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Remembering the Holocaust and Disliking Migrants: Politics of Memory, National Belonging and Nativism

Preface (or theoretical direction)

In 1992 Rogers Brubaker traced the origins of two ideal types of national belonging: civic and ethnic. He was at pains to emphasize that these were analytical models not fixed identities,² and in tracing the models he looked to structural forces of state building to explain the French and German understanding of citizenship. He claimed that the way a nation understands or imagines itself - who it considers a legitimate or illegitimate member, and what principle it sets up so that a non-member may cross a boundary and join the community³ - is dependent on the power of the state to *create* its citizens. He posited that in France the state created its constituent unit by homogenizing differences among its subjects and inventing a civic nation.⁴ He further claimed that in Germany the state lacked such centralizing capacity, and it emerged as an expression of a culturally understood nation. What was crucial in Brubaker's argument was that both German and French nation makers *imagined* their nationhood, and that the difference of their imaginaries related to where they located the boundary of belonging, or what marker of identity they activated: civic duty in France and cultural attachment in Germany. Thus, not only was Brubaker echoing Gellner (1983) in claiming that nations are made, he was also specifying that this making concerns the principles through which groups erect and maintain their boundaries.

What was muted in 1992 account became a central preoccupation of Brubaker's later writing on Central and Eastern European (CEE) nationalisms (1996, 1998). Examining the nations widely understood as purely ethnic - seen as homogeneous and somehow automatically holding ethnic

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² They refer to the different ways in which a group imagines itself, but their identification does not mean to assign an ontological reality of the concepts or the groups. Groups form and disband and they use different binding principles, which may, at times, be a source of internal conflict. In other words, groups *become* rather than *are*; they become through conflict over the boundary and the binding principles; and institutions and symbols that create groups change over time.

³ The 'it' in the sentence is deceiving. It undermines note 1 above as it suggests that in order for a nation to decide and conceive it has to exist and bestow an identity. This reification is not what Brubaker, or other scholars of identity construction have in mind. I will clarify this point below.

⁴ For similar accounts see Conner (1972) and Scott (1998). Scott writes on the resistance to the state, rather than a nation, or any other sense of groupness. I list him here as states rely on the created sense of groupness to ensure governmentability, and they emerge by homogenizing local diversity.

principle of belonging, or seen as heterogeneous and automatically conflicted along ethnic lines - he attended to the exact processes by which groups imagine themselves, that is the way by which they activate and police the boundaries of their belonging. Bucking the trend to see the groups as made once and remaining static; and turning away from retrospective structural analysis of state building, he moved to explore the emergent and contingent quality of the CEE nations.⁵ In other words, he turned attention to the ongoing, *presentist* and *processual* nature of the way in which communities imagine who is the 'us' to what 'them.' He argued that a nation was not a finished product, made once, on the contrary, it was an ongoing present-day process through which it made and imagined itself.

Such unfixed and constructivist understanding of identities - national, ethnic, civic, or any other for that matter - is contrary to mainstream accounts of political science. The discipline sees identities as static and given, and it treats them as independent variables used to explain the distribution of attitudes - attitudes towards migrants, for instance.⁶ The constructivist view reverses this relationship and analyses the way in which the public debate about migrants shapes the self-understanding of a group. In this paper I rely on Brubaker's injunction to study the process of forming and articulating the shape of communal imaginary, that is, I attend to the present-day efforts in which groups consider who belongs and who does not, and how do 'others' join (if at all). More concretely I identify a mechanism by which political and cultural elites shape attitudes and the resultant conception of national boundary. My contribution is two-fold: I identify political parties and their cultural milieus as actors shaping national identity and I analyze past-inflected narratives to explain present day attitudes. That is, I study how stories of the past, deployed for political reasons in the present, affect who is included and excluded from the emergent conception of the 'we.'

Europe and Migrants since 2015, and Collective Memory

More than a million people arrived in Europe in 2015 fleeing war and violence. The following year over another million arrived, slowing down to around 700,000 by 2017.⁷ Their arrival constituted a crisis for many countries into which large numbers of migrants entered - Italy,

⁵ He did not do it because the CEE nations were somehow more emergent than the fully formed nations of Western Europe; it was done because the moment of regime transition and societal flux made certain process more visible. In other words, his motivation was opportunistic rather than substantive.

⁶ In this analysis Hungarians would be assumed to hold ethnic, and therefore closed, conception of national belonging. That is, they would be expected to be hostile to non-ethnic others. This would be assumed as somehow given (by birth, schooling, religion - this is usually unspecified) and then used to explain how Hungarians treated asylum seekers in the recent migration crisis. My analysis would claim that ethnic shape of Hungarian nation is *made* in the process of the past-inflected political framing of migrants as threatening others. The assumed static would be examined as dynamic process.

⁷ Eurostat reports that EU states as well as Norway and Switzerland received 1,321,560 asylum claims in 2015; 1,260,900 in 2016 and 704,600 in 2017 (Undated).

Greece and Hungary, for instance - and for the European Union as a whole. The crisis concerned the nature of assistance to migrants and the countries with their highest numbers, and more importantly for this paper, the member states' divisions as to how best to handle the situation. With the exception of Germany and Sweden which accepted large numbers of resettled migrants - that is, migrants who entered one EU Member state, but were allowed to file for asylum in another state - many Western European countries accepted limited quotas for relocation,⁸ and most CEE states resisted accepting many, if any at all (Hungary, of course, already had a very large numbers of newly arriving refugees).⁹ Without overstating the difference, the Western states talked of acceptance while they capped the accepted numbers low, while Eastern states, talked of refusal and followed suit with exclusionary policies (Kaźmierkiewicz 2018). Indeed Poland reneged on its former acceptance commitments - capped at 6,000 - after electing a majority centre-right government in 2015, and similarly to Hungary it accepted no migrants relocated from other EU states (Kaźmierkiewicz 2018, 7). In 2016 50% of Poles, and 70% of Hungarians, claimed that they should accept no migrants at all, and an additional 42% and 22% respectively, wanted to accept limited numbers only (2018, 10).¹⁰ Notwithstanding the lukewarm welcome to migrants from the vast majority of the EU states, the strength of the reaction emanating from CEE states surprises.¹¹ In most of those states, *all* non-native born inhabitants, pre and post migration crisis, represent less than 1% of population (2018, 5). The crisis did however move the topic of migrants from the periphery to the centre stage (2018, 29). Detailed survey and focus group data of the 7 CEE countries revealed that migrants were perceived to be threatening to the security, culture and the economy; and the EU was seen as threatening to the notions of sovereign control (2018, 24-9).

The usual explanation for the popular attitudes points to media framing and political opportunism (as well as little exposure to actual migrants and foreigners). Media are said to sensationalize the issues and threats, and recently minted populist politicians are assumed to give voice to the prevailing social attitudes (Kaźmierkiewicz 2018). I do not wish to undermine these causal stories, but wish to explore an alternative one. My explanation seeks to illuminate a *dynamic* relationship in which popular attitudes are shaped by the narratives of belonging, especially narratives of the past, emanating from the political and cultural centre. Rather than assuming popular attitudes as a given, I propose that country elites weave the stories of common belonging, those stories always concern the past, and that they establish interpretative frames

⁸ As did Canada, whose low commitment was all the more surprising as it was driven by private and non-governmental sponsoring schemes.

⁹ The data on Hungary suggests that the country received 179,000 asylum applications in 2015 (BBC quoting unspecified Eurostat statistic, 2016), of which 45,315 were first time applications (Kaźmierkiewicz 2018, also relying on Eurostat). For the sake of comparison, Poland had 4,780 in the same year and Bulgaria 5,475 (Kaźmierkiewicz 2018).

¹⁰ Hungary run a national non-binding referendum on the further acceptance of migrants. 98% of the Hungarians who voted in that referendum - the turnout was low at 43.7% (Prifti and Hutchison 2016) - objected to EU mandated resettlement.

¹¹ Kaźmierkiewicz (2018) provides a recent and comprehensive review of 7 EU states: both the distribution of attitudes (some supportive of migrants) as well as their reasons.

which allow their citizens to interpret the world and their place in it. This interpretation usually involves the identification of ‘us,’ constructed in opposition to some ‘them,’ who are separated according to some arbitrary marker of difference, rendered significant in the storytelling.

Most scholars concerned with narratives of the past (especially those working on transition societies) approach it through the lens of retributive policies (Nalepa 2010, Nedelsky 2014, Stan 2009a and 2009b, Welsh 1996, Williams, Fowler and Szczerbiak 2003), or commemorative practices (Bernhard and Kubik 2015, Kubik and Bernhard, 2015, Lebov 2006, Rev 2005, Vardery 1999). That is, they channel the past into a particular event or a policy, and then they explore how the political arrangements affect the practice of retribution or commemoration. In other words, their analysis maps how politics affects past-related policy, but not how representation of the past affects present-day politics. I wish to reverse this exploratory gaze. To this end, I analyze how present invocations of the past shape politics, and how politics affects collective self-understandings. This analysis consists of two moves: the first identifies the tropes, or interpretative frameworks, articulated by the elites; the second examines the ways in which the tropes penetrate and reshape the collective imaginary. Due to the richness of the material and space limitations of the article, I will confine myself to the first question, specifying how political actors - in this case in Poland - establish authoritative frames with which to think about and understand the past, and the present.

In tracking the productivity of the past in contemporary politics, I expand the collective memory literature. This literature posits that memories are socially and *dialogically* constructed - that is, they involve the collective telling of stories more than simply sharing experiences (Halbwachs 1992, Olick 1999 & 2015, Schwartz 2015, Somers 1992).¹² The literature further claims that the process of telling stories is partial - one could therefore call it political - in that it relies on actual historical events, but it selects and orders those events in ways that serve and reflect the present-day needs of the storytellers (Chmielewska 2011, Eyoh 1998, Gillis 1994, Hobsbawm 1972, Hodgkin and Radstone 2006, Kubik 2003, Le Goff 1977, Lowenthal 2015, Margalit 2002, Martin 1995, Neumayer and Mink 2013, Nora 1989, Novick 2000, Simon and Rosenberg 2005, Zerubavel 1994). Pakier and Str ath call this *presentist* process “the invention of usable pasts” (2010, 4). The usability they invoke involves the process in which the past, or the story about the past, is harnessed to establish distinctiveness (Halbwachs 1992, Hobsbawm 1972, Horowitz 2000, Smith 2003), or sameness over time (Alonso 1998, Gillis 1994, Margalit 2002 and Halbwachs 1992), or superiority (Hodgkin and Radstone 2006, Korycki 2017, Pakier and Str ath 2010, Pakier and Wawrzyniak 2016), or a sense of worth (Assman 1992 quoted in Uhl 2010, Horowitz 2000, Smith 2003). All in all, the collective memory literature explores how present-day self-understandings emerge dialogically, in the process of establishing the group’s sense of continuity through time. In my analysis, I foreground the relational aspect of collective remembering: I argue that remembering constitutes identities, by establishing relations between

¹² Somers does not write on collective memory directly. However, she explores the analytical force of narratives in tracing the articulation of interests and identities (1992). For more see note 29 below.

the imagined selves and the imagined others. I further claim that others imagined in the past establish a way a group may consider itself in the present.

Scholars of collective memory agree on the partiality of memory, but they disagree on the importance of manipulation in the process of memory's construction. On the one hand, Olick claims that the concept's greatest value lies in its sustained attention to multiplicity, distortion, and contestation over meanings (1999 and 2015). On the other hand, Schwartz argues that the persistent focus on contestation has led collective memory scholars away from theorizing that which collective memory does best, namely, how it binds, and works to cohere a group (2015). My approach does not resolve this dispute, but uses both insights sequentially. I first analyze the multiplicity of narratives paying attention to their variance, and second, relying on Schwartz's concept of "redundancy," I isolate the repeated themes and tropes organizing the emergent imaginary community. In other words, after identifying the difference of narratives, I move to specify the points of similarity. In doing so I follow Schwartz's intuition that what is repeated and amplified in multivocal stories, what is consonant despite differences, is what shapes self-understanding (2015).

My argument proceeds as follows: Using the example of post-communist transition Poland I first introduce the concept of *mnemonic capital*, which allows me to divide the Polish political field into three stable political positions. Second, I identify the occupants of the three positions - that is the three main political parties and their intellectual circles - and show how each deployed its mnemonic capital and how each narrated the last 70 years of Polish history. I demonstrate that even though the major political players use the past for political reasons, and even though they all repudiate communism differently, they all end up circulating the mythical conflation of Jewishness and communism. Some do so directly and others indirectly, but they all end up recycling the myth of the hostile other, the Jewish Bolshevik. In the final section, I show how this different in structure but similar in meaning rendering of Polish and Jewish implications in communism, elevates the ethnically, if not racially, organized nationality. This conception is so saturating that it works as the only relevant axis of identity. It is this closely bound notion that affects the present-day understanding of migrant others. On this understanding, the way contemporary political classes remember Polish and Jewish imbrications with communism affects present day understanding of a nation as closely bound and ethnic.

Political Space and the Past

Twenty-eight years after the transition from communism,¹³ the specter of the past continues to haunt and shape politics in Poland. Specific political parties come and go, but their positions, as

¹³ In this work I rely on the term 'communism' to analyze the work of a symbolic trope of contemporary political speech. This trope is invoked directly by some, covertly by others, and at times it is replaced by 'real socialism,' or 'Polish People's Republic of Poland' (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa - PRL*), or Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza - PZPR*). I fold all these terms into 'communism,' but wish to emphasize that I am neither interested in the doctrinal debates of Marxist-Leninist theory, nor in historical debates

given by their relationship to the past, remain stable. This relationship to the past is what I call *mnemonic capital*. The capital denotes a symbolic resource that the parties harness to achieve political identities and to shape electoral strategies. The other resources that the parties require in order to successfully compete involve what Pierre Bourdieu termed material or cultural forms of capital (1986, 1998). Material capital refers to financial and physical assets. Cultural capital designates organizational structures, as well as the experience, or expertise, of being a political party. The parties that emerge from the fog of transition have unequal access to these resources: the transition-loser, or the party that succeeded the former ruler, has money and skills in spades; the transition-winner, the former dissident group or movement, has none. What the winner does have is the symbolic, or more specifically mnemonic, capital of having won a moral victory and of being on the right side of history. The winner therefore will keep the past alive, so as to emphasize its historically-given rectitude. The loser, conversely, will turn to the present to emphasize its commitment to reform.

As the Polish case makes clear, the division into winner and loser - one oriented to the past, one to the present - holds until one of them subdivides. This is more likely on the side of the winner - there is no reason to think that the former opposition has the required discipline or ideological homogeneity - but theoretically each side may come apart. If the winner splits, the two emerging parties will continue to use their mnemonic capital, but the political competition will become more complicated in that the winners will have to distinguish themselves from each other. Thus, winner one will turn to the past fully and repudiate it forcefully. Winner two will distinguish itself from winner one by appearing to turn to the present and guarding the gains of transition. While adopting this ostensible presentist orientation, winner two will continue turning to the past in search of a moral justification of its current policies. The loser will remain as before: turned to the present whilst mildly repudiating the past.

Political parties in Poland have followed this pattern of organizing politics since 1989, even as the particular parties have changed names, members and even platforms. The simple binary division between the loser and the winner held briefly from 1989 to 1990, when the communist PZPR faced the opposition's Citizens' Committee (KO) in the first semi-free elections.¹⁴ The split of the winner occurred as early as 1990, with the Centre Agreement (PC) emerging as winner one, and the Democratic Union (UD) and the Liberal-Democratic Congress (KLD), as winner two.¹⁵ Winner two consolidated and formed one party, Freedom Union (UW) in 1994.¹⁶

about the ways in which the term was used and discarded by the Polish rulers and dissidents before 1989 transition. Instead, I analyze how current elites use the last 70 years of Polish implications with communism in its various names and guises, and to what effect.

¹⁴ *Komitet Obywatelski (KO)*. June 4, 1989 election was semi-free as only 35percent of Parliamentary seats were contested. 65percent of seats remained reserved for PZPR. All newly established Senate seats were freely elected.

¹⁵ *Porozumienie Centrum (PC), Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny (KLD), Unia Demokratyczna (UD)*. The later two parties differed slightly in terms of programs, but they belonged together according to my typology.

¹⁶ *Unia Wolności (UW)*.

Given the electoral victories of the transition loser, by then renamed the Social Democracy of Poland (SdRP), the winners formed an opposing coalition, the Electoral Action Solidarity (AWS) in 1994.¹⁷ When the coalition divided again in 2001, the Law and Justice party (PiS) took the position of winner one, and the Civic Platform (PO) became winner two.¹⁸ The loser changed its name to the Union of the Democratic Left (SLD) in 1999.¹⁹ (For a pictorial rendition of positions and parties through time, see Table 1. The Table lists smaller and recent parties: the Agrarian (PSL) and Together (R) parties.²⁰ They are unconcerned with communism and they do not rely on the invocation and condemnation of the past to establish their political identities.) As to parties' electoral success: the loser held power - it was in charge of the executive - from 1993 to 1997 and from 2001 to 2005. The winners held power from 1990 to 1993, 1997 to 2001, and from 2005 until now.²¹

Judgment/Temporal Orientation	Past		Present
Condemn communism	Transition Winner One: PC → AWS → PiS	Transition Winner Two: UW → AWS → PO	Transition Loser: SdRP → SLD
Do not condemn communism	Smaller parties: PSL, R		

Figure 1 Political parties through time, assigned to positions organized by mnemonic capital

Thus, the most powerful players in the Polish political field relied on remembering and representing the past in their strategic positioning. For example, in the last legislative election in 2015, the PiS predicated its electoral strategy on a claim that the post-transition state had not been cleansed of communism. Indeed, the state had allegedly been captured by the former communist apparatchiks, who were shielded in their privileged position by the co-opted transition winner, the PO.²² In making this claim, the party relied on an understanding of

¹⁷ *Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (SdRP), Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (AWS).*

¹⁸ *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), Platforma Obywatelska (PO).* A small and now defunct Democratic Party (*Partia Demokratyczna, PD*), closely aligned with the former UD, also emerged from the 2001 split.

¹⁹ *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD).*

²⁰ *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL), Razem (R).*

²¹ With the exception of 2015 electoral victor the PiS, all governments were formed in coalition with smaller parties.

²² PiS Program 2014. Similar electoral strategy has been adopted by the transition winner one before: first in the repeated lustration campaigns, and then in the calls to end the reign of the 3rd Republic (RP). 3rd RP is a strategic trope which combines the rule of the PO and the SLD into

communism as essentially inimical to Polishness. Such a framing of the problem helped the PiS polarize the political field and manufacture a sense of crisis - a crisis, which only they could solve (Korycki, 2017). The PO, in turn, used the particular badness of communism to justify the putative goodness of their present-day policies. Their 2015 Platform relied on a list of stock phrases, like “catching up from backwardness” and guarding the “developmental gains of transition,” all of which contained an indirect reference to the inept and authoritarian past.²³ Apart from justifying the policy, the invocation of the past helped the party strategically, in that the traits attributed to communism, magnified the alleged threat of the “authoritarian” PiS and the “inept” SLD.²⁴ True to its present-day orientation, the SLD did not refer to the past frequently in its programs. However, in an effort to adapt to the field of political competition organized by the language of the past, the party produced its own historical narrative, “The Historical Kit of the Left.”²⁵ I will review its contents below, but suffice it to say here, in narrating the past, the SLD made itself into the party of the so-called ‘left,’ not through its policies, but by discursively lumping its opponents into a ‘right.’ It did so, while forcefully condemning communism.

To gain a deeper understanding of each player’s approach to, and judgment of, the past, and to enable analysis of the emerging consonant themes, I have identified a popular history narrative of each elite position. In locating the narratives, I relied on the parties’ cultural entrepreneurs,²⁶ that is, people and institutions constituting the reflexive milieu of political actors, who help to articulate and disseminate the players’ mnemonic capital. Those entrepreneurs, or milieus, group the members of the friendly media outlets, affiliated think tanks and institutes, and intellectual circles matching the party’s position in my taxonomy of players. Thus, as I mentioned above, “The Kit” (the account of the post-communist transition loser) was penned by Ignacy Daszyński Centre, a think-tank connected with the SLD. “It All Began in Poland,” a 2009 narrative of winner one, was published by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN).²⁷ The Institute is a state funded body, and in 2009 it was in no way coterminous with the political party representing winner one. I use this account because the retrospective and judgment-oriented mandate of the Institute is definitional to the mnemonic capital orientation of winner one.²⁸ The main account of

one period. PO emerges as guilty by association. For more on this, see Szczerbiak (2002, 2008 and 2013).

²³ Rather than saying, ‘we are building roads because citizens need them,’ they were saying, ‘we are catching up from backwardness.’ Roads are the point of both remarks, but the justification of action moves from the present need to past-created problem.

²⁴ PO Program 2015. For more on the representation of the past as a justification of rule, see, Hobsbawm (1983), Lebov, Kansteiner and Fogu (2006), Lowenthal (2015) and Vardery (1999).

²⁵ *Niezbędnik Historyczny Lewicy* has no identified author. All translations of it are mine.

²⁶ Kubik, “Cultural Legacies of State Socialism.”

²⁷ *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN)*. I rely on the English version of *It All Began in Poland*. When referring to it, I use the names of the contributing authors. The volume has no identified editor or translator(s).

²⁸ For the exploration of the changing personal and social connections between the PiS and its milieu, see Friszke (2011) and Szeligowska (2014).

winner two, “PRL for the Novice,” was written by Jacek Kuroń (with Jacek Żakowski, 1995). In analyzing this account I also rely on the articles by Jan Błoński (1990) Jan Józef Lipski (1996) and Adam Michnik (1998). All of these authors, especially Kuroń and Michnik, are (or were) the most articulate intellectual theorists of the transition winner who is turned to the present and to the past simultaneously. The position is now occupied by the PO, a party which may not match the authors’ programmatic commitments, but fits and represents their mnemonic orientation closely.

In the interest of space, when exploring the narratives, I do not recreate the entire stories, or concentrate on the intentions of authors, or measure the degree to which the stories distort historical truths (although I signal moments in which those distortions escape notice). Instead, I identify the stories’ structures (that is, the ‘how’ of the narration) and their central themes (that is, the ‘what’ of the emergent meanings), and I give examples. More specifically, I trace how the stories’ elements are related to one another, how principal actors are relationally constructed, and what periodic and causal chains are being proposed and substantiated. Treating narratives as epistemological entry points to meanings,²⁹ my analysis uncovers interpretative frames that the stories help establish. In other words, my analysis demonstrates how elite remembering furnishes the building blocks of Polish self-understanding.

Narration and Judgment of the Past - the Transition Winner One

Winner One began the story of Polish implication with communism in 1939. Poland was invaded by the Nazis on September 1, followed by the Soviet “knife in the back” offensive on September 17 (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 22). The narration characterized the events as the loss of national independence, the occupation, and the “fourth partition” (2009, 25). It then called the events of 1944 - the end of the War made possible by Soviet forces - the beginning of a second occupation (2009, 59 and Żaryn 2009, 67). Thus, on the one hand, by drawing linkages to the 1772-1918 partitions and Polish loss of statehood, the story de-exceptionalized the War. On the other hand, by blending the War and the subsequent communist rule into one occupation, the depiction suggested a putative equivalence between Nazism and communism. Indeed, the reference to Soviet treachery, the treachery that apparently decided the fate of the War, signaled communism as actually worse than Nazism. In this telling, even Nazi crimes were indirectly caused by the Soviets.

This original signal was supported in the following narration, in which the authors described what had happened in Poland at the hands of the Nazis and the Soviets, but they characterized only Soviet actions as genocidal. Germans were said to be worse only when the narration described the Jewish fate. This way of weaving the story segregated the two communities and

²⁹ I follow Somers, who identified four features of narratives as analytics: *instrumental appropriations* designate that which is selected from history, *relationality of parts* establishes their identities, *causal emplotments* speak to ways in which narrative elements are arranged, and in what temporal and special *sequences* they have been placed. I supplement Somers’ elements with sustained attention to emerging judgments.

assigned each, each its own nemesis: Jews got the Germans and Poles got the Soviets. This is how it was done:

The Nazis were said to have stolen Polish territory, instigated mass deportations, expropriations, terror and executions (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 63). They were blamed for exploiting the country economically and establishing concentration camps (2009, 32-3). The camps were not described in detail, with the exception of Auschwitz, which was specified as having originally been built for the Poles (2009, 33). The Germans came to be blamed for planning to exterminate the Poles at the end of the War (2009, 43), and for actually devastating Polish cities (2009, 59). Despite reporting that Germans killed over 5 million Poles (this figure included Poles of Jewish descent, [2009, 63]), the Germans continued to be presented as a disciplined, civilized even, occupying army. Comparing the forces that split Poland, Wieczorkiewicz wrote: “the Red Army, in contrast to Wehrmacht, did not observe any rules and procedures” (2009, 24).

The Soviet forces were also said to have stolen Polish lands (2009, 32, 49, 62), but the losses here were seen as more significant: they concerned larger and more historically important parts of the country (2009, 49 & Żaryn 2009, 67). Like the Germans, the Soviets were blamed for mass deportations to the gulags, terror and killings (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 35). The aim of their policy was here spelled out, and it concerned a total alteration of the occupied territories; so much so, that no return of the refugees could be imagined. The word “genocide” appeared in this part of the narrative only:³⁰ it applied to the camps and gulags to which the Poles were sent within the USSR (2009, 35); it was used in the description of the Katyń killing of Polish officers (2009, 41); and, in a slight variation, Stalin was said to contemplate a “biological solution,” when he refused to help Polish forces fighting in the Warsaw uprising (2009, 56).

After establishing the special evil of communism in regards to the Poles, the narrative returned to the Nazis and their plans for the Jews. The actual description of Jewish fate began early, in that they were reported to have been forcibly moved the ghettos in 1939. They were again possibly mentioned in the reference to the General Eastern Plan, which, we were told, assumed an extermination of 85% of Poles (2009, 43). I say ‘possibly mentioned’ as the narrative did not usually refer to Jews as Poles,³¹ and it followed the reference with a strangely structured paragraph on the Final Solution and Jedwabne: after referring to the plans of Jewish annihilation without specifying them as such, the narrative proceeded to describe the “intensely symbolic crime,” in which Poles of Jedwabne murdered all of their Jewish neighbours (2009, 44).³² The crime was said to be “perhaps” inspired by the Nazis, and it was given its “context:” a) Soviet “genocide” of the Polish landowners, b) Soviet torture and murder of a pregnant woman and a priest (the gruesome details were included in the text), and c) the putative popular beliefs that

³⁰ Note that Germans were blamed for planning to exterminate Poles, and Soviets were blamed for actually doing it. This judgment is unaffected by the losses listed in the narrative: over 5 million dead by Germans and over 1.2 million dead by Soviets (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 63).

³¹ Which they were, if Pole is understood in civic, rather than ethnic, terms (Brubaker 1990).

³² Jedwabne is the small town in which the murder occurred. For more on the 1941 events, see Gross (2000) and Machcewicz and Persak (2002).

Jews were communist-sympathizers (2009, 44).³³ The story then referred to the actual extermination of the Jews in the death camps (2009, 45-6), a fate which the Jews were said to have “accepted (...) with resignation” (2009, 45).

The story switched to Poles again. They were said to have been discouraged from helping their Jewish neighbours by the draconian penalties for such help, the help which they nonetheless provided (2009, 45). They also alerted the West of the Jewish plight, an announcement that elicited no response (2009, 46). The narrative then mentioned those who preyed on and betrayed Jewish victims and who were said to have been condemned by all Polish authority figures (except far right nationalists). The section on Jewish plight culminated in an assessment of Polish conduct, which was said to have been better than most other occupied countries (2009, 46). The narration ended with the description of the “weak and ineffectual” 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and tallied Jewish losses (2009, 46 and 63).

After the war with the Nazis had ended, the communists were said to have consolidated and monopolized all power by a skilful manipulation and ruthless pacification. It is at this juncture that genocide got replaced with totalitarianism as the primary characterization of the communist rule. The Party and its organs were said to have subordinated all political, economic and social institutions to Marxist atheist ideology (Żaryn 2009, 78); and the “Soviet people” were said to have occupied all upper positions of security forces, while Poles served as collaborators and spies (2009, 79). 85,000 of the recruited Polish agents were said to have spied on close to 5 million Poles (2009, 79), and they subjected 300,000 of political victims to the prisons and dungeons of the security forces. The surveillance and harassment resulted in 20,500 deaths (2009, 81). I recreate these details in all their richness to underscore the absence of such details in the description of Nazi terror.

Jan Żaryn gives an account of the post-war Polish-Jewish relations:

Meanwhile Polish-Jewish relations deteriorated after the war: “the NKVD with the assistance of remaining Jews, is preparing a bloody orgy” - read the AK reports, and later the reports of the national underground. Up to July 1946, about 250,000 Jews lived in Poland, either having previously concealed themselves in Polish families, or else having arrived from the USSR. All across Poland, banditry was spreading and Jews were also among its victims. The tension was aggravated by the complex questions of ownership. At the same time, both the official Jewish organization (the Central Committee of Jews in Poland - “CKZP”) and a significant proportion of Jewish individuals either supported the communist authorities or else simply joined their ranks. Many worked in the UB (where about 40 percent of management posts were held by communists of Jewish descent) and also in censorship and propaganda, slandering the memory of the PPP, the AK, and deceitfully remaining silent about Soviet massacres (the Katyń massacre was officially ascribed to the Germans). This intensified anti-Semitic attitudes which, with clear support of the UB, could have led to the uncontrolled impulses toward the pogroms. Such was the

³³ For a repudiation of this view, see Gross (2007).

case in Kielce. On 4 July, 1946, after rumours had spread throughout the town that a Polish child had been kidnapped, riots occurred in which over 40 people died”.³⁴

This remarkable paragraph recycled many, if not all, of the anti-Semitic tropes, and it brought into full view the previously suggested judgment of communism as worse than Nazism. It then discursively tied such forcefully repudiated system to Jewishness. In other words, relying on Nuremberg definition of Jewishness, it made communism *as if* racial.³⁵ The strong judgment of communism was already visible in the references to 1939 Soviet treachery, as well as the declared genocidal and totalitarian nature of the system. The connection to Jewishness was also alluded before, in the narration of Jedwabne: there the 1941 killings were placed in the justificatory contexts of alleged Jewish sympathy to communism, and of communist’s crimes against Poles. In the paragraph above, the explicit Jew-the-Communist emerged with full force, reportedly “planning bloody orgies” and presiding over the security apparatus of the second occupier.³⁶ The report made the post-war into a time of the (communist) Jewish rule of Poland, and then it used this construction to explain, or justify, the 1944 pogrom of Jews by the Poles.

The quoted paragraph relied on two discursive moves that allowed Jew-the-Communist to emerge: the first granted the authority to decide who was and who was not a Jew, to the representatives of ethnic majority, regardless of the self-identification of those about whom the report was made.³⁷ The paragraph revealed the assumed right of present-day historian to a) establish the grid of significant - in this case, ethnic- or blood-based - categories into which humanity was to be sorted, and b) decide who met the criteria of thus-constituted grid.³⁸ This move rested on, and was amplified by, the second maneuver, which established the authority to

³⁴ NKVD - People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Soviet secret political police), AK - Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), CKZP - *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce*, PPP - Polish Underground State (*Polskie Państwo Podziemne*), UB - Polish Security police (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*). For more on the Kielce pogrom, see Gross (2007), Kersten (1992), Szaynok (1992). The event was significant enough to merit a mention in Judt’s history of the postwar (2005, 43; for earlier treatment see 2000, 311 & 321).

³⁵ For more on the maneuver which ontologizes political affiliation, see Korycki (2017).

³⁶ For more on “Jew-the-Communist,” see Gross (2007), Śpiewak (2012), and critical of Śpiewak, Zawadzka (2009 and 2013).

³⁷ For more on the ambiguity of those identifications see Kersten (1992), whose account is especially attentive to the issue of self-identification, and also Torańska (1987). Zawadzka (2009, 2013) takes it as one of her central themes. The authors demonstrate how many communists renounced national, ethnic or religious belonging in favour of internationalism of communism. To have them now assigned to a category “Jew,” or “Pole,” is a retroactive invention at best, or a normative elevation of blood- over choice- based memberships, at worst. Epistemologically, if one assumes the right of individuals to self-identify, then all speculation about the numbers of the so-called Jews in the post-war security apparatus is mute, as the sources of that knowledge are no longer alive.

³⁸ For more on the establishment of powerful authorities to sort humanity, see Foucault (1990, 1994, 1995).

pronounce the truth: in this telling, the AK report, or present-day historian's account.³⁹ Both are a) ethnically determined and both are sources of 'facts', while b) Jews, who are also ethnically determined, are made coincidental with communists, and are therefore sources of propaganda and slander. In such a presentation Jews-as-communists lose their voice, that is their personhood, and they emerge as essential enemies of the Poles.

To conclude this section, let me summarize the main themes of the narration. The story of communism began in 1939. Its presentation supported a judgment that communism was existentially threatening to Poles, that indeed, it was worse than Nazism. The following narration supported a further assessment that the regime, when it was installed in Poland post-War, was foreign and imposed. The final theme of the narration established communism as coincidental with Jewishness, making it as if racial. In doing so the narration lent scholarly and political weight to the mythical construction of Jew-the-Communist. The narrative was all the more remarkable for being published with state funds, for the purpose of foreigners and local populations,⁴⁰ and for eliciting no critical reactions. The lack of critical reaction suggested that its exclusionary load was invisible to its readers, indeed that it was reflective of their interpretative frames.

Narration and Judgment of the Past - the Transition Winner Two

If winner one wove a sustained narrative of racially coded communist enemies, winner two conjured individual anti-communist heroes who opposed the economically inept and politically repressive regime. The narration did not assume communism as a time out of national history, an aberration comparable to a partition, but rather a time in which people lived, compromised, had careers. They were said to have made hard, complicated choices in hard, inhuman conditions. Some of them, very few, actively resisted the regime and its conditions.

Winner two began the narration of communism when Soviet armies crossed Polish borders in 1944 (Kuroń and Żakowski 1995, 5). This immediate crossing was followed by a three-year-long violent effort by the Communist Party to consolidate power, followed again by seven years of 'Sovietization' (or Stalinism; 1995, 5-99). The period was presented and judged in complex ways. The narrative highlighted the benefits of rebuilding efforts as well as necessary reforms (of agriculture and industry, for instance; 1995, 28, 43-45, 66-70); and it balanced the positive aspects with attention to the decreasing democratization and increasing terror (1995 13, 31-40, 45-51). It also identified multiple societal responses to the circumstances: some, we were told, were tempted by promises of progress and visions of an egalitarian society (1996, 42); others withdrew into the private sphere to work toward cultural preservation (1996, 39-40); others still continued the armed struggle (1995, 17-9); while the majority were said to have opportunistically and passively, complied (1995, 42, 47, 65, 116, 137). Communism was presented not as a foreign import, even though its advent in Poland was said to be midwife-d by a foreign power, by a unwanted regime in which the country and its citizens participated.

³⁹ Żaryn called himself a Pole in our interview (February 7, 2013).

⁴⁰ As per note XX, I relied on an English version of the document.

This was all the more visible in the “thaw” that followed Stalin’s death, the thaw in which large sections of the population mobilized in the spirit of reform and Polish Road to Socialism (1995, 71-86).⁴¹ Societal energy was slowly curbed, however, and subsequently crushed, by a state captured by opportunistic apparatchiks. This established a pattern for the next 30 years. The period between 1956 and 1980 was described as a time of pervasive economic shortages and inefficiency, state attempts at reform, societal opposition, and invariable state retrenchment. Workers organized periodic eruptions (in 1956, 1970, 1976, 1980), which were always economically motivated and always brutally repressed. Dissidents, mostly intellectuals, appeared as early as 1964 and remained active, but they were always a minority. Their efforts became more effective when the intellectuals of the secular left bridged the divide with workers, Catholic intellectuals, and the Church (1995, 199-207), which culminated in the explosive “re-awakening” of Solidarity (1995, 207-33), and eventual downfall of communism (1995, 261-77).

Two themes emerged in this narrative, and both implicated judgment: communism was presented as economically inefficient, plagued by faulty policy and substandard results; furthermore the reason for this inefficiency resided in communism’s authoritarian and repressive nature. These themes and judgments were of special present day political importance: on the one hand they, signaled winner two’s commitment to what it considered sound economic management and democracy; such casting of communism was then used in the programmatic and strategic documents to amplify the economic ineptness of the transition loser, and the putative authoritarian appetites of the transition winner one (PO Program, 2015).

The issue of minorities in general, and Polish Jewish relations in particular, appeared only three times and each was rather episodic: the longest story recounted the events of the War and the immediate post-War - I will turn to this account next. The second reference described two competing factions within the communist Party, one of which was said to be liberal (but close to the circles active under Stalinism) and the other nationalistic (and accusing the “liberals” of being Jewish) (Kuroń and Żakowski, 1995, 91-2). Their internal conflict and competition for power culminated in 1968 crisis - the third reference - which the nationalists won by blaming the so-called Jews for all societal problems. Poles were said to have harbored many anti-Semitic views, which were only exacerbated by the Party’s skillful campaign (1995, 133).

The longest story, one that meant to encapsulate the history of the difficult relations was recounted in a special three-page section called “Anti-Semitism and Pogroms.” It began with Kuroń’s father who had managed a small factory in Lwów during the War. He was also a member of Żegota (a clandestine unit helping Jews), so until it was possible, he assisted and employed Jewish workers. When the systematic killing had begun, he was given 50 work permits for his 100 employees. In effect, he had to select who would live. He chose intellectuals as he judged that they had the best chances of survival. Kuroń, who was a child at the time, wrote, “I feel great shame about this, to this day” (1995, 35-6). He further recalled how Jews were being hounded in the streets and how there was nothing one could do about it. He recalled sensing his

⁴¹ *Polska Droga do Socjalizmu* - 1956 Party’s slogan.

teacher's shame for teaching racist material in the occupied school (1995, 36). Finally, he acknowledged that perhaps 10% of Poles helped Jews, and those who did not, had to explain away their inaction. He speculated that this was made easier by blaming the Jews for their own plight (1995, 36).

After the war, miraculously surviving Jews returned to their homes, by now inhabited by Poles. "What was one to do?" asked Kuroń, "Were they to move out?" (1995, 36). The atmosphere of pogroms, he added, hung in the air. The pogroms were provoked by the authorities - we were told - but they had a social base and resonance. The tension and fear of these times was vivified by an account of Kuroń's little brother, walking home with his grandfather shortly after the war and being mistaken for a child kidnapped by a Jew. The story ended well, but it could have resulted in violence.

The narrative then moved to described the political scene:

After the war, there was a strong feeling that Jews were in the service of the Soviets. And in truth, there were many Jews in the secret police, in the PPR apparatus, and in the offices of the new administration, but Poles were by far more numerous. There are many reasons for this. First, before the war, assimilated Jews were often communists, as this was the only refuge against anti-Semitism. Second, the Soviets trusted those who survived the war in the USSR more, and more Jews survived there. They survived, returned to Poland and got jobs. (...)

Certainly, the surviving Jews felt the need for revenge for anti-Semitism. Revenge on anti-Semites, not on Poles. This was true, but it happened on much smaller scale than the myth that had grown around it. And the myth was huge. For a nation that was undergoing Soviet invasion it was useful to see that communism equaled Jews. Since the Polish nation refused to accept the Soviets, those who did accept them, could only be Soviet themselves, or Jewish (1995, 37-38).⁴²

The section was accompanied by five illustrations. The first page showed a copy of the (Soviet installed) provisional government's (PKWN) July Manifesto promising active support in the rebuilding of Jewish life, as well as legal and factual equality (1995, 35).⁴³ The next page pictured a pre-war Jewish street, with a caption mourning its loss and that of the traditionally dressed Jews. The caption claimed that the dual absence was accompanied by a revival of the "nonsensical" belief in Jew the vampire (1996, 36).⁴⁴ The facing page displayed the Certificate of Honour granted by Israel to those who risked their lives by helping Jews survive the Holocaust. The caption read: "Despite inglorious post-war excesses, Poles constitute the most

⁴² *Polska Partia Robotnicza* (PPR) refers to the ruling party at the time. PPR became PZPR in 1948.

⁴³ *Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego* (PKWN)

⁴⁴ Jew-the-vampire refers to the myth of Christian children being kidnapped and having their blood drained, in order to make matzo. The operation of this myth was implied in the story of Kuroń little brother walking with his grandfather and being accosted by an angry mob.

numerous group among the Righteous Among the Nations. Among 12,000 honoured, there are 4,500 Poles” (1996, 37). The page is bordered by a reproduction of Wachtel lithograph “Christ in a Pogrom Quarter” accompanied by a statistic of 230 Jewish deaths from January to August 1945. The readers were told “And the wave of anti-Semitism was only increasing” (1996, 37). Last image represented a tablet commemorating the July 4, 1946 Kielce pogrom placed in Kielce by the Nissebaum Foundation on the initiative of Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarity (1996, 37-8).

On its surface, the story is multilayered and complex, shot through with moral disquiet. It retrieves a variety of positions - heroic rare helpers, compassionate or indifferent numerous bystanders, rarer criminal collaborators and anti-Semites - and it confronts the difficult truths of Poles killing Jews. It discredits various myths about Jews. It signals that post-transition order repudiated exclusion and violence, induced or facilitated by communism. The readers are left with a vision of a difficult and tragic past, about which easy judgments are impossible, and which is now bracketed with hope for a better future.

I would like to explore the fragment beyond this nominal of readings to identify its embedded meanings and assumptions.

The narrative reflected a well-established structure, in which two exceptional or extreme postures flanked - that is constituted - the societal norm.⁴⁵ First, we were told of the most numerous in the world helpers of Jews. The helpers were the most heroic given the brutality of Nazi occupation and the draconian penalties for helping Jews, and yet, they still managed to be the most numerous. This presentation pays deserved homage to the people who risked their lives to help others. But it obscures the well-documented and pervasive fear of the Righteous to admit to their neighbours that they were helping, or had helped Jews (Engelking and Grabski, 2011 and Gross 2007). In so doing, the narrative *uses* the plight of the Righteous to tell half a story.⁴⁶ It then uses them again to win an international rectitude competition: in Lipski’s words, Poles did better than the Dutch or the French, even as their occupation was harsher (1996, 63).⁴⁷ Having introduced the exceptional helpers of Jews, the narrative presented the equally rare helpers of the Holocaust, the so-called, “*szmalcownicy*,” or people who blackmailed, hunted and denounced

⁴⁵ The structure is followed by Błoński (1990), Lipski (1983 and 1996) and Michnik (1998). I will indicate their additions and specifications in the following footnotes.

⁴⁶ In other words, it erases significant part of the Righteous’ story.

⁴⁷ All references to the ‘most numerous in the world,’ will have this competitive bent. For more on the state’s competition for ethical capital using the actions of heroic few, see Judt’s writing on France (2000). The commonality of competition should not blind us to its instrumentality. In the narrative of winner two it is doubly productive, for if one were to recalculate the ratio of the numbers of those saved to the numbers within the population, Poland would not top the charts. Note that Błoński’s (1990) and Lipski’s (1996) articles are both motivated by a wish to correct the alleged “bad” opinion of Poles in the West, even if Błoński claims to write against such a trend. Both, therefore, place Polish-Jewish story in a comparative, if not competitive, setting. Michnik does so less directly (1998).

Jews to the Germans. They were declared to be criminal, marginal, and therefore anomalous, and they were universally condemned. The condemnations were at times relativised by, again, being placed in a competitive setting: both Błoński (1990) and Lipski (1996) claimed that all societies have criminals (1990, 45; 1996, 62).

In between these two extremes, the ordinary Poles emerge as innocently indifferent. Their indifference was not demonstrated empirically, nor was it problematized, on the contrary, it was established by the three-part structure of the storytelling: few helped, few denounced, the majority tried to survive. The innocence, or the reasonability of this stance, is also established discursively: on the one hand there is the exceptionality of the Occupation, as demonstrated by the extraordinary heroism of the Righteous; on the other, there is the exceptional criminality of those who denounced. My analysis does doubt the harshness of the Occupation, or the heroism of the helpers. Its aim is only to demonstrate that the putative indifference and innocence of the Poles vis-à-vis their Jewish co-citizens is not demonstrated, but produced in the process of weaving of the story.⁴⁸ The alleged and undemonstrated indifference was at times complicated, as it was in Kuroń's story, by references to the pervasive social anti-Semitism. In his account the anti-Semitism was invoked repeatedly, but as the indifference before, it was unexplained. The readers were told, that the expression of anti-Jewish feeling seemed to have been facilitated by the Nazis, and it was used by the Soviets, but other than those amplifying external factors, the hostility itself was presented as common and 'normal' as air. It designated some putative *essential* quality of the masses, and as such it dispensed with explanation. Also, by being naturalized, it was also somehow excused. Just as the myth of indifference obscured popular hostility and violence, so did story of hostility elevate the intellectual, who neither shared, nor approved the narrow and superstitious notions of the ordinary Poles.

The Wartime anti-Semitism and hostility were said to grow post-war. The reasons for hostility may have concerned stolen homes, babies kidnapped for matzo, or belief in Jew-the-Communist. These were declared unsolvable (homes), rejected as superstitions (matzo babies), and explained as false and blown out of proportion myths (Jewish communism). But again, since no analysis of the myths and hostile attitudes was offered, these clear repudiations lost some of their force.

⁴⁸ For the full elaboration of the indifference myth, see Błoński (1990) and Lipski (1996). For a challenge to the myth see Gross (2014) and Janicka (2015a, 2015b, Tokarska-Bakir 2012, and Żukowski 2011). In brief, Gross challenged the 'bystander' category on two fronts: its translation to Polish as 'witness' is inaccurate, and its applicability, in the context of ultimate violence of the Holocaust, is oxymoronic: the supposed inaction is a form of action and it has consequences (2014, 885-6). He argued away the practice of contextualizing Polish actions against Jews, which he showed as serving to disguise Poles' saturating and general hostility (2000b, 80-92). Janicka went further and repudiated the myth explicitly. She demonstrated that Poles were not indifferent to the Holocaust, but holding virulently stereotypical views, were its active or ideational supporters. Violence, and the desirability of violence against Jews, she claimed, was not a matter of exception but of cultural norm (Janicka 2015a, 156 and 2015b).

They acted as a particular form of *paralipsis*, in which the subject was introduced by a denial that it should be discussed.⁴⁹

This is especially true as one of the myths - Jewish involvement in communism - got an elaborate treatment. The quoted paragraph began with the assertion of a popular hostile feeling toward Jews. It moved to the high numbers of the so-called Jews in the communist ranks, which was quickly balanced with the higher number of Poles. It asserted that there were many reasons for *this*, and then went on to explain the high numbers of Jews in the ranks of the Party. The paragraph did not directly explain the anti-Jewish feeling but by positing reasons for commonly exaggerated - but still high - numbers, it insinuated those numbers as the cause of the feeling.

Furthermore, the so-called explanation of the high numbers of Jews in the security apparatus reinforced the Jew-the-Communist myth of the winner one. First and similarly, the narration assumed the right to decide the ethnicity of its protagonists. Second, it suggested an equivalence between pre-war communists and Jews.⁵⁰ Third, it placed these Jews between the *natural* and pervasive anti-Semitism of the masses, and a promise of a *de facto* equality (see the picture of the PKWN July Manifesto), or better yet jobs, jobs that offered opportunities for revenge. The narration here did not assume that Polish citizens of Jewish descent had no reasons for revenge (this is an important fact omitted in the account of winner one), even as they did not demonstrate the *intention* or the *fact* of revenge empirically. Indeed, by attending to that putative revenge, the narration ended up suggesting that anti-Semitism was indeed a reaction to what the (so-called) Jews had done. In a curious inversion of meaning, anti-Jewish feeling was substantively legitimated, as it is nominally rejected.

The narration of winner two devoted much attention to communism and its moral flaws. The story was complex and multilayered and although it established communism as economically inept and authoritarian, it did not posit it as a regime implemented in Poland without Polish involvement. Judging by the mere size of the entries, the Polish-Jewish implications did not appear to be important in the story. They merited two episodic mentions and one slightly longer one. This longer story, however, reflected the canon of the milieu's writing on the topic: the War was described as a space of tragic helplessness ('nothing could be done'), heroism ('and yet so much was done'), and marginal criminality ('what society does not have criminals?'), to circulate the myth of Polish innocent and reasonable indifference to the Holocaust. When the narrative moved to the fraught period of the postwar, it wove another myth - that of reasonable

⁴⁹ It is like saying "he drove the car into a tree, but no, he had not been seen drinking before." In the absence of any hypothetical explanation, one is left either suspecting or concluding that drinking was the cause.

⁵⁰ There were over 3mln self-identified Jews in the pre-War Poland (Porter-Szücs 2014) and there were fewer than 20,000 members in the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) prior to 1936 (Trembicka 2003). Even if all the Polish communists self-identified as Jews, which was unlikely, this would still result in fewer than 1% (1 in a 1000) of the so-called Jews being communists.

Jewish revenge. In other words, as the narrative aimed to establish putative Polish innocence, it also recirculated the story of putative Jewish guilt.

Narration and Judgment of the Past - the Transition Loser

As I explained in the section on Politics and the Past, post-transition political actors fashion their political identities by adopting different approaches to temporality and judgment. I also explained that the loser of the transition had an interest in turning to the present and forgetting the past. This indeed had been the strategy of the SLD and its predecessors until 2013. Prior to that, if the loser Parties turned to the past, it was only to signal the repudiation of the old regime and to maintain present day legitimacy.⁵¹ This changed in 2013, when the SLD faced two electorally strong transition winners, who both used the past as their strategy. Recognizing the potency of those strategies, the SLD produced its own historical narrative and entered the fray of mnemonic politics. The most striking feature of the text is its deliberately instrumental, or political, nature. Here is the SLD's party leader and *Sejm* Deputy, Leszek Miller:⁵²

The politics of history is one of the tools of power. Creating a dark legend out of the old system serves to legitimize the current system. We face a paradox in recent years, in that the longer the 3rd Republic lasts,⁵³ the more resources it spends on vilifying the PRL. De-legitimizing the PRL seems to be the most effective way of legitimating the 3rd RP. We reject this logic. I think that the 3rd RP has good and real accomplishments. I also think that the PRL had accomplishments. The Historical Kit of the Left brings back some *balance* to the debate on recent Polish history... (The Kit 2013, 2 emphasis added).

And here is Bartosz Machalica, historian and consultant, responsible for the SLD's platform:

If we assume that history is not black and white, then we wanted to add some whiteness to those times, which in the last 20 years were only painted in black. And to those times, which were mostly whitewashed, we wanted to add some grayness. *If we felt that the grayness [of narratives] was appropriate, we refrained from making an entry* (2013, 9 emphasis added).

In weaving the story of Polish implication with communism, the transition loser reached far back in time. It claimed lineage with the workers' movements of the partitions era, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) created in 1892, and even Józef Piłsudski - a socialist (for some time), then 1918

⁵¹ In one exception to this trend, in 2007, the Party implemented its own version of the lustration policy, that is a policy meant to vet former party and bureaucracy members in public offices, but it did so only to prevent a harsher policy being adopted by others (Nalepa 2010). For more on the mildness of the repudiation of the post-communist successor parties, see Grzymała-Busse 2002.

⁵² *Sejm* is the name of the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament.

⁵³ As per note 12, Miller uses the term 3rd Republic (RP) to designate post 1989 Poland.

liberator and the country's first leader (2013, 13).⁵⁴ Since the movement, the party, and the man symbolized the nation's independence and progressive reform - placed in stark contrast to the 'right' who were said to have promoted collaboration with the partitioning powers (2013, 11)⁵⁵ - this reaching back in time allowed the narrators to signal their commitment to freedom, democracy, and socialism.

The narrators devoted more attention to the pre-War Poland, than to any other period. They specified that it did not remain democratic or socialist for long. On the (far) left, the Polish Communist Party (KPP) wanted to import the Soviet model of rule,⁵⁶ and it supported Soviet forces in the Polish-Russian War of 1920 (2013, 14 & 16). On the right, the 1926 Piłsudski-led coup moved to severely limit the fledgling Polish democracy. The Parliament was suspended in 1930 (2013, 22) and parliamentary democracy rejected altogether in 1935 (2013, 17). The PPS opposed the treason of the communists and authoritarian appetites of the nationalists and it did so under increasing antidemocratic threat.

The state's political travails were not said to have produced good economic results: the country was reported as being plagued by high poverty and illiteracy rates (2013, 26), poor housing stock, especially in the workers' districts (2013, 24), and crippling unemployment - of up to 40% - during the Great Depression. In response to the crisis, the regime of the 'right' was the slowest in Europe to implement Keynesian solutions, and to provide relief for workers (2013, 25).

In contrast to pre-War Poland, World War II was narrated very briefly. The authors mentioned the September 17 aggression by the USSR, but minimized its import by adding that Polish forces were not ordered to fight the Soviets, and that the Polish state was not at war with the USSR (2013, 30). The Katyń massacre was also mentioned, and it devoted more space to casting the blame on Stalin, than actually reporting the events (2013, 32-3). In general, Poland was said to have been attacked by two foes. It was later liberated by one of the foes, by then turned ally. Those within Poland who sided with the liberator, were still *for* and *of* Poland, and they displayed a realistic assessment of the situation. Those who continued to fight the Soviets engaged in futile gestures, like the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, which brought death to 200,000 civilians and no strategic advantage (2013, 31). The description of the Uprising painted the anti-Soviet forces as callous and all-too-quick to sacrifice civilian lives.

After dispensing with the anti-Soviet forces, the narrative then moved to describe, and harshly critique, Stalinism. In other words, after critiquing the cavalier opposition, it moved to decry the regime of the so-called liberator. Stalinist Poland was characterized by the cult of a despotic leader, elimination of opposition, and a total political dependence on the USSR. All three tenets were enforced and carried out by a pervasive and powerful secret police. PZPR, however,

⁵⁴ *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (PPS)*.

⁵⁵ The 'right' is not specified in this part of the story, nor are readers offered examples or references.

⁵⁶ *Komunistyczna Partia Polski (KPP)*.

condemned Stalinism in 1956 (2013, 36),⁵⁷ and in doing so it ended its totalitarian reign in Poland. It remained authoritarian - no other option was possible - but it used its time in office to wrestle as much cultural and economic autonomy as possible (2013, 36-7).

The PRL was presented as a grand attempt to lift Poland out of its periphery status, unaddressed in the pre-War years, and worsened by war. Its successes included: the securing of Poland's western border (2013, 38); the victory over Ukrainian and Polish nationalist or ultra-nationalist forces (2013, 39); agrarian reform, which collectivized large estates and parceled the land to individual peasants (Stalin's wish to have agriculture be nationalized was ignored after his death; 2013, 41);⁵⁸ massive rebuilding, industrialization, eradication of illiteracy through vast investments in education and culture (2013, 40-44); and entrenching of the rights of women (abortion, contraceptives, as well as fully paid crèches, 2013, 45). The relationship with the Church - explored next - was said to be varied: Stalinism was the time of repression, post-1956 was marked by symbolic hostility, and the 1970s were a time of friendship and openness (2013, 46). The population grew in record time, owing to the vast expenditure on health care (2013, 48). Rationing, used on occasion, was meant to ensure fair distribution of scarce resources. The Kit reminded readers that chits for meat were demanded by Solidarity in 1980 (2013, 49). The description ended with PZPR's participation in the Round Table and transition to democracy (2013, 51).⁵⁹

In the entire narrative, Polish minorities were mentioned four times. The first three entries decried the discriminatory practices of the pre-war "right": The National Democracy (a party) and the National Armed Forces were said to have been anti-Semitic (2013, 19 & 30); and the far-right was said to have been successful in university circles, where it established racial entry quotas and in-classroom segregation (2013, 20). Notwithstanding the accuracy of the characterizations, their brevity and tokenism suggest that they were made more in order to condemn (and constitute) the right's exclusionary practice and to establish the left's inclusive credentials, rather than to vivify the plight of the excluded.

Similar conclusion may be drawn about the description of Polish Ukrainian conflict, which was the fourth and the longest reference to minority relations. The entry described the brutal campaign between the Polish forces and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and it alluded to, but did not specify, the subsequent policy of ethnic cleansing of civilian Ukrainian population. Both the brutality and the ethnic cleansing were seen as regrettable but justifiable by Polish *raison d'état* (2013, 39). As with the brief condemnation of anti-Semitic practice, the story seemed to confirm the patriotic mantle of the storyteller.

⁵⁷ Stalinism ended in 1956, even though Stalin died in 1953. The end of the eponymous era coincides with the 1956 20th Party Congress in USSR, where Khrushchev delivered his 'secret speech' on the erroneous cult of the personality (Judt 2005, 309-10).

⁵⁸ Polish privatized agriculture was unique in the Soviet bloc.

⁵⁹ In the interest of space, the list and exploration of positives is much abbreviated. I also omitted Solidarity and the Martial Law, as they are not pertinent to the overall argument.

In summary, the transition loser used its narrative of the past, to balance, and correct for the putative omissions and misrepresentations in the stories of others. In so doing, the narrative cast the loser into the role of the ‘left’ and the combined transition winners into the role of the ‘right.’ In assigning the roles, the loser was careful to offer a forceful and focused repudiation of communism. Thus, the narrative used the pre-War Poland to invent patriotic and democratic ancestor for the loser, and to disown communism when it was reported un-patriotic. It also used this period to indirectly critique the parties of the present winners, who venerate the pre-war Poland, despite its poor political and economic record. It relied on the story of the War and communist Poland to paint itself as a party that had significant accomplishments, both in securing the state, managing the economy and providing concrete benefits for the citizens. Finally, it concentrated the entire evil of communism in the figure of Stalin, and it specified this evil as anti-Polish. That is, Stalinism in Poland was said to have followed the Soviet model with no regard for Polish particularity: it was hostile to the Church, it pushed for the collectivization of land against the wishes of peasants, and it relied on violence and repression. The Party recognized its faults first and it used all its power to protect Polish interest against USSR.

Having paid so much attention to the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of the narrative, I want to end the section, by specifying what the story left out.⁶⁰ Attention to omissions matters in this narrative especially, because of the stated goals of the framers. As the quotes at the beginning of the section make clear, the topics that were covered in the narrative were clearly judged to be in need of correction; and topics that were omitted were clearly seen as narrated sufficiently elsewhere.

Let me recall that the transition winners, whose narratives I analyzed above, made Stalinism coincidental with Jewish rule of Poland. They wove the narration of that time differently but they both left their readers with a conclusion that Jews ruled the security apparatus at the time of highest terror. The SLD, and its Kit, never made such a claim. On the contrary, the narration repudiated anti-Semitism, and did so forcefully. In the context of such instrumentally deliberate narrative, one needs to ask if such repudiation is enough. Here is the pared down structure of this narrative:

1. Declare the intention to address only those issues that need correcting.
2. Make three statements about anti-Semitism being reprehensible.
3. Narrate communism as foreign and coincidental with Stalinism.
4. Omit the topic of Polish-Jewish relations when others relate the time of Stalinism as if it were a time of Jewish rule.

I argue that the ambiguity of this structure allows the SLD to neither confirm nor deny the myths of others. The authors explicitly decry anti-Semitism, but they do not correct the myth circulated by others. This would be acceptable in a narrative that did not deliberately set out to rebalance

⁶⁰ I do not address all omissions, like the fact that PPS would not have consented to the merger with communists in 1948, or the communist’s regime use violence against its population - with the exception of Martial Law, the topic was not covered. I concentrate on those omissions that relate to the issue of minorities and the topic of Polish-Jewish and communist entanglement.

history. As it is, by not taking an explicit stance against it, the Kit's authors imply that they agree with the veracity of the stories of others. In so doing they miss the opportunity to offer a different account of communism and affect the way Holocaust is remembered in Poland.

Conclusion

I began this essay with a statistically derived view of the Polish attitudes to contemporary migrants. To the degree that such data offer insights about interpretative frames, it appeared that large numbers of Poles did not want to see non-ethnic others in their midst. In trying to account for these patterns and in following the insights of collective memory literature, I examined the narratives woven by the country's elites. First, I argued that much of the political conversation in Poland occurs through the medium of the past; second, I divided the field into three positions given by the actors' approach to and judgment of history; finally, I examined how those elites, narrated communism, paying particular attention to how they conceived the story of Polish, Jewish and communist involvement. My aim was not to retrace the historical events as they happened, but to analyze how those events were used in the present-day political narratives. Also, my aim was not to tease out the precise mechanisms by which elite discourse affects memory, but to examine what interpretative frames and themes emerge in elites' narrations. By the way of conclusion, I wish to specify, first the divergent, then the consonant themes. Their consonance is especially important, because, as argued by Schwartz (2015), it is precisely the repeated, and through repetition amplified,⁶¹ themes that bind the collective in the imagined togetherness.

Polish, Jewish and communist imbrications were central to the account of winner one. In this narration, Poles were placed in competition of suffering with the Jews. The stake of the storytelling was first, to *establish* a symmetry of that suffering (Janicka 2010, Zawadzka 2013), and second, to declare the primacy of Polish pain. These feats were performed through skilful narration, which imbued well-established historical facts with invented meanings: Poles and Jews were narrated as ethnically segregated and Poles emerged as suffering at the hands of the Soviets as much as Jews did from the Nazis. Finally, the Poles were absolved from the responsibility for violence against their Jewish neighbours, because those neighbours were made into the carriers of communism, that is, a force constituted as existentially threatening to Poles. In this account, whatever Jewish citizens suffered, they had brought it upon themselves.

In contrast, Polish-Jewish relations were marginal in the account of winner two, and they were treated in a markedly different fashion. The framers deplored the practice of blaming Jews for what had happened to them at the hands of the Poles (Michnik 2011, 173), and it called for deep self-reflection about the limits of societal indifference in the Holocaust (Błoński 1990, 44). However, despite the clear distinction from narrative one, narrative two also obscured: the invocation of the heroic and by definition *extra*-ordinary helpers of Jews, and the relegation of violence against Jews to again *extra*-ordinary criminals, discursively created the vast, indifferent

⁶¹ Schwartz called them redundant (2015, 13).

- and guilty *only* of indifference - majority. The narrative was also competitive, but its objects and stakes differed: it was woven to invent Polish innocence at home and a good image abroad.⁶²

The story of the transition loser did not address the Holocaust, or Polish, Jewish and communist involvements. After a perfunctory condemnation of anti-Semitism, the narrative left the topic shrouded in silence. The silence was significant, however. In the context of the story woven to correct and balance the stories of others, silence indicated agreement.⁶³

As different as the approaches and stories were, they shared a number of features and themes. First, each advanced the story from the point of view of ethnically defined Poles. No matter how much the narrators invoked a civic conception of belonging, or claimed to respect individual choice in the matter of self-identification, and no matter how much pride the narrators took in the tradition of Polish multiculturalism, they all *segregated* the communities in their storytelling. They assumed the authority to decide who was a Pole and who was a Jew, and they relegated the story of those who had made Poland diverse to the role of a prop in the drama of the majority, or its primary villain.

Second, this was true to the extent that no presentation of Jewish fate was ever made from the point of view of its protagonists and victims. The story of the Holocaust and communism was always enmeshed in a web of relations and competitions. It was always a story of Poles and either their self-defined or other-defined image. The Jew, as the central hero of the Holocaust, did not enter the tale. All references to that hero were made for the sake of elevating, or saving, the Pole.

Third, and most concretely, the narratives of both transition winners conflated communism with Jewishness. Winner one did so directly and openly. Making communism discursively coincidental with Jewishness made both doubly foreign and odious. It made communism as if racial. Winner two ostensibly rejected the Jew-as-communist conflation. Its storytellers called it a myth and a superstition. Curiously however, when Jewish people actually made it into the story, they were placed in the security apparatus where they were declared legitimately vengeful. The effect of this new myth is similar to the direct conflation of winner one. In lieu of the racially coded communist, we were given a vengeful Jew. Both were invented, and both were invented as acting against the Poles.

As such, the three major political camps supplied their citizens with a consonant story of the past-derived ethnically and ideologically coded enemy. In so doing, they elevated the ethnic

⁶² It is beyond the scope of this work to explore the issue of anti-Polonism, a charge levied by both Lipski (1983) and Michnik (1998). The charge compares anti-Polonism - that is Jewish antipathy towards Poles - to anti-Semitism. That the first is not threatening to Polish survival, but only its self-image, while the other had existential consequences, escapes the presentation. Even Błoński who deplored the “haggling” over the issue of moral responsibility, still placed his call for reflection in the context of a conversation with non-Poles (1990, 44).

⁶³ This is explicitly stated in Machalica quote above.

understanding of nationhood, and they contributed to making of the Polish memory, and conception of belonging, into a place inhospitable to contemporary others.

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