

# Double Memory: Poles and Jews after the Holocaust

Piotr Wróbel

Contemporary Polish-Jewish relations resemble a vicious circle. On the one hand, most Poles firmly believe that Poland has always been one of the most tolerant countries in the world and that anti-Semitism has existed only on the margins of Polish society. As far as they are concerned, there has been no such phenomenon as Polish anti-Semitism, for Poland has always been a true *paradisus Judeorum*. On the other hand, most Jews, especially those on the American continent and in Western Europe, claim that Poland is one of the most anti-Semitic countries in the world. Jews have often shared the former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's belief that virtually all Poles received their anti-Semitism "with their mothers' milk." Often, this unfortunate polarization makes any reasonable communication, let alone consensus, quite impossible. A regrettable, knotty, and tragic Polish-Jewish war intensifies. Every historical anniversary, every film about the Holocaust, and every doubtful decision of the local Polish authorities to initiate a construction project in the vicinity of the Auschwitz camp make this war more bitter and more disastrous for the two societies involved.

Optimism (or perhaps common sense) suggests, however, that the Poles and the Jews cannot be doomed to eternal enmity. An ever-increasing number of Jews visit Poland every year, though not necessarily as participants in the controversial "marches of the living," and a growing number of Polish tourists go to Israel. Jewish businessmen invest in the Polish privatized industry, and the Poles do business with the Jews in Israel. Polish and Jewish scholars exchange visits and cooperate more and more frequently. Since the early 1980s, Jewish literature, art, and history have attracted many enthusiasts in Poland. In some social circles in Poland, in fact, there is a fascination with the Jewish heritage. A chair of Polish history has been established in Jerusalem. Hopefully, the burden of history will eventually disappear—in spite of the activities of fanatics and ignoramuses on both sides—and hostility and mistrust will give way to consensus and reconciliation. To facilitate this reconciliation and understanding, we must study not only the history of Polish-Jewish relations but also the perceptions of both societies. Perhaps A. J. P. Taylor was right when he said that "what men think is more important in history than the objective facts."<sup>1</sup>

In May 1945, the anti-Nazi coalition crushed the Third Reich and the Holocaust had finally come to an end. The Jewish survivors in Poland expected that after their horrible experiences Polish-Jewish relations would improve. Exhausted, traumatized, and nearly starved, the Jews left their hiding places in Poland and began returning from Soviet exile or the Nazi camps. They hoped that the Poles would sympathize with and help them. Many Poles, shocked by the Holocaust, did treat the Jews with compassion and extend a helping hand. But many others had no sympathy for the Jews and made no offer of help. It appeared that the Holocaust had changed little in Polish-Jewish relations. The Jews were bitterly disappointed and angry.

Many Jews believed that the Poles gladly watched as the Jewish community disappeared from Poland during the war. They argued that numerous Poles helped the Germans murder the Jews, and that the Poles, along with the Germans, were guilty of the extermination of the Jewish population. The thesis was born that Adolf Hitler located the Nazi extermination camps in Poland because he was certain that the Poles would help to annihilate the Jews. It was obvious, the Jews frequently claimed, that a clear majority of the Poles considered the Holocaust a "German-Jewish war" that did not concern them. If Polish help had been more energetic, the casualties would have been fewer or perhaps the Holocaust would not have taken place at all, the Jews thought. To them, the Poles' attitude toward the Jewish population during the Second World War was in some respects more painful than that of the Germans. Most Jews understood very quickly what they should expect from the Germans, but they presumed that the Poles would act as co-citizens.

Often the Germans, unlike the Poles, were not able to recognize a Jew in a street crowd. To a disguised Jew, a Polish *szmalcownik* (a blackmailer who harassed and denounced the Jews) was more dangerous than a German policeman. The Polish underground, the Jews maintained, did not really help, and some of its branches actually participated in the killing of the Jewish people. Most Jewish survivors thought that life was almost normal on the "Aryan" side, while the ghettos resembled a living hell. Jewish deportees in the Soviet Union claimed that for the most part the Polish diplomatic network there helped

ethnic Poles and excluded the Jews during 1941-43. They further argued that the Anders army was dominated by anti-Semites, that it accepted only a small group of Jewish volunteers, and that it evacuated mostly Poles, not Jews, to the Middle East. Accusations of anti-Semitism were directed against the Polish army in the West as early as 1940.<sup>2</sup>

Some Poles were indeed glad that the Germans had murdered the Jews and liquidated the "Jewish problem" in Poland. Yet the majority of the Polish people had a completely different vision of the war and of Polish-Jewish relations. These Poles remembered well how powerful the Germans were, and how mercilessly they punished any attempt to help Jews. The Poles claimed that their country was the only place in Nazi-occupied Europe where assistance to the Jews was punished by death. Many Poles did not believe that greater help would have saved the Jews; they were convinced that it would only have increased Polish casualties. The Poles also believed that only criminal individuals took advantage of the Holocaust. They argued that the Home Army executed the szmalcowniks, and that, instead of participating in the killing of the Jews, many Poles actually helped them.

Simultaneously, the Poles accused the Jews of enthusiastically supporting the Soviet authorities during the 1939-41 Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and of instigating an anti-Polish atmosphere in the West during the entire war. In addition, the Poles considered the existence of the Jewish councils and the Jewish police in the ghettos to be a clear and undeniable act of collaboration with the Nazis. There was no anti-Semitism in the Anders army, claimed the Polish side. The Soviets were the ones who eliminated the Jews from the Polish army, which had been evacuated to Iran. It was Moscow that wanted to antagonize the Poles and the Jews to show the world that the Poles were a reactionary and chauvinistic nation. Furthermore, the Poles insisted, the Jews were not the only ones who were isolated during the war. The Polish cause, too, was abandoned, in the fall of 1939, during the 1944 Warsaw uprising, in Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam. "How could people who had lost their fathers and brothers, and frequently their entire families, people who were desperately fighting for survival themselves, even think about the Jews?" the Poles asked. How could anybody demand that the entire nation behave like heroes and how could anybody blame people for capitulating to fear in the face of death? They felt that they shared the martyrdom of the Jews, lived from hour to hour, and were terrorized and murdered every day. Even so, numerous Poles helped the Jews, and paid for this act of kindness with their lives and the lives of their families. Many Jews were truly ungrateful, the Poles thought, because even when they survived thanks to Polish efforts, they continued to malign the Polish society for being particularly anti-Semitic. It was the Allies, most Poles reasoned, who could and should have done more for the Jews, and it was the Western societies, including the Jews among them, that were far more responsible for the Holocaust than the Poles.

After the war, it became obvious that there were marked differences in the Jewish and Polish expectations and perceptions. According to most Poles, a new occupation started in 1945 and the Jews helped to establish it, just as they had done in 1939-41 in eastern Poland. Again, the Poles claimed, there were no Jews fighting against communism, but there were numerous Jews among the new communist authorities who were helping to subjugate Poland and to kill the Poles. Bolesław Bierut was frequently believed to be a Jew. The myth of *żydokomuna* (Judeo-communism) was growing stronger and stronger. A secret agent of Jewish nationality became a symbol of the new regime. The Poles believed that the Jews not only occupied numerous high positions in the Soviet security system in Poland but also distinguished themselves by using excessive force. The Poles also felt threatened by the growing presence of Jews in communist intellectual circles, on the editorial boards of Polish periodicals, at Polish universities, and in other cultural institutions.

Soviet persecutions, new martyrology, and the hardships of everyday life overwhelmed the Poles and in their eyes overshadowed the Holocaust, which had taken place several years earlier. The Germans decimated the Polish society, but they did not change its fabric and structure, many Poles believed. During the very first years of the Soviet order, entire classes of Polish society disappeared, including the landowners. The former gentry had shaped the Polish nation and state, was its soul and pillar, and had created the cultural patterns that other classes of Polish society regarded as their standard of behavior. Most Poles did not support the new system and did not want its stabilization. Some counted on the Third World War or some other conflict between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies. Others hoped that the Soviet Union would not be able to subjugate the entire area of East-Central Europe and that the Soviet bloc would simply disintegrate.<sup>4</sup>

Most Jews had very different expectations. They believed that the new regime would survive, and that the new Poland that emerged would bear little resemblance to the Poland of the interwar period. They also believed that democracy would rule and anti-Semitism would recede. Unlike most Poles, they did not

see the Red Army as a major threat. Even deportation to Siberia was better than the Nazi Holocaust. Most Jews did not realize the strength of the belief, shared by many Poles, that there was a Jewish co-responsibility for communism in Poland. In the eyes of most Polish Jews at that time, Berman, Minc, Borejsza, Róžański, and other prominent Jewish communists were no longer quite Jewish and certainly did not represent the Jewish community. They were just agents of the Polish national communist government and, as such, were largely indifferent to the future of the Jewish community. This is one of the reasons, the Jews believed, that only a small portion of Jewish property had been returned to Jewish communities and individuals after the war and eventually all the Jewish parties and social institutions (except one) were liquidated. To most Jews, complete assimilation would have been tantamount to the elimination of their Jewishness. The Jews knew that before the war their co-nationalists constituted a large segment of the Communist party of Poland. But the party had never been larger than 15,000 or 20,000 people, which was nothing compared with the 3 million Jews living in Poland. On the contrary, the Jews emphasized, most Jewish people were strongly against communism, because they were private entrepreneurs and therefore natural enemies of the communist system. The same applied to the period 1939-41 in the eastern Polish territories occupied by the Soviet Union, they claimed. The Jewish people made up between 10 and 15 percent of the entire population before the war. Because they owned small enterprises -- so typical of the prewar east-Polish Jewry -- the Jews constituted almost 30 percent of all deportees sent by the Soviets to the east. Not all the Jews collaborated with the Soviets, but all of them suffered from the Soviet system, the Jews believed.<sup>5</sup>

From 1945, the Jewish survivors tried to return to a normal life and to rebuild a Jewish community in Poland. There were 11 Jewish political parties in Poland soon after the Second World War ended. The Central Committee of the Polish Jews constituted some form of Jewish cultural autonomy. Emil Sommerstein, a Zionist, a member of the Polish prewar parliament, and a former prisoner of Soviet camps, became a minister in the first Polish communist government. Three Jewish deputies were members of the first postwar Polish parliament. Local Jewish communities were established in more than 230 towns and villages. There were Jewish schools, including a religious academy, theaters, publishing houses, Jewish newspapers, synagogues, hospitals, cooperatives, and radio programs. Tens of thousands of Jews lived in some Polish towns. In the early summer of 1946, a quarter of a million Jews lived in Poland. But soon the Jewish postwar expectations crumbled. The Jews again found themselves in the traditional role of scapegoat and saw only one solution: flight.<sup>7</sup> Many Jews, threatened by the anti-Semitic comments of the Poles, by anti-Jewish pogroms, and by acts of vandalism against Jewish cemeteries and communal buildings, decided to keep their Aryan war identity. Frequently the Jews felt like unwanted guests in Poland, and were afraid to rebuild old social ties with prewar Polish friends.<sup>8</sup>

It is obvious that the Second World War was crucial to the formation of contemporary Polish-Jewish relations. The first postwar years, however, were equally important and, in some cases -- particularly that of the Polish Jews who spent the war in the Soviet Union -- even more so. After the late 1940s and definitely after 1956, there were almost no Jews left in Poland. Nevertheless, the remaining tiny group and the people of remote Jewish background and of mixed Polish-Jewish ancestry were still treated with suspicion, accused of all manner of crimes, and turned into scapegoats during every major crisis in communist Poland. Yet a new generation of Poles appeared. It included young people who shared the anti-Jewish prejudices of their parents, but it also included a relatively large group of people who did not care about the old conflicts and looked at the Jews with a new friendly interest.

The new trend started during the stormy 1980-81 Solidarity period. The Solidarity press began to inform readers about national minorities in Poland, especially about the Jews. Focus on the broad themes of freedom, tolerance, and pluralism made this new surge of interest in Jewish history timely. At this time, some of the young people from assimilated and communist families returned to the Jewish religion and customs. Many people began studying the history and culture of forgotten national minorities. Segments of the Polish intellectual elite became fascinated with the Jewish past. The communist propaganda answered with anti-Semitic slogans, developed by the Grunwald Patriotic Association, which was established in October 1981 and supported by some communist leaders. The Grunwald Association, as well as a number of priests and chauvinists, advanced the theory that Solidarity was led by experienced Jewish agents who wanted to seize power in Poland as other Jewish cliques in the Stalinist period had done. Unfortunately, there were anti-Semites in Solidarity, too.

At that time, however, anti-Semitic propaganda was not generally well received in the country. The Polish economy had been crippled, and the international situation was tense after the proclamation of martial law in December 1981. General Jaruzelski's government, which was desperately seeking financial

help, attempted to foster a better image of Poland in the eyes of the world. The Polish communist leadership therefore changed its attitude toward the Jewish problem in order to court a better world opinion. In 1983, in keeping with this new spirit of generosity, the administration celebrated with pomp the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Polish intellectuals were encouraged to write about Jewish history, and state publishing houses edited a series of important books on Jewish subjects.

The true intention of the Jaruzelski regime was to advertise its openness and progressiveness, but the maneuver had important practical consequences for the cultural changes that took place in Poland. Yiddish courses were offered at Polish universities. In Warsaw, the National Library organized its Jewish collection and the Jewish Historical Institute was revived. The prewar Mayer Bałaban's chair of Jewish History at Warsaw University was reestablished, a similar chair was organized at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and many articles on Jewish history were published in Polish journals. Jewish writers began to be highly acclaimed in Poland. Newspapers were publishing reckoning articles on the 1968 purges and on the Kielce pogrom. The church organized discussions on anti-Semitism. Jan Błoński's article "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," published in the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1984, provoked a stormy debate that lasted several years and engaged many Polish intellectuals. Polish scholars began to participate in international conferences that addressed the history of Polish Jews.<sup>9</sup>

Many Jews outside Poland seem not to have noticed these changes and still view Poland as a macabre cemetery populated by hostile barbarians. Are we destined to remain forever entombed within these two diametrically opposed visions of the Second World War? Each is so different from the other that at times it is difficult to believe that they portray the same place, the same time, and the same people. Are we doomed to remain frozen in this tragic dialogue of the deaf? Can the Jews and the Poles not elaborate a single interpretation of their past? How does this affect the prospects for a Polish-Jewish reconciliation or, more important, for participation of the Jews and the Poles in the emerging multicultural society of the growing global village? Does this global village still care about the Polish-Jewish conflict? Or is it possible that we do not need a common interpretation of history and objectivity is neither achievable nor important? There is no ready answer to most of these questions. Yet it seems that we should pursue the escaping horizon of objectivity. Without some modicum of objectivity we would not be able to understand anything, and we would have to agree with those Jews who feel that the Holocaust is "a sacred and essentially incomprehensible event," beyond intellectual discourse and description, especially through the social sciences.<sup>10</sup>

Is this the approach we really want? Intellectually, acceptance of a "Jewish truth" and a "Polish truth" as the final analysis of the Holocaust in Poland is a miserable surrender. The "double memory," or the "double truth," approach may be a useful compromise, and is currently espoused by numerous Jews and Poles, but it is not satisfying. Finally, to use Jacques Le Goff's arguments, we cannot identify history with memory or divide "history in small bits."<sup>11</sup> "Memory is the raw material of history," to quote Le Goff again. History is frequently manipulated by political regimes and national movements, but memory "is in reality more dangerously subject to manipulation by time and by societies."<sup>12</sup> Our ability to remember faithfully is limited. We construct our memories by combining elements from the original material with existing common knowledge. A lot of details are lost, and new material is added. If some remembrances do not match the existing schema, we tend to alter them to make them fit. We accept "thematically consistent information" more easily and, after many years, some images created through the process of suggestion become "as real and as vivid as a memory that arose from the actual perception."<sup>13</sup>

The memories most Poles and Jews have of the Second World War and the postwar years are bound to be different because the two societies had different experiences during this period -- experiences that deeply affected them and limited their mutual understanding. From the Jewish point of view, there were three components of the 1939-45 conflict in Poland: the Germans, the Jews, and the Poles. To the Poles, it was a war between Poland and Germany, and the Jews merely hovered around its margins. For the Jews, the Poles and their attitude toward the Jewish people were crucial to the very issue of Jewish survival. From the first weeks of the war, it was obvious that the Jews and the Poles were situated very differently. All of the Jews were sentenced by the Nazis to die, but not every Pole was to be killed. The Jews were much more vulnerable to the Polish hatred than vice versa. Each passing day threatened the Jews more than the Poles.

The Poles saw the second bank of the abyss of the war during the entire 1939-45 period. They were certain that sooner or later the Germans would be defeated. The Poles fought and died for their fatherland.

By contrast, most Polish Jews felt that they had no fatherland to die for, could not imagine a positive scenario for postwar times, and fought for basic survival or just for a decent death. To the Jews, the Holocaust was the end of the world. To most Poles, the fall of the Second Republic and the German occupation, in spite of the terrible casualties, was just a lost battle. The Poles did not experience the ghetto or the gas chambers. While the Poles generally went to the concentration camps, the Jews went to the extermination camps. Frequently, the Poles were sent to the camps as punishment for something. Theoretically, of course, it was possible to avoid doing this "something." The Jews, however, were killed because they were Jews, and nothing, not even collaboration, could alter this fact. The Poles were treated as subhumans, but the Jews were branded as nonhumans and treated accordingly.<sup>14</sup>

Numerically, about 3 million Jewish and 3 million non-Jewish citizens of Poland were killed during the War. Relatively, however, this meant that almost all of the Polish Jews were murdered and about one-tenth of the non-Jewish Polish citizens were exterminated by the Germans. The Polish nation survived, while the Polish Jewry, once one of the few most important Jewish communities in the world, has ceased to exist. This is the most serious argument against using symmetry when we describe postwar Polish-Jewish relations, conflicts, and unreasonable and malicious activities on both the Polish and the Jewish side.

The Holocaust did not change the Polish stereotype of the Jew. After centuries of separation, most Poles had no corporate feeling of a common suffering with the Jewish people.<sup>15</sup> Besides different experiences and different expectations, several other factors made Polish-Jewish relations tense and complicated after the war. There were numerous confused and desperate people on both sides. Many Jews, returning from the Soviet Union or leaving their wartime hiding places, planned to emigrate from Poland immediately. They did not want to live in a graveyard. They did not believe in a future Jewish life in Poland and were horrified by the brutalization of East European societies, by the Polish civil war, by the postwar killing of the Jews, and by other horrors of that time. They did not see a place for themselves in a communist society, with a limited or a nonexistent private sector. There was no possible good scenario for them, the Jews believed. Communism offered only acculturation and pauperization, while the fall of communism might bring a wave of chauvinism and anti-Semitism. Poland, where a non-Jew ruled and a Jew traded, was acceptable -- according to a Jewish joke -- but Poland, where the Jews ruled and non-Jews dominate in trade, is unbearable.<sup>16</sup>

Many Poles were confused, too. Most of them, overwhelmed by both the war and the postwar situation, were unable to devote much thought to the Jews. Some felt ashamed of the attitude other Poles had toward the Jews but did not know how to counteract it. Others relieved their feelings of guilt by accepting the theory that the Jews were at least partially responsible for their sufferings. Some were irritated that the Jewish question remained so persistent and annoying. Some believed that the Jews exaggerated their anti-Polish accusations and reacted with anger to any critical remarks concerning Polish-Jewish relations. Others felt that too much talking and writing about the Holocaust would overshadow and diminish the memory of the Polish martyrology. Three million Jews were killed, and 3 million Poles lost their lives, they argued. Some envied the Jews because they received material and financial aid from the Polish government as well as from abroad. A Polish miner, for example, did not understand why his Jewish colleague received a stipend in addition to his regular wage. Frequently, the Poles felt superior because it was believed that they had fought bravely against the Germans, while the Jews had remained passive. The peasants in particular failed to understand what anti-Semitism is. The Catholic Church or, rather, many parish priests, strengthened negative feelings toward the Jews. Even some Polish communists perceived their Jewish colleagues as competition, or believed that those who survived the war in the Soviet Union (this was largely true of Jews in the Communist party) were in a sense worse than those who had suffered in Poland.<sup>17</sup>

Polish-Jewish relations were made even more complicated by an inconsistent policy of the Polish communist government, pressed simultaneously by its Soviet sponsor and by the situation in Poland. On the one hand, the government needed Jewish professionals and had to revitalize the newly acquired depopulated territories of Silesia, Pomerania, and East Prussia. The government did not want Poland's image to be that of a country whose population was trying to escape abroad. Communist propaganda tried to weaken the negative impression that the murder of the Jews had left on international public opinion. As part of its plan to help the Jewish survivors start a new life, the government declared war on anti-Semitism.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, verbal announcements and the activities of the "All-Polish League for the Fight against Racism" notwithstanding, the government did not mount a very strong campaign against anti-Semitism and did not publish any data concerning its spread or its true character.<sup>19</sup> The communist

authorities did not trust the Central Committee of the Polish Jews, allowed the Zionists to organize mass emigration from Poland, and did not encourage Jewish DPs to return to Poland from the camps in Germany and Austria. In addition, some communist leaders did not conceal the fact that they saw the Jewish population as a burden. They mistrusted the Jewish cooperatives, which received money from abroad. They were also frustrated with the failure of the so-called productivization action: Jewish workers frequently left state factories for more profitable, better organized cooperatives and private enterprises.

The communists manipulated the Jewish issue cynically, interpreting any opposition to the government as nationalist, reactionary, and anti-Semitic. As might be expected, this propaganda provoked a lot of enmity. For example, on the walls of the former Warsaw ghetto, were posted -- side by side -- propaganda posters with the following inscriptions: "Glory to the Heroic Defenders of the Ghetto" and "Shame on the Fascists Flunkies of the Home Army."<sup>20</sup> In 1948, when the plan to make Israel a Soviet bridgehead in the Middle East failed, the communist authorities launched an anti-Zionist campaign that threatened all Jews. Rumors about purging the Jews appeared.<sup>21</sup> The Jews became a substitute enemy.<sup>22</sup> In reality, they made up only a small percentage of the Polish communist secret police and were concentrated mostly in its command, where they constituted about 13 percent.<sup>23</sup> In 1952, under the Soviet pressure, the *nomenklatura* was closed to the Jews. Jewish conditions in Poland were worse than in any of the surrounding countries, except the Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup>

During the installation of the Soviet order, Poland was involved in a "civil war." The Jews were harassed and killed, often as communists, even in large urban centers. Altogether, about 1,500 Jews lost their lives in Poland between 1945 and 1947. The panic after the Kielce pogrom caused more than 150,000 Jews to flee Poland. After 1948, when the sovietization of Poland rapidly accelerated and Soviet-Israeli relations were fractured, almost all Jewish institutions were liquidated. From 1948 to 1950, more than 30,000 Jews emigrated from Poland, leaving only about 50,000. After the first five years of communism in Poland, the Polish-Jewish Gordian knot proved to be even more tangled than it had been in 1945. New stereotypes and accusations were added to those produced during the Second World War. Later, every political crisis in Poland created new Polish-Jewish controversies, even as the old ones remained unsolved.

After the war, both the Poles and the Jews created a new civic religion. Using arguments based on historical experience, each side worked to strengthen Polish and Jewish beliefs that their respective nations were indeed exceptional. Both of these religions have their roots in the national heritage of the Poles and the Jews. The Polish civic religion had already begun to crystallize in early modern times as the "*antemurale Christianitatis*"—the bulwark of Catholic Christianity against the Moslem Turks and Tartars, the Orthodox Muscovites, and the Protestant Swedes and Prussians. The Polish civic religion developed significantly after the Partitions of Poland ripened during the Second World War and the ensuing communist regime. Nineteenth-century ideas, such as a vision of Poland as a Messiah of nations, were supplemented by contemporary concepts. Most Poles believe that other nations, particularly those in Europe, owe a special debt to Poland because it was Poland that maintained the longest and most determined defense against Nazi Germany and Poland that, even though it had the largest number of casualties during the war, opposed Bolshevism from the outset and was always right about the true character of the Soviet Union. During the war, there was no collaboration in Poland and the Polish underground army was the largest in Europe. Most Poles think that during all those complex territorial and ethnic conflicts of East-Central Europe -- in the Lwów, Vilno, and Cieszyn regions, in Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, Silesia, Pomerania, and East Prussia -- the Poles were always right and behaved, contrary to their opponents, exclusively in an impeccably chivalrous way. Churchill, Roosevelt, and many other Western politicians were, in Polish eyes, traitors and cowards, because they "sold Poland down the river" and collaborated with Stalin. In the postwar era, Poland contributed decidedly to the destruction of the Soviet system, but current Western intentions toward Poland are again not quite honest, etc., etc.

The Jews have developed their own civic religion, too. Its aim is to reunite all the secular and assimilated Jews who find the exodus from Egypt and other related stories too distant in time and too irrelevant to affect contemporary life and ways of thinking. A new medium of unification was necessary, and the history of the Holocaust proved to be perfect for this role. In 1951, the Knesset inaugurated *Yom Hashoah*, the "Holocaust and Ghetto Uprising Remembrance Day." Since the late 1970s, the Holocaust has become a generally accepted civic religion of most Jews, especially in Israel and North America. It has created its own liturgy, rites, shrines and high priests, and its observance now dwarfs older religious practices.<sup>2</sup>

Both "civic Judaism" and the Polish self-idolization include universal motifs. The Poles are proud that they have always fought "for your freedom and ours." The unique moral of the Holocaust story is that

the Jews should speak against everybody's oppression and the world should remember the Shoah to prevent another one. Yet both civic religions also include destructive elements that pose a threat to their followers. Both religions have turned the past into a collection of untouchable dogmas, supported stereotyping, and opposed impartial scholarly research. Both of them continue to stress the "otherness" of the Poles and the Jews, to tell them that they are alone in an eternally hostile world, and that each must rely exclusively on its own group. The only issue that matters is survival, survival for survival's sake and continuity for continuity's sake. "What is the message of this hopeless story?" asks Rabbi Michael Goldberg, the author of an extensive critique of the civic Judaism. How are the young Jews supposed to build their lives on the Holocaust story?<sup>27</sup> We can also ask how the young Poles are supposed to build their lives on the idea that their fatherland is as a crucified nation eternally bleeding in an inequitable fight against all the cowardly enemies that surround Poland on all sides.

Leaving aside a small group of intellectuals writing on Polish-Jewish relations, we can draw the following conclusion: "The claims of suffering confuse and divide us," to quote Joseph Amato.<sup>28</sup> The Poles compete with the Jews for a palm of martyrdom. Both sides accuse each other of the heinous theft of suffering. Both sides have concentrated on their own martyrdom and do not try to understand each other. Both sides demand attention and sympathy as a reward for their suffering and both sides want to build their moral superiority on suffering. Both sides have selective perceptions of the past and know almost nothing about each other.<sup>29</sup> One man's history is another man's lie.

1. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle of Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 17.

2. Stanisław Krajewski, "Problem żydowski—problem polski", *Więź*, XXXV: 4 (1992), 34-40; Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm: Anatomia półprawd 1939-1968* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992), 19, 21, 35,50; Barbara Engelking, *Zagłada i pamięć: Doświadczenie Holocaustu i jego konsekwencje opisane na podstawie relacji autobiograficznych* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiSPAN, 1994), 38, 51.

3. Krajewski, "Problem żydowski," 34-40; Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi*, 21,51; Stefan Nowicki, *The Defamation of the Poles* (Maryborough, Australia: 1989) 12-20.

4. Helena Datner-Śpiewak, "Antysemityzm w powojennej Polsce—perspektywa socjologiczna", *Studia z dziejów Żydów w Polsce*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 1995) 108; Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi*, 78-86; Krystyna Kersten and Paweł Szapiro, "The Context of the So-called Jewish Question in Poland After World War II," *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from Polin* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 1993), 457-60; Stefan Korboński, *The Jews and Poles in World War II* (New York: 1989), 74-85; Artur Sandauer, "O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku (Rzecz, którą nie ja powinienem był napisać)" *Pisma Zebrane*, vol. 3. (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1985), 497-507.

5. Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi*, 78-86; Kersten and Szapiro, "Context of the So-called Jewish Question," 457-60.

6. *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, Jerzy Tomaszewski, ed., (Warsaw: 1993), 393-98.

7. Zachariah Sinitser, "Between the Millstones in Poland," *Commentary*, vol. 2 (July-December 1946), 107.

8. Zofia S. Kubar, *Double Identity: A Memoir* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989), 182-87; Janina Bauman, *A Dream of Belonging: My Years in Postwar Poland* (London: Virgo Press, 1988), 15-17.

9. Antony Polonsky, "Polish-Jewish Relations and the Holocaust," *Polin*, vol. 4 (1989), 226-41.

10. Ronald J. Berger, *Constructing a Collective Memory of the Holocaust: A Life History of Two Brothers' Survival* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1995), xii.

11. Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), xi, xiv.

12. *Ibid.*

13- Mark H. Ashcraft, *Human Memory and Cognition* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994), 313-25.

14. B. Engelking, *Zagłada i pamięć*, 16-32.

15. Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi*, 17; *American Jewish Year Book 1948/49* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1949), 390.

16. Eugenic Reale, *Raporty: Polska 1945-46* (Warsaw: 1991), 242.

17. Kersten and Szapiro, "Context of the So-called Jewish Question," 457-60; "Poland and the Jews: An Interview with Czesław Miłosz," *Tikkun* 2, 37.

18. E. Reale, *Raporty*, 230, 238, 240; Kersten and Szapiro, "Context of the So-called Jewish Question," 463.

19. Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland 1943-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 165.

20. K. Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, 220; Kersren and Szapiro, "Context of the So-called Jewish Question," 460; Bożena Szaynok, "Ludność żydowska w Polsce 1944—1950" *Studia z dziejów Żydów w Polsce*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 1995), 73.

21. J. Bauman, *A Dream of Belonging*, 104.

22. Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi*, 79.

23. *Ibid.*, 84.

24. Michael Chęciński, *Poland, Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism*, (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishing, 1982), 41.

25. Nathan Reich, "Jewish Life in the Russian Satellites," *Commentary* (April 1949), 331.

26. Michael Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive? Looking Past the Holocaust Toward a Jewish Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Balfour Brickner, *A Sabbath Service for Yom HaShoah* (New York: 1984).

27. M. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*

28. Joseph A. Amato, *Victims and Values: A History and a Theory of Suffering* (New York: Praeger, 1990), xviii.

29- Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi*, 10, 28; Zygmunt Bauman, "Adolf Rudnicki. The Jew and the Polish Writer," *The Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1991-92), 39.