210,000 died in the last, third phase of the Holocaust (Barbara Engelking, 2011).

Poles had influence on the last phase of the Holocaust.

# Discrepancy between historiography and education

In many European countries, disparities have grown between history and the memory of the Holocaust.

Debates on Polish–Jewish relations during the Holocaust and empirical studies in the field of education reveal that there is a gap between research and education.

Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Robert Szuchta, The intricacies of education about the Holocaust in Poland. Ten years after the Jedwabne debate, what can Polish school students learn about the Holocaust in history classes? *Intercultural Education*, 2014, Vol. 25, No. 4, 283–299



**Gap between historical knowledge and common knowledge**  
**Historical facts do not change identity overnight**



# Educational challenges

- Despite the effort of so many researchers, the genocide of Polish Jews is not integrated into the war narrative and martyrology of Poland
- Historical facts of the Holocaust are presented in accordance with international standards of representation
- Discrepancy between new historiography and the content of post-2008 reform textbooks in terms of attitudes of Poles toward Jews during the Holocaust

## TNS-OBOP survey 2002 and 2011

more of surveyed in each age category were unaware of Jedwabne  
(total **6%** in **2002** and **12%** in **2011**)

**18%** of 15–19-year old students had not heard about Jedwabne in **2002**  
and **41%** in **2011**

This was attributed by Antoni Sułek not to forgotten memory, but to  
events never having entered memory; Jedwabne evaporates DUE to  
education

2002 – source of knowledge about Jedwabne – media, public debate

2011 – source of knowledge about Jedwabne – school

only **14% of 16–17-year-old** high school students gave the correct  
answer about the number of Jews murdered during the Holocaust (JAJ,  
2008)

Marta Witkowska, Michał Bilewicz (2014), Czy prawda nas wyzwoli? Przełamywanie oporu psychologicznego w przyjmowaniu wiedzy o Zagładzie [Can Truth Liberate Us? Counteracting Psychological Resistance in Accepting Knowledge about the Holocaust], Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały, 10, 515-538.

- Post-war rejection and resistance toward the topic of the Holocaust in public discourse (805)
- **Confrontation with historical truth is not effective** (806)
- Less respondents see Jews as a group that suffered the most during WWII
  - 46% in 1992
  - 38% in 2002
  - 28% in 2010 and in the sample of Warsaw's students in 2013
- Dominate responses that both nations suffered the same
- The level of **ignorance is growing** (807)
- Irritation of the new historical research on Polish-Jewish relations (57% of adult sample in 2013)
  - Fear of compensations/restitutions
  - Secondary antisemitism correlated with the identity based on suffering (809)

Marta Witkowska, Michał Bilewicz (2014), Czy prawda nas wyzwoli? Przełamywanie oporu psychologicznego w przyjmowaniu wiedzy o Zagładzie [Can Truth Liberate Us? Counteracting Psychological Resistance in Accepting Knowledge about the Holocaust], Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały, 10, 515-538.

- More hours of teaching – more stereotypical view of the Holocaust
- Causes of ignorance:
  - Need to maintain positive self-image of in-group and positive social identity
  - Constructive *fictions help to live*
- How to overcome mechanisms negating crimes?
  - Affirmation of moral self-image in other contexts (stories of the Righteous)
  - Awareness of similarity between in-group and other victims
  - Indicating positive examples of behaviour of members of in-group
  - Direct contact
  - Awareness of low costs of revealing dark pages of history (810) (research does not lead to financial claims)

# The project of new legislation

- Aim - „protection of the good name of Poland”
- „Whoever publicly, and without factual base, accuses the Polish nation, or the Polish state, of responsibility for the Nazi crimes committed by the III German Reich, or other crimes (...) will be subject to prison term of up to three years and/or a fine”.
- Political goal
- Threat of a penalty may lead to self-censorship

# The project of educational reform

- Aim – new narrative/curricula/textbooks

*The Polish Center of Holocaust Research of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences wishes to express its deep concern over the adoption by the government, on August 16, 2016, of changes to the laws enabling "the defense of the good name of the Polish Republic and the Polish Nation".*

*The envisaged changes introduce fines and sentences of up to three years of imprisonment for those who "attribute to the Polish Nation or to the Polish State, the participation, organization, responsibility or complicity, in crimes committed by the III German Reich, or other crimes against peace and war crimes". The only limitation of the opportunistic character of the proposed changes is the formula "against the facts" which has been added to the text.*

## **Cont.**

*The proposed formula of the “defense of the good name” is equally spacious as it is imprecise, and may well be interpreted according to the current needs of the state and the prosecuting and police authorities, which act on its behalf.*

*(...) The proposed laws will give the authorities a possibility not only to intervene in areas such as journalism, education or into the broadly defined popularization of knowledge about the attitudes of Poles during WW II, but also - despite assurance to the contrary - into the domain of artistic expression and sovereign academic and scientific life.*

***An idea to criminalize debates about the past and threatening their participants - should they stray from the official and required interpretation - with jail terms, brings to mind the worst periods of red and brown totalitarianism.***

**Thank you for your attention!**



**Bodzentyn phot. Sz. Beźnic**