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The Golden Mean Principle. A Handful of Comments on the Currently Dominant Discourse on 'Polish-Jewish Relations'

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The Golden Mean Principle. A Handful of Comments on the Currently Dominant Discourse on 'Polish-Jewish Relations'

In a society in which normative power is pervasive, control over the means of rationality is as important as, if not more important than, control over other social forces.

Jodi Melamed, Represent and Destroy

The objective of this text is to turn the Readers' attention to a certain principle currently dominant in Poland, which organises and determines the public discourse on 'Jewish topics'. We have called it, somewhat arbitrarily, the 'golden mean principle'. We shall try to illustrate its characteristics, functions, and practical application with three examples: the reception of Paweł Pawlikowski's film *Ida*, the opening of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and the initiative to build the monument of the Righteous ('Ratującym Ocaleni' – to the Rescuers from the Rescued) on the ground of the former Warsaw ghetto. But before one move on to the exemplification, one should explain what is understood by the golden mean principle.

Until recently debates on the attitude of Poles towards Jews followed more or less the same scenario. First came a public revelation of knowledge on certain forgotten or unrecorded past events, the crux of which was the Polish anti-Semitism. If due to its solid and legitimate basis that revelation could not be intentionally overlooked, it initiated a national debate. This is what happened after the publication of Michał Cichy's article on the murders of Jews committed during the Warsaw Uprising, Bożena Umińska-Keff's text on Stefan Żeromski's anti-Semitism, Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross' books, some studies prepared by the Centre for Holocaust Research, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir's research on the persistence of the legend of the ritual slaughter, etc. During those debates 'humiliated patriots' defended the good name of Poland and Poles and guarded Polish innocence, while the 'open-minded citizens' appealed from their intellectual heights for a public examination of conscience and urged scholars to avoid 'hasty generalisations', not to 'miss important contexts', and to avoid

using shock therapy on 'ordinary people'. But a number of recent debates and discussions prove that this division is a thing of the past. It is no longer the case.

Currently, as far as the issue of 'Polish-Jewish relations' is concerned, one observes a clear domination of a conservative discourse shifted towards nationalism, but posing as a centrist voice of moderation and common sense. This discourse is copied and reproduced by Polish symbolic elites regardless of their political views and affiliations. The vital element for its construction is the golden mean principle, which is used to determine the 'right-mindedness' of publically available knowledge. The discursive categories used to build the golden mean are: moderation, the weighing of arguments, objectivity, balance, just judgement, distance, candidness, reasonableness, and consensus. The rhetorical devices based on the golden mean principle are abundant in expressions such as: "let us not exaggerate," "one should not generalize," "the truth lies in the middle," "one should balance the arguments," "let us have more distance," and "there is no point in festering." The golden mean principle facilitates pacification of those voices, which do not meet these requirements as being: extreme, radical, ideological, doctrinaire, exaggerated, hysterical, and emotional (with the last two epithets used mostly towards women). They are treated as the voices of fanatics, who always find faults, are never satisfied and always oversensitive.

Consequently, let those statements, which can earn the prestigious title of 'balanced', be analysed, because they provide excellent material for analysing what discourse regarding the 'Polish-Jewish relations' is currently hegemonic in Poland, and consequently, what knowledge cannot be internalised by it.

Ida

A characteristic example of a practical application of the golden mean principle is the discussion generated by Paweł Pawlikowski's film *Ida*. The debate had two phases. The first one took place after *Ida*'s Polish premiere and before the film began to receive awards at international festivals. The second phase, definitely more intense, began with *Ida*'s triumphant march through esteemed film festivals, with the Oscar for the best foreign film as its culmination.

Initially, *Ida* was deemed a masterpiece of cinematic art not only by reviewers from the mainstream liberal media, but also by a number of right-wing journalists. Typically searching for any traces of 'anti-Polishness', that time even the latter did not perceive any in *Ida*. The film was contrasted with another film about anti-Semitism and Poles' complicity in the Holocaust – Władysław Pasikowski's *Aftermath* (original title *Pokłosie*). As opposed to *Aftermath*, *Ida* was deemed a balanced and honest film. A fragment of Łukasz Adamski's text published on Wpolarityce, an ultra-right wing website:

Ida is the exact opposite of Władysław Pasikowski's *Aftermath*, which is as clumsy and unsophisticated as a baseball bat. They both discuss the sins committed during World War II by some Poles against their Jewish neighbours. But unlike the director of *Pigs* [original title: *Psy*], Pawlikowski does not judge, condemn, or stigmatise Poles. Instead, he focuses on the complexity and universality of a man's sin. I hope that *Ida* shall help us forget about *Aftermath* and that it will become the main film reckoning with the dark pages of our past.¹

During the initial phase of the discussion, the only publicised critical comments on *Ida* came from scholars of both sexes who argued that Pawlikowski's film contained anti-Semitic clichés, such as, communists of Jewish descent ('żydokomuna'), Christianisation of the Holocaust, and false symmetries. The director was accused of telling a story, which intended to 'heal through slumber,' that is, use Jews to build a false consensus in the name of concord among Poles.² But those voices were underestimated and invalidated in various ways. Accidentally, most critical opinions about *Ida* were voiced by women, who became targets of gender profiled epithets ('hysterical', 'crazy'). Right-wing, centrist, and leftist periodicals saw criticism of *Ida* as too politicised, ideological, full of disrelish and barratry, insensitive to aesthetic qualities, and, consequently, crude. The authors of critical reviews were likened to their counterparts from the social realist period, which in a unanimously anti-communist country is considered the worst insult.³

The laurels reaped by *Ida*, particularly the Oscar, changed the trajectory of the discussion. First of all, they influenced the modification of the stance of the Polish Right, which eventually deemed Pawlikowski's move 'anti-Polish'. That

¹ Łukasz Adamski, "„Ida” – opowieść o ludzkich grzechach," wPolityce.pl, <http://wpolityce.pl/kultura/79608-ida-opowiesc-o-ludzkich-grzechach>, access 26 May 2015. See also Grzegorz Benda, "Kino do kwadratu," *Uważam Rze*, <http://www.uwazamrze.pl/artykul/1063572/kino-do-kwadratu>, access 20 June 2015; Michał Legan, "„Ida” – świetne polskie kino, tragiczna polska historia," *Niedziela*, <http://www.niedziela.pl/artykul/116362/nd/%E2%80%9EIda-%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-swietne-polskie-kino>, access 20 June 2015; Krzysztof Kłopotowski, "„Ida” wiecznie żywa," wPolityce.pl, <http://wpolityce.pl/kultura/236037-ida-wiecznie-zywa>, access 20 June 2015.

² See Anna Zawadzka, "Ida," *Lewica.pl*, <http://lewica.pl/blog/zawadzka/28791/>, access 26 May 2015; Agnieszka Graff, "„Ida” – subtelność i polityka," *Krytyka Polityczna*, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/en/artykuly/film/20131031/graff-ida-subtelnosci-polityka>, access 26 May 2015; Piotr Forecki, "Legenda o Wandzie, co zastąpiła Niemca," *Krytyka Polityczna*, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/film/20131108/legenda-o-wandzie-co-zastapila-niemca>, access 26 May 2015; Bożena Keff, "Ida i jej ubranka," *Pismo Zadra*, <http://pismozadra.pl/felietony/bozena-uminska/675-ida-i-jej-ubranka>, access 26 May 2015.

³ See cf. Krzysztof Varga, "Piękno pod pręgierzem," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 November 2013; Katarzyna Szumlewicz, "Być Żydówką w powojennej Polsce," *Bez Dogmatu* 103 (2015). Helena Datner and Agnieszka Graff polemic with Krzysztof Varga, see eidem, "My, komisarki od kultury," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 November 2013.

happened because currently the Polish *raison d'état* is determined by the image policy.

It is enough to mention the efforts to eliminate the expression 'Polish concentration camps',⁴ with regard to which, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its "diplomatic posts intervened more than 150 times in the last year alone."⁵ A fragment of Michał Kozłowski's commentary on those interventions:

the use of this 'expression' is incriminated, though an expression is not a thesis and its meaning depends on the context. In this case it refers to the geographical location of the camps. Why does the Ministry not try to eliminate instances of promoting a thesis that the death centres were established by the Polish state or even created on the initiative of Poles or run by them? Most probably because nobody claims so. [...] The Polish state and the Polish public opinion institutions are guilty of manipulation. For they stubbornly deny an accusation, which nobody makes, just to put themselves in a situation of slander victims. But the Holocaust history proves a different thesis – the one about the prevailing hostile attitude towards the Jewish victims, the popular tolerance towards denunciations, violence, looting, killing, and finally the difficult lot of the Poles who decided to help Jews and who, also after the war, tended to hide that fact, as if it were shameful. Polish concentration camps⁶ have become a smoke screen, a way to reverse the roles, a manipulation of the collective awareness.⁷

In the context of this Polish image policy, *Ida*, screened also outside Poland, suddenly became dangerous, because when discussing events during World War II Pawlikowski omitted an important occupation-period context: the presence of Germans as the Holocaust's causative and executive subject. He thus threatened the principle of symmetry between the suffering of Poles and Jews, for he failed to include the main perpetrators of Poles' martyrology. This was why the Polish League against Defamation (*Reduta Dobrego Imienia*)⁸ petitioned *Ida's*

⁴ The expression 'Polish death camps' was first used as early as in the summer of 1945 by Zofia Nałkowska in *Medallions*: "Neither dozens of thousands nor hundreds of thousands, but millions of human lives were processed into raw materials and commodities in Polish death camps" (translation of a fragment of the Polish edition published in 1966 by the Czytelnik Publishing House, p. 63.). We wish to thank Jacek Leociak for that remark. More on the expression 'Polish death camps' see Dariusz Libionka, "'Truth About Camps,' or the Uneventful 1942," *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2013).

⁵ http://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/msz_w_mediach/schetyna_nie_bedziemy_bierni_w_przypadku_prob_falszowania_historii_depesza_pap_z_23_kwietnia_2015_r_.

⁶ Used more often than 'Polish concentration camps' (in the quoted article, the author uses an acronym POK – *polskie obozy koncentracyjne*), the expression 'Polish death camps' is the one which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Polish media find outrageous.

⁷ Michał Kozłowski, "Polskie obozy na straży polskiej tożsamości," *Bez Dogmatu* 106 (2015).

⁸ The information about the League's founding objective and its activity so far is available on its official website: http://reduta-dobrego-imienia.pl/?page_id=530, access 20 June 2015.

producers to introduce appropriate clarifications in the film, for instance, in the form of information about the history of occupied Poland to be displayed at the beginning of the film.⁹ The Oscar for *Ida* triggered a nationalist and patriotic mobilisation against the film, under the banner of protection of the good name of Poland and Poles.

What seems the most symptomatic of the second phase of the discussion about *Ida* is the fact that with the power of the authority of the liberal and even leftist 'people of film and art' all critics of *Ida* were put in the same category: both scholars of anti-Semitism and patriotically oriented anti-Semites. They were all deemed fanatics and ideologists, representatives of polar opposite stances, two extremes attracting each other, for whom there is no place in a civilised debate. Critics had long not heard so many insults directed at them. They heard that they were stupid, wrongheaded, insensitive, culturally ignorant, that they belonged to the 'unsophisticated audience', that they represented communist-period morality and used Stalinist methods, that the ideology had made them unreasonable, and that doctrinarism had rendered them unresponsive to true art. Such a generalising diagnosis, classification, and description of *Ida*'s critics were made, for instance, by Agnieszka Holland,¹⁰ supported by many other opinion leaders respected in Poland.¹¹

Regard for *Ida* became a measure of good taste, restraint, moderation, cultural sensitivity and sophistication. The film became a criterion of whether

One of its members is Piotr Gliński, once a Prime Minister candidate of the Law and Order party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS).

⁹ These are the specific demands made of the producers: "It is not our objective to interfere with the artistic message of the movie or alter its content in any way. We only wish for the following information about the historical context to be displayed at the beginning or end of the movie, for instance, including the following six points: 1. Poland was under German occupation during 1939–1945; 2. The German occupier conducted the policy of the extermination of Jews; 3. During the German occupation of Poland, the Germans meted out death penalty not only for those who sheltered Jews, but also their entire families. Nevertheless, a number of Poles did shelter Jews; 4. Thousands of Poles died in that way, sacrificing their lives for their neighbors and fellow citizens of the Second Republic of Poland – the persecuted Jews; 5. The legitimate authorities of the Polish Underground State, recognized by the Allies, severely punished instances of persecution of Jews by the Poles demoralized by the cruel and ruthless German occupier; 6. Poles constitute the largest national group of the Righteous among the Nations recognized by Yad Vashem", <http://reduta-dobrego-imienia.pl/?cat=4>, access 25 May 2015.

¹⁰ "Poraża mnie brak wrażliwości u krytyków „Idy”", Cezary Michalski's interview with Agnieszka Holland, *Krytyka Polityczna*, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/opinie/20150303/holland-frank-underwood-zostal-bohaterem-naszyczasow>, access 26 May 2015.

¹¹ In this context one undoubtedly should read the interview given by the director of the Jewish Historical Institute, Paweł Śpiewak, for the *Polityka* weekly (see "Pokłosie „Idy”", Marcin Kołodziejczyk's interview with Paweł Śpiewak, *Polityka*, <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1611597,1,prof-pawel-spiewak-o-co-tyle-halasu-wokol-idy.read>, access 20 June 2015).

one belonged to the 'normal', healthy majority, an audience, which appreciates the artistic mastery of the film and its universal message, instead of regarding it as a voice saturated with clichés from the dominant discourse, clichés of Jewish communists who must have been either confused or evil, women made unhappy and driven insane by emancipation,¹² the People's Republic of Poland as a country, which was nothing but grey, horrible, dirty, and awful for 50 years, and Polish Catholicism as a trustworthy foundation and the healthiest moral backbone. Those who did not like *Ida* were accused of bad taste and lack of aesthetic sensitivity as the film had beautiful cinematography and a moving soundtrack.

Contrary to declarations of the advocates of the 'aesthetic assessment' of the film, they applied the golden mean principle also to its content. *Ida*'s defenders stressed that the film weighed the arguments and did justice, as it showed mutual – Polish-Jewish – sins: like for like. It was 'balanced' because it included both communists of Jewish origin and a Polish peasant murdering Jews. It depicted Polish and Jewish faults, and it won an Oscar. The Right finally saw communists of Jewish origin on the screen, while readers of Jan Tomasz Gross were given a Polish peasant (why, of course, that it could not be an intellectual), who despite being an anti-Semite and a murderer did save a Jewish child, which partly made him a Righteous. United we stand, divided we fall. Those who do not like this truth of the screen should make their own film. *Ida* fulfilled the task of building national concord, but in the golden mean discourse there is no place for questioning the validity of that concord or asking at whose expense it was achieved.

The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Those excluded from the discussion on *Ida* as radical ideologists learned their lesson on how to avoid being marginalised and they applied that knowledge with regard to the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Immediately after its opening, the creators and reviewers of the POLIN Museum's permanent exhibition talked about it almost in unison, amplifying the content one another's comments. Here is a handful of definitions of the Museum formulated by various – right wing, centrist, liberal, and left-wing – officials, journalists, and commentators. They were all voiced in an unambiguously affirmative context. The institution was called "a museum of a difficult coexistence,"¹³ which shows

¹² See Eliza Szybowicz's excellent analysis of the film as a work disavowing the emancipation of women in communist Poland (see eadem, "Wanda nasza siostra," *Czas Kultury*, 20 February 2015, <http://e.czaskultury.pl/felieton/eliza-szybowicz/1864-wanda-nasza-siostra>, access 26 May 2015).

¹³ Filip Memches, "Muzeum niełatwego współistnienia," *Rzeczpospolita*, 29 October 2014, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1152782.html>, access 22 May 2015.

“the long term intermingling of the Jewish and Polish worlds”¹⁴ “without avoiding difficult topics;”¹⁵ a museum, which “emphasises the thousand years of Poles and Jews living under the shared Polish sky”¹⁶ and “perfectly captures our shared history, both its most beautiful moments and those difficult ones;”¹⁷ a museum, which is a “manifestation of life,”¹⁸ one that did not forget that Jews treated Poland “like a safe haven;”¹⁹ a museum that expresses the “longing for the lost multiculturalism”²⁰ and offers “a comfort zone in which a discussion on controversial topics [...] may proceed in an open way that assumes participation of all sides,”²¹ a museum that “teaches empathy and tolerance towards the Other, towards the Alien,”²² and whose “opening finally made it possible for the world to begin to see a Poland different from its image painted by certain anti-Polish milieus.”²³

The picture emerging from what has been said about the POLIN Museum is as follows: there were some aliens whom Poland, unlike the external evil world, welcomed with open arms. The aliens liked it here and Poland generously took them in, giving them numerous privileges and guaranteeing their feeling of safety. That Polish hospitality enabled Poles and Jews to live next to each other and independently of each other. Nonetheless, they liked, respected, helped, and

¹⁴ Bronisław Komorowski, after: “Komorowski: przywrócić pamięć o życiu Żydów w Polsce,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 October 2014.

¹⁵ Adam Cissowski, “Tysiąc lat historii Żydów polskich. Wystawa w Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich otwarta,” TVP.Info, 28 October 2014, <http://www.tvp.info/17348169/tysiac-lat-historii-zydow-polskich-wystawa-w-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-otwarta>, access 22 May 2015.

¹⁶ Gabriel Kayzer, “Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich Polin otwarte,” *Frona*, 28 October 2014, <http://www.frona.pl/a/muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-polin-otwarte,43339.html>, access 22 May 2015.

¹⁷ Bishop Mieczysław Ciso, after: “Biskupi zwiedzili Muzeum Żydów Polskich,” Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna [Catholic Information Agency], 12 March 2015, <http://ekai.pl/wydarzenia/ekumenizm/x87122/biskupi-zwiedzili-muzeum-zydow-polskich>, access 22 May 2015.

¹⁸ Roman Pawłowski, “Otwiera się interaktywne Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich. Czyli pierwsze muzeum historii Polski,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 October 2014, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,16869612,Otwiera_sie_interaktywne_Muzeum_Historii_Zydow_Polskich_.html, access 22 May 2015.

¹⁹ Piotr Semka, “Oczekując na wejście do ziemi Izraela,” *Życie Warszawy*, 26 October 2014, <http://www.zw.com.pl/artukul/666747.html>, access 22 May 2015.

²⁰ Pawłowski, “Otwiera się interaktywne Muzeum...”

²¹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, after: Antony Polonsky, “List tygodnia: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich,” *wSieci*, 23 September 2013, <http://www.wsieci.pl/list-tygodnia-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-pnews-401.html>, access 22 May 2015.

²² Marian Turski, “Muzeum życia,” *Polityka* 43 (2014), <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnik-polityka/spoleczenstwo/1596477,1,marian-turski-opowiada-o-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich.read>, access 22 May 2015.

²³ Kayzer, “Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich...”

imitated each other, and sometimes also argued. Those arguments gave rise to certain difficult issues, which used to be objects of disputes but which today should be an object of dialogue. And of course, there was the Armageddon in the form of the Holocaust: an external force, which came from the outside and killed the Jews. Now Poles miss them. They have fond memories of the times when their country was a cradle of multiculturalism and tolerance. Unfortunately, history has deprived them of that opportunity. This is the vein in which Piotr Zychowicz has recently spoken during the debate “Whispering and Shouting about Polish Jews” organised by the POLIN Museum.²⁴ Piotr Zychowicz is the author of a book entitled *Pakt Ribbentrop–Beck* [Ribbentrop-Beck pact], where he advances a clearly formulated thesis that before the war Poland should have contracted an alliance with the Third Reich, because that would have later have protected it from entering the Soviet influence sphere.

One may easily notice quite a lot of inconsistencies in that picture, painted by the Museum’s creators and reviewers. One may examine only one of those inconsistencies. The hospitality, which Poles purportedly extended to Jews, supposes that we are concerned with two unequal subjects: the host and the guest. The former is at home and disposes of a certain space, which he may grant access to or not. The latter is not at home, must subordinate himself to the host’s laws, and his stay in a given space is conditional; it is somebody at the mercy of the one who has him as a guest. Similarly, the category of tolerance signifies the inequality of the subjects discussed. For tolerance is a privilege of the majority.²⁵ Nobody discusses, for instance, Jews from shtetls, who, though with difficulty, did tolerate Poles’ different customs. Finally, the figures of the Alien, the Other, used in POLIN Museum’s descriptions in reference to Jewish men and women indicate that non-Jews were those who were ‘normal’, ‘ordinary’ ‘fellow countrymen’, who were ‘at home’. And this means that ‘Jewishness’ was a stigma in Poland.

But a little further in the same comments on the POLIN Museum and interviews with its creators, one may read about dialogue, communication, conversation, mutual relations, grudges and wrongs, about coexistence and relations. All these terms build an image in accordance to which Poles and Jews, both as individuals and groups, were equal to each other, equal before the law, had equal rights in the symbolic sphere and were equally represented. This symmetrisation obscures the structurally conditioned majority-minority relationship, with its

²⁴ <http://www.polin.pl/pl/wydarzenie/relacja-wideo-z-debaty-o-polskich-zydach-szeptem-i-krzykiem#>, access 22 May 2015. Piotr Zychowicz is also the author of a text published in *Do Rzeczy*, where he does not conceal his admiration for the POLIN Museum (see idem, “Opowieść o polskich Żydach,” *Do Rzeczy* 39 [2014]).

²⁵ See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion. Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), particularly the chapter “Tolerance as a Discourse of Power,” pp. 25–47.

whole dynamic, and predominantly with the power, domination, and violence it entailed. An effective expression of this power, dominance, and violence is the fact that the word 'overrepresentation' is fully legitimate and accepted in discussions about Jews in politics, in higher education institutions, and in art and media. Both in the journalistic and scholarly discourse this word functions as a descriptive category, particularly in reference to history.

In the Polish discursive practice symmetry is used predominantly to play down anti-Semitism, to present it as a Polish reaction to wrongs suffered from Jews. For instance, a journalist of one of the biggest Polish newspapers writes that the POLIN Museum's permanent exhibition shows that the "triumphs and fiascoes of Poland were at the same time triumphs and fiascoes of the Jews who lived there. This is not undone even by facts such as the inter-war ghetto benches or the significant representation of people of Jewish origin in the Stalinist repression apparatus."²⁶

A fragment of an interview given by the POLIN Museum's co-creator, Marian Turski, to one of the most popular opinion weeklies:

during the millennium there have been difficult aspects of that coexistence on both sides. [...] Approximately 300,000 of 3,500,000 Jews had survived, and only crumbs had survived from the [Jewish] material culture. We do not avoid the difficult topics. We do discuss the participation of people of Jewish origin in the communist authorities.²⁷

As in *Ida*, one must deal with a symmetry of sins and wrongs: like for like. Within the framework of the golden mean discourse there is also symmetry of heroism, summed up with the Warsaw of Two Uprisings slogan, promoted by the Museum of the Warsaw Rising.²⁸ The logo of this initiative depicts a fist with the Star of David tattooed next to the 'anchor', that is, the symbol of Fighting Poland. The uprising in the Warsaw ghetto occurs to be a twin brother of the Warsaw Uprising, and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is an equivalent to the Museum of the Warsaw Rising. That construction was pointedly expressed

²⁶ Memches, "Muzeum niełatwego współistnienia."

²⁷ Turski, "Muzeum życia."

²⁸ Various enterprises were undertaken under the "Warsaw of Two Uprisings" banner. They were organized by the Warsaw Rising Museum, Polish Jews Forum (*Forum Żydów Polskich*), the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage (*Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego*), the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and the following individuals: Dariusz Gawin, Jan Ołdakowski, Mikołaj Mirowski, and the main advocate of this initiative, Dawid Wildstein, who also announced himself its godfather and publically explained its premise, according to which "these two uprisings form one story" (see idem, "O Warszawie dwóch powstań," *Teologia Polityczna*, <http://www.teologiapolityczna.pl/dawid-wildstein-o-warszawie-dwoch-powstan>, access 20 June 2015; "Nie zasłaniajmy jednych trupów innymi," Agnieszka Kalinowska's interview with Dawid Wildstein, *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 April 2013, A2, <http://archiwum.rp.pl/artykul/1186683-Nie-zaslaniajmy-jednych-trupow-innymi.html>, access 20 June 2015.

by the joining of reflector light emitted simultaneously from the two museums during the ceremony of the opening of the POLIN Museum.

As it was the case with *Ida*, it occurs that the main objective of the POLIN Museum is to shape the image of Poland and Poles. This objective is not concealed, quite the opposite. A passage of an article by Jarosław Sellin, a politician from the conservative party, printed in an ultra-right wing magazine:

This shall be one of the most important places that shape the image of Poland in the world. Hence, it shall be a place where the Polish historical policy should be carried out in the most indirect fashion. [...] [The Museum] is being built predominantly [...] from Polish taxpayers' money. Consequently, it should express the Polish objectives in the historical policy of our country. [...] From the point of view of the Polish national interest it is important to emphasise those threads in the history of Jews in Poland and the Polish state, which build a positive image of our nation and our country.²⁹

The head historian of the POLIN Museum's permanent exhibition, Antony Polonsky, thanked Sellin for those "valuable and insightful" remarks in the same magazine. On that occasion he presented the discourse of symmetry in its most mature form:

In my opinion, the most persistent sin of both Polish and Jewish historiography (and present in historiographies of other nations in Central Eastern Europe) is its apologetic character and the intention to present things as better than they were. The objective of the main exhibition is to avoid such apologetics, be they Polish or Jewish, and to look at all the complex and difficult aspects of the Polish-Jewish past in an open and self-critical way.³⁰

The openness and self-criticism mentioned by the chief historian and internal reviewer of the Museum is to be expressed through lack of a central narration. The illusion of polyphony has been created by constructing galleries of the main exhibition exclusively from quotations. In his text entitled "Polonizacja historii" [Polonisation of history], Konrad Matyjaszek indicates an inconsistency in the Museum creators' declarations. For on the one hand, they stress that the Museum is purportedly a narrative one, and on the other hand declare that "it does not have any overall historical narration"³¹ (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett). Matyjaszek observes that the Museum's publically expressed premise to not discuss anti-Semitism (more specifically, to "leave anti-Semitism to anti-Semites," as the Museum director has put it) has defined its narration as being

²⁹ <http://www.wsieci.pl/pokazac-wspolistnienie-pnews-324.html>, access 12 April 2015.

³⁰ <http://www.wsieci.pl/list-tygodnia-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-pnews-401.html>, access 12 April 2015.

³¹ <http://www.obieg.pl/rozmowy/6956>, access 11 April 2015.

"in opposition to important contemporary historical research. The Museum staff's solution to this methodological impasse was to base its main exhibition on a wide selection of fragments of written primary sources and to classify them as historically objective."³²

The quotations with which the exhibition is extremely richly encrusted create an impression of informational chaos. They are striking and emotionally moving sentences removed from context. Full of pompous words such as ('nation', 'a people', 'Israel', 'Poles', 'protection'), they surround the visitor completely, giving him an impression that he is allowed to arrange this puzzle into a whole, any whole he pleases, with freedom to interpret it in whichever way. The POLIN Museum gives one facts without descriptions and at the same time a privilege to think about them anything one wishes and in whatever way one pleases.³³

One of the means to ordering this chaos is the story told by the exhibition guides. One can learn from it, for instance, that "though Jews constituted less than one per cent of the population of [Medieval] Poland, they were visible and had connections with the rulers;" that "Jews were marked with spiky hats;" that "King Casimir had a favourable attitude to Jews because he had a Jewish mistress named Estera;" that synagogues in shtetls in the east of Poland "burned without instigation, either struck by lightning or due to arson;" that "the Catholic Church hierarchs and kings generally opposed persecution of Jews, but were not always able to do it effectively;" that "the Polish-Jewish relations did somehow function; Jews were Poles' servants and vice versa;" that the Jews' poverty resulted from their "enormous population growth;" that when Jews could not work in factories, it was because they "refused to work on Saturdays, and only Sundays were days off in factories;" that anti-Semitism stemmed from "the feeling of danger, aversion, fear, and [economic] competition;" that "multiculturalism gave rise to a number of tensions in Poland;" and that the universities used *numerus clausus* because they regarded them as a means to "protect their Jewish students from the armed groups' violence." In the gallery devoted to the Holocaust, our Museum guide gave a long speech about the extermination of the Polish population. She also repeated thrice that in 1941 the occupier introduced capital punishment for helping Jews. Following the symmetry principle, she also said that "most Poles remain indifferent towards the Holocaust and these are witnesses. But there are

³² <http://kulturaliberalna.pl/2015/03/24/konrad-matyjaszek-mhzp-wystawa-stala-recenzja/>, access 22 May 2015.

³³ In her text "Cytatotchórzostwo" [quotation cowardice] about the construction of the POLIN Museum's core exhibition, Joanna Krakowska wrote: "'Letting the historic figures speak' is a classic form of evasion, an excuse for not formulating thoughts, in order to avoid falling foul of anybody, having to explain oneself, or becoming entangled. Besides, aspiring to objectivity is a methodological embarrassment as impartiality is simply impossible, for the quotations inscribed on the plaster panels are a substitute, and this lack constitutes the most dangerous partiality – opportunism" (<http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/5453-konformy-cytatotchorzostwo.html>, access 21 June 2015).

also two other groups: those who benefit from the Jews' plight and those who risk their lives to help them." At the end of our tour we learned that post-war Stalinism was what destroyed the Jewish life.³⁴

We intentionally quote individual sentences uttered by the guides because they just say them without a comment. The logic of reversal of the causes and consequences recurs in the guides' narration. Why was there anti-Semitism? Because people were afraid of Jews. Why did Polish factory owners not employ Jews? Because Jews refused to work on Saturdays. What was the reason for the introduction of ghetto benches? To protect Jews from the anti-Semitic accusation that there were too many of them. In this narration, anti-Semitic violence appears to be an exception, an initiative of the ignorant masses contrasted with the open-minded elites, or consequence of Jews' behaviour.

The core exhibition of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews concludes with a film about the rebirth of Jewish culture in Poland. One learns from it that, contrary to a popular perception of Poland is an anti-Semitic country, nowhere else in the world are there so many anti-Semitic initiatives. Proof? Rafał Betlejewski's campaign of writing 'I miss you, Jew' on walls, a mayor painting over an anti-Semitic graffito, Jewish cemeteries restored by young Poles, the popularity of klezmer music, the reactivation of the Makabi sports club, the large number of Jewish culture festivals, and the trendiness of Jewish cuisine. The film begins with footage of 1980s Solidarity protests, accompanied by the Polish national anthem. The film's message is that the political transformation was a new beginning for Jewish life in Poland. That new chapter made enabled the closing of the previous one. History, including its most difficult aspects, is already known. Poles have internalised it, become accustomed to it and processed it better than any other nation in this part of Europe. It was impossible earlier, because the authorities of socialist Poland blocked access to knowledge about Jews and the Holocaust, along with all mourning or commemorative processes. Now a new chapter has begun.

Today, similar to admiration for the movie *Ida*, a visit to the Museum is considered good form: it ensures participation in legally valid culture. The POLIN Museum has become a destination of pilgrimages from all parts of Poland. It enables the visitor to feel like a good host. The Museum gives him an opportunity for a narcissistic admiration for himself, an exalted self-identification as somebody who accepts Jews to such an extent that he visits a museum of the history of Polish Jews, and even misses them, misses Polin. The

³⁴ We visited the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews on several occasions in February and March 2015, with guides and without, and we also listened to what the guides were telling other visitor groups. We do not intend to provide the names of the exhibition guides quoted here. Nor is it our intention to criticize the individual guides, and even less so to complain about the employees to the employer. We treat the guides' narration as a voice of the institution which they work for, by which they are trained, and which they represent.

POLIN Museum offers a narration about tolerant, open, hospitable Poles who created a paradise for Jews. By producing the Polish visitor who takes delight in himself and reproducing the discourse of the symmetry of Polish and Jewish wrongs, sins, suffering, and heroism, the POLIN Museum remains colonised by the discourse hegemonic in contemporary Poland, where the history of Poland is a history of Poles' good name. The location of the Museum in the former area of the ghetto enhances the impression of a fantastic, fictional narration, which ignores the reality seen through the Museum's glass walls – the apartment buildings of the Muranów quarter erected without conducting an exhumation.

The Rescued for the Rescuers

The same location is of crucial importance for the monument of the Righteous. This is not a place for an in-depth analysis of the stances revealed in the course of the discussion about "The Rescued for the Rescuers" initiative. The debate began with Barbara Engelking's text "Cierpienie wymaga ciszy i przestrzeni" (suffering requires silence and space), published on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto.³⁵ That first public objection to locating the monument in the former area of the Warsaw ghetto paved the way for similar voices. Representing various entities and institutions, the authors of the subsequent letters and appeals stressed the inappropriateness of the place, time, function, and tenors of the planned monument. Maintaining the chronological order of the publicised voices of objection, it is enough to mention an open letter from the Centre for Holocaust Research of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (*Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk*);³⁶ an appeal of representatives of various Jewish organisations in Poland (Second Generation Association – Holocaust Survivors' Descendants [*Stowarzyszenie Drugie Pokolenie – Potomkowie Ocalałych z Holokaustu*], Polish Organisation of Jewish Youth [*Żydowska Ogólnopolska Organizacja Młodzieżowa*], The Jewish Community in Warsaw [*Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska w Warszawie*], Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland [*Stowarzyszenie Żydowski Instytut Historyczny*]);³⁷ the open letter to the Righteous Monument Construction Committee (*Komitet Budowy Pomnika Sprawiedliwych*), written by Helena Datner, Elżbieta Janicka,

³⁵ Barbara Engelking, "Cierpienie wymaga ciszy i przestrzeni," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4 April 2013.

³⁶ See <http://www.otwarta.org/list-otwarty-w-sprawie-lokalizacji-pomnika-sprawiedliwych-polakow-srodowiska-centrum-badan-nad-zaglada-zydow/>, access 26 May 2015.

³⁷ The letter from the Jewish organizations' representatives regarding the location of the Monument of the Righteous, <http://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/pl/aktualnosci/419-list-w-sprawie-pomnika-sprawiedliwych>, access 26 May 2015.

and Bożena Keff, and then signed by a few hundred people;³⁸ an appeal of writers and poets calling for a different location of the monument;³⁹ and press articles by Jan Grabowski,⁴⁰ Paula Sawicka,⁴¹ Kinga Dunin,⁴² the aforementioned authors of the letter to the Committee,⁴³ Jan Tomasz Gross, and others.⁴⁴

Considering that those appeals failed to change the course of events and that the decision concerning the location of the monuments shall probably be implemented, they can be regarded as a lone multi-voice, foredoomed to failure in its confrontation with the ideology of Polish nobility. That ideology enjoys support from public institutions, which spare neither money nor authority and also exploit the Righteous within the framework of the image policy, and its causative power – and this is vital in the context of the golden mean principle – is based on an alliance, whose essence was captured by Jan Grabowski:

It is astonishing and symptomatic that the issue of commemorating Poles who rescued Jews [*upamiętnienie Polaków ratujących Żydów*, UPRŻ] creates something like a narrow footbridge on which representatives of the political left, centre, right, and ultra-right wing meet in concord, though each of them for slightly different reasons. As one can see, they are even joined by loyal Jews. One can even say that UPRŻ is the only such forum of national concord in contemporary Poland, a place where journalist Gebert meets Redemptorist Rydzyk.⁴⁵

Let us analyse how the voices undermining the foundations of the Muranów monument were discredited during the establishment of the agreement across divides.

As in *Ida's* case, the critics of the monument's location were classified as radicals. "A group of radicals has declared war on the monument of Poles Who Rescued Jews," stated Piotr Zychowicz at the beginning of his article only to then specify who he had in mind: "The radically leftist Jewish milieus are publically

³⁸ "Nie budujmy Pomnika Sprawiedliwych obok Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich," *Krytyka Polityczna*, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/opinie/20140327/nie-budujmy-pomnika-sprawiedliwych-obok-muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich>, access 26 May 2015.

³⁹ "Pisarze i poeci popierają strefę pamięci," <https://m.facebook.com/notes/czy-upami%C4%99tni%C4%87-sprawiedliwych-na-terenach-by%C5%82ego-getta/pisarze-i-poeci-popieraj%C4%85-stref%C4%99-pami%C4%99ci-writers-and-poets-support-the-zone-of-m/1591487997761903/>, access 26 May 2015.

⁴⁰ Jan Grabowski, "W sprawie Zagłady Polska gola!," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 April 2014.

⁴¹ See <http://www.otwarta.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Kilka-uwag-po-wys%C5%82uchaniu-rozmowy-Konstantego-Geberta-i-Bo%C5%BCeny-Keff-http.pdf>, access 26 May 2015.

⁴² Kinga Dunin, "Postawić na cudzym," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 May 2015.

⁴³ Elżbieta Janicka, Helena Datner, Bożena Keff, "Polska panika moralna," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 May 2014.

⁴⁴ Jan Tomasz Gross, "Polski problem żydowski," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 January 2015.

⁴⁵ Grabowski, "W sprawie Zagłady Polska gola!"

criticising Polish Jews who dared put forward a project of building the monument of Poles Who Rescued Jews in the vicinity of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.”⁴⁶ Contrary to Adam Michnik, Zychowicz did not include any names of Jewish radicals in his text. In that role Michnik cast Jan Tomasz Gross, who also criticised the monument initiative. Gross voiced his objections in his article in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, almost entirely devoted to the passive attitude towards the Holocaust adopted by the Catholic Church and the structures of the Polish Underground State (*Polskie Państwo Podziemne*) as the two chief ‘norm-setting’ institutions during the occupation.⁴⁷ *Gazeta Wyborcza*’s editor-in-chief decided to pacify Gross’ theses, striking a patronising tone on the neighbouring page: “My close friend writes in a sharp, brilliant manner, formulating opinions, which are radical, often too radical, and consequently, one-sided. But as the French say, a melody makes a song. Hence our dispute, a dispute over a melody...”⁴⁸ Adam Michnik thinks that Gross “paints his picture using one colour – black,” ignores important threads and loses contexts. Consequently, he contrasts Gross’ vision with the balanced opinions of Władysław Bartoszewski, Teresa Prekerowa, and Jacek Bocheński. In Adam Michnik’s opinion, Jan Tomasz Gross’s point of view is determined by the fact that he “looks at those times through ‘Jewish glasses.’” Though Michnik magnanimously does not forbid Gross to do that, he does observe that those glasses “show images, which one cannot clearly see through Polish glasses. The Jewish testimonies were precisely like that: instead of AK members or the Righteous on the street, the Jews, most of them persecuted and hunted, saw blackmailers.”⁴⁹

Let one imagine that this text had been published in *Nasz Dziennik* and that somebody else had been its author. But in fact one does not need a great imagination for that. During the debate on the pogrom in Jedwabne, the Catholic/nationalist press published a whole cannonade of analogous enunciations and accusations directed against Jan Tomasz Gross and his findings. The author of *Fear* and co-author of *Golden Harvest* has probably become accustomed to complaints that he ‘loses contexts’, ‘over-interprets’, ‘formulates hasty judgments’, ‘exaggerates’, and ‘radicalises’, and all this because he ‘writes from the Jewish point of view’. It is striking when such a line of reasoning, legitimised by the editor-in-chief, appears in an opinion-forming liberal daily distributed nationwide. Apparently, nowadays such a statement in the main current of the public discourse inspires neither objection nor even surprise. What is more, using this type of argumentation, *Gazeta Wyborcza* positions itself as a mouthpiece for the centrist voice, from where it patronises a Jewish radical. “Let us repeat

⁴⁶ Piotr Zychowicz, “Zakazani Sprawiedliwi,” *Do Rzeczy*, 16 May 2014.

⁴⁷ See Gross, “Polski problem żydowski.”

⁴⁸ Adam Michnik, “Dobrzy Polacy patrzą na getto [komentarz Adama Michnika],” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 January 2015.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

that Jan Tomasz Gross is an important author,” concludes Adam Michnik in his text, “I think his brilliance equals his stubbornness. I do not suppose that I can convince him, but I wish that people remember that I did try.”⁵⁰

The use of the figure of the ‘Jewish voice’ – but a different one from that of the radicals – was an important discursive strategy in the construction of the consensus over the location of the monument of the Righteous and it made it easier to silence the opponents. In the course of the discussion, one might often hear that the monument planned near the POLIN Museum was a manifestation of Jews’ gratitude. ‘The Rescued for the Rescuers’ is the name of the monument initiative proposed by the ‘Memory and Future’ Foundation (*Fundacja „Pamięć i Przyszłość”*). So the critical voices were refuted with an admonishment that nobody had the right to forbid Jews to fulfill the need of their heart, financed – which was also noted with alacrity – from their own resources. The ‘Jewish gratitude’ figure was intended as a counterbalance for ‘Jewish ingratitude’, which fuels the arsenal of anti-Semitic clichés. In accord with the logic of domination, the monument initiators are trying to prove that they are not as anti-Semites present them. Coupled with the golden mean principle, this logic has generated a situation where the only valid participants of the discussion on the location of the monument are those Jews who did not see it as a problem. Other voices of Polish Jews, such as those included in the aforementioned letter from several Jewish organisations, have been ignored.

The publically expressed voices of Polish Jews critical of the monument initiative were actually sparse.

The letter [from the Jewish organisations] emphasised the great importance of the commemoration of the Righteous, but not in that place. Other Jewish voices were sparse. I regard it as a weakness and a manifestation of a specific servility that prohibits speaking out about important matters even when the discussion takes place in the public sphere. I hold it against a number of people, who express this criticism covertly but are careful to remain silent in public,

said Jerzy Halbersztadt, a former director of the POLIN Museum, during an interview he gave to Katarzyna Markusz.⁵¹ Quoted in *Rzeczpospolita*, Jan Śpiewak, the chairman of the Polish Organisation of Jewish Youth (*Żydowska Ogólnopolska Organizacja Młodzieżowa*), discussed exclusion from the debate: “Mister Rolat is not affiliated with the milieu of Polish Jews; he did not consult us on the location. We are being treated objectively and we think it shocking.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ “Wojna pamięci,” Jerzy Halbersztadt’s interview with Katarzyna Markusz, <http://www.jewish.org.pl/index.php/he/opinie-komentarze-mainmenu-62/7009-wojna-pamieci.html>, access 26 May 2015.

⁵² As quoted in: Janina Blikowska, “Dwa pomniki dla Sprawiedliwych,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 20 November 2013.

That, which shocks Jan Śpiewak, and which Jerzy Halbersztadt calls servility, is the result of the 'Jewish voice's function in discussions on Polish-Jewish topics.

The 'Jewish voice' gains decisive power when it confirms the prevailing point of view, whereas other voices – identified as Jewish or not – are not registered when they diverge from the dominant stance. Furthermore, they can simply be ignored. This is the kind of violence which constitutes the invisible framework of the ongoing debate. As long as this framework remains hidden, the debate can be regarded as pluralist and unrestricted,

remarks Elżbieta Janicka.⁵³ Within the framework of that "pluralist and unrestricted" debate, the opponents of the location of the monument in the Warsaw quarter of Muranów could hear that they were exaggerating, that they were mistaken, or that they were simply talking about a different monument. Let us quote Dariusz Stola: "This monument inspires controversy, which I sometimes cannot comprehend. I have an impression that the critics of this initiative are against some other concept."⁵⁴

As has been mentioned, the Muranów location of the monument of the Righteous is crucial for both the advocates and opponents of this idea. By the entrance to the POLIN Museum, next to Jan Karski's bench and Irena Sendler's path, the monument acquires a special meaning and it can perform numerous evidential functions: it can prove that Jews are in fact not ungrateful, that Poles did help Jews during the Holocaust, that that help was a widespread phenomenon, that the ghetto was not dying alone, that the Polish hospitality, which the Museum celebrates, not only did not vanish during the war, but also saved a number of people in need.

A monument commemorating Poles who rescued Jews during the occupation has been my dream for years. I think that it should be funded neither by the Polish state nor a Polish town or city. Instead, it should be an initiative of Jewish milieus, financed from their contributions. I cannot imagine a better place for such a monument than the square around the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. A symbolic space is being created there – there is the Monument of the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes, the statue of Jan Karski, and Willy Brandt's bust. Consequently, the monument is bound to be seen by a number of Museum visitors.

So said Zbigniew Rolat, one of the monument's initiators.⁵⁵ His claims are supported by Paweł Machcewicz, the director of the Museum of World War II

⁵³ "Zderzenie cywilizacji," Michał Siermiński's interview with Elżbieta Janicka, Lewica.pl, <http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=29760&druk=1>, access 26 May 2015.

⁵⁴ "Montują wystawę główną w Muzeum Żydów. Zdążą?" Tomasz Urzykowski's interview with Dariusz Stola, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9 August 2014.

⁵⁵ As quoted in: Katarzyna Markusz, "Wojna pomników," <http://www.jewish.org.pl/index.php/opinie-komentarze-mainmenu-62/573-wojna-pomnikow.html>, access 26 May 2016.

(*Muzeum II Wojny Światowej*) and another Polish scholar, after Dariusz Stola, who took the responsibility for implementing the Polish historical policy onto his shoulders:

The crux of the dispute regards the location of that monument – either next to the Museum on the territory of the former ghetto or somewhere else. I am in favour of the first option. Any other location shall inevitably marginalise the commemoration of the Righteous, as their monument shall become one of the dozens in Warsaw, which most people just ignore.⁵⁶

Konstanty Gebert expresses a Jewish voice acceptable to the Polish majority because of it being saturated with Polish patriotism and Jewish gratitude towards Poles for their generous help:

If no space were found [next to the POLIN Museum] for a commemoration of all those heroes who rescued Jews, both as Żegota members or not, it would be a triumph of national disrespect. Both as a Jew and a Pole, I would feel insulted by that absence. Of course, it shall be necessary to avoid easy triumphalism of memory, which the staff the Centre [for Holocaust Research] rightly warns against, and to ensure the monument's appropriate artistic form and historical message. But its pedagogical dimension cannot be ignored either. The square and the Museum are bound to be visited by a number of people, and those from Poland, most of whom – let us hope – are aware that Poles constitute the largest group among the Righteous recognised by Yad Vashem, would not understand the reason for this monument's absence.⁵⁷

The statements quoted, which emphasise the monument's visibility and impingement, do not exhaust the functions attributed to the memorial. In the opinion of journalists connected with the Catholic nationalist periodicals, this monument is also a response to the accusations that Poles took part in the Holocaust and, more broadly speaking, are anti-Semitic. The monument might be a chance to obscure these phenomena: "For what are our opinions if we cease saying that 'Poles were also noble'? To bow our heads and passively accept the sheer nonsense from Gross' books and the movie *Aftermath*?"⁵⁸

The monument of the Righteous in Muranów is also praised by social psychologist Michał Bilewicz, who refers to his own experiences based on his meetings with young Poles and Jews:

⁵⁶ Paweł Machcewicz, "Sprawiedliwi poza naszymi sporami," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 May 2013.

⁵⁷ Dawid Warszawski, "Miejsce Sprawiedliwych jest obok powstańców," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9 April 2013.

⁵⁸ Piotr Gociek, "Szlachetni? Broń Panie Boże!," *Do Rzeczy*, <http://dorzeczy.pl/id,634/Szlachetni-Bron-Panie-Boze.html>, access 26 May 2015.

Historical topics are much like mines, precluding any communication between Polish and Jewish youth. Poles approach the topic defensively, expecting to be held accountable for their nation's past, which they cannot influence in any way. Young Israelis and American Jews ask inconvenient questions – about the daily life on the one big cemetery, which is how they see Poland, about specific occupation-period stances and actions of the young Poles' grandparents. Those historical mines could be deactivated only after the Righteous had been mentioned. Both sides of the debate realised the diversity of stances during the occupation – that among those passive and hostile there were also heroes. The young Jews left those meetings feeling more receptive to contemporary Poland and the whole non-Jewish world, while Poles began to understand the Jewish narration about the past.

Bilewicz's comments on the miracles, which the Righteous can work, led him to conclude that the monument of the Righteous, or actually the whole 'park of heroic memory', can contribute to a reconciliation between Poles, Jews, Germans, and "all those who wish to commemorate the resistance of the few offered to the passivity of the others."⁵⁹

Bilewicz's comment is yet another example of the discourse of symmetry, from which vanishes not only the social and historical position of the individual aforementioned entities, but also the cultural context and cultural validity. Disappears also the Polish dominant discourse, within the framework of which the anti-Polish sentiment, purportedly dominant among Jews in the West, is a means to depreciate the significance and scope of Polish anti-Semitism. In the asocial discourse of individualism, anti-Semitism appears as a characteristic of individuals, autonomous in their choice of stances, and neither as an element of culture nor one reproduced by it. All this is intended to build mutual affinity. As if that affinity was a value in itself, a value, which everybody shall agree to, regardless of how many skeletons have to be locked in a closet in order to achieve it. Indeed, the skeletons are somehow inconvenient. But Poles' comfort is a quality, which Bilewicz also cares about. So it is no wonder that he joined the advocates of the monument of the Righteous, which is to greatly improve – also in our opinion – that comfort regarding the issue of 'Polish-Jewish relations', slightly impaired by the 'Jewish radicals'.

The intention to improve the Poles' mood, though articulated in different parlance, was also the foundation of the monument of Poles Who Rescued Jews to be erected on Grzybowski Square beside the All Saints' Church. There was no preliminary debate on that initiative, and the winner of the contest for the monument's design has already been announced. There is an ongoing intensive search for 10,000 Polish Righteous, whose names are to be engraved on the stone band circumventing the church. This has proved somewhat difficult as

⁵⁹ Michał Bilewicz, "Sprawiedliwy wciąż czyni cuda," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 May 2014.



“Los” [fate], Galeria Rusz, Warsaw, 2014. The ‘Galeria Rusz’ art group from Toruń inadvertently made an illustration for our text. As it receives a number of subsidies from the state (for instance, almost annual stipends of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage), it can afford to display its works in the urban space. This work is an example of the symmetrisation being discussed; its universalising title equates everybody’s experiences. The artwork was displayed on a billboard in Warsaw.

there are 6,532 recognised Polish Righteous, but the Polish state is currently working on overcoming that obstacle – the monument’s designers plan to leave space to systematically add new surnames. Formed during the discussion about Jedwabne, the monument’s construction committee was headed by Tomasz Strzembosz, the main opponent of the author of *Neighbours*. Hence, the genealogy of this monument is rooted in the Jedwabne debate, and more precisely, in the response to *Neighbours*. Thus, both monuments of the Righteous shall be erected in reaction to the history of Polish anti-Semitism and the research on its manifold manifestations; the only difference is that due to the ‘Jewish voice’, the monument of the Righteous in Muranów is advertised as a manifestation of concord, moderation, and compromise, while the other one is presented as a ‘Catholic-nationalist’ monument and as such dismissed in silence. Following the golden mean principle, one is tempted to call the latter monument radical, but it would be a rash generalisation, for its construction won the approval and support of public institutions such as the Warsaw City Council (*Rada Miasta Warszawa*) and the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites (*Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa*). Consequently, it seems that critics of the two monuments are now entirely alienated in the corner for radicals marked out by the golden mean principle.

* * *

Due to the golden mean principle, the knowledge (or actually the ignorance about 'Jewish topics', which ensures one's comfort) produced in the Polish public discourse is governed by the principle of symmetry: there were good Poles and evil Poles; there were good Jews and evil Jews; the faults are mutual, and so are the wrongs, for the truth lies in the middle. The golden mean principle is similar to Themis, who has the power to determine the validity of voices in the debate. Those who speak from this valid position may hope to be taken seriously and gain access to the public debate. Conversely, this access is denied to voices, labelled as radical. The golden mean principle limits the scope of valid comments. Consequently, if one wishes to be in the valid zone and enjoy full rights, one may not go beyond the truisms of the Polish public sphere or disturb them in any way. The stake of the game is to be in that zone, or to be precise, at its very centre, for this enables one's voice be regarded as audible, significant, present, and even 'opinion-forming'.

In order to speak in such a voice, one must consistently pursue the posthumous inclusion of Jews into the vision of idyllic Polish-Jewish coexistence, defined by the Polish majority, which was discontinued by an external force to everyone's despair.

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska*

Abstract

The article attempts to deconstruct the dominant Polish discourse regarding the 'Polish-Jewish relations'. Its central figures are: the logic of the golden mean as a tool to reach historical truth, symmetrisation of Polish and Jewish wrongs and faults, and hospitality as the prevalent attitude of Poles towards Jews. The authors show its opinion forming power using three examples: a review of Paweł Pawlikowski's film *Ida*, the reception of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and a discussion on the Righteous monuments, which were to be erected in Warsaw.

Key words

anti-Semitism, Polish-Jewish relations, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, *Ida*, monument of the Righteous, dominant discourse

Note

Piotr Forecki and Anna Zawadzka's article was written in April 2005, and in the meantime, the 'Memory and Future of the Monument of Gratitude' Foundation (*Fundacja „Pamięć i Przyszłość Budowy Pomnika Wdzięczności”*) (board: Chairman Zygmunt Rolat, members: Adam Daniel Rotfeld, Konstanty Gebert) organised an international competition. On 24 April 2015, its jury chose the winning project – "Forest" designed by two Austrian architects: Eduard Freudmann and Gabu Heindl.

However, in an announcement made on 31 July this year, the competition's organiser stated that he is unable to "carry out the winning project because the necessity to constantly renew the concept's durability would require constant allocation of additional maintenance resources, which shall exceed the sum appropriated for the construction of the Commemoration. The Foundation cannot accept a Commemoration whose durability would be limited in time." From then on the issue of the construction of the 'Rescued for Rescuers' Monument of Gratitude in the immediate vicinity of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw remains unclear, with a number of unknowns. It remains to be seen when the monument shall be erected and according to what project. It is also possible that the location shall be changed or that the monument shall not be erected at all. Thus, as one can see, the situation is dynamic and changing.

The editorial staff