The Embassy of Poland in Poland

The Polin myth in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ) as narrative pattern and model of minority-majority relations

Elżbieta Janicka

Abstract: The text offers an analysis of the MHJP's core exhibition, the architecture of the Museum's building as well as the transformations of its surroundings, seen as operations **in** as well as **on** a space that is a sign and a designate of the Holocaust. This observed de-Holocaustization of the Holocaust story takes place in the context of progressing Holocaustization of the story concerning the past of ethnic Poles.

The main narrative uniting the MHJP's surroundings, building and core exhibition is the idyllic myth of Polin, which dictates the selection and presenting of information. The story of Polish hosts and Jewish guests that is inherent to the Polin myth establishes inequality and dominance/subjugation as framing principles of a story of majority-minority relations. It also constitutes a mental gag and an instance of emotional blackmail which precludes any rational – analytical and critical – conversation based on historical realities. Furthermore, in practice, it is a part of a pattern of culture which produces – and at the same time legitimizes – violence and exclusion.

The article reconstructs the principles governing the Polinization of the history of Jews in Eastern Europe (a term coined by Konrad Matyjaszek). These principles include: emphasizing the Polish over the Jewish *lieux de mémoire*; presenting the figures and landmarks of importance for both groups through the prism of those aspects which concern the majority group; refraining from problematization of specific phenomena (like Judaism or transboundary character) and from applying to them a *longue durée* perspective; and decontextualization (e.g., by passing over anti-Semitism – Christian but not only Christian – and its significance for the construction of the majority group's collective identity, an identity that over time increasingly determined the Jews' conditions of life, until eventually it determined their fate).

In relation to the core exhibition the text discusses such issues as: "last minute" censorship; affirmation of anti-Semitic phantasms (like the *Paradisus Iudaerum* or Esterka); the abandonment of planned – and prepared – part of the exhibition dealing with the period after the regaining of independence by Poland in 1989; presenting numerous events and questions in a way that contradicts the state of research not only known but often arrived at in Poland (a particularly outraging example of this is abstaining from a realistic presentation of the Polish context of the Holocaust in favor of a return to the outdated category of the innocent, or indifferent, Polish bystander to the Holocaust).

The stake of this retouched story is the image of Poland and reputation of Poles, that is to say – the complacency of the non-Jewish majority. The price is the mystification of Eastern European Jewish history and the thwarting of the potential for change which arouse as a result of the Jedwabne debate. This potential promised a chance for a revision of culture and a remodelling of social relations in the spirit of equal rights and integrated history. Apart from the period from 1944/45 to 1946, this chance was unprecedented in the Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish "common history that divides."

Keywords: anti-Semitism; de-Holocaustization; Museum of the History of Polish Jews (POLIN MHPJ); Polin myth; Polish historical policy; politics of memory; Polish Jews (concept revision); symbolic violence.

> In those words – alternative visions – you have in condensed form what I believe is the essence of a useful museum. For as I see it, that museum is best that helps to free a society from the tyranny of a redundant and conventional vision – that is to say, from the tyranny of the present. […] A museum, then, must be an argument with its society. […] A good museum always will direct attention to what is difficult and even painful to contemplate. Therefore, those who strive to create such museums must proceed without assurances that what they do will be appreciated.
>
> Neil Postman, *Museum as dialogue* (1990)
> (Postman, 1994, p. 70)

Warsaw, Poland. 70 years later. A "Museum of Life" on the site of death. What is going on within the area where the Holocaust took place and which, until recently, was considered an icon of the Holocaust? I am referring here to the square, formerly filled-in with a void – if not with the Void – which has now become a site loaded – if not overloaded – with other symbolic messages.[1] I propose to look at the space around the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the design of the building and its content – within their mutual interactions – as a text of culture, a kind of spatial-discursive production. What narrative stems from it? What is at stake in this narrative?

De-Holocaustization?

For years, the only symbolic center in this place with no name was the 1948 Monument to the Fighters and Martyrs of the Ghetto, designed by Natan Rapoport and Leon Marek Suzin. Facing the Monument now stands the 2013 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ), designed by Rainer Mahlamäki. But there are also ten other, additional memorials. They encircle the Monument and the Museum. Three of them are devoted to the Ghetto Uprising. One identifies the Germans as the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Six emphasize efforts by both Polish society and the Polish Underground State to help the Jews – at the risk of the helpers' own lives – without any other mention of the context.

The message emanating from the content as well as the proportion of commemorations is clear: Polish solidarity with the Jews was a fact and it stood the test of terror and death brought about by the Germans. A few and isolated exceptions notwithstanding, such a version of events is drastically different from the actual facts (see: Janicka, 2015b). Hence the dynamics of an obsessive-compulsive disorder characterizing the way this kind of commemorations materializes. I am referring here to the common conviction that there are never enough monuments to the "Polish Righteous." I am also referring to

1 I am dealing here with the site of the former ghetto, where in April 1943 the first uprising against the Third Reich in German-occupied Europe broke out. During the Jewish uprising and after its suppression, the Germans razed the ghetto to the ground. After the war, housing estates were built in the exact same place where the remains of the murdered Jewish insurgents and civilians still rest. As a result of wartime devastation and post-war construction, a square was created on the site of the formerly densely built-up area.

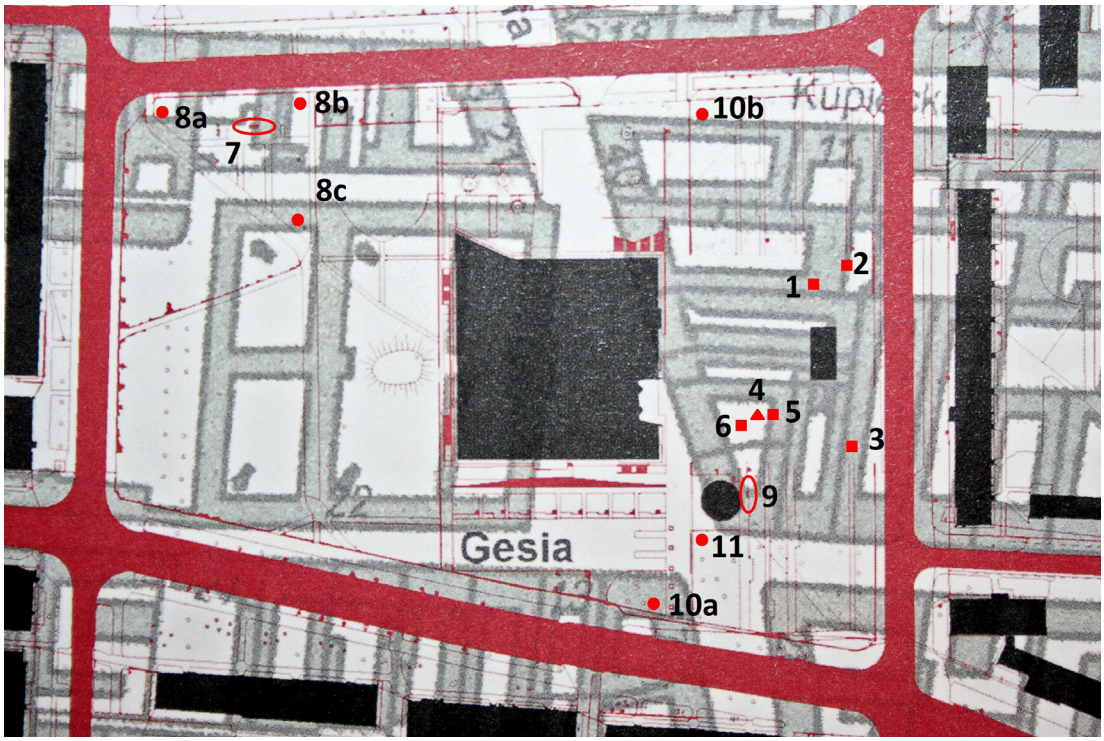
a plan to erect in this very place an additional monument to the "Polish Righteous" – one of two new monuments that are going to be built on the site of the former ghetto.

In other words, the present-day space around the Monument and the Museum is a manifestation of the narrative pattern characteristic of the dominant Polish narrative of the Holocaust. It has been an integral part of the Polish historical policy at least since the early 1960s, equally under the People's Republic of Poland as under the independent Third Republic of Poland (see: Libionka, 2008). Referring to Manfred Garstenfeld's reflections, Jan Grabowski termed this phenomenon the "de-Judaization of the Holocaust" (see: Grabowski, 2016; Grabowski refers to: Garstenfeld, 2009).[2] Instead, I would suggest here the category of "de-Holocaustization," referring to the practice of removing the essence of the Holocaust from the narrative on the Holocaust. This is even more the case in today's Poland, given the fact that the de-Holocaustization of the Holocaust goes hand in hand with the Holocaustization of the history of the Polish majority (cf. Janicka, 2010, 2013b, 2014).



May 1973. View to the south-west on the former site of the Horse Artillery Barracks (also known as the Volhynia Barracks), the last seat of the Warsaw Judenrat. The menorah at the center is part of the Monument to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Ghetto, designed by Natan Rapoport and Leon Marek Suzin (1948). Behind it in the background is Anielewicz(a) (former Gęsia) and Karmelicka Streets intersection. The edge of the vertical part of the monument is visible in the left part of the image (photograph by Helmut Lauterbach) – http://warszawa.fotopolska.eu/399408,foto.html?galeria_zdjec&ródło=1513

2 A number of authors have written about de-Judaization as one of the ways of preempting the Holocaust. See, for instance: Langer, 1998, pp. 1–22; Rosenfeld, 2013. On the attempt to overcome the Holocaust by means of the figure of the Righteous, see: Novick, 1999. In the Polish context, the symbolic interest of believers in this American dream about the Holocaust coincides with self-image interests of the defenders of the reputation of Poland and the Poles.

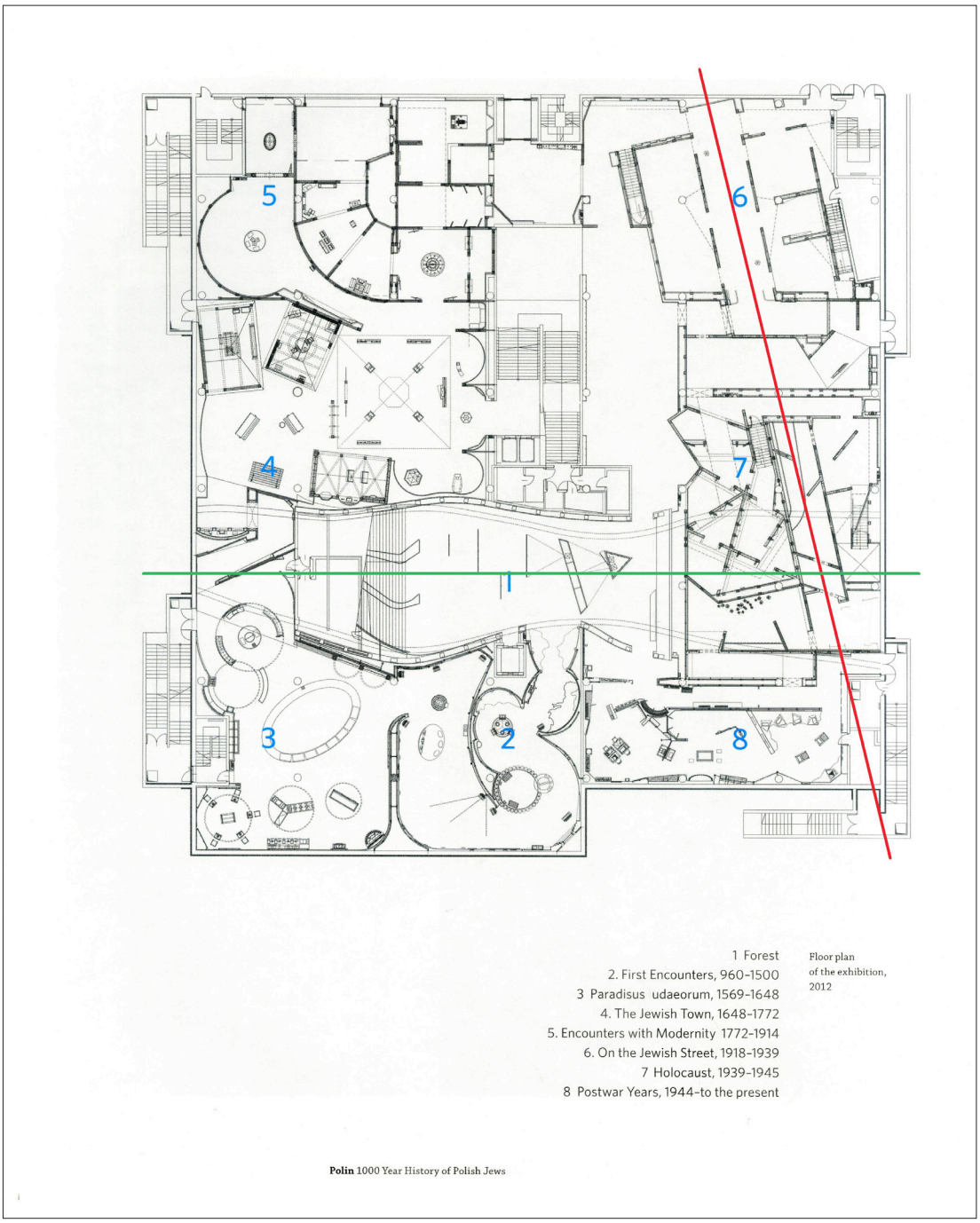


Fragment of Joanna Ways's graphic presentation in: Odnous & Down, 2015, p. 29. Joanna Ways used a portion of the map *The Jewish Ghetto as Compared to the Entire City Plan in 1939* (Weszpiński, 2013)

Marked grey: inexistent development from before 1943. **Marked red:** current street layout. **Marked black:** current development. **Black circle:** the first monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1946). **Black rectangle:** the Monument to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Ghetto (1948). **1.** The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorative stone (1988) – part of the Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle. **2.** Emanuel Ringelblum commemorative stone (1988) – part of the Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle. **3.** The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorative stone (1988) – part of the Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle – identical with the one described in point 1. **4.** The Tree of Common Memory (1988) – a fastigiate oak. **5.** A commemorative stone accompanying the Tree of Common Memory, dedicated to "Polish Jews murdered in 1939–1945 by the Hitlerist invader and [to] Poles offering help to the Jews" (1988) – part of the Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle. **6.** Relief Council for Jews (Żegota) commemorative stone (1995). **7.** Monument to Willy Brand (2000). **8a, 8b, 8c.** Willy Brand Square (2000) – Municipal Roads Authority street signs. **9.** Monument to Jan Karski (2013). **10a, 10b.** Irena Sendler (Ireny Sendlerowej) Alley – Municipal Roads Authority street signs. **11.** Commemoration of Irena Sendler (2013) – biographical plaque of the Municipal Information System.

The MHPJ's building was erected on the site of the final headquarters of the Warsaw Judenrat. Here ran Zamenhofa Street, along which 300,000 Warsaw Jews were driven to the Umschlagplatz. On this site, the Jewish uprising took place. Later on, mass executions were also carried out there. "The square plan of the new building is in straight proportion with the front existing yard of the Memorial."[3] The Monument and the Museum are two structures referring to Pesach, two competing Haggadot based on an antithetic understanding of the Polish context. On the one hand, we have the Pesach of 1943 in flames, in loneliness, in the shadow of the Christian topos of the Crucifixion and Christian blood libels immanent in the Easter narrative of the Resurrection. On the other

3 Declaration by architect Rainer Mahlamäki displayed at the temporary exhibition: *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?*, held at the MHPJ from October 24, 2014 to February 2, 2015 and advertised as "an event accompanying the great opening of the core exhibition of the POLIN MHPJ." Original translation. Photograph from the author's personal collection.



Floor plan of the exhibition, 2012 (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, p. 26)

The red axis follows the so-called *Himmelweg*, the old route of Zamenhof(a) Street, along which the Jews of Warsaw went to the Umschlagplatz. Today this area houses the MHPJ interwar and Holocaust galleries. In the former an anonymous "Jewish street" has been staged along this axis; in the latter – the "Aryan" Chłodna Street.

The green axis – marking out a Sunset Boulevard of sorts – is the new symbolic East-West axis, bypassing the Monument to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Ghetto by Natan Rapoport and Leon Marek Suzin (1948). The window facing the monument in the temporary exhibitions room remains permanently covered.

hand, we have the Pesach of the Book of Exodus – the feast of liberation, the feast of unleavened bread (Chag HaMatzot), the feast of the parting of the Red Sea. The hall of the Museum symbolizes a life-giving sea cleft. It runs from east to west, representing a kind of correction to the former north-western course of Zamenhofa Street. So, what we have underneath is the *Himmelweg* (way to heaven) – immersed in semi-darkness, deprived of its name. What we have on top is a kind of glamorous Sunset Boulevard with a wide view of greenery, air, and light.

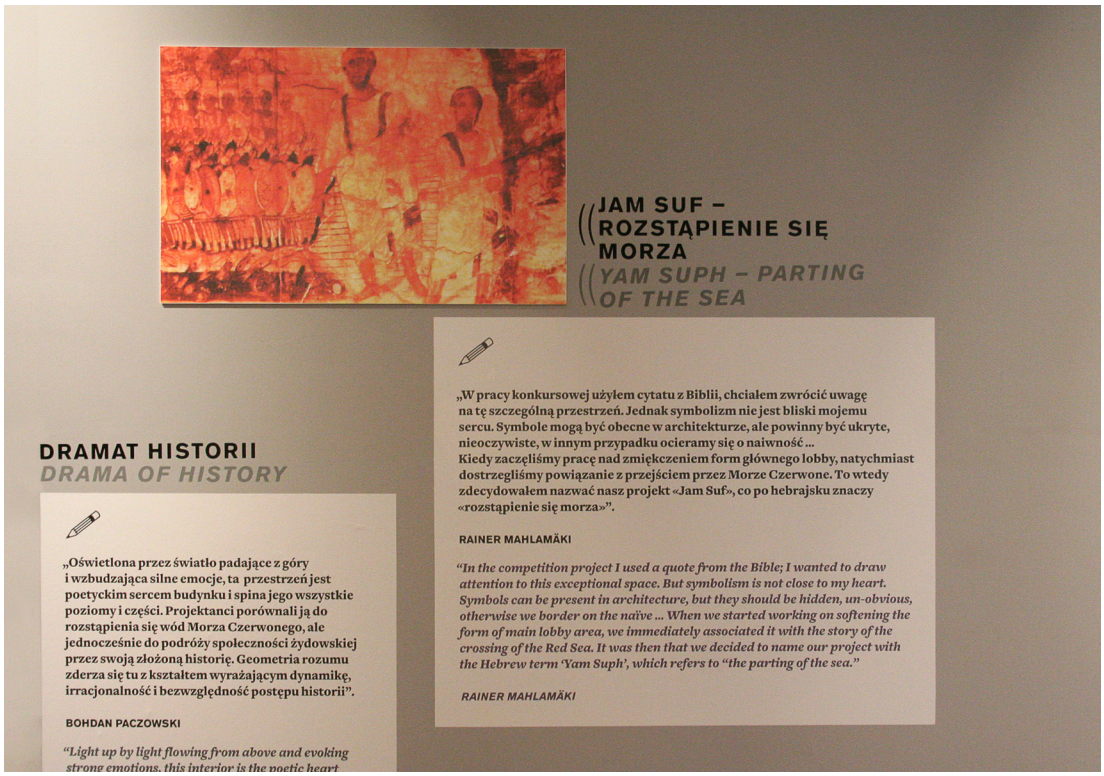
Here, the name of the Red Sea is Polin. The façade of the building is made out of glass plates with the inscription "Polin" repeated in countless numbers in Polish and Hebrew. The Red Sea Polin is a protective figure, providing insulation from the enemy, enabling survival and crossing dry-shod and unscathed to Canaan, the land of milk and honey. Thanks to the goodwill of the Red Sea, the people of Israel were able to return home, to their place. The Red Sea is a figure of mercy and transit. And because we are talking here about transit, it may come as no surprise that we are looking through the "window of life" at a Poland of about 40 million citizens where 8,000 Jews live – as many as the French.

The establishment of the figure of Red Sea Polin runs opposite to the efforts the local culture undertakes – outside the margins of social legitimacy – in order to face the history of Polish Jews. The architectural representation contrasts with one of the most powerful images in Polish poetry concerning the Holocaust, namely the image of the Red Sea. Tadeusz Różewicz's poem *Chaskiel* describes Chaskiel's search for a hideout that would protect him from death, which after all was not unavoidable. When all possible options fail, the Red Sea ends his torment. This time, however – in an action of grace – it does not open up. It closes around the hero, hiding him in its hospitable interior. This is the Red Sea of Jewish blood. Here, the Jews do not escape anywhere, just as they did not escape from the surroundings of the Museum, where their unburied corpses remain to this day. The image of the Red Sea of Jewish blood depicted by Różewicz will always be the invisible reverse of the redemptive narrative of the history of Polish Jews with the Red Sea Polin as its central figure.

Further reconnaissance inside the building does not allow one to forget the attempt undertaken outside at denying reality and substituting it with an openly competitive, if not suppressive, myth. I leave aside the question of why the core exhibition is located in the dark basement of this big building advertised as "full of light" and what the symbolic consequences of this are. [At the very least, it looks like a visualization of the paternalistic platitude: "We did take Jews into our home, but we made them live in the cellar" (Błoński, 2010, p. 1087),[4] or else is directly reminiscent of the architecture of a gas chamber.[5]] Instead, I want to reflect on the *Forest* gallery. The *Forest* gallery is a kind of

4 The text was originally published as: Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto," *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Błoński, 1987, pp. 1, 4). For an English translation, see: Błoński, 1998, pp. 34–52. The quotation is from page 44.

5 Artur Żmijewski: "Let me tell you about the feeling I got when I went to see the exhibition for the first time. I left my clothing in the cloakroom and, going down the monumental staircase, I was overwhelmed by the feeling that this is the same situation as in Auschwitz. That this is a staircase down into the abyss of a gas chamber.



The temporary exhibition *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?* (curated by Tamara Sztyma), October 24, 2014 – February 2, 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

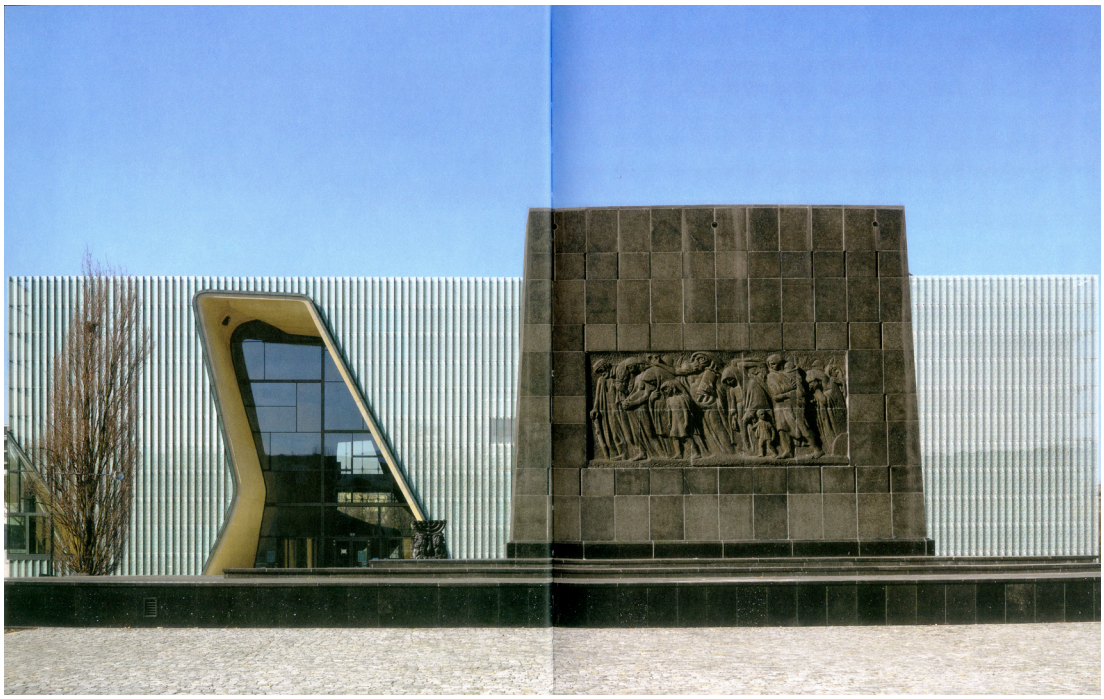
"*Yam Suph – parting of the sea*: […] When we started working on softening the form of the main lobby area, we immediately associated it with the story of the crossing of the Red Sea. It was then that we decided to name our project with the Hebrew term 'Yam Suph,' which refers to the 'parting of the sea'" (Rainer Mahlamäki).

The meaning of "Yam Suph" is not "parting of the sea" but "Sea of Reeds." Over time, as a result of subsequent translations, the Sea of Reeds mentioned in Exodus has become the Red Sea.



The temporary exhibition *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?* (curated by Tamara Sztyma), October 24, 2014 – February 2, 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

"*Drama of history*: Light [*sic!*] up by light flowing from above and evoking strong emotions, the interior is the poetic heart of the building, connecting to it all its levels and all parts of the program. For the designers of the project, the abstract form of the tear symbolizes the parting of the waters and the Jews crossing [*sic!*] the Red Sea, while at the same time expressing the journey of the Jewish community through its complicated and tragic history [in the Polish version: its complex history – E. J.]. The mind's geometry collides here with a shape expressing the dynamics and irrationality of the ruthless uncompromising progress of history."



Photograph by Wojciech Kryński, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, pp. 20–21. A visualization of a redemptive narrative: Israel crosses the Red Sea of Polin

A miracle within a miracle: "Although the architect did not do this intentionally, the entrance is shaped like the letter 'tav'; 'tav' like 'Tarbut' (culture), 'Toldot' (history), 'Tikkun' (repair)" – Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

"From the outside, the building is very quiet, respectful of its environment, transparent, reflective and full of light – in no way do these features form a message related to the Holocaust" – Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

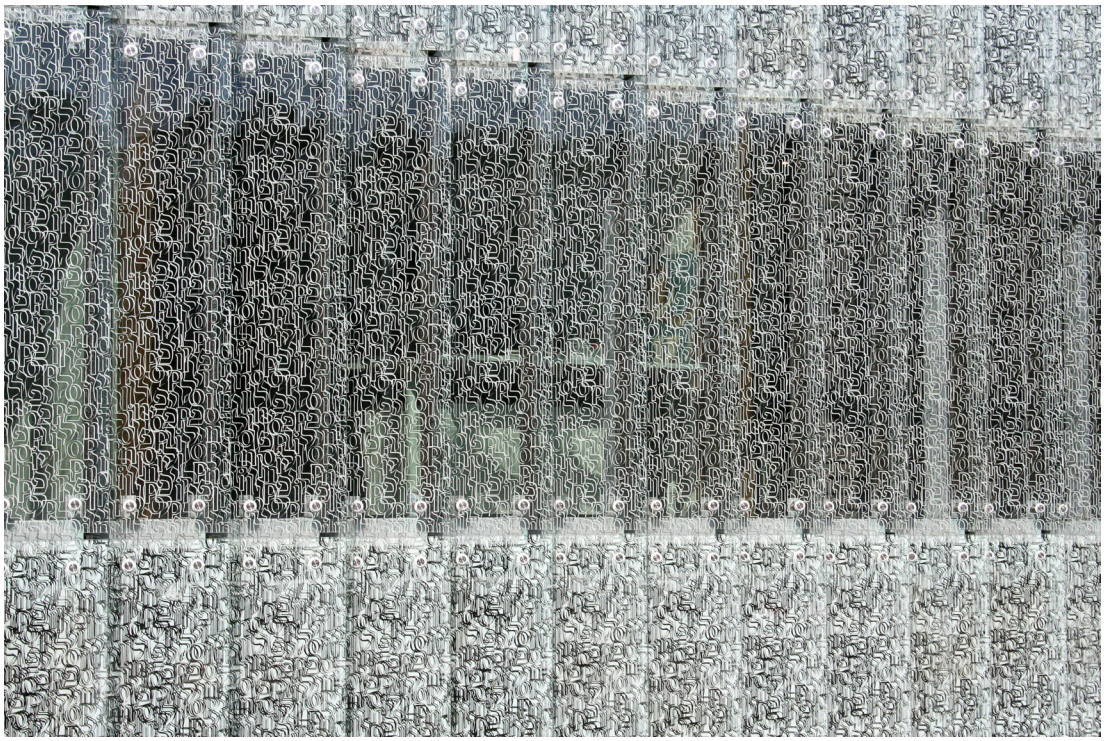
Both quotes come from notice boards presented at the temporary exhibition *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?* (curated by Tamara Sztyma), October 24, 2014 – February 2, 2015 (photograph of the boards in Elżbieta Janicka's archive)

sluice gate through which we enter the core exhibition. The myth of the reception of the Jews into Poland, dressed up in Shmuel Yosef Agnon's words, is presented here uncritically. For a visitor familiar with Polish culture, it may bring to mind the paintings of Artur Grottger and Jan Matejko. On the screens, however – alongside the text – an image is displayed. We know this image by heart – from our own experience and from films[6] – as an icon of the Holocaust. As in the case of the figure of the Red Sea, what we have here is an attractive obverse which lets its macabre reverse show through.

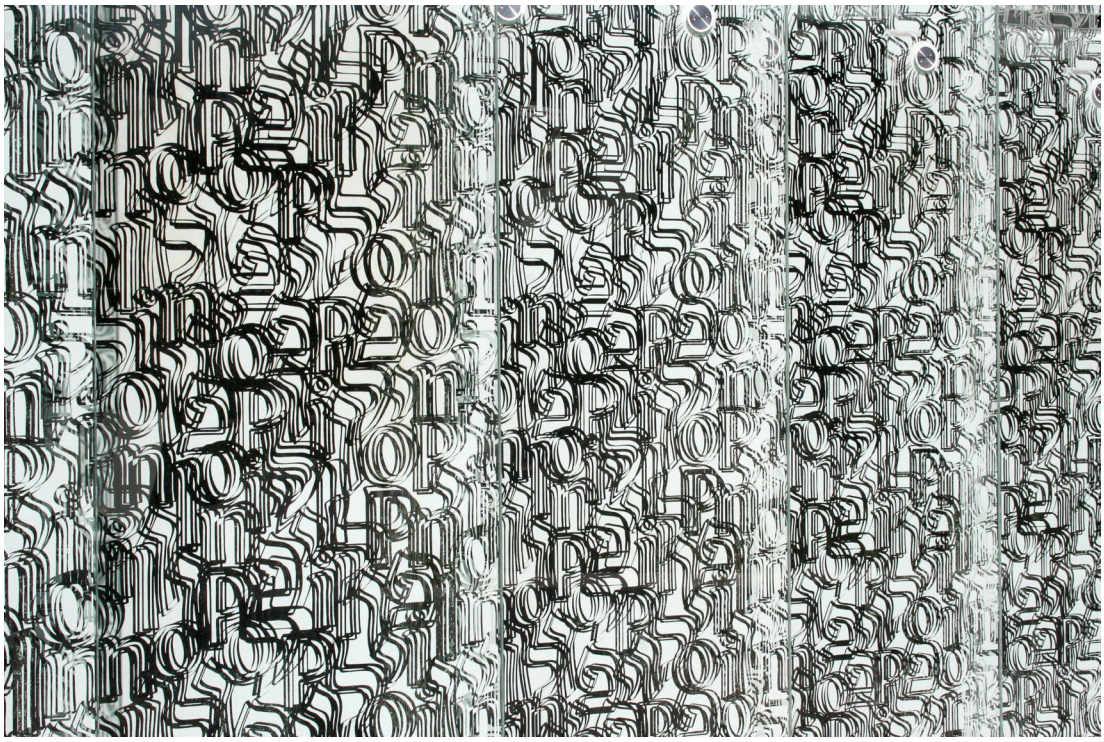
The forest is an emblematic figure of the Holocaust in its broad definition: both in the sense of the German process of industrial extermination and of what we nowadays call

Why is this exhibition underground? Why isn't it where there is sunshine? Why is this glass building occupied by the administration and its offices but to see the exhibition, you go to the basement? To me, this is at odds with the idea that this is a museum of life. From the very beginning, what I see there is death. One might say that what you all have repressed comes back in my fantasy" (Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Leociak, 2015).

6 This applies to both documentary and feature films. Among documentaries, the most memorable are *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann (1985), *Miejsce urodzenia* [*Birthplace*] by Paweł Łoziński (1992) and *Shtetl* by Marian Marzyński (1996). Feature films include: *Naganiacz* [*Beater*] by Ewa Petelska and Czesław Petelski (1963), *Jeszcze tylko ten las* [*Just Beyond This Forest*] by Jan Łomnicki (1991), *W ciemności* [*In Darkness*] by Agnieszka Holland (2011), *Pokłosie* [*Aftermath*] by Władysław Pasikowski (2012), *Ida* by Paweł Pawlikowski (2013), *Ziarno prawdy* [*A Grain of Truth*] by Borys Lankosz (2015) and *Klezmer* by Piotr Chrzan (2015).



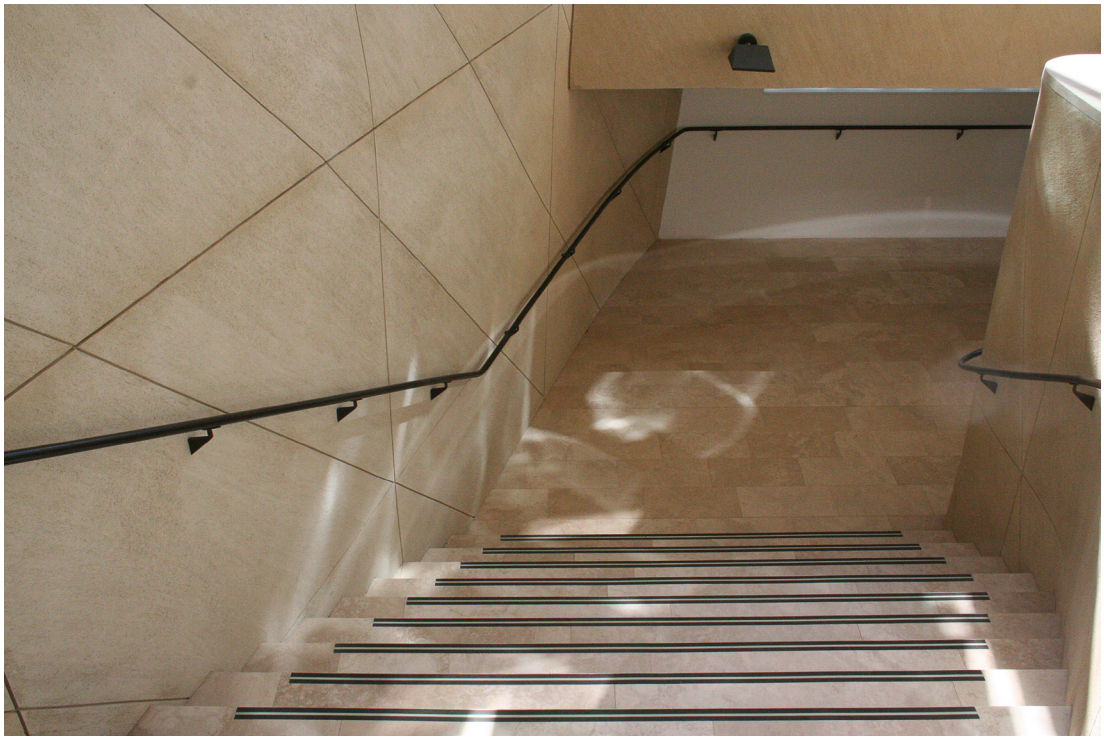
The exterior glass paneling (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



The exterior glass paneling (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



“A building full of light” (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



The staircase underground (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



In the background is part of the projected hospitable, life-giving transitory forest (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

"the margins of the Holocaust." The latter refers to the attitudes and behavior of the majority societies towards the Jews. In the Polish context, the forest then denotes the period called Judenjagd – hunt for the Jews – which claimed 200,000 victims, the majority of whom are still scattered throughout backyard gardens, fields, meadows, and forests in particular. At this point, the fight for the signifier repeats itself. It is *de facto* a fight against the signified. Given that the signified, the Holocaust, is impossible to do away with (crime prevention cannot be instituted ex post), one can at least try to preempt it on the level of cultural representation. In a symbolic sense, the MHPJ is like a sarcophagus made of concrete, the kind that is used to cover the radioactive remains of nuclear reactors in disaster areas – dead zones.

The exterior, design and content of the building are organized around a myth – one and the same, essentially. The Jews are saved from imminent and certain death by – in succession – Poland as the state and society of the Righteous among the Nations, Poland as the Red Sea Polin, Poland as the forest – the Polish soil that has innately always loved Jews. This myth has also been inscribed into the identity of the institution as a result of a change of its name and logotype.[7] Such is the context of the core exhibition. This is not only an act of placing facts and myths in the same space. This is an act

7 "A new logo, created by PZL agency was approved in January 2013. It combines the Polish and Hebrew letter P, which begins the word 'Polin' – referring to the legend about coming of the Jews to Poland. The word 'Polin' was included in the logo and in the museum's official name in September 2014. The blue-turquoise alludes to the colors of the building." The quotation comes from a chart featured in the exhibition: *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?* Photograph from the author's personal collection.

of placing facts in a triple encirclement, in a triple bracket of myth. This results in the establishment of a conceptual and phantasmatic framework, which determines perception and the space for mental and emotional maneuver. The visitor is placed in a field of emotions connected with the categories of the guest and the host, pity and gratitude. In this language, one cannot speak of historical, economic, political, and religious concreteness. In such a configuration, any analytical and critical reflection turns out to be an act of ingratitude. The same goes for the demand for equal rights that in this context would produce the impression that an open-hearted welcome is met with a clenched fist. What does this look like upon closer examination?



The first logo – current until January 2013



The second logo – current from January 2013 until September 2014



The third logo – current since September 2014

Polin for internal use

What was the meaning of the Polin myth in the history of Polish Jews? "Bernard Weinryb, the historian of Polish Jewry, examined legends of origin from a historical perspective and found a striking resemblance among the legends of the various Jewish diasporas" (Bar-Itzhak, 1999, p. 27). Irrespective of whether the story happens to be set in Poland or in Yemen, a good king features in all legends. From all of them we learn that:

> In the distant past, the Jews enjoyed fair treatment and equal rights. The deterioration in their circumstances came later, usually quite recently. […] He [Bernard Weinryb – E. J.] ascribed this similarity to the common lot of all such communities – the parlous situation that confronts a minority that settles in the midst of another people (Bar-Itzhak, 1999, p. 27).

The legends of origin were addressed to both the Jewish community and the non-Jewish majority. Their function changed depending on the addressee. Addressed to an internal Jewish audience, they fulfilled onomatological midrash functions, making the place more familiar by Judaizing it. In addition, they bestowed divine sanction upon the presence of the Jews in the place of settlement, and hence the sense of a higher order, which helped them bear reality. The legends of origin were directed to the outside for political reasons, as an apologia meant to appease the non-Jewish environment. Such an operation is characteristic of the emotional work carried out unilaterally by the subordinated towards those on whom they are dependent.

All versions of the legends of origin and onomatological midrashim emphasize the temporary character of the Jews' residence in the place of settlement. In the Polish case, this also concerns the twentieth-century literary versions, regardless of whether they were written by Sholem Asch, Aaron Zeitlin, or Shmuel Yosef Agnon – authors representing very different Jewish identities, who were not on friendly terms with one another.

> The archetype of settlement – the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness during which God accompanies and guides His people, and the entry into the Land of Canaan – is repeated in the narrative of the settlement in Poland; but an awareness of the myth of redemption reforms the depiction of space and time. The Land of Israel remains the Holy Land, the navel of the world, the lost paradise, and thus the cynosure and object of desire (Bar-Itzhak, 1999, p. 41).

Nevertheless, the nomadic ethos did not necessarily harmonize with the frame of mind of Polish Jews – again, irrespective of their chosen identity. Thus, for example, the hearing that Józef Piłsudski gave the Jewish delegation from Jędrzejów on the eve of the independence of Poland was remembered as a traumatic event. It concerned the outbreak of anti-Semitic violence in the town. "During the audience Piłsudski expressed his opinion that in general the Jews attach too much importance to events of this kind, and

afterwards he stated that the Jewish issue may be sorted out by means of emigration to Palestine" (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 180). The Zionists were devastated, to say nothing of non-Zionists of all possible orientations.

Regardless of this – or rather, precisely because of this – Polish-speaking Jews of various self-definitions – from Zionists to assimilationists – drew on the Polin myth in the interwar years.[8] The Polin legend was disseminated in different forms in Jewish journals for adults, children, and youth. In certain periods, it appeared among the Jewish books recommended for use in schools, often in Agnon's edition (Halpern, 1934, p. 3). The third variant of his version of the midrash about the Hebrew name for Poland – *Poprzednicy* [*Antecedents*] from the volume *Polska: Opowieści legendarne* [*Poland: Legendary Tales*] (1925) (see: Agnon, 1925) – met a growing need. The reason for its popularity was that the Polin narrative had a reactive character. The worse things were in reality, the more Jews drew on the legend. Within the subordinated group, the Polin myth was an instrument of despair management, part of a survival strategy.

> The acculturated Jews, living, if not in the Polish milieu, then at least within Polish culture, reading the Polish press, being hence exposed to nationalistic propaganda, also needed to be confirmed in their belief that had they not been foreign in this land from time immemorial, that they had not always been unwanted newcomers (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 105).

The main purpose of the recourse to the Polin myth addressed to Jews by Jews was self-persuasion:

> the assertions that ancient Poland was tolerant, that it gave the Jews special privileges, the protection of the rulers, [all] had the task of convincing the readers that anti-Semitism was a temporary phenomenon, that Poland was a country in which one would be able to stay forever – or at least until the moment of regaining one's own state (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 108).

This tendency was even present in Jewish historiography. History became a "heavenly realm of delusion"[9] on the basis of which it still seemed possible to achieve integration.[10]

> Both journalists and historians created the myth. Emphasizing a bright past and hope for a return to ancient tolerance lying in the "nature" of the Polish nation was kind of a sui generis spell cast on reality. […] What we are dealing with here then is a quite unusual operation – an attempt to convince the readers that what they see with their own eyes, what they encounter on a daily basis, is not typical and is bound to pass (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, pp. 108, 112).

8 In contrast to what the guides at the core exhibition of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews claim and what is generally believed in Poland, among Polish Jews being a Polish native-speaker did not have to mean, and usually did not mean, Polish identification, assimilation, and even less so assimilationism. On this subject, see: Mendelsohn, 1983, pp. 30–32; Landau-Czajka, 2006, p. 207; Cohen, 2014, pp. 269–275.

9 A reference to the fourth verse of Adam Mickiewicz's *Oda do młodości* [*Ode to Youth*].

10 "A positive assessment of Polish-Jewish relations in the past was supposed to prove that co-existence was possible. […] Both Jewish historians who had begun their academic career on the threshold of independence and a younger generation of researchers only changed their way of describing Polish-Jewish relations to a small degree in the face of the deteriorating position of the Jewish community" (Aleksiun, 2006, p. 49).

Reality was placed outside of reality. The myth was supposed to be the truth, reality – a delusion. As Anna Landau-Czajka puts it: "Poland is not them." Poland is not Poland. Poland is Polin. Admittedly, Agnon "hints that the Jews' exaggerated sense of security had no basis" (Bar-Itzhak, 1999, p. 43).[11] However, no one drew upon his version of the Polin legend in order to interpret it in such a way. The self-deception – even if at first life-giving – soon proved to be death-bringing.

Polin for external use

In relations with the dominant group, the Polin myth served as an instrument of mercy-evoking persuasion. Pseudo-arguments like the tropes of Polin and *Paradisus Iudaeorum* were called upon at the dawn of the Second Polish Republic in the face of the pogrom wave of 1918–1919. The Polish-language Jewish press of the period identified as the main problem the fact that Polish public opinion was receptive neither to sensible arguments, nor to facts, nor to declarations made by Jews (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 81). Irrational Polish action thus provoked irrational Jewish reaction. In November 1918, the assimilationist *Rozwaga* [*Prudence*] invoked the *Paradisus Iudaeorum* myth. In the same issue, the Circle of Polish Patriots of the Mosaic Persuasion reminded of the merits of Poland for Jews, beginning with the sacrosanct formula: "Casimir the Great's Poland […] offered the ever persecuted Jews sanctuary and shelter."[12]

> Poland was thus an exceptional country not only because it offered Jews a safe life and the protection of the powers that be, it was also exceptional as a center of Jewish culture. Texts of this kind, however, usually pertained not to the past they invoked, but to the abysmal contemporary Polish-Jewish relations and expressed regret that Jews were now treated like strangers, that anti-Semitism was flourishing (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 104).

The idyllic myth had the purpose of convincing Polish public opinion that: a) Jews had the right to live in Poland; b) the "true Poland" was a Poland that was kind to Jews; c) anti-Semitism was a misunderstanding: a non-Polish element, instilled by the partitioning powers' "fanatic poison of thralldom."[13]

The reception of the myth by the Christian majority proceeded smoothly, not in small part because, from its point of view, the Polin myth had – and still has – nothing but advantages. First, it eliminates any rational language of description and any recourse to historical facts. In doing so, it renders one immune from any factual analysis, any conversation in rational terms. The persuasive aspect – the element of humble supplication and homage-paying address – is readily ignorable from the perspective of the lords, if it

11 On Agnon's attitude toward Poland and the diaspora see, for instance: Scholem, 2006, 2012.

12 "Odezwa Koła Patriotów Polskich Wyznania Mojżeszowego: Do ludności żydowskiej," 1918, p. 165, as cited in Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 104.

13 The phrase comes from: "Przemówienie Prezesa Zarządu Gminy Żydowskiej J.L. Mincberga wygłoszone w dniu 11 XI 1929 r. w synagodze przy ulicy Wolborskiej," 1929, pp. 34–36, as cited in Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 106.

is noticed in the first place. The story not only binds to nothing, but downright absolves of responsibility. What is more, it is told by the subordinated themselves. One could hardly imagine a better alibi against the proverbial rest of the world and against oneself.

The Christian majority can afford to ignore the fact that the Polin legend does not mention it at all. Agnon writes:

> They [the Jews] went to the land of Poland and gave the king a mountain of gold. The king received them with great honor. The Lord had mercy on them and caused the king and ministers to show mercy to them. The king allowed them to settle in all the lands of his kingdom [...] and to worship the lord according to the tenets of their religion. The king protected them against any foe and adversary (Agnon, 1966, p. 353 – translation quoted from Bar-Itzhak, 1999, p. 33).[14]

The construction of collective identity within the Christian culture made it impossible for the Christian majority to cast itself in the role of the Jews' "foe and adversary." Indeed, to this day, members of the Christian majority – predominantly descendants of serfs, the principal victims of the feudal system – consider themselves heirs to the mythical king, mythical ministers, and mythical land, and hence – the actual benefactors of the Jews.[15] Expressing the Jewish experience is impossible within a culture in which merely tolerating Jews, even in a subordinate role and out of one's own interest, is seen as an act of benevolence. After all, a benefactor deserves gratitude, not exegesis.

The Museum's rendering of the Polin myth is thus unable to accommodate the postwar, post-Holocaust tradition of poems, always addressed *zu Poyln* [to Poland].[16] Yiddish literature counts around a hundred of them. Their artistic value varies but each expresses the pain of those who found out last and were disillusioned – often fatally. ("The one who finds out last" is Henryk Grynberg's definition of a Jew.) These were people who imagined a life for themselves in Poland, and did so not just because they had no way of escaping, but also because they harbored hope – a hope that was contrary to reality, yet fed on the myth, a hope they thought they had lost completely. The *zu Poyln* poetic tradition – whose key date is the year 1946 – means the Polin myth's confrontation with reality, evaluation, and final farewell. The most famous work in this current is the funeral rhapsody by Avrom Sutzkever (see: Shmeruk, 2014a). Carefully browsing through the material on one of the light pads in the postwar gallery, one can come across the 1946 short poem *Poyln, Poyln* by Yitskhok Yanasovitsch. This, however, offers no chance of appreciating the magnitude and importance of the phenomenon, let

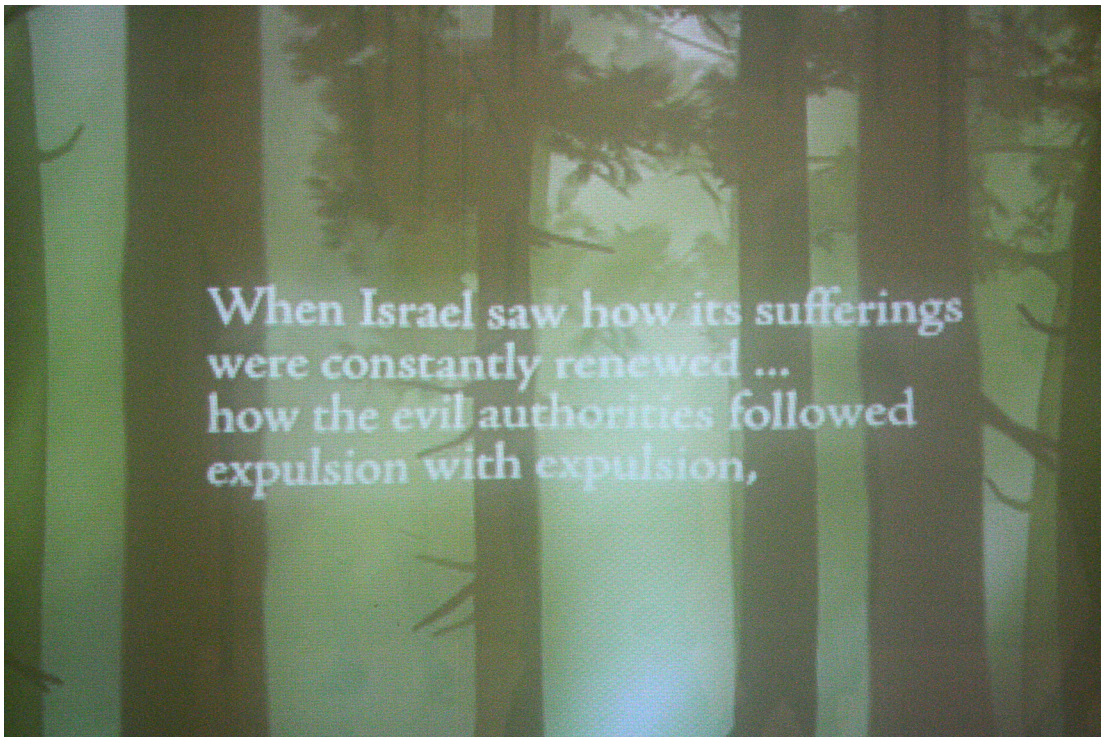
14 The Polish translation of Agnon's text – "'Nie wiedzielim' (Z legend o Polsce)" – appeared in the Polish-language Jewish journal *Naród* 11 (January 1930) (Agnon, 1930, pp. 65–66).

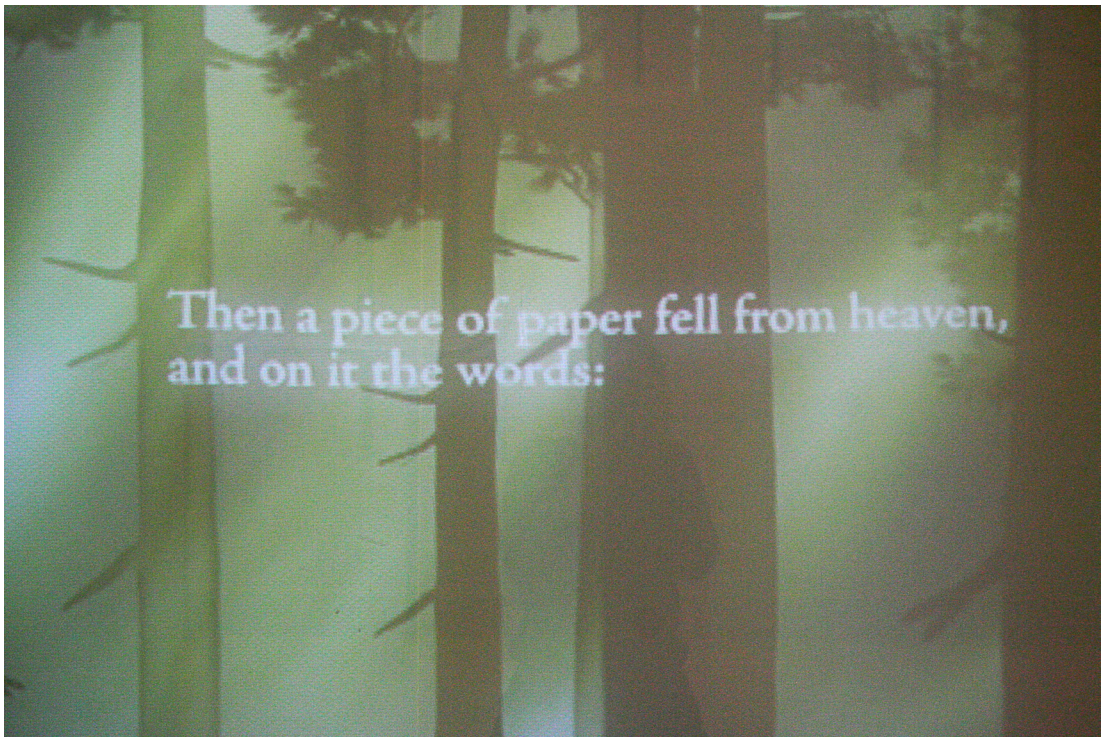
15 On the identification of today's Poles with the figure of the benevolent ruler and the career of the myth about welcoming Jews in Poland see: Janicka, 2013a, pp. 1–56.

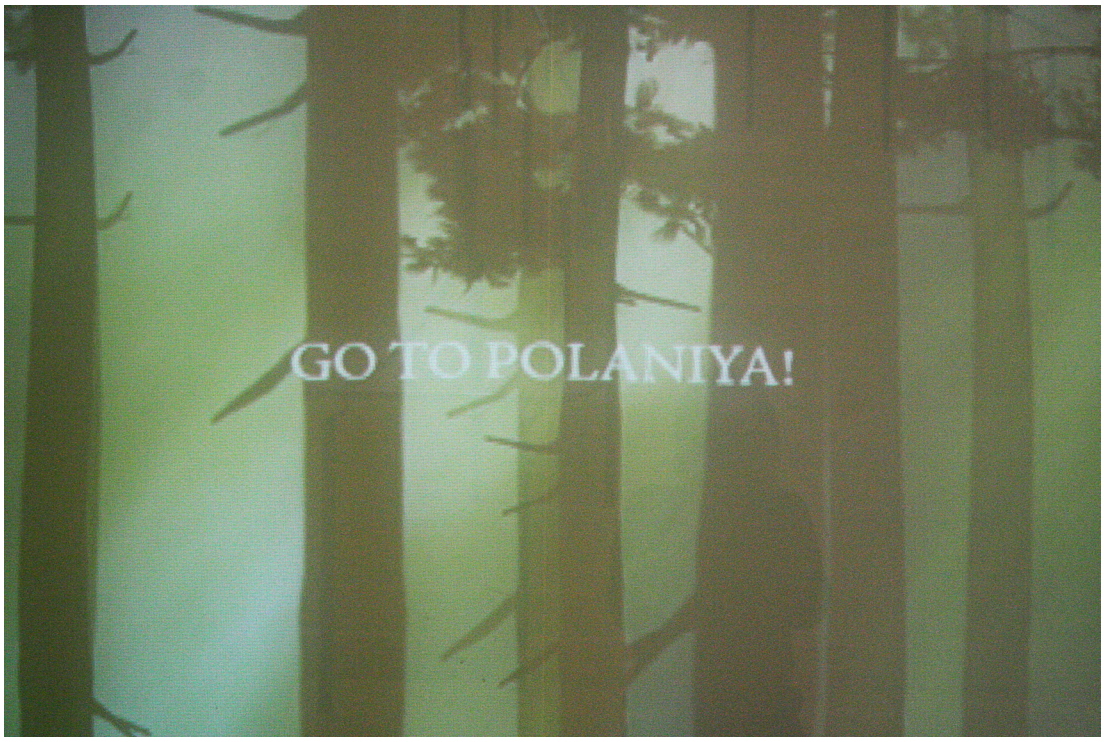
16 Incidentally, in terms of sources, the midrash about the Hebrew name for Poland is a legend of destruction. "The oldest written source [...] is the *Elegy of the Massacres in Polonia*, an elegy on the pogroms of 1648–1649 by the seventeenth-century Jacob b. Moshe Halevy, first printed in Venice in 1670-1671" (Bar-Itzhak, 1999, p. 31). On the affinity of legends of origin with legends of destruction, see Bar-Itzhak, 1999, pp. 133–158. A separate study would be warranted on the relationship between the Museum-propagated version of the Polin myth and the research tradition, a part of which was (is?) constituted by the academic yearly *Polin: Studies on Polish Jewry*.

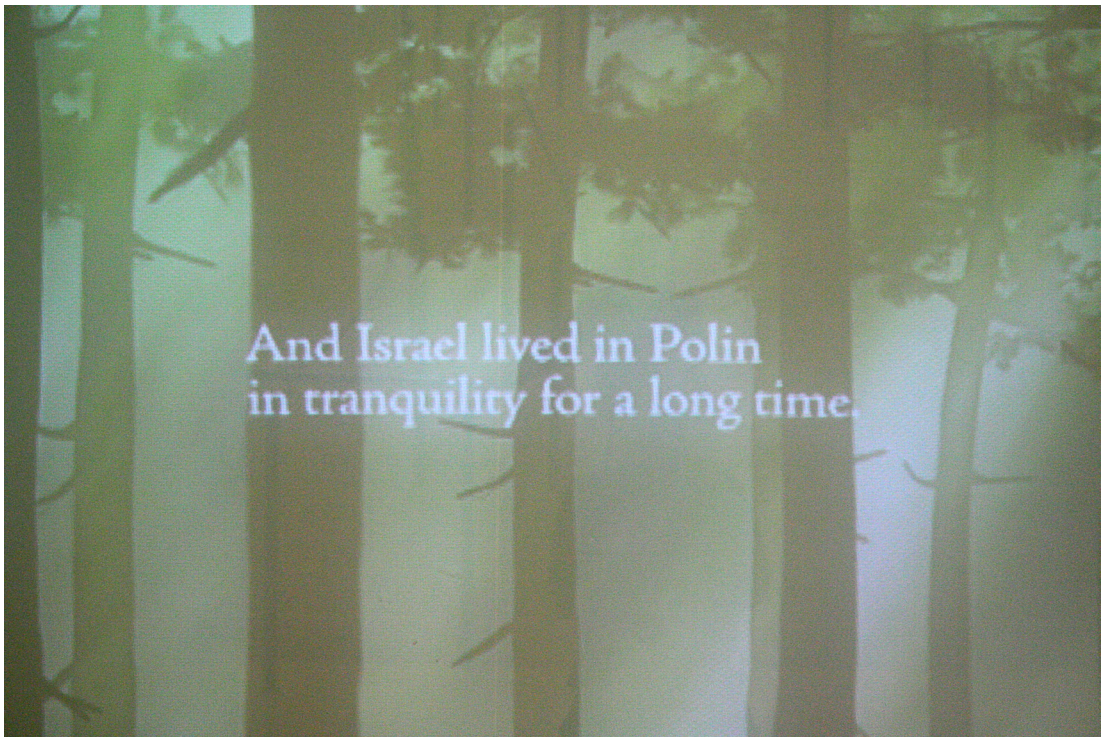


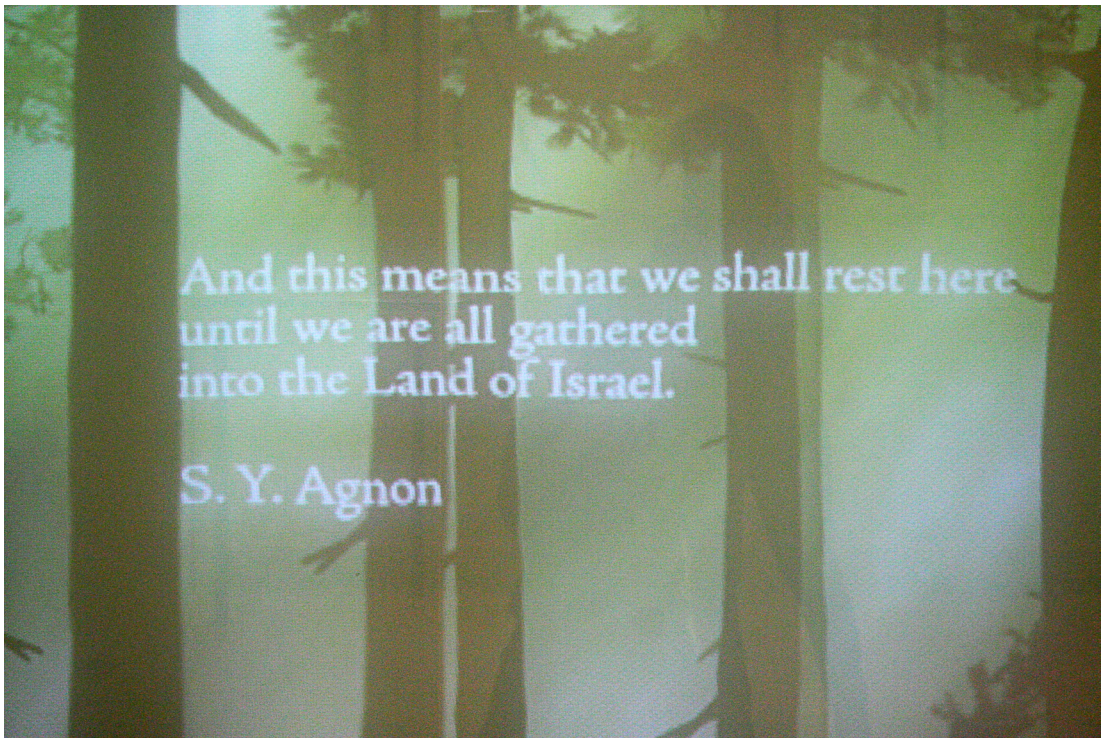
The *Forest* gallery, pp. 18–20 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)




Then a piece of paper fell from heaven,
and on it the words:


GO TO POLANIYA!


And Israel lived in Polin
in tranquility for a long time.


And this means that we shall rest here
until we are all gathered
into the Land of Israel.
S. Y. Agnon



Two blocks away: upper part of the commemorative stone at 18 Miła Street (2006), designed by Hanna Szmalenberg (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



Four blocks away: the rounded pediment of the monument at the former Umschlagplatz (1988), designed by Hanna Szmalenberg and Władysław Klamerus (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

alone confronting it with the inscriptions covering the building's exterior glass paneling, the Museum's new name, or Agnon's story on display by the entrance to the core exhibition. These Jewish dirges mark a turning point that is tragically important for Polish Jews but utterly irrelevant from the perspective of the awareness and emotions of the Christian majority. The POLIN Museum consolidates and legitimizes this state of affairs.

Polin reloaded

The Polin myth has been seamlessly overtaken by the dominant group and included in the arsenal of symbolic violence as a tool of blackmail, precluding any factual debate. Before 1989, it was absorbed at home, in school, and in Church. It left one stunned by Jewish ingratitude, which after the war would time and again afflict Poland and Poles, like the outbursts of "Jewish anti-Polonism" and of the "slandering of Poland and Poles abroad" in 1946 and 1968. In the independent Third Republic, the Polin trope was revived after the Jedwabne debate and when the first results of research on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust by scholars from different disciplines were published. The burning barn then became part and parcel of the collective imaginary. Artists spoke out, as did teachers. Two of the latter wrote the textbook *The Holocaust – understanding why* (2003).[17] The book is clear and accessible, based on up-to-date knowledge about facts and mechanisms, and takes as its point of departure the place and role of perception of Jews in the Christian doctrine.

Since then, the danger has been staved off. The debate was cut mid-word. The reckoning was limited to assessing the quantitative aspects of one isolated crime. Further research and the task of revising Polish culture were taken up by a handful of people. Most of their efforts never reach the general public. At that time, however, there seemed to be a viable threat that a textbook about the Holocaust would make its way into the school curricula. That when confronted with an alternative narrative, pupils – who are keen observers of the reality around them, tend to readily discern contradictions and, last but not least, are rebellious – would stop believing in Casimir the Great and might articulate their dissent in an undesirable manner. They could, for instance, start asking questions at the family dinner table or – God forbid – in Church. Sooner or later, they might start digging up their home gardens. In short, a threat emerged that education would lead to exhumation, if not revolution. I am referring here to a grassroots revolution of the communal imaginary and of collective identity. For the reality of Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish history – a common history that divides – threatens the constitutive myths of the dominant model of Polishness. It threatens the founding myths of the independent Third Republic of Poland: the myth of the Second Republic (of which the Third Republic declared itself the direct successor), the myth of the Polish Underground State, and

17 Szuchta and Trojański (2003), *Holokaust – zrozumieć dlaczego*. An annotation inside reads: "Auxiliary textbook for use in history instruction in middle schools."

the myth of the anti-communist underground. This jeopardized set includes all that has hitherto been socially and culturally self-evident: from the master narrative of Christianity to what might be called the anti-communist dogma.

To rephrase the above in terms of the dominant culture: at the turn of the 21st century, an increase in knowledge caused the appearance of "Polish anti-Polonism" and the "slandering of Poland and Poles" began taking place in Poland and being paid for with Polish taxpayers' money. It became clear that what was at stake was not a partial revision of the image of the six years of Nazi occupation but the majority narrative and collective identity in their entirety. At stake were intergenerational relations within families, societal authorities (including within the academia), the moral immunity of the dominant religion, as well as the political and economic position of the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of an unprecedented chance of emancipation, of achieving mental and emotional independence, of liberation through self-subjectivization, the dominant, or at least decisive, majority – including a considerable segment of the social elites – saw on the horizon a vision of something much worse than the end of the world. Namely of *Finis Poloniae*. In this situation, symbolic tools from the arsenal of anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic violence were put to use – all of them produced by the same matrix.[18] This was initiated at the grassroots level and in a top-down manner, and was done both consciously and unconsciously, with cynicism and with the best of intentions – but always following patterns of culture that were unproblematized and unreflected and, as such, remained in the realm of social and cultural self-evidence.

It was in this context that the Polin myth was reanimated and revitalized. Pieced together from mutually exclusive bits, it was restored, colorized, sonorized, and introduced into the field of public visibility – literally, as Jolanta Dylewska's 2008 "documentary" film *Po-lin: Okruchy pamięci* [*Polin: Scraps of Memory*]. The film made a triumphant tour of cinemas throughout Poland and sites of Polish diaspora, receiving along the way – in Chicago – the Golden Teeth award. (Humor after Auschwitz is possible! Humor is possible after Jedwabne!) Since then, the film has been periodically re-run on television, broadcast in schools, and shown during workshops on multiculturalism and tolerance as well as festivals of tradition and dialogue. The trope of Polin has thus survived its own decease, jauntily risen from the dead, and engaged in (re-)Polinization.[19] The term alludes to the slogan of re-Polonization, which in 2005, just a year after Poland's accession to the

18 Referring to the Christian figure of the God-killing Jew, Artur Sandauer wrote: "This [Jewish] descent is surrounded by an aura which we cannot ignore. […] I therefore propose to coin a new term, 'allo-Semitism,' which describes a predilection to single out this descent and a conviction about its uniqueness. Allo-Semitism is the general base from which both anti- and philo-Semitic conclusions may arise. […] Seeing a Jew, the ancients did not experience this mystical shock, which lies at the core of all anti-, or speaking more broadly, allo-Semitic emotions. […] And so, Christian Europe demonizes Jews: they are all the more dangerous for having once been chosen and then having rejected the calling. […] This demonization perpetrated on the Jews results in a phenomenon much more dangerous than the general dislike they encountered in Antiquity. Dislike has now found itself an ideology, which consists in the conviction about their uniqueness, about some magical ambivalence of their lot. It is a people that is sacred in the double sense that Latin bestows on the word 'sacer,' a sacred-cursed people" (Sandauer, 1982, pp. 9, 10, 12). The current director of the MHPJ does not shy away from publically voicing an allo-Semitic motto: "Jews are people like everyone else, only more" (Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Stola, 2015, p. 283).

19 "Polinization" is a category coined by Konrad Matyjaszek (2015).

European Union, helped the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) come to power and install their leaders, the twin brothers Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński, as prime minister and president, respectively. Prime minister Kaczyński would later ask rhetorically whether "it is all right that some nations hold in their hands the brains of other nations" (Śmiłowicz & Kaczyński, 2006, p. 3).[20] The Polish nation decided to take its brain in its own hands. The universal quantifier is fully justified. After the rival political party took over, it did not change the historical policy and patriotic education put in place by their predecessors by one iota. On the contrary, the policies were further radicalized. Suffice it to mention the state cult of Roman Dmowski, the state cult of the anti-Semitic postwar anti-communist underground (since 2011[21]) or of the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, NSZ), collaborators of the Third Reich rehabilitated by the Sejm of the Third Republic in 2012.[22] Radicalization has also taken place in the realm of the "foreign historical policy" (see: Grabowski, 2016).

Polinization, or decontextualization

The essence and function of the smooth transition between the mythical land with its mythical king of the pre-national period and the nation as a whole was aptly parodied by Marek Edelman in a 1985 interview. The question concerned attitudes toward Jews during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, though in fact one is tempted to say that it could have concerned any event in Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish history. In reply, the last commander of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising stated: "Do not listen to this, it's disgusting, it's not fit for this paper of yours, or any other. Because the Polish nation, as you are well aware, is tolerant. […] It's an extraordinary nation. Casimir the Great took in the Jews, and he cherished them and to this very day he loves them" (Grupińska, Filipek, & Edelman, 2000, p. 30). **By precluding – by force of the emotional blackmail inherent to it – any reflection or debate in rational terms, the Polin myth works like an absorber: it annihilates the factual. In doing so, the myth extends moral immunity to the dominant culture and the majority group. Polinization amounts to the decontextualization**

20 The question was: "Roman Giertych suggests […] that the signees of the pact [the pact for the stabilization of the mass media, signed by Jarosław Kaczyński's PiS, Roman Giertych's League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR) – and Andrzej Lepper's Self-Defense (Samoobrona) – E. J.] are in agreement concerning the need to re-Polonize the mass media […]". One of Kaczyński's statements in reply to this was: "If someone were to ask me whether I would like for the mass media to become re-Polonized, I would confirm it."

21 The legislation was initiated by President Lech Kaczyński; the initiative was later upheld by President Bronisław Komorowski. On February 2, 2011, a law institutioning the National Day of Remembrance of the "Accursed Soldiers" was almost unanimously supported by all parliamentary parties. 406 out of 417 parliamentarians present voted for the motion, 8 were against, and 3 refrained from voting. Having been passed by the lower chamber (Sejm), the law was then brought before the Senate on February 4 and passed with no amendments. The law was signed by President Bronisław Komorowski on February 9 and published in the Journal of Laws, No. 32, pos. 160, of February 15, 2011.

22 For the Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland paying homage to the National Armed Forces, see: "Uchwała Sejmu RP oddająca hołd Narodowym Siłom Zbrojnym," n.d. The debate concerning this resolution took place during the 25th seating of the 7th Term of the Sejm, on November 7, 2012. It can be found on pp. 123–130 of the official transcript: "Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 25. posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniu 7 listopada 2012 r.," 2012. For the result of the voting, which took place on November 9, 2013, see: "Głosowanie nr 43 na 25. posiedzeniu Sejmu dnia 09–11–2012 r. o godz. 15:57:15," 2012.

of Jewish history and, as a result, the loss of the essence of a significant part of Jewish experience.

One result of Polinization is, for example, that the transboundary character of the civilization of Eastern European Jews has been obliterated. In consequence, in the term "Polish Jews" the very concept of "Polishness" comes to mean something altogether different than simply territorial affiliation. (The role of the adjective "Polish" in the Polish dominant imaginary is best understood by drawing upon the example of the "Polish concentration camps" affair, which takes up the lion's part of the energy of both public opinion in Poland and Polish diplomacy.[23]) In the Polin discourse, the "Polishness" of Polish Jews refers not so much to their relation with Poland and all things Polish, as to a dependency on – if not debt to – Poland and Polishness; both, of course, under the sign of Polin. Here is a formulation of this mechanism from the Polish majority perspective: "This is my country and in this country there developed something as wonderful as this Jewish culture. I'm proud of it. […] I am proud of Poland, proud of Polish Jews" (Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Stola, 2015, pp. 283–284).[24] Even suggesting that the MHPJ might present a perspective other than that of the majority proved unacceptable (cf. Paziński & Datner, 2015, p. 8). To paraphrase Roman Dmowski's aphorism: it is the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, therefore it has "Polish duties."[25] By this token, **Polinization has a further consequence of a pseudo-logical nature. It turns out that the better the situation of Polish Jews, the more heavily their position depends on the behavior and attitudes of Poles. The worse their situation, the weaker its connection with the Polish context.**

Another ironclad law of Polinization is that it prevents the problematization of key phenomena, which are never seen from a *longue durée* perspective. From the beginning, all the way through to the end of the core exhibition, Judaism remains consistently unproblematized. The same applies to the master narrative of Christianity. Along with it, unproblematized are the Christian doctrine and culture, in which, after all, Jews occupy a central position: that of the enemy constitutive for the new religion's identity.

23 "Since 2011, Polish diplomacy has intervened about the 'camps' 636 times. But what was the reason for those interventions in the first place? The website for the Foreign Ministry which list them leaves no place for doubt – they were protesting the usage of the phrase 'Polish concentration camp.' A phrase, however, is not a proposition. In this case, the phrase probably refers to the geographical location of the camps. Why doesn't the ministry intervene in cases when the proposition is voiced that the extermination camps were set up by the Polish state, or that they appeared on the initiative of Poles or that they were run by the Polish? The probable reason is that nobody makes such claims. We know of no historians of the Holocaust, either in Poland or the US, Europe or Israel, who would hold such views. Not even those very critical of Polish activities at the 'margins of the Holocaust'. […] Both the Polish state and institutions of Polish public opinion are perpetrating an act of manipulation. They fight feverously against an accusation nobody is making so as to present themselves as victims of libel. […] The scandal over the usage of the phrase 'Polish concentration camps' has become a smokescreen, a way to reverse roles, a manipulation of collective consciousness and an infallible trumpet call to national hysteria" (Kozłowski, 2015, p. 1). The phrase "Polish death camps" was used by people like Jan Karski and Zofia Nałkowska. See: Karski, 1944, facsimile in: Karski, 2012, p. 642; Nałkowska, 1982, p. 63.

24 Such logic came to the forefront in Poland during the Six-Day War with ubiquitous expressions of pride of "our Jews" who bashed "the Russky Arabs." In a similar vein, today's public discourse refers to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as: "A typically Polish fight for honor. Honor requires that a man says 'no!' when the weak, women, children, the elderly are dying. […] An uprising so romantic could only have been organized by Polish Jews. Let me stress that: Polish" (Klich, Kurski, & Bartoszewski, 2013, p. 14).

25 The original quote from Dmowski, which has become part of common parlance, reads: "I am Polish, therefore I have Polish duties."

As a consequence, then, what remains unproblematized is anti-Semitism, its origins, essence, mechanisms, and its place within the dominant culture. Meanwhile, it was the dominant culture that determined the situation of Jews. The symbolic dependency of Christian culture on Jews (at the level of identity) and the actual dependency of Jews on the Christian culture (at the level of elementary conditions of existence) remain completely invisible. **Factual knowledge remains scattered and *de facto* ceases to signify.** We do learn of the Sandomierz trial (1710–1713), which ensued after accusations were made of a supposed ritual murder, and about the Kielce pogrom of 1946, which likewise was the result of such accusations. A comprehensive perspective, however, is missing. We receive no information as to the reason for this pattern's persistence, that is, no information about the place and importance of the ritual murder myth within the master narrative of Christianity. And this place is fundamental.[26] In today's Poland, indicators of belief in the myth of ritual murder are alarming.[27] Yet, the core exhibition informs us that Christianity had little, or indeed nothing, to do with this myth.[28] Again, it is not about mentioning anti-Semitism more. It is about taking a different, problematized stance.

Anti-Semitism appears – as *deus ex machina* and, at the same time, very discretely – with the advent of modernity and nationalism. Its role is limited to that of an ingredient of a particular political ideology. It is new, external, and strange in relation to the cultural code. In the Museum's narrative, the realities of the bureaucratizing partitioning monarchies turn out to be more important than Polish nationalism. The exhibition fails to mention that this nationalism reproduced the anti-Semitic structures of Christian culture, simultaneously doubling and thus reinforcing them. A religious criterion of exclusion came to be supplemented by an ethnic (or indeed, a racial) one. In the dominant Polish culture, this was the moment when the figure of Christ – which was central to the pre-modern construction of collective identity – found its double in the figure of Poland the Christ of the Nations. The trope of Crucifixion found its double in the trope of Judeo-Communism. Both these tropes had a crucial – if not downright decisive – consequence for the situation of Jews in Poland. In the POLIN Museum, however, when

26 See: Tokarska-Bakir, 2008. See also the changes introduced into the book's French edition, unequivocally situating the work within the anthropology of Christian anti-Semitism: Tokarska-Bakir, 2015.

27 A survey carried out in 2011 by the Centre for Research on Prejudice at the University of Warsaw revealed that 10% of respondents believe or firmly believe that Jews abduct Christian children; 56,4% neither agree nor disagree with the statement. "The survey was nationwide, [conducted] on a sample of 620 Internet users, aged 15–35. Its goal was to shed light on whether legends of this type appear among modern people who are active users of contemporary technology" (Bilewicz & Haska, 2012). The questionnaire used in the survey did not consider secularized and rationalized versions of the myth.

28 "In the central frame of the panel a quote is inscribed in large cursive. It comes from an encyclical by Benedict XIV, dated 1751: 'The Jews are not to be persecuted; they are not to be slaughtered; they are not even to be driven out.' Further down, slightly below the line of sight of the visitor, are reproductions of three images by Carlo de Prévôt from the Sandomierz Cathedral and a caption informing us that they depict the 'alleged ritual murder'; lower still is a quadrangular slate with a factual description of the Sandomierz trial, information about the role that the founder of the pictures, father Stefan Żuchowski, played in the trial, and about the resulting execution of three falsely accused officials of the Kahal. That is all we are told. What then is the purpose of quoting the pope's words? Are the authors of the exhibition suggesting that the pope was 38 years late in reprimanding father Żuchowski? Was the trial a breach of the guidelines from the Church hierarchs? A non-historian visitor does not have to know that the encyclical quoted, *A quo primum*, is not a protest against judicial murders but rather a call to observe more strictly the restrictions placed upon Polish Jews: not to allow them to take office or to employ Christian servants. The document ends with the phrase: 'We promise you that when the situation arises, We will cooperate energetically and effectively with those whose combined authority and power are appropriate to remove this stain of shame from Poland.' When the pope writes of the 'stain of shame,' he refers not to the judicial murders of falsely accused Jews but to the Jewish presence in Poland" (Matyjaszek, 2015).

it comes to decisive matters for the common history that divides, the rule clearly is: "Don't ask, don't tell."

Polin as master narrative

The core exhibition's program director put a lot of effort into arguing *urbi et orbi* that the narrative-based POLIN Museum does not feature a master narrative. However, the Polin myth has been built into the main-frame construction of the undertaking: first, into the architecture of the building (its design and the exterior glass paneling); second, into the identity of the institution (its name); and, third, into the core exhibition as its conceptual frame, since the reverse side of the opening projection "Forest" features a screening of a film on the present-day "Jewish revival and rebirth," which closes the exhibition. (The spatial proximity of the two films makes the twittering of forest birds blend with enthusiastic "revival and rebirth" exclamations.) **Because of the overriding position assigned to it, the Polin myth is not just one of the narratives present in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. It is the Museum's master narrative. And it is not only a narrative, it is also a principle that legitimizes and delegitimizes alternative narratives.** Indeed, there is no confrontation of narratives at the exhibition. The exhibition does not offer any other narratives. The confrontation took place earlier. In this basement in the ex-Jewish district of Muranów we see just its results. On the one hand, we have an explicit and multiple articulation of the Polin narrative. On the other, we have a muddle of dispersed information, which does not add up to any alternative narrative.

The master narrative is a system of knowledge organization. The Polin myth represents a criterion of selection, positioning (hierarchizing) and articulating knowledge. The master narrative under the sign of Polin respects all *lieux de mémoire* pertaining to the dominant narrative,[29] even if they are of no great importance to the situation of the Jews, such as the Constitution of May 3, 1791. This is accompanied by a downgrading of the importance of *lieux de mémoire* essential for Jewish narratives – like the Khmelnytskyi Uprising. The core exhibition's program director justified this by saying that "recent investigations of the effects of the Khmelnytskyi Uprising no longer consider it a turning point in the history of the Jewish communities in the Commonwealth of Both Nations. It was rather a catastrophe, after which these communities rebuilt themselves and life went on at the same rhythm" (Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2015, p. 271).[30] "Recent investigations" are thus a sufficient argument for obliterating the

29 To understand the hiatus at hand here, it suffices to compare the reception of, for instance, the January Insurrection of 1863–1864 in both universes. See: Bartal, 1986; Michalska-Bracha, 2015.

30 The idea of "recent investigations" is in itself an interesting construct, considering how already almost a hundred years ago Marxist theorists – both Yiddishist and Zionist – distanced themselves from what they considered to be bourgeois historiography, as represented by historians like Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, or Majer (Meir) Bałaban. The fascinating Marxist-Yiddishist Meir Wiener – who opposed Yiddishist historiography by the likes of Maks Erik, Yisroel Tsinberg (Israel Zinberg), or Max Weinrich – "in his historical studies […] sought to identify and explore the moments of class struggle, regarding them as the main engine of historical progress. […] In his scheme of things, the national dramas and tragedies, such as the Sabbatean movement or Khmel-

importance of the pogroms of 1648–1649, whose anniversary appeared in the Jewish calendar[31] and was commemorated in Jewish Eastern Europe until the outbreak of the Second World War (see: Yerushalmi, 1982, p. 52). Such an approach closes the door on important texts and whole swathes of the multilingual culture of the Eastern European Jews – from Nathan (Nata) ben Moses Hannover (17th century) to Hayim Nahman Bialik and Isaac Bashevis Singer (20th century), including Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, Shloyme An-ski, or Moishe Broderzon. At the same time, there is no information at all about the "investigations" which would establish the Constitution of May 3, 1791 as a turning point in the history of the Jewish communities. This, however, did not prove to be an obstacle to its expositional overvaluation.

"Many elements of the core exhibition were designed in such a way as to serve as a presentation of Polish history for foreigners."[32] Furthermore, the figures and caesurae which are important for both Jews and Poles are presented through the prism of what is significant in them for the dominant perspective. Berek Joselewicz, for example, has been presented in such a way that has allowed to convert him into a fridge magnet to be sold in the Museum's Store as a memorial gadget. 1918 is in turn the year of the "regaining of independence by Poland," which the Jews greeted with joy,[33] as the exhibition would have it. On the margin, literally behind the visitors' backs, one can find information on the wave of pogroms during the years 1918–1919. However, there is no mention of the fact that the wave in question developed into the anti-Semitic violence of the year 1920, accompanied by the state legitimization of the Judeo-Communism (*żydokomuna*) myth. Behind the visitors' backs, there is indeed a photograph of Jews interned in Jabłonna. However, it is presented in the convention of an interesting fact, a piece of trivia, not as an emblem of a phenomenon with far-reaching and long-term fatal consequences.

nytsky uprising, were historically less significant than the gradual socio-economic changes within the Jewish community in the course of its transition from the late feudal to the early capitalist mode of production" (Krutikov, 2011, p. 290). As we know, majority cultures and societies verified negatively all the universalist aspirations of the Jews, regardless of whether these stemmed from a materialist or idealist motivation.

31 "The Sejm of the Four Lands, the chief institution of Jewish-self-government in Poland, by means of a document from 1690, established a day of fasting on 'the 20th day of the month of Sivan, on which the Niemirow tragedy began' [Halpern, 1945, p. 78]" (Shmeruk, 2014b, p. 93); see also: Shmeruk, 1990. The commemoration prayers of *churban Niemirov 20 Sivan* were said in the whole diaspora after the Kishinev pogrom (1903) and with respect to the pogroms of the years 1881, 1905, 1918–1919, and 1920. The Khmelnytskyi massacre was still referred to as an archetype of persecution at the beginning of World War II. In the 1960s – in Isaac Bashevis Singer's historical novel entitled *The Slave*, serialized in *Forverts* in 1961–1962 – it was still used as an understandable and effective element of the communication code.

32 This is an observation made by the editor-in-chief of the journal *Midrasz*, Piotr Paziński: "I had the impression that some parts of the exhibition, for example the partitions hall with the portraits of the three partitioning monarchs and the empty throne of the Polish king, use the history of Jews in order to show a moment in the history of Poland that is important for Poles, and often completely unknown in the West" (Paziński & Datner, 2015, p. 6).

33 "Indeed, the majority of the [Jewish] press stated that among Jews the general opinion prevailed that the regaining of independence by Poland was an extraordinarily happy event, not only for Poles but also for [the Jews] themselves. However, this statement was nearly always made in the past tense. Describing the present moment (from November 1918 to the end of 1920), the journalists expressed their prevailing feeling of disappointment. Not with the regaining of independence itself of course, but with the fact that in a revived Poland anti-Semitism was also revived. […] Thus, one cannot unequivocally state if this declared common enthusiasm was real or if evoking it rather served the journalists in emphasizing the discrepancy between the hopes for the emergence of a democratic, multinational Poland, a homeland for all citizens, and the actual reality, in which Jews were treated as a population for whom there was no place in the new country, or in which a place as second-class citizens was assigned to them" (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, pp. 71–72).

Returning to the year 1918, we do not understand the impetus of the pogroms nor the key significance that they had for the Jews. We do not learn of Roman Dmowski's anti-Semitic display at the conference in Versailles, nor what the small Versailles treaty, i.e., the so-called minority treaty, meant for whom. (Roman Dmowski – a prophet of Polish chauvinism – is hidden in a 19th century closet, hermetically isolated from the past as well as the 20th and 21st centuries.) We do not comprehend that in 1918, the status of the Jews in relation to the Poles changed: out of two minorities among the other minorities of the three empires, the Poles became the dominant majority, whereas the Jews were now a minority in the Polish state, which the Polish majority was gradually transforming into a nation-state. All of these pieces of information are not important from the point of view of the dominant group's principal concern: the independence of Poland. The authors of the postwar gallery made an attempt at reversing the perspective of looking at independence. However, it was thwarted by an extraordinary intervention (more on that below).

The Polin myth does not allow for any reconfiguration of the dominant majority narrative. It prevents any reinterpretations of meanings. It also blocks the appearance of new symbols. Staying with the example of Poland's regaining of its independence: the photograph of Vayter's grave – unknown in Polish Poland and displayed discretely, to say the least, behind the visitors' back – remains a marginal symbol. Given the fact that within secular Jewish culture in Poland, and throughout the Yiddish world, this photograph was of central importance, should it not be one of the central symbols at a place devoted to the history of Polish Jews in the period of the Second Republic? Even more so because – visually speaking – it has a paradigmatic potential. The same concerns the refugee crisis in Zbąszyń and its entanglement with the *Kristallnacht*. Zbąszyń is an important icon of the Jewish fate during the Second Republic. Understanding the ruthless attitude of the independent Polish state and the Polish majority towards the Jewish refugees – who were then both Polish citizens and victims of Hitler – would entail liberation from intellectual helplessness in the face of the subsequent course of the history of Polish Jews. It would help not to repeat potentially criminal gestures. It would enable a more conscious participation in contemporary world. The relegation of Vayter and Zbąszyń to a corner proves that the division into center and periphery dictated by the dominant culture has remained in force.

The same principle applies to the Jewish *lieu de mémoire* known as the Grabski's devil's decrees, the Grabski's carts, or the Grabski Aliyah. As Szymon Rogoziński wrote in his memoirs in 1994: "I doubt that the reader will be able to find in a textbook of Polish history this term or its explanation, even though it describes a very important period in the life of Polish Jewry" (Rogoziński, 1994, p. 30). Twenty years on, this statement still stands. In neo-liberal Poland the narrative of Władysław Grabski, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (1923–1925), and his reforms remain a legend about the common good. The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews does not even attempt to confront it, al-

though "[t]hese years were best remembered by the Jews of Poland for the oppressive economic measures that hit hardest at the Jews and were indeed perceived as directed against them" (Shmeruk, 1987, p. 277).[34] **The core exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews squandered the chance of becoming a starting point for a debate about the difference between majority and minority positions and perspectives. It does not help to understand why these perspectives and positions are not symmetrical and why it is not possible to unify them, if one wants to avoid lies and violence.**

An interlude

Information which traditionally would appear in the footnotes, in small print. Traditionally. This time, however, will be different.

Ayzik Vayter (1878–1919) was a Yiddish writer and playwright, drawing on the Polish Romantic and post-Romantic tradition, a deportee to Siberia, an activist of the Bund, and the author of its first party proclamation. He was murdered in the pogrom of Vilnius in 1919 by Polish national heroes: the legionaries of Edward Rydz-Śmigły, later Marshal of Poland. On Easter Monday. On the seventh day of Pesach. In Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish history these two narratives – Pesach and Easter – meet at the point known as *gzeyres Poyln*.[35] Vayter's body lay in the gutter for two days, until the end of the pogrom, which the Jewish cemeteries also fell victim to.[36] This is not about an isolated incident. Nothing was incidental nor isolated about the circumstances of Vayter's death. The cause of the murder of the Bundist, as of many before and after him, was the belief of the majority in the Judeo-Communism myth – still present in Polish public life today, not named, not problematized, and not disarmed in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Vayter's death belongs to a permanent and important – if not essential – theme of an alternative Pesach Haggadah, that is, a type of narrative about the Red Sea that does not end in deliverance.

Vayter was especially revered by An-ski. Having learned about Vayter's murder, An-ski dedicated *The Dybbuk* to his memory.[37] Despite the huge popularity of the play in post-1989 Poland, this fact has not been brought into the public domain. The core ex-

34 The article also offers a bibliography of the problem and of the rationalizations thereof.

35 "On Easter Sunday, April 20, 1919, [...] the Polish nation of Vilnius celebrates not only the Resurrection of the Lord. The holiday of national liberation was also frenetically experienced. 'This event [...] like the Vilnius operation which preceded it, went down in the pantheon of national history, establishing at the same time the legend of Józef Piłsudski as Commander-in-Chief'" (Różański, 2006, pp. 13–14, as cited in Szymaniak, 2014, p. 111).

36 Like his gravestone, Vayter's publicly decomposing corpse became an "icon of a pogrom commencing the Polish-Jewish interwar years and also an icon of modern Yiddish culture, which after World War I had to settle into a new system of political-cultural forces. The macabre corpse of murdered A. Vayter could, and what is more should, haunt Polish-Jewish imagination, asking questions, making people reflect" (Szymaniak, 2014, p. 109). See also: Szwarcman-Czarnota, 2011, p. 70.

37 The actor Avrom Morevski, who played the Miropoler Tsaddik at the play's world premiere staged by the Vilna Troupe, saw a place for both of them in the founding myth of a future Jewish culture. "Vayter and An-sky were 'tragishe ringen fun der "goldener keyt" fun der yiddisher kultur' (tragic links in the 'golden chain' of Jewish culture)" ["An-ski," 1921, as cited in Steinlauf, 2006, p. 238].

hibition of the MHPJ has not altered this state of affairs. The monument over Vayter's grave featured an eagle with a broken wing along with inscriptions in Yiddish. However, for the majority, which has yet to revise its own culture, all this counts at most as a possible blemish on its image. From the perspective of the majority, what is really important is the fact that leaving aside all the violence and exclusion, the Jewish culture flourished – for the glory of Poland and the Poles, of course. According to one of the abovementioned laws of Polinization: "This is my country and in this country something as great as this Jewish culture developed. […] I am proud of Poland, of the Polish Jews" (Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Stola, 2015, pp. 283–284). *Da capo al fine*.

Zbąszyń, in turn, was the site for the internment of roughly 17,000 Jewish citizens of Poland, expelled from the Third Reich in the last days of October 1938. This so-called *Polenaktion* was a reaction of the Nazi state to a legislative change implemented by the Second Polish Republic. The latter concerned a law, passed by both chambers of the parliament and signed by the Polish President, which allowed the state to deprive of Polish citizenship any citizen who "was active abroad to the detriment of the Polish state or who was living abroad continuously for a period of at least five years after the establishment of the Polish State, and who had lost contact with the Polish State."[38] From the consular instructions, it becomes apparent that the purpose of the law was to cut off the return route to Poland for Jews of Polish citizenship residing in Germany and Austria (approximately 70,000 people). Their impending influx had been expected as a result of the intensification of Nazi persecution policies (see: Steinweis, 2009).

When the Polish consular posts announced passport controls among Polish citizens, the Third Reich decided on the policy of enforced *faits accomplis*. In an action organized by Reinhard Heydrich with Heinrich Himmler's approval, thousands of Jewish citizens of Poland who had been robbed of their possessions were taken to the German-Polish border and driven by bayonets into Poland. In Poland, the majority of them were met with the prohibition of proceeding any further into the country. Zbąszyń was transformed into a refugee camp. Soon afterwards, the situation reached the state of a humanitarian catastrophe. On November 7, 1938, under the influence of news from Zbąszyń, the Polish citizen Herszel Grynszpan shot the German Nazi diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris. This event was used by the Third Reich as "grounds" for initiating a wave of pogroms, arrests, and property destruction organized and coordinated by the Nazi leadership, which swept through Germany on the night from November 9 to 10, 1938 (the *Kristallnacht*).

38 Law of March 31, 1938 – concerning deprivation of citizenship, Journal of Laws, No. 22, position 91.

Polinization *in flagrante*

What criteria lie behind the selection, hierarchization, and articulation of knowledge, as well as how the narrative about Jewish-Jewish matters is contextualized, can be most clearly seen by looking at the example of the fate of the postwar gallery, and specifically the confrontation of its authors with state censorship. The state was represented by presidential circles (the Chancellery of the President) and government circles (the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage).[39] The process itself has been described in detail by the co-author of the original version of the gallery, Helena Datner. Datner left the team of scholars in protest against this censorship, its ideological orientation, as well as its ultimatum form and the *last minute* formula in which it was carried out during the final phase of the production of the exhibits.[40]

As it turned out, the interests of the state's historical policy and patriotic education were directly threatened:

> In our gallery they pressured us to dedicate considerably more space to the changeover of the political system to a Communist one, more than the history of Poland as a context for the history of Jews requires. What was important for the history of Jews were the liberation by the Red Army, the promises of equal rights, and the protection from anti-Semitism, including anti-Semitism on the part of the anti-Communist underground. The point of the critics was not only to narrate at greater length but also to do so differently: namely to focus on Polish martyrdom under Communism, in accordance with the currently dominant vision of history. The thing is that Polish martyrdom is not at all relevant to the history of Jews. For the Jews the entry of the Russians meant liberation from physical annihilation (Paziński & Datner, 2015, p. 7).

An alternative selection, hierarchization, articulation, and contextualization proved to be out of the question concerning matters of independence, the Polish underground, the Catholic Church, and the dominant majority.

In a bid to save the postwar gallery from itself, a letter was withdrawn from the exhibition in which Irena Sendler expressed her thanks for having received help from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Below the display of anti-Semitic leaflets, the name of the organization that published them and put their spirit and ideas into practice has been removed. In present-day Poland, this organization – The "Freedom and Independence" Group (Zrzeszenie "Wolność i Niezawisłość") – is the subject of

39 In February 2013, the presentation of three galleries – the interwar, Holocaust, and postwar galleries – took place in the Chancellery of the President in the presence of the Polish President Bronisław Komorowski. The Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Bogdan Zdrojewski, also participated in the presentation. The presentation of the interwar, Holocaust, and postwar galleries was repeated in May 2013. This time, it took place in the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage: "There we were informed outright that our gallery (the postwar gallery) is inconsistent with the Polish *raison d'état*, because the Museum is built with Polish money, isn't it?" (Paziński & Datner, 2015, p. 7).

40 A notice board in the basement of the Museum says that Helena Datner left the team on June 18, 2014. The core exhibition was opened to the public on October 28, 2014. See: Sobel & Datner, 2014. See also: Paziński & Datner, 2015, pp. 5–10; Szaniawska & Datner, 2015.



The gallery *Postwar years (1944 to the present)* (photograph by Magdalena Starowieyska, Darek Golik), reproduced in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, p. 376

The caption in the English version of the catalogue reads:

"It was during the March 1968 antisemitic campaign that the state used television as a propaganda tool for the first time, reaching viewers watching about 3 million television sets. In contrast, student protesters had to write leaflets by hand or type them and make carbon copies, because printing was controlled by the state" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, p. 376).

One wonders about the meaning of this piece of information considering that the other side of the barricade never mentioned – either in student leaflets or anywhere else – the anti-Semitic campaign or the fate of Jews.

a state-promoted cult, and is presented to the younger generation as a model, lauded by popular culture. In addition, the narrative of the Kielce pogrom was censored, namely the part concerning the attitude of the Catholic Church. A desperate defense of the Second Polish Republic was also implemented. To this end, an "outstanding Polish historian" (Andrzej Friszke), who had been appointed as an expert, "stated that one could not use the term 'equitable social system' not even in a sentence like: 'many Jews, who did not leave Poland straight away, hoped that the new system would be equitable, that is, that it would bring with it real equality for Jews'" (Paziński & Datner, 2015, p. 7). In short, in the original version of the postwar gallery, the portrayal of the anti-Communist pro-independence underground, the Church, and the majority was at odds with the conviction that the entire responsibility for anti-Semitic oppression falls on the postwar authorities that fought against the underground and the Church, thereby alienating themselves from Polish society and, in effect, from the Polish nation. It is telling that in the postwar gallery's final version we watch a fragment of a film about Jewish refugees in Copenhagen made by Marian Marzyński in March 1968. One of them makes a statement, voicing his personal opinion. In this exhibition, however, it sounds like collective absolution: "We cannot identify the Polish nation with the Polish government."

Furthermore, the entire section concerning the post-1989 period was cut from the postwar gallery for "objective reasons" (lack of space). However, according to Helena Datner, what was *de facto* decisive was "the lack of a so-called political will to show the significant discussions of the 2000s, present-day anti-Semitism, and so forth. The end of the exhibition was supposed to be smooth-running and optimistic" (Paziński & Datner, 2015, p. 7). The anonymous film, which was added to the exhibition without the prior knowledge and agreement of the creators of the gallery, narrates post-1989 history in a way that more than validates Helena Datner's statements.[41] The presentation of "Jewish contemporary life […] as a colorful, trouble-free kaleidoscope" (Sobel & Datner, 2014) perpetuates the Polin myth, thereby enabling a harmonious closure of the bracket opened with the *Forest* gallery. As Jerzy Halbersztadt noted: "the last part of the exhibition is nearly devoid of any connection with the present time" (Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Halbersztadt, 2015, p. 315). Polinization as annihilation of the facts is revealed here in its entirety.

Passing in front of a screen, on which enthusiastic representatives of the dominant majority uproariously shout "I miss you, Jew" (*Tęsknię za Tobą, Żydzie*), visitors leave the exhibition area and enter the Museum Store, the suggestiveness of which is such that it appears to be part of the Museum's narrative. The little store offers among others things folk handicraft, an album about the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, a large selection

41 "The part concerning the post-1989 period – so important for Polish-Jewish relations and for the very emergence of the Museum – is a weird, tacked on, hastily and haphazardly produced substitute. […] Furthermore, particularly distasteful are the fairly important changes in content that have been made in the postwar gallery concerning thorny political questions. Its [the gallery's] significance has not been completely annihilated but in many places it has become nondescript and evasive" (Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Halbersztadt, 2015, p. 315).



Polish souvenirs. The Museum Store in the summer of 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



Polish souvenirs and the catalogue of the temporary exhibition *Jew, Pole, legionary 1914–1920*, which took place between July 24 and October 3, 2014. The Museum Store in the summer of 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



"We recommend!" The Museum Store in the summer of 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



A photo-book devoted to the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. *Brok. Eugeniusz Lokajski 1908-1944. Fotoreporter*, overall concept by Dorota Niemczyk, graphical concept and design by Marta Surowiec, editing by Anna Kłosińska, published by Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego / The Warsaw Rising Museum (Niemczyk, 2007). The Museum Store in the summer of 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



"Try a sweet taste of Poland." The Museum Store in the summer of 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



"I love Poland," "Poland is OK." The Museum Store in the summer of 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

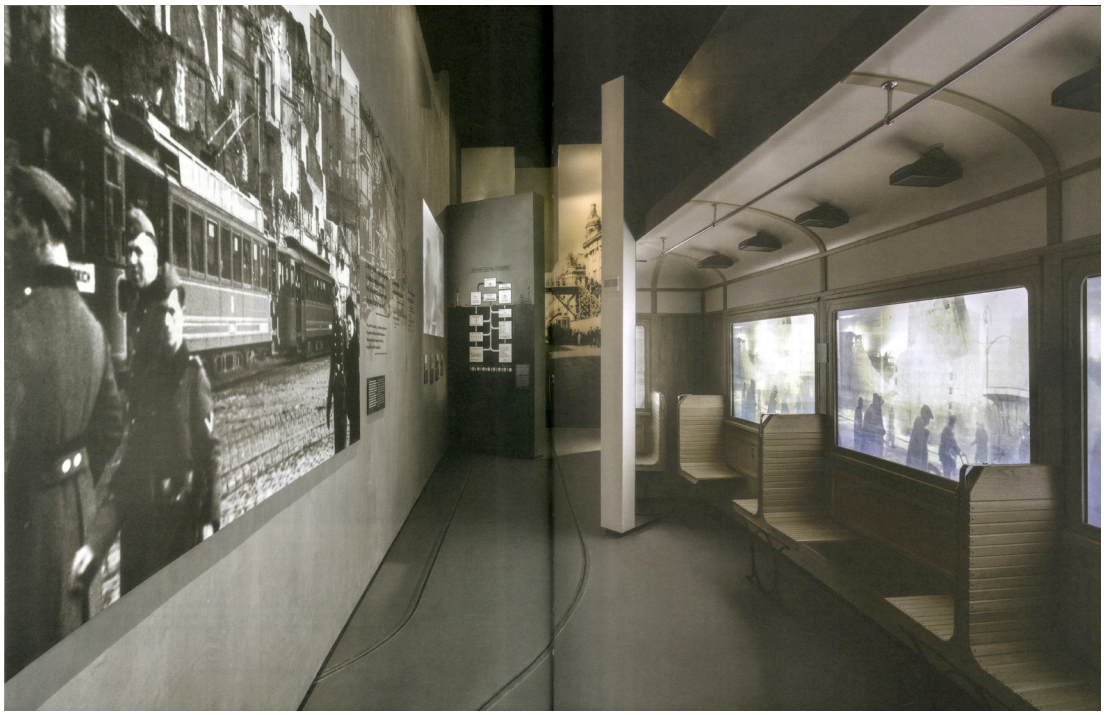
of culinary literature, as well as entire shelves of books about Jan Karski (the shelves are captioned in English: "We recommend!"). For a modest price, visitors can purchase a good feeling, which emanates from the gadgets emitting persuasive messages: "Memory unites us,""Remembering together,""Warsaw of the two uprisings," and "I love Poland." On shirts and mugs we also encounter the multiplied incantation: "Poland is OK." The candy wrappers entice: "Try a sweet taste of Poland." Here, the master narrative reigns absolute. This store resembles a duty-free store of sorts. Visitors exit it further relieved, liberated from any possible questions and duties, freed from reality.

Polinization through contextualization

The contextualization of Jewish experiences in such a way that they lose their essential aspects, sometimes their very essence, also appears to be an essential means of Polinization, that is, of decontextualization. To repeat: the point is that there is contextualization that actually results in decontextualization. This phenomenon intensifies when the entanglement of Jewish experience with the dominant culture and with the behavior and attitudes of the dominant group becomes tighter. This principle did not spare the Holocaust gallery. The portrayal of Jewish-Jewish matters *intra muros* reflects the current state of research. It also takes into account the contemporary receptive context in the manner in which an educational institution should do so. It therefore attempts to disarm the majority phantasms of Jewish collaboration, Jewish passivity, Jewish cowardice, undignified Jewish death, and so forth. It also outlines in detail the context of the two occupying powers' occupational policy toward both groups – the Jewish minority and the Polish majority – with special emphasis on the German eliminatory and exterminatory policy toward the Jews. However, as far as the attitude of the majority group toward the minority is concerned, the results of recent research have been withheld.

The majority group has been conceptualized as indifferent witness/bystander. This figure marks out the maximum "truth limit"[42] that was acceptable to the most open-minded sector of Polish public opinion in the second half of the 1980s (see: Żukowski, 2013) – before both independence in 1989 and the subsequent debates about the works of Jan Tomasz Gross. In the 21st century, the Polish majority has regained its status of acting subject. The category of Polish witness or bystander has thereby lost its status as a relevant descriptive category (see: Janicka, 2015a). Why and how, then, has there been a return to the pre-Jedwabne-debate state of consciousness? Why the neutralization of the knowledge established during that debate and in the course of further research? The category of witness/bystander is epitomized by the figure of a passenger of an "Aryan" tramway crossing the Warsaw ghetto, and underpinned by a symbolic reconstruction

42 "Truth limit" is a formulation by Feliks Tych. See: Tych, 1999, p. 160.



The gallery *Holocaust, 1939–1945* (photograph by Magdalena Starowieyska, Darek Golik) reproduced in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, pp. 326–327

of the bridge connecting the two parts of the ghetto over "Aryan" Chłodna Street. The bridge is the visual equivalent of Raul Hilberg's triad, a sign of a clear distribution of roles: perpetrators, victims, bystanders.

The category of indifference, in turn, has been visualized as an element of the triad: benevolence, hostility, indifference. This division – emphasized by the use of quotes – has been further reinforced by the following comment: "Some sympathized with Jews […]. Most, however, were indifferent, while others made anti-Semitic comments." The occurrence of anti-Semitic commentary in the public sphere betrays its socio-cultural legitimacy, and hence belies the concept of indifference. Nonetheless, as something that diverts from the dominant wishful thinking, this escapes the visitors' attention. The recipients' consciousness is authoritatively downgraded to the level of a laboratory experiment from the field of social psychology, abstracted from the socio-cultural context. Meanwhile, an examination of the sources reveals that indifference on the part of the social environment – which was actually considered desirable by Jews – was decidedly lacking.[43] Even today, there can be no question of indifference towards Jews and the Holocaust. Suffice it to mention the excesses committed by both Bronisław Komorowski and Andrzej Duda when competing with one another during the 2015 presidential debate to capture the support of the electorate.

43 "I am by no means so blind as to think that the obligation of every Pole would be endangering his or her life by hiding a Jew in his or her apartment, but I think that it was the obligation of Polish society to enable Jews free movement in the Polish district" (Perechodnik, 2004, p. 129). This statement is representative for Jewish testimonies.

The notion of indifferent witness/bystander is based on the notion of physical separation between Poles and Jews. However, this is not borne out by the facts – even during the period of ghettoization, even in Warsaw. Given the perspective taken by the Holocaust gallery, it is impossible to understand the following information:

> The Germans established nearly 600 ghettos, *jüdische Wohnbezirke*, in cities, towns and villages, across the entire territory of occupied Poland. Some of the ghettos were closed, surrounded by high brick walls, wooden fences, or barbed wire. Others were open. All of them were overcrowded, living conditions harsh, hunger and disease a constant threat.[44]

It is just as impossible to understand how in Jedwabne – and in several dozen similar examples – just tens of Poles were able to murder several hundred Jews without the participation of Germans. Indeed, the existence of an invisible wall around the Jews is mentioned – independent of any visible walls or lack thereof. The quote from *Megilat yisurin* [*Scroll of agony*] by Chaim Aron Kaplan explains, however, that it relates to a wall of silence around the Jewish soul ("a wall of silence for our spirits"). In reality, that "wall around the wall" – which Israel Gutman describes as actual, horribly hermetic, and effective (see: Engelking & Gutman, 2013, pp. 207–242) – was constituted by the attitudes and behavior of the non-Jewish majority, in continuity with prewar behavior and attitudes.

The notion of indifferent witness/bystander is also based on the assumption of a break in historical continuity. Prewar anti-Semitism, which in the previous galleries is presented in a dispersed way and on the periphery of the master narrative, remains suspended in a void, giving way to the policy of the Germans. The German Nazi ideas imposed on the Jews as a group come across as unprecedented and unimaginable. This impression is intensified by the *evergreen* of mass imagination: Messerschmitts with black crosses: an icon of absolute evil, which swooped down upon Poland like a bolt from the blue to which nothing compares and with which nobody – apart from the Germans – had anything to do. A quote from Julian Tuwim's letter attests: "In Poland it was… sunny, fresh, azure blue…." Given the de-politicization of the interwar gallery one can, without difficulty, endow the poet's words with a figurative meaning as well. All this, while in fact it was the activity of the Christian majority – the indefatigable daily bustle, which intensified after the German invasion of Poland in 1939 and did not stop after the Germans had been driven out of the country by the Red Army in 1945 – that determined the range of success of the German project of *Endlösung*. After the German invasion a pogrom atmosphere reigned, the results of which included the Warsaw Easter pogrom of 1940, which lasted for eight days.[45] We know about this from the testimonies left behind by

44 All unreferenced quotations come from the core exhibition at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. In keeping with the intentions of its creators, I consider all captions as complete, self-contained exhibits. Accordingly, I do not explore such issues as: full titles of sources, original language versions, authorship of translations, omissions, or the relation between the excerpt quoted and the entirety of the text from which it originates. My analyses and interpretations assume as their point of departure the exhibits' existing form.

45 See: Szarota, 2000, in particular the Introduction (pp. 5–18) and the first chapter entitled "Warszawa" (pp. 19–82). See also Gutman, 1982, and, in the first chapter, the part entitled "Relations between the Jews and the Poles" (pp. 27–36).



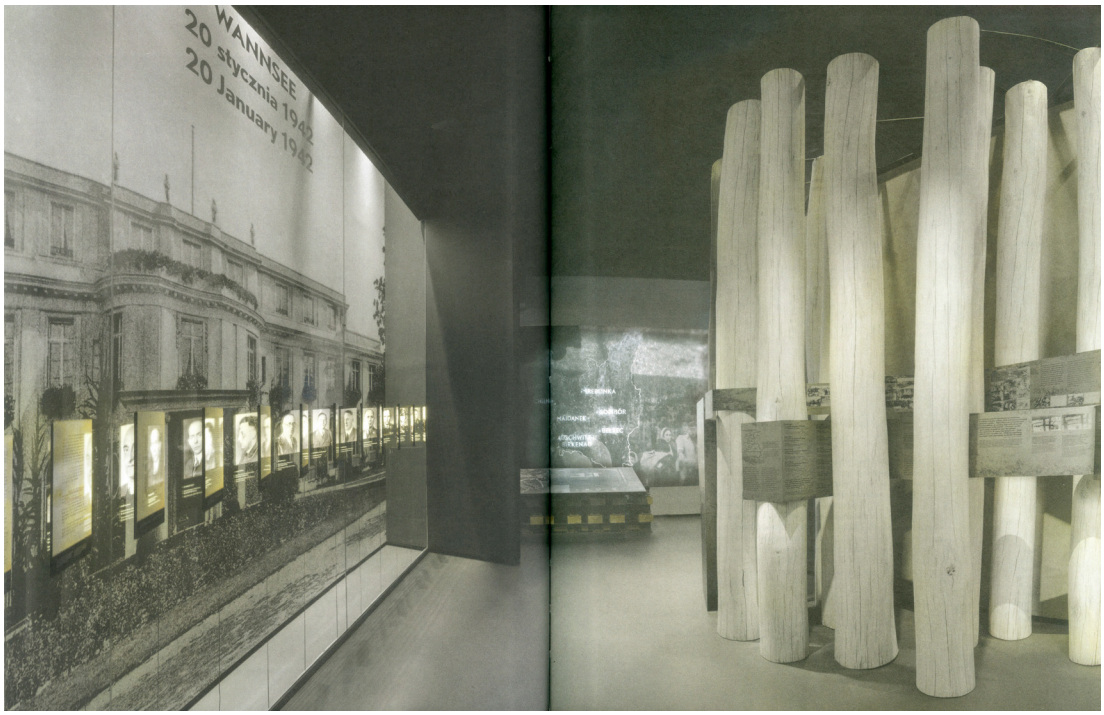
The gallery *Holocaust, 1939–1945* (photograph by Magdalena Starowieyska, Darek Golik) reproduced in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, pp. 294–295

Caption from the English version of the catalogue:
"View of German order wall and stages of separation and isolation of Jews" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, p. 293).

the protagonists of the Holocaust gallery: Emanuel Ringelblum, Adam Czerniaków and Jan Karski. We also know about this from the writings of both authors of this section of the exhibition. However, in the exhibition we do not find a single word on this topic.

From the perspective of the dominant narrative, the figure of indifferent witness/bystander, Messerschmitts, and the picturesque villa at lake Wannsee represent a message well assimilated and fixed: strong. **The strong message functions as an absorber of the message that is in conflict with the dominant narrative: weak, peripheral. At the core exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews the strong Polin message has been further reinforced by means of exhibitive solutions. The weak message, in its turn, has been further weakened.** In the Holocaust gallery, the information comprising the weak message is placed below eye-level. One is forced to assume a position that is physically impossible to maintain for a prolonged period of time. Owing to this physical discomfort, it is thus also not possible to remain focused on the presented content. In effect, visitors usually skip these parts of the narrative. Suffice it to compare the "watchability" of Jedwabne with the "watchability" of the huge, entire-wall-encompassing exhibit displaying large and clearly visible photographs of all the participants in the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 – an event of relatively minor importance.[46] Wannsee – in

46 The commentary accompanying the exhibition does not attempt to hide the secondary importance of the event. Thus, the spatial panache of the exhibit becomes openly absurd: "The purpose of the Wannsee Conference was



"Installation presenting the Einsatzgruppen, Chełmno (the first death camp), the Wannsee Conference, and the deportation of Jews to the German death camps in occupied Poland" (photograph by Magdalena Starowieyska, Darek Golik), reproduced in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, pp. 338–339, text p. 340

a spatial sense elevated onto an altar – resembles a fetish in the psychoanalytical sense, namely a construction of a substitute object that is supposed to distract attention away from that which one does not want to remember. What one does not want to remember might be, for example, the cramming of debarked tree stumps on the opposite side of the Wannsee exhibit – deprived of any meaning by the way they are displayed in the exhibition, representing, however, a potentially distressing symbol of the death of Jews in the landscape of their childhood, a landscape disturbingly familiar and in close proximity to the dominant majority. But a fully-fledged spatial arrangement of the dead forest would have discredited the *Forest* gallery and the Polin myth ascribed to it.

That is not the end of questions raised by the exhibition's spatial arrangement. The names and personal photographs of those who were burned alive in Jedwabne – a clear sign of their unique individuality – remain an accumulation of visual messages poorly individualized due to the size of the photographs and captions. Superimposed on this is a commentary, which diverts from an understanding of the crime in Jedwabne as Holocaust and presents instead an understanding of it as a pogrom.[47] All this is directly

not to decide on genocide, but solely to plan how to carry it out. The Conference focused strictly on the technicalities of mass murder, bureaucratic procedures, and legal issues. Indeed, the annihilation had already begun. During the previous six months, Einsatzgruppen had been carrying out mass executions in the East. Jews from the Third Reich were being deported to Chełmno (Kulmhof) – the first death camp – which was already in operation." The Germans began to build the extermination camp in Bełżec in December 1941. See: Gerlach, 1998. See also: Roseman, 2002. I wish to thank Katrin Stoll and Jan Grabowski for these bibliographical suggestions.

47 The difference in explanation between the two language versions in the exhibition is also striking. In Polish, it reads: "During the pogrom in Jedwabne Poles played a key role. All of the town's Jews were gathered in the mar-

juxtaposed with a showy film from the Petlura Days, that is, of the murder of Jews in Lviv by Ukrainians, even though from available historical sources we know that Polish inhabitants of Lviv, who were more experienced in the pogrom practice, participated in the murder. Next – at the far end of the spatial arrangement – there is a map showing towns in which "pogroms [were] carried out by the local population, summer 1941." The category of "local population" permits the pushing of Jews away to a safe mental and emotional distance, namely to that of an exogenous population. It also avoids any mention of the nationality and religion of the perpetrators. For the purpose of comparison, let us imagine the following statement: "in 1943 murders occurred among the local population in Volhynia." In other words: how would the Polish majority react to a lack of distinction between the identity of perpetrators and victims in a situation in which Polish public opinion exclusively identifies with the victims and attributes sole responsibility to the Ukrainian side? We do not encounter this type of language in any contemporary literature on the subject (see: Machcewicz & Persak, 2002; Żbikowski, 2006). LTI (Lingua Tertii Imperii) and postwar newspeak are no longer used today as a descriptive tool. Instead, they have become the very subject of research in their own right. However, the language of de-politicization and de-differentiation is not the only problem here.

On the map displayed in the exhibition, the sites of murder of Jews by the "local population" have been placed in… the USSR. The political borders on the map visualize – from the Generalgouvernement to the East – three entities: the USSR, Lithuania, and Latvia. This visualization does not reflect historical reality whatsoever.[48] The events happened on the former Eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic (needless to say, this does not concern Kovno), from which the Soviet Union – after nearly two years of occupation beginning on September 17, 1939 – withdrew after the Wehrmacht's invasion on June 22, 1941. In other words, this concerns Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, occupied by the Third Reich from the moment of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. How can one account for this error on the map? On the other hand, the map is very hard to read due to its location and size. Even after it has been photographed and subsequently enlarged on a computer monitor, only somebody thoroughly initiated into the geography and history of the area would be capable of deciphering the names of the

ket square. They were humiliated and beaten, and afterwards burned alive in the barn. Several dozen inhabitants of Jedwabne and its surroundings committed the crimes. The Germans were also present in the town. They observed the events, probably stimulated them, but they did not directly participate." In English, the information is phrased as follows: "Poles played a key role in the Jedwabne pogrom. Locals from Jedwabne and vicinity herded all Jews into the market square. They humiliated Jews, beat them and finally burned them alive in the barn. The Germans were present in the town. In all probability, they encouraged and observed the pogrom, but were not directly involved."

48 The Lithuania–USSR border visible on the map reflects the course of the Polish–Lithuanian border until October 10, 1939. After this date, until June 1940, Vilnius, together with the Vilnius region, were part of Lithuania – not the USSR. For this period, the course of the border is similar to that of the present day. From July 21, 1940 onwards, Lithuania in turn does not exist anymore. Instead, there is the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, that is the USSR, not Lithuania. The same applies to the fragment of Latvia represented on the map, which from July 21 onwards is part of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, that is the USSR, not Latvia. After the Third Reich's invasion of the Soviet Union, at the very moment of the massacre of Jews with which the map is supposed to be concerned, the situation becomes obsolete. I wish to thank my colleagues from the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences for their help in analyzing the cartographic phantasmagoria displayed in the MHPJ.



The map's caption on the wall in the *Holocaust, 1939–1945* gallery reads: "Pogroms carried out by local population, summer 1941." Reproduced in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, p. 333

Labeling on the map: Trzecia Rzesza – The Third Reich; Generalne Gubernatorstwo – The Generalgouvernement; Litwa – Lithuania; ZSSR – The USSR; Rumunia – Romania; Węgry – Hungary; Słowacja – Slovakia; Protektorat Czech i Moraw – The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

towns. The only thing clearly visible is the indication "USSR," along with an enormous amount of sites of anti-Jewish violence.

The illustration is placed inside a textual frame. On the one hand, the Museum's commentary explains that after the Third Reich's invasion of previously Soviet-occupied territories "the administration of these territories broke down, leading to chaos and lawlessness." On the other, however, the quote from Heydrich's order, dated June 29, 1941, deals with German consent, indeed with the triggering of "the self-cleansing activities of anti-Jewish and anti-Communists circles." Heydrich also calls these elements "self-defense circles," which in the exhibition has been translated into English as "resistance units." On yet another hand, historian and survivor Szymon Datner would years later speak of "the 'wonderful opportunity' – for the 'local communities' – to get rid of their neighbors and competitors […] the alien and accursed Jews." Datner concludes: "And they did what they did to take over the property of those they had killed." It is impossible to understand anything from this mixture except that some rational reasons must have played a role here. The confusion is remedied by the visualization through which the USSR almost advances to the rank of an explanatory category. This is so because in the entire exhibition, there is no explanation of what anti-Semitism is and what function the phantasm of Judeo-Communism fulfills within it. This map is phantasmatic, symbolic dynamite, given the place and function of the anti-Communist paradigm within the present-day historical policy of Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine (see: Perchoc, 2010; Arel, 2010; Stryjek, 2011; Arad, 2012).

The POLIN Museum[49] – "Poland is what's most important"[50]

The actual de-contextualization is reinforced by the presentation of topics that are unimportant from the point of view of Jews and their fate, but are important for Poles. The following serves as an example: the diagram of great size outlining in great detail the structure of the Polish Underground State and the film accompanying it. This resembles a polemic with Michael C. Steinlauf's assertion:

> The Polish underground was involved in various political, social welfare and military activities. But for all its exemplary democratic structure and its exalted national mission, or perhaps more accurately, because of them, the "underground state" was essentially for Poles only. […] Its powerful bond to the community it defended was based on culture and blood, not citizenship, and this intimacy implied its mirroring of popular attitudes, including those about the Jews (Steinlauf, 1997, p. 37).

49 "It is also paradoxical that the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is called Polin, that is Poland. The short name is becoming more and more popular and widespread and often one simply says Polin Museum. I understand all etymological nuances, but naming the Museum of the History of Polish Jews simply Poland is nonetheless absurd. And in a psychoanalytical sense it also says as much about us as the content of the permanent exhibition" (Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Leociak, 2015).

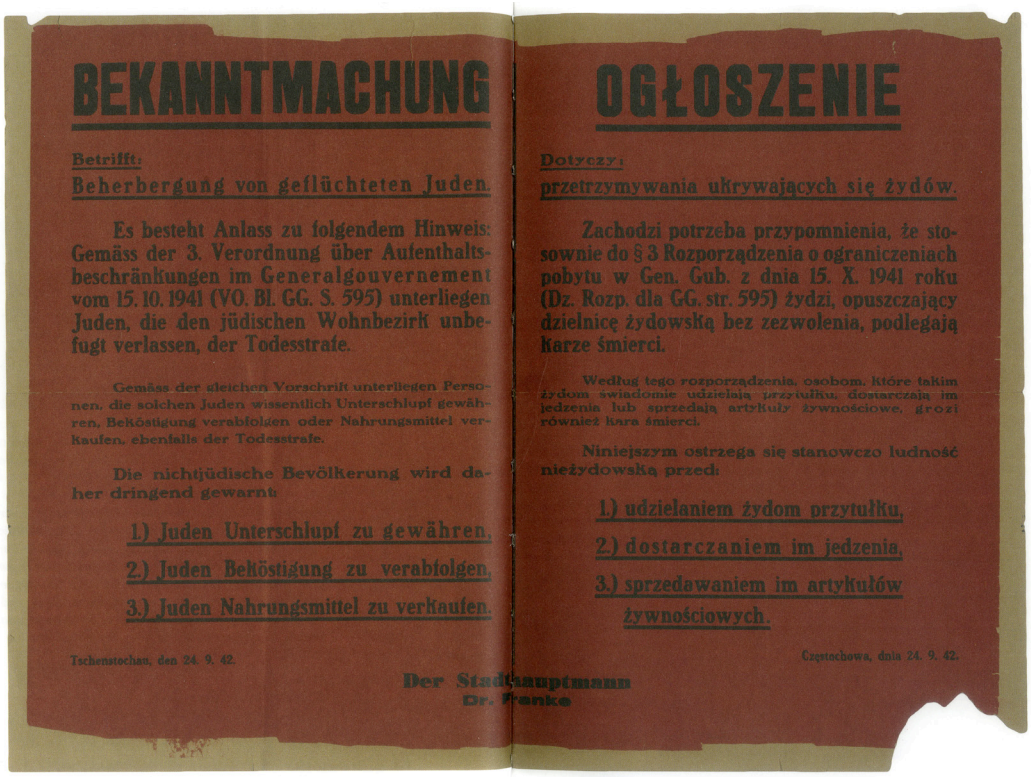
50 A 2010 election slogan of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) party.

However, in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Polish Underground State seems to have been very important for Jews and sincerely concerned about their fate.[51]

The attitude of the Polish underground authorities toward the wave of pogroms in 1941 has been concealed. We just learn that the Underground State's *Biuletyn Informacyjny* [*Information Bulletin*] issued a statement during Easter 1943 – exactly on April 25, one week after the outbreak of the Warsaw ghetto uprising – declaring: "The madness… of sniffing after the Jews… has broken out recently. Shame on you, denunciators, blackmailers, and murderers!" We do not learn that the frenzied hunt for Jews in "Aryan" Warsaw dated back to the summer of 1942, namely the so-called *Großaktion* – the period of the mass deportations of Jews to Treblinka. Despite that, the Polish Underground State only became interested in the blackmailers at the end of 1943 (*sic!*). In Warsaw alone, there were thousands of blackmailers. Yet the number of death sentences handed down by underground courts amounted to less than ten in total. They concerned those blackmailers whose activities simultaneously conflicted with the interest of the Underground State: "The blackmailers avoiding contact with the underground and the Germans did not have to fear the punishing hand of the underground state" (Grabowski, 2004, p. 55). However, one leaves the exhibition with the conviction that the *Information Bulletin* is beyond reproach in this matter. The periodical, presented to visitors in Jan Karski's words as the "'most valued underground newspaper'" – which was "published in occupied Poland by the Home Army" – functions as a *pars pro toto* of the Polish Underground State.

The real attitude of the Polish Underground State toward the Jews as well as its real significance for the Jews remain unmentioned. The bleeding anchor symbolizing "Fighting Poland" [*Polska Walcząca*] is given an honorary place – above a German *Bekanntmachung* about the death penalty for those who helped Jews – and it appears four times in the film material. However, we are not informed that in the Polish case the heroic fight against the Germans did not actually exclude anti-Semitism. On the contrary, the illusion of Polish-Jewish brotherhood in arms has been sustained and legitimized owing to the commentary in the film and the captions under at least two photographs whose factual content drastically contradicts this brotherhood in arms. I am referring to the real course of events during the liberation of Gęsiówka prison, which constitutes the context of the photograph of inmates and liberators, and to the death of Mordechai Anielewicz, as well as of members of the high command of the Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB), which constitutes the context of the photograph in which Symcha Ratajzer, Stefan Siewierski and Yitzhak Zuckerman appear. One could also question the use of a quote from one of Marek Edelman's later statements, which justifies the subsuming of ŻOB into the communist People's Army (Armia Ludowa, AL) during the uprising in 1944 as pure coincidence, whereas the actual reason was the murder of one of the ŻOB members – as a Jew – by a Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) unit and the anti-Semitic atmosphere prevailing within the ranks of this

51 To restore a sense of reality, see: Libionka, 2006; Puławski, 2009. See also: Engel, 1987, 1993.



BEKANNTMACHUNG

Betrifft:

Beherbergung von geflüchteten Juden.

Es besteht Anlass zu folgendem Hinweis: Gemäss der 3. Verordnung über Aufenthaltsbeschränkungen im Generalgouvernement vom 15. 10. 1941 (VO. Bl. GG. S. 595) unterliegen Juden, die den jüdischen Wohnbezirk unbefugt verlassen, der Todesstrafe.

Gemäss der gleichen Vorschrift unterliegen Personen, die solchen Juden wissentlich Unterschlupf gewähren, Beköstigung verabfolgen oder Nahrungsmittel verkaufen, ebenfalls der Todesstrafe.

Die nichtjüdische Bevölkerung wird daher dringend gewarnt:

1.) Juden Unterschlupf zu gewähren,

2.) Juden Beköstigung zu verabfolgen,

3.) Juden Nahrungsmittel zu verkaufen.

Tschenstochau, den 24. 9. 42.

Der Stadthauptmann
Dr. Franke

OGŁOSZENIE

Dotyczy:

przetrzymywania ukrywających się żydów.

Zachodzi potrzeba przypomnienia, że stosownie do § 3 Rozporządzenia o ograniczeniach pobytu w Gen. Gub. z dnia 15. X. 1941 roku (Dz. Rozp. dla GG. str. 595) żydzi, opuszczający dzielnicę żydowską bez zezwolenia, podlegają karze śmierci.

Według tego rozporządzenia, osobom, które takim żydom świadomie udzielają przytułku, dostarczają im jedzenia lub sprzedają artykuły żywnościowe, grozi również kara śmierci.

Niniejszym ostrzega się stanowczo ludność nieżydowską przed:

1.) udzielaniem żydom przytułku,

2.) dostarczaniem im jedzenia,

3.) sprzedawaniem im artykułów żywnościowych.

Częstochowa, dnia 24. 9. 42.

Caption in the English version of the catalogue (different from the one provided on the wall of the *Holocaust, 1939–1945* gallery): "German notice dated September 24, 1942 announcing the death penalty for offering assistance to Jews" (photograph by Piotr Jamski), Reproduced in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, pp. 324–325, text p. 325

organization. These are significant omissions, if one takes into account that all of these issues are dealt with in the source material and are covered in the scholarly literature on the subject.[52]

Then, there is the question of the Council for Aid to Jews (Żegota), which was established and exploited by the Polish Underground State for propaganda and financial purposes. At the same time, its organizational possibilities were restricted and, with them, its scope for action (Urynowicz, 2009). From the Museum's explanation, we learn that both Żegota and the Jewish National Committee (Żydowski Komitet Narodowy, ŻKN) were co-financed by the Polish government-in-exile, whereas in reality it was the other way around. The money from Jewish organizations was only partly forwarded to Żegota and the ŻKN. The rest subsidized the coffers of the Polish administration. There is no information about how often the money – transferred to occupied Poland via Polish Underground State channels – failed to reach Żegota for other than objective reasons or was paid to Żegota in Polish zlotys according to the official German rate instead of the much higher black market rate.

52 To restore a sense of reality, see: Engelking & Libionka, 2009; Rotem, 1993; Zuckerman, 1993. See also: Grupińska & Gawisar, 2000, p. 166.



Caption on the wall of the *Holocaust, 1939–1945* gallery: "A public notice dated September 24, 1942 stipulates the death penalty for offering assistance to Jews" – exhibition solution (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

The full text of the notice reads:

"NOTICE
Regarding:
harboring fugitive jews [*sic!*]
There has arisen the need for a remainder that in accordance with Article 3 of the Decree on Restrictions of Residence in the Generalgouvernement of October 15, 1941 (GG Journal of Decrees, p. 595), jews [*sic!*] who leave the [j]ewish district without permission are punished by death.
According to this decree, persons who knowingly give shelter to such jews [*sic!*], provide them with food or sell them grocery products, are also facing a death penalty.

The non-[j]ewish population is hereby categorically warned against:
1.) giving shelter to jews [*sic!*],
2.) providing them with food,
3.) selling them grocery products.

Tchenstochau / Częstochowa, 24.9.42.
Der Stadthauptmann
Dr. Franke"

[The Polish noun *Żydzi* (Jews) has not been capitalized, contrary to the rules of orthography. The non-capitalization of the adjectives *żydowski/nieżydowski* (Jewish/non-Jewish) is in keeping with Polish orthography. The German noun *Juden* is capitalized.]

Finally, there is the question of proportion. The number of Jews who were saved by their fellow Jews – through the channels of Jewish parties,[53] among others – was higher.

53 In interwar Jewish Poland, the word "party" referred to both a political stance and one's place on earth – in the most basic sense of the term – availed by the party networks, which featured kindergartens, schools, summer and winter camps for children and adolescents, libraries, clubs for adults, sport societies, eateries, night classes, workers' cooperatives, provident funds, trade unions, etc. "Ezra Mendelsohn described Jewish parties in Poland as substitutes for both the 'decaying home' and a state that was not 'serving this particular group the way it should.' Hence 'one gets the kind of party that is also an entire world, with its schools, its cultural institutions,

Yet the place assigned to this phenomenon is not directly proportional to the significance it had for Jews. The face of Żegota is represented by: Władysława Laryssa Choms, Julian Grobelny, and Maria Hochberg. On the other hand, the ŻKN as well as the Coordination Committee of the ŻKN and the Bund remain faceless, even though – or perhaps precisely because – Adolf Berman (simultaneously secretary of Żegota), Leon Feiner (simultaneously vice-chairman and chairman of Żegota after Grobelny and Jabłonowski), and Bathia Temkin-Berman were no less deserving of merit when it came to saving Jews. Żegota has represented an icon of Polish mass imagination and an instrument of Polish propaganda from 1942 until today (with an interruption from 1945 to 1963). Emphasizing the role of the Jewish National Committee and the Coordination Committee would have ruined this narrative, as would have the admission that Żegota was a history of Poles and Jews fighting to save the lives of Jews threatened with annihilation – but also that the fight they fought was against the Third Reich, against the majority of Polish society, and against the Polish Underground State, within which they were active. All of this was possible thanks to their own individual determination as well as to money from British, American, and Palestinian Jews. This is impossible to describe using language from the 1960s. The narrative that has been articulated remains in line with the – apparently categorical – imperative of maintaining self-satisfaction on the part of the majority group.

When in the core exhibition there happen to be *lieux de mémoire* that are important for both Jewish and Polish narratives – even though they carry different meanings for each side – they are presented from the Polish perspective. Katyń is one example. The film that opens the Holocaust gallery provides us with the information that among the victims of the crimes committed at Katyń there were 900 Jews, including the Chief Rabbi of the Polish Armed Forces, Boruch Steinberg. In connection with the depiction of the year 1943, however, the information about Katyń comes back to us in a de-contextualized form. Under the date April 20, 1943 (one day after the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), we learn that the "news about… the monstrous crime of mass murder of Polish officers, POWs committed by the Russians… has shocked and terrified the Polish public." The concurrence with the simultaneous intensification of the hunt for Jews seems to be coincidental here. And yet, Nazi propaganda publicized Katyń as a Judeo-Bolshevik ritual murder a week before the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, during the final phase of the industrial extermination of Polish Jews. This illustrates the connection of the phantasm of Judeo-Communism to the master narrative of Christianity and allows us to understand the mechanism of its operation. It is a great opportunity to present matters clearly and plainly – in particular in a situation when the icon of the Nazi imaginary is setting off the collective imagination. The Nazi Katyń poster – depicting the Judeo-Bolshevik murder – functions unhindered within the iconosphere of today's

its recreational institutions and so on'" (Mendelsohn, 1983, p. 212, as cited in Estraikh, 2015, p. 336). Marek Edelman emphasized that the Bund was more than just a political party: "We were a huge family," "The Bund was a mum for us all" (Assuntino & Goldkorn, 1999, pp. 24, 142). Israel Gutman gave a similar account of the Hashomer Hatzair, a multi-generational Jewish scouting organization, which transformed into a political party after the war: "It was namely the organization that was a family to me" (Engelking & Gutman, 2013, p. 218).



A Nazi German poster of April 13, 1943, issued on occasion of the Third Reich's announcement of the Katyń Crime (the shooting of Polish prisoner-of-war officers in Katyń) as a "ritual murder of Judeo-Bolshevism" – used as the cover for an issue of the weekly historical supplement *Ale Historia* to the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (of April 12, 2012). The article thus announced regards the failed attempts to present the crime as perpetrated by the Third Reich, which were undertaken by the USSR in connection with the Nurnberg Trial. The editors left the anti-Semitic content of the poster without comment

Poland, in the center of the public sphere, without any critical commentary.[54] Taking up the subject of Katyń in the context of 1943 without accompanying commentary means leaving the field open to automatic thinking.

Polin *Maximum Perversum ohne Kompromisse*

The MHPJ's core exhibition not only does not challenge, but downright perpetuates and transmits, and therefore legitimizes and consolidates, constructions which are at home in a museum of anti-Semitism. Two such constructs are the figure of Esterka (Esterke) and the category of *Paradisus Iudaeorum*. Esterka is not presented as a character invented by an official of the Roman Catholic Church. Nowhere is it explained that this construct was brought to life to be used against Jews in a power play between the Church and the state. The aim of the Esterka legend was not only to humiliate Jews and undermine their position – it was also to delegitimize their very presence in Poland. Along with the master narrative of Christianity, it assigned them "a truly 'unsafe place,' one that at any given moment could disappear from the face of the earth" (Tokarska-Bakir, 2004, p. 66).[55]

> There are no extant contemporary records of the relationship between Casimir the Great (1310–1370) and Esterka. The first mention of it is that of Jan Długosz (1415–1480), about a hundred years after the supposed event. […] In the footsteps of Długosz, the Casimir–Esterka tradition became a more or less permanent feature of Polish antisemitic literature, the supposedly preferential status of Polish Jews being traced to Casimir's partiality towards his mistress. […] These strictures, the bases for which are already present in Długosz, are encountered again as early as the sixteenth century, and in the most explicit terms (Shmeruk, 1985, pp. 10, 14, 17).

The first Jewish mention of the alleged affair between Casimir the Great and "a beautiful Jewess" is a century younger than the Polish one. Which is to say that it appeared two hundred years after the death of this last king of Poland's first dynasty. The quote we are being indulged with at the core exhibition comes from *Tzemach David*, a 16th century Jewish chronicle by David Gans: "The king performed great favors for the Jews for her sake, and she extracted from the king writs of kindness and liberty for the Jews."[56] We do not learn about the heated debate that revolved around the Esterke legend within

54 During Easter 2010, the Nazi poster was displayed in the Warsaw Temple of Divine Providence, known as The Pantheon of Great Poles, at the grave of the chaplain of the Katyń Families. In 2012, one could see the poster on the cover of the popular historical supplement to the largest Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*. In 2013 – independently of the promotion in right-wing journals and in shop windows of so-called patriotic bookshops in the whole of Poland – it was reproduced twice in the April edition of the historical mainstream magazine *Mówią Wieki* [*The Centuries Speak*]: in the main edition and in an educational supplement for teachers *Mówią Wieki w Szkole* [*The Centuries Speak at School*] etc. In April 2014, the poster decorated the door to the former synagogue in Krynki, currently transformed into the Municipal Cultural Center, as an advertisement for "The Solemn Commemoration of the Katyń Crime." Every year the collection increases. Not once was the reproduction accompanied by a commentary on the anti-Semitic meaning of the poster.

55 The text was written in 1999.

56 English translation from Bar-Itzhak, n.d.



The gallery *First Encounters, 960–1500* (photograph by Magdalena Starowieyska, Darek Golik), reproduced in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, pp. 68–69



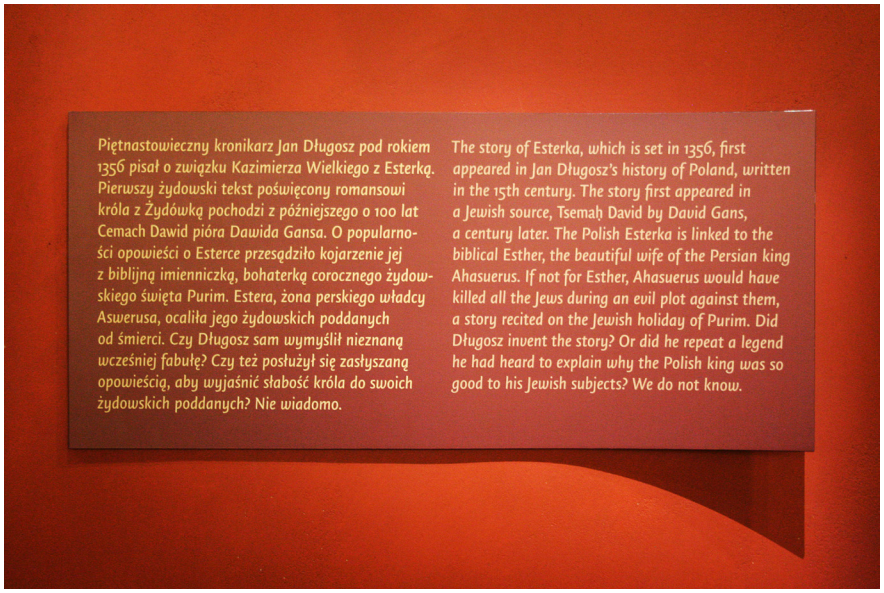
The English inscription on the right:

"In his 15th-century chronicle, Jan Długosz noted that [*sic!*] took place in 1356: 'The Polish king… took as a concubine a woman of Jewish origin, Esther, on account of her unusual beauty. He even had two sons by her… he issued exceptional privileges and freedoms to all Jews living in the Polish Kingdom' – Jan Długosz, *Annals*, 15th century" (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



The English inscription on the left:

"'Kazimierz, King of Poland, took for himself a mistress, a Jewish girl named Esther, so beautiful that there was no girl as beautiful as she in the whole country, and she was to him as wife for a long time. For her sake the king extended many privileges to the Jews of his kingdom' – David Gans, *Tsemah David*, 16th century" (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



The English caption below the inscription on the left:

"The story of Esterka, which is set in 1356, first appeared in Jan Długosz's history of Poland, written in the 15th century. The story first appeared in a Jewish source, *Tsemah David* by David Gans, a century later. The Polish Esterka is linked to the biblical Esther, the beautiful wife of the Persian king Ahasuerus. If not for Esther, Ahasuerus would have killed all the Jews during an evil plot against them, a story recited on the Jewish holiday of Purim. Did Długosz invent the story? Or did he repeat the legend he had heard to explain why the Polish king was so good to his Jewish subjects? We do not know" (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

Jewish culture, on one side of which was Sholem Asch, and on the other, such intellectuals as Shloyme An-ski, Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, and Aaron Zeitlin. An-ski accused Asch of "Polish nationalism (for assimilated Jews)" (An-ski, 1909, p. 612, as cited in Shmeruk, 1985, p. 65). Yiddishists considered Esterka an inglorious symbol of assimilationism. Jewish historians followed suit, and sometimes quite bluntly so: "To equate an ordinary whore with Judith is a proof of an utter lack of pietism for the national traditions."[57] At the core exhibition, this toxic phantasm is on display, incorporated into a structure akin to a three-panel altarpiece with the caption: "Did Długosz invent this previously unknown narrative? Or did he use a story he had heard to explain the king's partiality to his Jewish subjects? No one knows." The English translation provided is no less radical: "Did Długosz invent the story? Or did he repeat a legend he had heard to explain why the Polish king was so good to his Jewish subjects? We do not know." It is simply beyond comprehension that the Hanna Zaremska who designed the gallery and the Hanna Zaremska who authored the study *Długosz and the Jews* are one and the same person (see: Zaremska, 2011, pp. 267–292).

Another such element at the core exhibition is the notion of *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, whose original source is a 1606 pamphlet. The image of Poland as a paradise for Jews – "a goldmine for vagabonds" – has thus been a part of collective consciousness since the early 1600s. "An authoritative source-based study of the subject was published by Stanisław Kot in 1937" (Tokarska-Bakir, 2004, p. 53). Based on textual analysis of the squib, Kot identified its author as a Catholic bourgeois, presumably a priest. The anthropologist of Christian anti-Semitism whose findings I am quoting comments ironically:

> It is clear as day: the man who coined the opinion about Poland as a paradise for Jews was not a Jew himself. […] The moral intention behind the phrase "Poland is a paradise for Jews" proves somewhat different from how it is usually put forward. The undertone we hear is not the voice of a tolerant host but the sarcasm of a helpless man, terrified by the impunity of the newcomers who bring with them all that is evil (Tokarska-Bakir, 2004, pp. 54–55).

Another guise under which the *Paradisus Iudaeorum* myth remains active to this day is the myth of Judeopolonia. One of its victims was Gabriel Narutowicz, shot for being "a Jewish president" in 1922, at the dawn of Polish independence, after a smear campaign unleashed by Roman Dmowski's National Democracy party and the Polish Roman Catholic Church. As for the present-day life of the myth, one way to look into its workings is to follow the activities of the anti-Semitic foundation *Paradisus Iudaeorum*. At the Museum's core exhibition, this extremely biased category has been raised – with no question or quotation mark – to the status of an admissible and adequate, neutral descriptive tool.

57 The Polish translation of Shmeruk's book uses the word "dziwka," see: Shmeruk, 2000, p. 133. The German original reads: "Eine gemeine Dirne der Judith gleichzustellen zeigt von wenig Pietät für nationale Traditionen" (Sternberg, 1878, pp. 61–63, as cited in Shmeruk, 1985, p. 113). Or, as Shmeruk elegantly put it, "[Sternberg] objected to the elevation of Esterka, a Jewish concubine, into an honorable position in the traditions of Polish Jewry" (Shmeruk, 1985, p. 113).

This procedure constitutes an inadvertent repetition of one performed in 1942 in an article entitled *The Jews in Polish proverbs and proverbial expressions*. The work was published by the Division for Research on Jewry (Judenforschung Referat), a part of the Section for Race and National Traditions Research (Sektion für Rasse- und Volkstumforschung, SRV) within the Institute for German Work in the East (Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit, IDO), a Nazi research institution based in Cracow. Concerning the formulation describing Poland as the *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, it informs the reader that "it is a proverb which provides a valid insight into the actual relations in Poland."[58] Thus – now as before – not only has the category of *Paradisus Iudaeorum* not been disarmed, it has been legalized and legitimized. What we have before us truly is a hard-core exhibition.

Both these phantasms are among those that are most emblematic – and that is also to say, most indispensable – for the dominant narrative.[59] Their deconstruction has been deemed impossible. Yet let us imagine what would happen if both were neither embraced nor disputed – in favor of a third way: that of disregarding and omitting. What would have happened if the MHPJ had never mentioned Esterka or the *Paradisus Iudaeorum*? If it passed over the majufes singer Jankiel?[60] If it did away with such Polish-Polish places of memory as the Constitution of May 3, 1791, or the "Fighting Poland" anchor emblem? If no place was found for pornographic-sized garlic, nor a goose, nor even gefilte fish itself? Questions would arise. About the absence of Esterka, the absence of the *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, the absence of Jankiel, the absence of the goose and the Constitution, the absence of the anchor and the garlic. A seed of doubt, discussion, and debate would be planted. In the first place, about whether and – if so – what and for whom these facts, myths, and symbols signify. Second, about why the museum of a minority could not – or at least thought it could not – take an outright stand against figures aimed against this minority. A debate would ensue about the condition of culture and of society, including about the ways of silencing debate. Inevitably, this would lead to a reflection on the mechanisms of violence and exclusion – among them the mechanisms that produced the Holocaust – and on their continued presence in today's Polish culture. All this, however, would defy the meta-principle of Polinization, namely the annihilation of the facts of the matter.

58 "[E]s ist des Sprichtwort, das die tatsächlichen Verhältnisse in Polen am knappsten in einem gültigen Urteil umreisst" (Sommerfeldt, 1942, p. 314). The paper was consulted by Professor Tadeusz Estreicher. I thank Jan Grabowski for having brought to my attention this set of facts from the history of anthropology, ethnography, and anti-Semitism.

59 A particularly meaningful, if not downright grotesque, example of this was the treatment that Piotr Wróbel's review of Hanna Zaremska's *Żydzi w średniowiecznej Polsce: Gmina krakowska* [*Jews in medieval Poland: The Cracow community*] received from editors of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Both the book and its review dealt with historical knowledge about the period. Despite this, and without Wróbel's permission, the article was renamed "Casimir and his Esterka." The Internet edition was additionally illustrated with a reproduction of Wojciech Gerson's painting *Casimir the Great and the Jews* (also known as *The Reception of the Jews*, 1874). The publication of a factual and sober opinion concerning a scholarly monograph could not do without the icons of the nationalist imaginary. See: Wróbel, 2013, p. 34.

60 "'This utter disinterest in the fate and needs of Jewry, this lack of understanding of its tradition and culture, this complete unwillingness to delve into Jewish life has characterized the entire course of Polish statehood' [A. Russak 1919, p. 22]. […] The kind of Jew that was wanted in Poland was epitomized by Jankiel, who would bow down humbly whenever shouted at and never demand any rights but who loved Poland as much as a Pole. Unfortunately, as the author stated, this lack of understanding and unwillingness to learn about Jewish society survived until contemporary times" (Landau-Czajka, 2015b, p. 110).



The gallery *The Jewish Town, 1648–1772* (photograph by Magdalena Starowieyska, Darek Golik), reprinted in: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Polonsky, 2014b, pp. 136–137

We have at our disposal an extensive literature concerning each of the facts and myths used to piece together the POLIN MHPJ's master narrative. All these issues have long been recognized, analyzed, and subjected to critique. Knowledge about them is well established among scholars of Jewish history and culture as well as of the majority cultures of Diaspora countries. From Berek Joselewicz to Mordechai Anielewicz. From John of Capistrano to Roman Dmowski and his successors of today. From the medieval pogroms to 1968. The history of the annihilation of Polish Jews is no mystery. And neither is the attitude towards Jews on the part of the Underground State, which in the MHJP suddenly becomes a secret. Books have been written on both the history and anthropology of Christian anti-Semitism (*sic!*). Monographs have appeared on each of the most toxic anti-Semitic phantasms, including Esterka and the *Paradisus Iuadaeorum*. And likewise explained has been the figure of the majufes singer, whom the exhibition presents as if none of this transpired. And that is not even all: the Jankiel of Adam Mickiewicz has been additionally legitimized as a literary replica of real-life cymbalist Mordko Fajerman (*photographie à l'appui*). Last but not least, there are a number of studies concerning the Polin myth itself.[61] In 2013, in the Museum's main auditorium, a debate was held regarding the violence-enabling and exclusionary functions of this very myth, taking as its point of departure a juxtaposition of the film *Polin*

61 See: Bar-Itzhak, 1999, pp. 27–44; and the part entitled "Patriotyzm" in the chapter "Polin – czyli świetlana przeszłość" in Landau-Czajka, 2015a, pp. 102–112.

(2008) with its analysis, entitled *Philo-Semitic violence* (2012) (cf. Janicka & Żukowski, 2012).[62]

New museology makes it its mission to create axiologically oriented interpretations of the past. To achieve this, it has at its disposal the tools of critical theory, postcolonial studies, not to mention the subsequent turns in the humanities, which were motivated by emancipatory pursuits and opposition to discrimination. In other words, in light of both current knowledge and the current level of consciousness, what we are seeing in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews could not have happened. It could not have happened in any museum in a 21st century liberal democratic state. As Pierre Bourdieu liked to tell his students: "Whenever it's not about knowledge, it's about consent." We have thus come to a point when it seems absolutely crucial to reconsider the status of the institution of interest to us. If "[a] good museum always will direct attention to what is difficult and even painful to contemplate" (Postman, 1994, p. 68), then the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is not a good museum or… is not a museum at all. The MHPJ's priorities are the priorities of the current historical policy, including those set forth for Polish diplomacy. What is unacceptable in a museum becomes an obligation at a diplomatic outpost. The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the Embassy of Poland in Poland, located in the country's capital on the Square of Polish Innocence. "To a considerable extent, it is also a monument to free Poland,"[63] to quote a person of merit to both the creation of the MHPJ and to Polish diplomacy. Meanwhile, in 2015, the embassy-monument competed for the "best tourist product of the year" award, along with such contestants as the Wrocław ZOO or the Bieszczady Mountains Rail-Cycle Draisines.

62 The meeting, which took place on August 11, 2013, featured: the director of the film, Jolanta Dylewska, the authors of the text and, representing the MHPJ, Tamara Sztyma, co-creator of the interwar gallery and at the time curator of the temporal exhibition *Letters to afar* by Péter Forgács.

63 Statement by Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka from a film screened during the exhibition *How to Make a Museum?*; frame-by-frame photographic documentation of the film from the author's personal collection. Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka was Vice-Director for Development of the MHPJ project (2000–2005). She then went on to serve as an undersecretary of state (2006–2008) and secretary of state (2008–2010) in President Lech Kaczyński's Chancellery. In 2010–2015, she was the consul-general of the Republic of Poland in New York City. She currently heads the Jan Karski Educational Foundation.



A still from the audiovisual material presented at the temporary exhibition *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?* (curated by Tamara Sztyma), October 24, 2014 – February 2, 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



"The last office occupied by the AJHI exhibition team (inside the Museum building)" – part of the temporary exhibition *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?* (curated by Tamara Sztyma), October 24, 2014 – February 2, 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

Polin in case of an emergency

As Anna Wolff-Powęska remarked, after Auschwitz, "the Hebrew name Po-lin – 'rest here' – has taken on the character of a caricature" (Wolff-Powęska, 2015, p. 33). What she means is clearly visible. At least in Muranów. On the one side, there is naked earth and the static, silent, black structure of Rapoport's and Suzin's monument. On the other lies seductive architecture and an inundation of countless multimedia initiatives motivated by one and the same compulsive disorder. This neurosis has as its motto a slogan, which repeatedly reappeared in statements surrounding the architectural design contest for the Museum's building: "the power of the ground must be overcome."[64] Results of this confrontation can be observed in the interwar, Holocaust, and postwar galleries. In the interwar gallery, we get a chance to marvel at the *Himmelweg* of the (not so distant) past, cast in the role of an anonymous, "typical Jewish street." In the postwar gallery we have before us *papier-mâché* mock-up rubble. Apparently real rubble, dug up from the place where the mock-up now is, was deemed too obscene to be introduced into the field of visibility. Some expert must have declared it radioactive material whose force of impact exceeded the neutralizing capabilities of the concrete sarcophagus. A similar danger loomed over the Holocaust gallery. Its authors envisioned within it a space of silence: with no exhibits, filled in with a void. The plans were abandoned but that, as it turns out, was still not enough. The final result is that as you exit the Holocaust gallery, you find yourself facing an infographics that shows the way to the emergency exit.[65] The problem is that outside is the same, if not more of the same. Postwar Muranów was built from the rubble of the Ghetto and from the bones of Jews, and it rests on structural landfills of rubble and bone. In this respect, Muranów is like a *pars pro toto* of today's Poland. In other words, unlike the myth of Polin, the fact of the Holocaust does not have to do anything; it is sufficient for it just to be there. There is truly no good news in sight for the enthusiasts of a safe and healthy lifestyle. All projects of an *Endlösung der Endlösung-frage* fall through on Polish soil. No emergency exit will be of any help here.

Although it receives a similar treatment to that of the remainder of the core exhibition, the Holocaust nevertheless occupies a special place in the MHPJ's narrative. This is particularly brought to attention, for instance, by the elimination of the Holocaust gallery from the Museum's promotional film footage. The same effect is produced by the constant denial of the Holocaust's importance in the history of Polish Jews. This latter operation results in a message pushed to absurdity through its formulation by the Museum's guides: the Holocaust might be a turning point in the history of civilization, but not necessarily in the history of Poland, and as far as the history of Polish Jews goes – when we look at things objectively and impartially – the Holocaust was just several

64 Ref. photographic documentation of the exhibition *How to make a museum?* from the author's personal collection.

65 The Holocaust gallery's co-author, Jacek Leociak, gives an appalled account of this. See: Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Leociak, 2015.



Papier mâché rubble – the *Holocaust, 1939–1945* gallery (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



Rubble in the quarter between Nowolipie Street – Gen. Władysław(a) Anders(a) Avenue (formerly Przejazd Street) – Solidarity (Solidarności) Avenue – and Karmelicka Street, September 2011 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

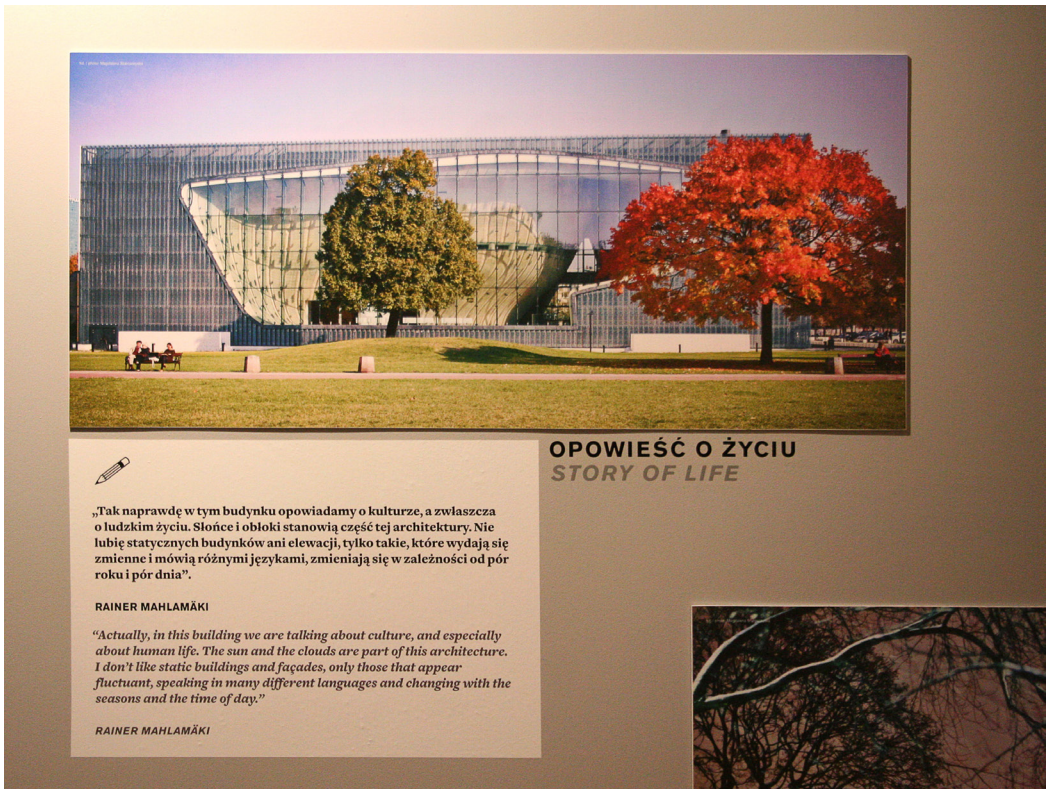
years out of several hundred. That is a dim-witted message, even if considered as a "Polish joke." Conceptualizations of this kind are difficult to get out of one's head: they haunt you. Finally, the Holocaust is placed in a central position by the Museum's most repeated catchphrase: "It is a museum of life, not death" (Dariusz Stola quoted in Bakalarski, 2014). In this perspective, the Holocaust becomes the axis around which the MHPJ's identity crystallizes: the primary element in relation to which secondary elements are defined. It is striking that this repertoire of counterproductive discursive stunts has been implemented despite the existence of a readily available, neutral, descriptive formulation – the Museum of the History of Polish Jews – which neither overexposes nor conceals the Holocaust. The reconfiguration gave priority to an antithetical fixation. As a result, the entire project of the Museum has become subordinated to the Holocaust.

The most puzzling and astonishing aspect of the case under analysis is that the position in which the Holocaust is placed is simultaneously fundamental and antagonistic. The "museum of life, not death" formula assigns the Holocaust the key and at the same time indispensable role: that of the constitutive other, if not of the constitutive enemy. Thus was defined the Museum's politics of identity. Hastily pieced onto it is a rationalization, which is really a manipulation – and not just an intellectual one. Here is how the current director of the Museum motivated the antithetic formula of "museum of life, not death" during his first foreign visit to the US: "'If you, God forbid, were killed in an accident tomorrow,' said Stola as he leaned forward and knocked slightly against the underside of a filigreed wooden coffee table, 'would you want people to remember the day of your death, or your life?'" (Goldenberg, 2014).[66] And everything would fit, except in the case of the Jews, it was not an accident. In the case of the Jews, it was the Holocaust.

The word "death" is taken to mean the Holocaust. But the word "Holocaust" means not only the death of Jews but also the life of Jews – and Jewish life was incredibly intense in the face of the Holocaust. The word "Holocaust" also means anti-Semitism. The word "Holocaust" means the crime perpetrated by the German Nazi state on the territory of occupied Eastern Europe, with special regard to Poland. The word "Holocaust" means the majority practices of local non-Jewish communities, which supplemented and sealed any holes and imperfections in the Nazi German project of extermination (see: Janicka & Żukowski, 2011, p. 20). Diverting attention from the death of Jews results in diverting attention from the circumstances of their death and is in the interest of any non-Jewish majority that does not wish to confront its own past and draw from it conclusions for the future.

The rationalization, which keeps up the appearance of decency, is: the story about the Holocaust overshadows the story about the history and culture of the European Diaspora, and makes it impossible to express in full the splendor and glory of Jewish civilization. In reality, however, such a relationship is non-existent. **The story about the**

66 This is more than simply an individual discursive strategy. In 2001, Józef Glemp, the Cardinal of Poland, used the word "accident" to refer to the Jedwabne murder. See: Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Halbersztadt, 2015, p. 308.





The "Story of Life" and the "Tree of Life" as emblems of a conceptualization juxtaposing life and death, where "death" is taken to mean Polish anti-Semitism and the Polish context of the Holocaust. The temporary exhibition *Jak zrobić muzeum? / How to make a museum?* (curated by Tamara Sztyma), October 24, 2014 – February 2, 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

Holocaust does not make expressing the splendor and glory of Jewish civilization impossible. Considering what those murdered managed to achieve in the face of death, the story about the Holocaust in fact adds to both the splendor and the glory of Jews and their civilization. And as it does so, it renders the magnitude of the crime committed on them more and more enormous. And this is what is so difficult to hear for all those who have not reevaluated and rejected the culture that led to the crime. This is why the majority group identifies the story about the Holocaust as an excess. Excess is in the eye of the beholder. This is what the phenomenon of "overrepresentation" consists in. The inability to express is a false problem; the real problem is an inability to listen. The majority group exhibits this inability, as does anyone who agrees to negotiate with it on its terms. When it comes to minority narratives and narratives about minorities, what the majority is interested in is its own image. Polinization allows the dominant group to visit Muranów without major discomfort. So far, so good. But because Polinization legitimizes and strengthens a regression in consciousness, the word "Polin" written all over exterior glass paneling in an apotropaic attempt to fend off reality might one day prove insufficient.

In way of a comment let me quote words which are strangely fitting to describe the Polish politics of memory before the Jedwabne debate in 2000–2001 and after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004: "The original sin of the Polish Workers' Party [PPR] and later the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR] which gradually led to the eruption of anti-Semitism […] was the aforementioned tabooization by the ruling party – from the first postwar years on – of topics like the Holocaust or anti-Semitism" (Tych, 2011, p. 395). What this account fails to mention: the postwar administration backed out from its initial commitment to fighting anti-Semitism after the Kielce Pogrom (1946), fearing the social anger stemming from the anti-Semitic myth of "Judeo-Communism."

Polin forever?

The Polin myth is a memento of a lack of equal rights, of a lack of conversation or the very possibility of conversation. It is a monument to exclusion and violence, to one-sided accusations that accompanied the unilaterally applied principle of alleged guilt without the right of defense. The Polin myth is a relic of humble supplications and homage-paying addresses. It is a sign of the weakness of the weak. And, in the hands of the majority – an instrument of blackmail. Here and then. Here and now. The Polin myth is a symbol of the defeat of the concepts of citizenship and liberal democracy. "The head of the core exhibition, Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, views the use of the word 'Polin' as 'the DNA of what is Polish about the history of Polish Jews'" (Penn, 2014). Sounds terrifying. If this was indeed the case, and if this is still the case – and the core exhibition of the MHPJ seems to be proof of that – it is time to ask: will it always have to be like this?

The Polinization of the MHPJ occurred gradually. Given the fact that it took such a long time for the institution to be established and that so many symbolic and non-symbolic interests were intertwined within it, it is difficult to answer the question of whether this process was unavoidable. But if it was, did it have to extend so deeply? The diplomatic character of the undertaking does not explain everything. In 2001, "the Jewish Museum […] found itself in the government's *exposé* – as one of the priorities of foreign policy" (Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Halbersztadt, 2015, p. 299). However, it was placed there by the Minister of Foreign Affairs who only a short time before – while still a member of parliament – had asked: "Are we so terrorized by anti-Semitism that we are unable to openly join in the discussion about the fact that Poles murdered their Jewish neighbors?" (Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Halbersztadt, 2015, p. 299).[67] Apparently, one can define the Polish *raison d'état* in different ways. As Jerzy Halbersztadt put it: "Primitive politicians thought about this in terms of image, and the more sharp-witted ones in terms of a fundamental change in culture reflected in social relations, in a change of Polish men and women" (Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Halbersztadt, 2015, p. 313).

Between the announcement of the political will to build the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (2000)[68] and the changing of its name to POLIN (2014), 15 years had elapsed. During this period, the Polish dominant culture and majority society underwent a nationalist radicalization – in virtually all its political manifestations and social movements. Was it not possible to stand up to it, considering how powerful – for Polish conditions – economic, as well as symbolic, capital was at disposal? Addressing the subject of symbolic capital, Jerzy Halbersztadt reported on his experience of running the MHPJ until 2011: "One has to admit, however, that the Jewish character of the Museum made [things] a lot easier for us. […] They did not want a possible conflict with us, which could have become an international scandal. What protected us was the potential of fear that this is an ethnic, a minority undertaking" (Śpiewak, Waślicka, Żmijewski, & Halbersztadt, 2015, p. 308). And so – again – was it not possible to stand up to the nationalist radicalization? And if not, was it necessary to yield to it to such an extent? Was it not possible to enter into negotiations with the stronger side (that is, the majority of the majority), taking into account an alternative potential of the weaker side (that is, the minority proper and the minority of the majority)? It seems that such an attempt was never undertaken. Was there any awareness that such negotiations needed to be undertaken? Or did the unreflected patterns of culture and the ready-made scenario of Jewish-Polish and Polish-Jewish slapstick tragedy perhaps incapacitate the actors? And hence, did this scenario realize by itself on the strength of cultural inertia?

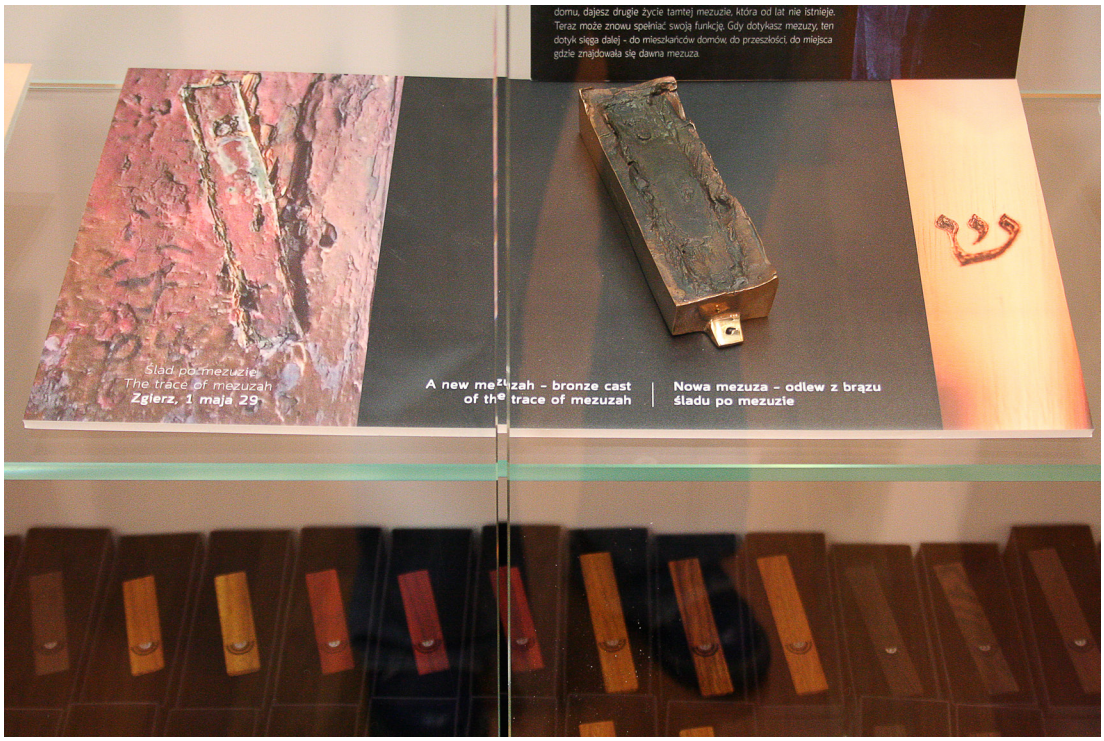
67 Jerzy Halbersztadt is referring here to Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz.

68 "The first public speech delivered abroad by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski in which he spoke of the Museum was at the International Holocaust Forum in Stockholm on January 26, 2000. He presented the idea to the most powerful leaders from across the globe." The passage is excerpted from an information chart displayed at the *How to make a museum?* temporary exhibition: Photograph from author's personal collection. The very idea of the Museum came into being in 1993–1994. In 1997, at the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute a team of a few people was formed whose task was to work out – with the participation of advisors from abroad – a concept for the project. Jerzy Halbersztadt led the team.

The POLIN MHPJ is not merely the product of a situation, but also its co-producer. The institution has stood for the most pessimistic – determinist, if not essentialist – vision of the history of Polish Jews. The cultural code has been mistaken here for the genetic code! Repeating the ritual of subordinating the minority to the majority and materializing it through the Museum's endeavor has nothing to do with emancipation and a subjective treatment of Jews. Nor of Poles. If something has been *ipso facto* preempted, it is not anti-Semitism or the Holocaust, but the potential for change.

Summer 2015

Translated from the Polish by Katrin Stoll and Jakub Ozimek



"The trace of mezuzah (Zgierz, 1 maja 29) / A new mezuzah – bronze cast of the trace of mezuzah." The Museum Shop in the summer of 2015 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



"Tangible Judaism. Contemporary Judaica from Poland" – the rebranded products, the Museum Shop in the winter of 2017 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

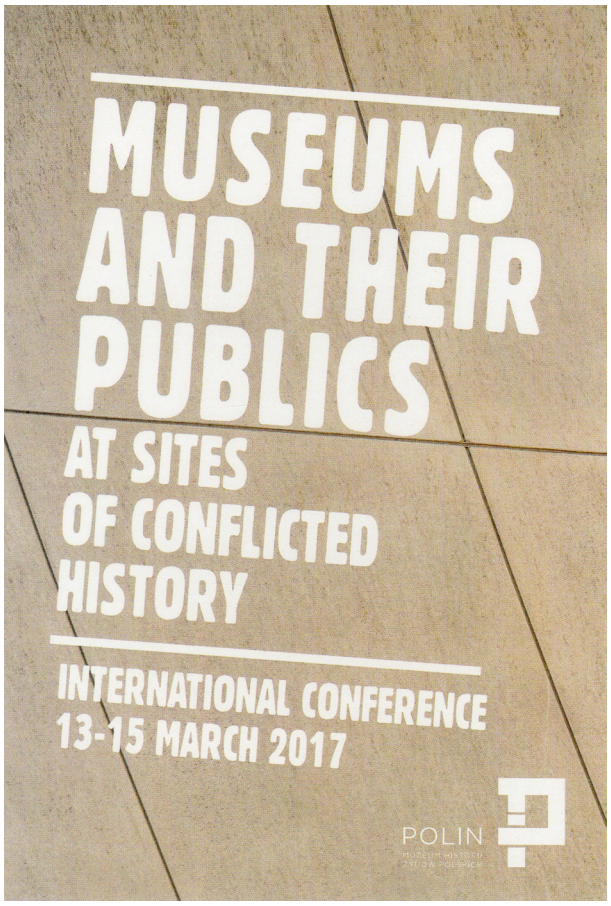
The inscriptions advertising the product are a model example of the euphemization and de-contextualizing of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism:

"Poland had 3,5 million Jewish inhabitants before the [*sic!*] World War II. During the war almost all Jews perished and with them mezuzahs. Only empty traces left [*sic!*]."

"The **Mezuzah from this home** is a series of new mezuzahs – bronze casts of these traces that commemorate the Jewish lives of prewar Poland. When you put a klaf inside and affix the mezuzah to your door frame, you fill the emptiness and give it a second life. Touching the mezuzah activates a link between past and present."

Murdering Jews and robbing their property – to a considerable extent also by Poles – has been called – in the Polish version of the text – "disappearance." The idea of "a second life," characteristic of virtual reality and RPG imagination, guarantees security and peace of mind to the perpetrators, and to the heirs of perpetrators, of the "disappearance of Jews" and "with them the mezuzahs." Never mind that the remains of the supposedly dematerialized Jews, just like the supposedly dematerialized mezuzahs, keep resurfacing in Poland's everyday life in least expected times and places. The touch of evidence of murder and robbery has been associated with "touching the past." What is meant, however, is not the past but rather images of the past, hollowed of any particulars and context. Otherwise this typically Christian production of remains-relics would be utterly deprived of commercial viability, as it is difficult to suppose that anyone aware of the actual state of affairs would be willing to surround him- or herself with things this gruesome.

The pricing of the product: 745 PLN (size S) and 845 PLN (size L)





Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN

serdecznie zaprasza na międzynarodową konferencję naukową

Museums and Their Publics at Sites of Conflicted History,

która odbędzie się w dniach 13-15 marca 2017

w siedzibie Muzeum POLIN,
w Warszawie przy ul. Anielewicza 6.

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Konferencja będzie okazją do dyskusji o roli muzeów wobec trudnej przeszłości i konfliktów pamięci. Szczególnie istotnym kontekstem będzie relacja muzeum – publiczność, a także rola narracji historycznych w tworzeniu nowych relacji społecznych w dobie dynamicznych przemian.

Rada Naukowa Konferencji:

Prof. Bruce Altshuler (New York University)
Prof. Annie E. Coombes (Birkbeck University of London)
Prof. Dorota Folga-Januszewska (International Council of Museums)
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Dr hab. Iwona Kurz (Uniwersytet Warszawski)
Prof. Erica Lehrer (Concordia University)
Dr Małgorzata Pakier (Muzeum POLIN)

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Museums and Their Publics at Sites of Conflicted History. International Conference, March 13–15, 2017 (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka). Religitimizing the discredited conceptualization of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in terms of intergroup conflict



Trends 2017. Reading fashion. On the relations between clothes and literature – photograph by Iza Grzybowska on the cover of the *Wysokie Obcasy* supplement to the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (of March 18, 2017) (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)



Od lewej, z góry: Ekipa przy pracy. Mariusz Szczygieł i producentka Małgorzata Pacuła. Kulisy okładki. Fotografka Iza Grzybowska. Stylista marki Babyliss (producenta technologii do stylizacji włosów) Sebastian Kobielski z asystentem pracuje nad fryzurą Katarzyny Bondy. Makijażysta marki Giorgio Armani Andrzej Kawczyński z asystentką i kulisy make-upu Natalii Fiedorczuk

(15)

Photographs by Mateusz Kubik accompanying Karolina Sulej's article entitled "Fashion is a trendy story " (Sulej, 2017, p. 15) (photograph by Elżbieta Janicka)

The release is concluded with the note: "The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a modern educational and cultural center, and a platform for social dialogue. Besides seeing the core and temporary exhibitions, the visitors can participate in academic events, concerts, workshops for adults and children. In 2016 the museum was awarded the prestigious European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA)" (Sulej, 2017, p. 28).

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Ambasada Polski w Polsce: Mit Polin w Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich jako wzór narracji i model relacji mniejszość–większość

Abstrakt: Tekst zawiera analizę wystawy głównej MHŻP, architektonicznej postaci gmachu muzeum i przekształceń jego otoczenia jako operacji dokonanych **w** oraz **na** przestrzeni będącej znakiem i desygnatem Zagłady. Kontekstem dla obserwowanej deholokaustyzacji opowieści o Holokauście jest postępująca holokaustyzacja opowieści o przeszłości etnicznych Polaków.

Narracją główną spajającą otoczenie MHŻP, gmach oraz wystawę główną jest idylliczny mit Polin, który rozstrzyga o selekcji i sposobie prezentowania informacji. Zawarta w micie Polin opowieść o polskich gospodarzach i żydowskich gościach ustanawia nierównoprawność oraz dominację/podporządkowanie jako zasady ramowe opowieści o relacji większość–mniejszość. Stanowi także rodzaj mentalnego knebla i emocjonalnego szantażu, który udaremnia racjonalną – analityczną i krytyczną – rozmowę w kategoriach historycznego konkretu. Ponadto zaś – w praktyce – jest częścią wzoru kultury, który produkuje – i legitymizuje zarazem – przemoc oraz wykluczenie.

Artykuł rekonstruuje reguły polinizacji historii Żydów w Europie Wschodniej (termin autorstwa Konrada Matyjaszka). Do reguł tych należą m.in. eksponowanie polskich miejsc pamięci (*lieux de mémoire*) kosztem żydowskich miejsc pamięci; prezentowanie figur i cezur obopólnie ważnych przez pryzmat tego, co w nich istotne dla grupy większościowej; brak problematyzacji zjawisk specyficznych (jak np. judaizm, transgraniczność) i ujęcia ich w perspektywie długiego trwania; dekontekstualizacja (np. pominięcie antysemityzmu – chrześcijańskiego i nie tylko – oraz jego znaczenia dla konstrukcji zbiorowej tożsamości grupy większościowej, która z biegiem czasu w coraz znaczniejszym stopniu rozstrzygała o warunkach życia Żydów, aż przesądziła o ich losie).

W odniesieniu do wystawy głównej tekst porusza sprawę m.in. cenzury *last minute*; afirmacji antysemickich fantazmatów (jak *Paradisus ludaeorum* czy Esterka); rezygnacji z przewidzianej i przygotowanej części ekspozycji dotyczącej okresu po odzyskaniu przez Polskę niepodległości w 1989 roku; prezentacji wielu wydarzeń i zagadnień w sposób sprzeczny ze stanem badań nie tylko znanym, ale też niejednokrotnie wypracowanym w Polsce (czego szczególnie bulwersującym przykładem jest odstąpienie od realistycznej prezentacji polskiego kontekstu Zagłady i powrót do zdezaktualizowanej kategorii biernego czy też obojętnego polskiego świadka [*bystander*] Zagłady).

Stawką tak spreparowanej opowieści jest wizerunek Polski i reputacja Polaków, a więc dobre samopoczucie nieżydowskiej większości. Ceną zaś – mistyfikacja historii Żydów Europy Wschodniej oraz zniweczenie potencjału zmiany, który ujawnił się w związku z debatą jedwabieńską. Potencjał ten oznaczał szansę rewizji kultury oraz przebudowy stosunków społecznych w duchu równych praw i historii zintegrowanej. Nie licząc okresu 1944/1945–1946, była to szansa bezprecedensowa w żydowsko-polskiej i polsko-żydowskiej „wspólnej historii, która dzieli".

Wyrażenia kluczowe: antysemityzm; deholokaustyzacja; Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN (MHŻP POLIN); mit Polin; polska polityka historyczna; polityka pamięci; Żydzi polscy (rewizja pojęcia); przemoc symboliczna.

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Author: Elżbieta Janicka, Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Correspondence: slh@ispan.waw.pl

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