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The Omnipresence of the Righteous

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The Omnipresence of the Righteous

In her review of Grzegorz Górny's book *Sprawiedliwi. Jak Polacy ratowali Żydów przed Zagładą* [The Righteous. How Poles rescued Jews from the Holocaust], published in this issue of *Holocaust Studies and Materials*, Agnieszka Haska aptly describes the basic assumptions of the discourse, which she characterises as focused mostly on 'the dominance of the Righteous'. The message of this discourse can be reduced to the statement that the rescuing of the Jews by the Poles during WWII was a common phenomenon and that the Polish surnames on the wall in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem are just 'the tip of the iceberg'. Representatives of all social strata and occupational groups purportedly risked their lives, while the phenomenon of acting to the Jews' detriment had a marginal character in both meanings of this word, as this discourse discusses isolated incidents for which people from the margin were responsible. The next two basic assumptions of this model can be reduced to claims about "the absolute uniqueness of the Poles against the background of other European nations" and "the failure to appreciate the heroism of the Polish Righteous" during the post-war period, and actually until modern times, which finally brought initiatives to redress those wrongs. Haska aptly indicates the various manipulations at the foundation of this message. Though it makes no sense to recapitulate her text, one should emphasise two basic threads, which clearly indicate the direction which this kind of narration about the Righteous is taking.

The first one is the collaboration of the Jews with the Germans. Taking up the book devoted to the Polish Righteous, a reader probably expects it to be set mostly on the 'Aryan' side and devoted to the relations between the Poles and Jews. Such an expectation appears to be logical and consistent with elementary historical knowledge. Nonetheless, Górny devoted a lot of space to the Jews as the accomplices in the Holocaust, for instance, to the functioning of the Jewish police, the infamous 'Thirteen' from the Warsaw ghetto, and the controversial stance of Mordechaj Chaim Rumkowski. These are important issues, which should be discussed in studies of ghettos, but they are totally unconnected with the topic stated in the title of the book.

We shall return to the issue of the Jewish collaboration with the Germans, but for now let us focus on the other thread, which we can tentatively call 'the

Poles' silent solidarity'. Although in Górný's narration not all Poles have the courage to heroically help the Jews (let the threat of horrible repressions be remembered), the Righteous – and this is very important – are surrounded with the silent solidarity of their compatriots. Persecuted by the Germans, the Jews and the Righteous who were rescuing them become included in the chain of social solidarity. In Górný's opinion, the procedures used by *szmalcownicy* (blackmailers) can serve as evidence for this phenomenon. One learns from his book that in fear of the pedestrians' reaction, the blackmailers pulled their victims into tenement gates and other secluded places to freely blackmail them there. Apparently, the author does not know that blackmail, that is, extortion of ransom under threat of denunciation, was illegal in the General Government. By contrast, denunciations were legal and were often rewarded by the Germans with, for instance, vodka, sugar, or the clothes of the captured Jew. But the German occupation authorities did not support blackmailers. On the contrary, they penalised blackmail, which they considered against the interest of the Third Reich (first of all, the German state was to benefit from the Jews, and secondly, a bribed blackmailer released his victim and that hampered the realisation of 'the final solution of the Jewish question'). Blackmailers extorted ransom in tenement gates, because they knew that they were breaking the law, for which they could be punished or – which was more probable – that they could be spotted by a German policeman who would demand his share of the profit.¹ Personal document literature contains descriptions of a certain ploy, which sometimes helped the Jews escape from the blackmailer's hands. The blackmailed person did not call for help to the passers-by, counting on their inexpressible solidarity, discussed at length by Górný. On the contrary, the Jew knew that the German compliance with the law could save him. Consequently, he would assert that he was not a Jew and suggest going with the blackmailer to a Gestapo station. If the Jew had no money to bribe the blackmailer, he knew that such a bluff would be the only chance to save his life. When the blackmailer refused to give up, the blackmailed Jew had to convincingly play an outraged 'Aryan Pole' in front of the Gestapo functionary to convince him that he was accused of Jewish origin for a financial gain.²

Grzegorz Górný's contribution to the Polish narration about the Righteous consists in putting a strong emphasis on the Jewish collaboration with the Germans, mostly in the ghettos (which – let it be repeated – has little to do with the subject of the book), and in painting a pastoral picture of the chain of solidarity and compassion with which the Poles surrounded the Jews and the Righteous. Both these threads are also present, though much less evidently, in

¹ Jan Grabowski, *„Ja tego Żyda znam!“. Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie, 1939–1943* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004).

² See Gustaw Kerszman, *Jak ginąć, to razem* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 2006), chapter "Początki w Warszawie."

the narration created within the framework of the 'Life for Life' project, carried out by the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, IPN), and the National Centre for Culture (*Narodowe Centrum Kultury*). As the project's website informs, its objective is to "disseminate knowledge about the Poles who risked their own life and the lives of their family to help Jews."³ This is achieved through publication of books and educational packages, preparation of posters, and making documentaries, feature films, and promotional videos. One of the first enterprises carried out within the framework of the project was the documentary entitled *Życie za Życie. Pamięci Polaków, którzy narażali życie, by ratować Żydów* [Life for life. In memory of the Poles who risked their lives to rescue Jews].⁴ It presents ten stories of the Polish Righteous, at the same time strongly emphasising and frequently repeating that it is "only the tip of the tip of the iceberg" (in his book, Grzegorz Górny talks about "the tip of the iceberg" only). As the film informs, it is an expression taken from Tomasz Strzembosz's 2002 comment on the results of the research carried out by the Committee to Commemorate Poles Who Rescued Jews (*Komitet Upamiętniający Polaków Ratujących Żydów*), which he established three years earlier. As I was able to see during a discussion with students of cultural studies at the Warsaw University, a careful viewer of the documentary shall quickly notice a recurring theme. It concerns the fact that the Germans appeared in Jewish hideouts either as a result of a denunciation made by a Jew or in an unknown way, which interests neither the narrator of this story nor the witnesses whose testimonies he quotes. The presence of this pattern in Górny's narration was also emphasised by Agnieszka Haska. But one should stress the consistency with which the author frequently indicates the Jewish denunciators, while he mentions the Polish ones perhaps once and the denunciator is a communist, and as we know, communists are not Poles (see the stereotype of 'żydokomuna', that is, communists of Jewish origin). But Górny writes not only about Jewish denunciators, as he also devotes quite a lot of space to the Jewish provocateurs, often Gestapo informers, who insidiously encouraged Poles to help them in order to then denounce them to the Germans (this theme rhymes with the stereotype of Jewish perfidy). By contrast, not only testimonies (let one take, for instance, the already classic monograph entitled *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej...*)⁵ and studies written by historians⁶ discuss the fact that Polish helpers feared mostly

³ See www.zyciezazycie.pl.

⁴ *Życie za Życie. Pamięci Polaków, którzy narażali życie, by ratować Żydów*, dir. Arkadiusz Gołębiewski and Maciej Pawlicki (2006).

⁵ *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, eds. Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewin, 2nd edition (Cracow, 1969).

⁶ See, for example, Marcin Urynowicz, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej eksterminowanej przez okupanta niemieckiego w okresie drugiej wojny światowej," in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1943–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. Andrzej Żbikowski (Warsaw: IPN, 2006); the Association Polish Centre for Holocaust Research's

being denounced by their neighbours. This issue also begins to be discussed in newly published books addressed to children.⁷ Who knows? Perhaps soon even an elementary school student will not believe in the psychic powers of the Germans, which enabled them to correctly locate Jewish hideouts. Anyhow, that version, consistently presented by the makers of the *Życie za Życie* documentary proved amusing to the students.

Contrary to what the creators of *Życie za Życie*'s narration and Grzegorz Górny wish to think, the fundamental problem of those doomed to extermination who sought rescue on the 'Aryan' side did not stem from the fact that the occupier's threats and repressions paralysed the Poles' sympathy or even that most of the society was indifferent. Sympathy suppressed with fear or authentic indifference would have given the Jews a good chance of survival, which Jan Tomasz Gross discussed as early as in the late 1980s. Comparing the situation of the underground activists and the individuals who sheltered the Jews, he observed that while the former could hope that the Polish population's would actively or silently support their activity, the latter could expect mostly hostility.⁸ Practiced and promoted by, for instance, the representatives of the Catholic Church and the nationalist milieu, the pre-war Polish nationalism contributed significantly to that state of affairs. Both those milieus appear in Górny's narration, but even though he does recall their pre-war hostility to Jews, at the same time giving numerous examples of the 'reformed' Righteous, he fails to offer any explanation for that evolution. According to his line of reasoning, during the occupation the pre-war anti-Semitic campaign of the Catholic Church and the National Democrats resulted not in hostility towards the Jews but in the totally opposite phenomenon of heroic and widespread acts of help. But the fact that during the war former anti-Semite Father Godlewski rescued those doomed to extermination does not necessarily mean that the hostility towards Jews, which he had spread for years, evaporated from the minds and hearts of his parishioners during the occupation.

The immorality of this type of narration, represented by Grzegorz Górny's book, consists in the lack of respect for the Righteous, their Jewish beneficiaries, and the contemporary Poles, who are fed infantile stories about the widespread Polish heroism. Its authors count not only on the audience's ignorance, but also mainly on the natural and fully understandable comfort of thought and the need of moral comfort. Jan Błoński discussed this mechanism both in his famous essay "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto" and in his later speech delivered during a 1988 congress in Jerusalem: "thinking about history (and perhaps also writing

'blue' series, which includes, for instance, *Zarys krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec Zagłady Żydów 1942–1945*, eds. Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski (Warsaw, 2011).

⁷ See, for example, Joanna Rudniańska, *Kotka Brygidy* (Lasek: Wydawnictwo Pierwsze, 2007); Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogała, *Bezszenność Jutki* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2012).

⁸ Jan Tomasz Gross, "„Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej...”, ale go nie lubię," *Aneks* 41/42 (1986).

about it as a historian) should be somehow based on the ethical experience. For facts are poor witnesses for people who look at them from the perspective of their own interest, be it even an emotional or intellectual one. Even though intellectual masochism does not lead to anything good, it is better for historians (and perhaps people in general) to think at least a little against their own moral comfort.”⁹ Poles find it comfortable to focus their attention on the Righteous not only because reckoning with national wrongs and crimes is always painful and uncomfortable, but also because the model of Polish collective identity very effectively prohibits such reckoning.

The Polish *imaginarium* rests on several pillars, among which the Romantic paradigm holds a special place. This paradigm requires a short discussion in the context of the narration about the Righteous. It is based on the belief that when the Polish nation engaged in the struggle, which was doomed to failure, it made a heroic offering on the homeland’s altar. Though it seems a total defeat in the historic, political, or social dimension, it is in fact a great moral victory.¹⁰ The power of the Romantic paradigm can be gauged from the unbelievable success of contemporary narrations about the Warsaw Uprising, usually based on the said model. The topic of the Righteous can also be presented from this paradigmatic perspective. And so the Poles become involved in an almost hopeless cause, while, making matters worse, the rest of the world remains indifferent, as in the case of the Warsaw Uprising. The moral imperative forces them to oppose the power of the Third Reich and the perfectly organised extermination machine. Consequently, they take the greatest risk and make the most tragic offering of their own life and the lives of their closest ones and fellow countrymen to fight a lost cause, also similarly to the August 1944 insurgents. Even though they fail to stop the Holocaust and the number of the rescued constitutes a per mill of the total number of victims of the ‘final solution’, the moral triumph of the Righteous is undisputable, and years later new generations of Poles can participate in it, precisely in the same way as in the case of the Warsaw Uprising.

Górny’s entire narration is based on this model of heroism and sacrifice, and the author supports it with numerous statements confirming this vision. And with the Romantic paradigm so deeply ingrained in the *imaginarium* of Polish culture, he has no problem finding them. A striking example of the paradigm’s impact might be the words of Arnold Mostowicz quoted in the book: “No other nation sacrificed more of its members on the altar of helping Jews than Poles, even though in many occupied countries that help was less risky.”¹¹

⁹ Jan Błoński, “Myśleć przeciw własnemu komfortowi,” in idem, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008), p. 45.

¹⁰ Maria Janion, “Zmierzch paradygmatu,” in eadem, *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2000).

¹¹ Arnold Mostowicz, quoted in: Grzegorz Górny, *Sprawiedliwi. Jak Polacy ratowali Żydów przed Zagładą* (Izabelin–Warszawa: Rosikon Press, 2013), p. 220.

While discussing this model of narration about rescuing those doomed to extermination, which the Poles find comfortable, one cannot omit the issue of the monument of the Righteous by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Despite the noble intensions of many of its initiators it is so risky an enterprise that it is almost certain that the Polish memory of the stances of Poles towards the Holocaust will become fixed in the trajectories very deeply engraved by the Romantic paradigm. As a matter of fact, during the last two years that memory has undergone some destabilisation and problematisation, which encourage a critical reflection on the Polish-Jewish past. After the publication of *Neighbours*, Jan Tomasz Gross's subsequent books, and the research conducted by other historians, a ferment appeared in the reflection on the topic of the wartime Polish-Jewish relations, a movement of thought taking the Polish audience away from the (frankly speaking) ethically comfortable position of victims of two totalitarian regimes. This phenomenon is manifested in numerous texts, theatre performances, and films produced during the last ten years.¹² Aleida Assmann writes that this kind of critical and multi-voiced approach to the not so distant history might be stopped by the 'politics of memory'. She discusses the danger posed by monuments, commemorative sites, and state anniversaries, which might make the past an object of reflectionless ritualisation.¹³

Assmann also discusses the power and durability of the mechanism, which reduces historic subjects to two ideal categories: the perpetrators and the victims. Simultaneously she indicates the cognitive cost of such a simplification: "The murderous constellation of omnipotence and defencelessness cannot be used as a yardstick for all other, more ambiguous situations. Aside from the absolute perpetrators [...] there were also those partially involved, for instance, the Wehrmacht soldiers, the occasional perpetrators who reacted to specific situations, and the passive perpetrators who permitted the Holocaust through their consent, opportunism, or failure to resist. Similarly, aside from the absolute perpetrators [...] there were also the victims who were tangled up, for instance, the prisoners who were kapos in concentration camps, and the temporary victims such as the German civilian population, which at the end of the war constituted the object of military aggression."¹⁴ Such a complex description of the ambiguous and dynamic stances does not fit the simple and stable structure of the Romantic paradigm, which sanctifies the victim (let it be added that it is a special one that burns to ashes in the heroic struggle only to triumph in the end) and makes it morally crystal clear and prohibits any kind of flaw in its image. "We wish to be totally beyond suspicion. We wish to have a totally clear

¹² See my article "Literatura polska ostatniego dziesięciolecia wobec Zagłady – próba odpowiedzi na nowe wyzwania," *Zagłada Żydów, Studia i materiały* 10, vol. 2 (2014).

¹³ See Aleida Assmann, *Między historią a pamięcią. Antologia*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Warsaw: WUW, 2013), p. 221.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 204.

conscience. We also wish to be victims, and only victims..."¹⁵ wrote Jan Błoński. But we know that even though Poles engaged in the struggle against the German occupier in many ways, the 'Jewish question' was a kind of a 'footbridge' between them, as Jan Karski wrote.¹⁶ I wonder how many pedestrians who have their picture taken on Karski's bench outside the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews know these words and understand what they mean.

If we settle ourselves comfortably in the armchair of the absolute victim, we shall have a very difficult time admitting this complicated picture of the past into our consciousness. The narration about the 'omnipresence of the Righteous' stabilises the image of Poles as morally crystal clear, heroic victims, but it also requires a conceptual analysis of the issue of *szmalcowniks*. I use the inverted commas here because I am referring to the figure very firmly set in the Polish memory, onto which are projected all the wrongs done by the Poles to the doomed Jews. Of course, a way to deal with the *szmalcowniks* is to emphasise, in line with the symmetry principle, the issue of the Jews who contributed to the Holocaust. As accomplices can be found even among the unquestionable victims of the largest genocide of the 20th century and this does not depreciate the suffering of the other Holocaust victims, then Polish *szmalcowniks* (let one remember that they purportedly constituted the absolute margin of society) cannot harm the morally impeccable image of the Poles.

In the thus constructed picture of the past there is no space whatsoever for the phenomena, which constituted the core of the Polish-Jewish relations during the war and the inseparable context of the activity of the Righteous'. First and foremost, there is no space for the financial aspect of those relations, in short, for the issue of Poles' benefitting from the Holocaust, as well as for the issue of paid help. In the narration represented by Górný, the Poles provide help in a disinterestedly even though they themselves are starving. In this version one is involved, for instance, with popular and disinterested help provided to ghettos, including the Warsaw one, which involved smuggling of drugs, food, and other products. Though the war-time testimonies and historical research confirm the massive scale of smuggling into the Warsaw ghetto, they offer a much more complicated picture of this phenomenon. Perec Opoczyński, a journalist and member of the Oneg Shabbat group, had no doubt that so-doing, unscrupulous Poles reaped large profits in that way, taking advantage of the dramatic position of the ghetto inhabitants. But this is not tantamount to an explicit condemnation of their stance, which the reporter explains in terms of the universal mechanism of the age old market economy. His report entitled "Szmugiel do getta" [smuggling into the ghetto] reads: "while smuggling as such is ignoble, it is a noose tightening on the neck of the swollen consumer, in

¹⁵ Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto," in idem, *Biedni Polacy...*, p. 25.

¹⁶ See Jan Karski's 1940 report in Stanisław M. Jankowski, *Karski. Raporty tajnego emisariusza* (Poznań: Rebis, 2009), pp. 53–61.

the horrible conditions of the ghetto prison walls enclosing the Warsaw Jews, it is the only rescue for those still alive, and perhaps one day a monument to the smuggler should be erected for his putting his life at risk, because when one looks at it from such a perspective, he did save a significant percentage of Warsaw Jews from death by starvation.”¹⁷ Reports of the Polish underground also discuss the issue of smuggling and the difficulties with moral assessment of that phenomenon.”¹⁸ According to those reports, a part of the Polish population became so indigent that its only source of livelihood became trade with the countryside or with the Jewish quarter. But a part of the society ruthlessly derived large profits from the dramatic situation of the Jewish population. The authors of the reports expressed their concern over the moral consequences of the participation of Polish society in those dealings, which came to be known as ‘disconnected economy’ (*gospodarka wyłączona*), a term coined after the war by Kazimierz Wyka.¹⁹ Such a complex evaluation of smuggling does not fit the narration about the “ubiquity of the Righteous.” Similarly, there is no space in it for the interpersonal aspects of the relations between the Polish benefactors and the Jewish beneficiaries. Their picture emerging from the diaries and post-war testimonies upsets the common ideas about the behaviour of people during the occupation; it is surprising and thought-provoking, particularly in the case of long-term help. There is everything in these stories: mercy turning into aversion, hostility changing into empathy, and there is also love, treachery, and taking advantage of the other party’s weakness (the structurally weakest link in this chain was the Jews, but Poles occasionally also became dependent on their beneficiaries for emotional or financial reasons). The motivation behind the provision of help often changes too, for instance, initially paid support transforms into disinterested help (with love or friendship emerging between the parties) or quite the reverse – with the intensification of the everyday struggle, the benefactors begin to expect financial gratification. Here, of course, appears the issue of the form in which one expressed one’s expectations (was it a request, blackmail, or a proposition to change the agreement) and of the amount to be paid. The dramaturgic potential of such stories was noticed by Agnieszka Holland when she began to work on the script to *In Darkness*. The Polish reader might also read about those issues in Jacek Leociak’s book

¹⁷ Perec Opoczyński, “Szmugiel w getcie,” in idem, *Reportaże z warszawskiego getta*, trans. and ed. Monika Polit (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów and ŻIH, 2009), p. 149.

¹⁸ See Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, „Żydów łamiących prawo należy karać śmiercią!” *„Przestępczość” Żydów w Warszawie 1939–1942* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2010), pp. 176–177.

¹⁹ Kazimierz Wyka, *Życie na niby* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2010), chapter “Gospodarka wyłączona.”

Ratowanie. Opowieści Polaków i Żydów [Rescuing. Stories of Poles and Jews].²⁰ This publication makes one aware of not only the complexity of the mutual relations between the Righteous and the persecuted Jews, but also of the evolution of the narration about their shared experience. Leociak shows that not only the passing of time is conducive to changes in the interpretation of the past events, but also that the past often becomes intentionally distorted for political or financial reasons. This story would not fit the simple model of the narration about the 'ubiquity of the Righteous', so it is no wonder that Leociak's book is not included in the bibliography of Grzegorz Górny's publication.

The narration about the 'ubiquity of the Righteous' is not conducive to asking questions, it does not provoke thought or critical reflection on the stereotypes or what is apparently obvious. Consistent with the model of the Polish *imaginarium* shaped in the 19th century, it is to satisfy the need for moral comfort. It is the nation of the Righteous flattering itself, and let it be added that this flattery is harmful predominantly to its authors and at the same time its addressees. It is similar to the Monument of the Righteous next to the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which probably will not initiate a discussion or inspire questions, but will exploit the heroes who deserve an authentic commemoration. Or perhaps it would be better to create The House of the Righteous instead? It could be a place of meetings, discussions, and reflections not only on the heroism during the Holocaust, but also on the context in which that heroism acquired its actual meaning.

At the end of my reflection on the topic of the contemporary exploitation of the memory of the Poles who helped Jews during the Holocaust, I should mention another current phenomenon – the disintegration of the very notion of the Righteous. Consistent with the project promoted by the Italian organisation Gariwo, the first Polish Garden of the Righteous was opened in the spring of 2014 in the Warsaw quarter of Muranów. Gariwo appeals for the creation of Gardens of the Righteous throughout the world, modelled on the garden at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, which – as everybody knows – commemorates the individuals who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. The first Garden of the Righteous was opened in 2003 in Milan and it has honoured 35 individuals, but it is important that they are not only those who helped the doomed Jews; some of them stood in defence of human dignity in various extreme situations.

The idea of creating the Warsaw Garden of the Righteous was born in 2013, during the first celebration of the Day of the Righteous, established by the European Parliament and falling on 6 March. The Garden was created a year later on Gen. Jana Jura-Gorzechowskiego Square, on the confluence of Jana Pawła II and Dzielna Streets. Before the war it was an area inhabited mostly by the Jewish population, during the occupation it was included in the ghetto,

²⁰ See Jacek Leociak, *Ratowanie. Opowieści Polaków i Żydów* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2010).

and after the war the debris was removed to make a square. The first six heroes were commemorated by planting paradise apples and placing cobbles that stated the surnames and contributions of the Righteous. Marek Edelman was commemorated as the commander of the uprising in the ghetto, and a post-war physician, social activist, and oppositionist. Magdalena Grodzka-Gużkowska was honoured for her underground activity, rescuing Jews from the Warsaw ghetto, and creating a pioneering method of treating autistic children. Jan Karski was commemorated for his contributions during WWII, when as an emissary of the Polish Underground State he called on the world to stop the extermination of the Jews. The next person to be honoured was Antonia Locatelli, who was an Italian missionary in Rwanda, where she died trying to prevent a Hutu massacre of Tutsi. Finally, Tadeusz Mazowiecki was honoured as the UN envoy to the Balkans who resigned in a protest against the international forces' lack of reaction to the ethnic cleansings.

Regardless of the perhaps noble intentions of the creators of the Warsaw Garden of the Righteous, who, as their Milan counterparts had done, decided to honour those ready to oppose criminal regimes and defend their victims, it is yet another instance of the internationalisation of the symbols arising from the experience of the Holocaust on the territory of the former Warsaw ghetto. In the past, its main object was the Monument to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto erected in 1948 and its main occasion was the celebrations of the anniversary of the outbreak of the April uprising, which was seen as an act against the spectre of fascism and Nazism, a heroic struggle for freedom and independence of Poland and also human dignity. But the Righteous Among the Nations is a 'brand' established for years. It is common knowledge that this title is awarded along with a medal and diploma to those who rescued the doomed Jews. The names and surnames of the recognised Righteous are engraved on special walls in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, where the Righteous have been planting commemorative trees since the beginning of the 1990s. All this is common knowledge today, particularly among Poles, whom the media at least once a year, in April, remind that their compatriots constitute the largest group among those so honoured. The term 'Righteous' automatically refers one to the events connected with the Holocaust. For instance, if one opens the book *Dziewczyny z powstania. Prawdziwe historie* [Girls from the Uprising. True stories]²¹ in a bookstore and glance at the contents, one would see chapters about Anna, a count's daughter from the Home Army, or Dora, a Righteous from the Żoliborz quarter. One needs no extraordinary cultural competence to understand that the heroine of the last chapter not only participated in the Warsaw Uprising, but also helped the doomed Jews. But perhaps in a while this might become less obvious to an average reader, who will associate the term 'Righteous' with opposition to crimes against mankind. Of course, the intention is not to stop honouring such

²¹ Anna Herbich, *Dziewczyny z powstania. Prawdziwe historie* (Cracow: Znak, 2014).

stances, but does it really need to be done under the banner of the Righteous and on the territory of the former Warsaw ghetto?

The phenomenon of the universalisation of the symbols connected with the Holocaust and the practice of the narration about the 'ubiquity of the Righteous' has a long tradition in Poland. The brochure published by the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (*Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację*, ZBoWiD) on the 20th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising included a long list of Poles who rescued Jews: "communists, socialists, members of peasant parties, democrats, scouts, officers and soldiers of the People's Guard and the Home Army, Catholics, priests and nuns, professors, physicians, workers, and students."²² As Piotr Forecki reminds one, five years later, in 1968, the anniversary narration was supplemented with the thread of the Jews co-responsible for the Holocaust and the Polish Righteous: "The Jews who remained passive or collaborated with the occupier were contrasted with the heroic Poles who had not disgraced themselves with collaboration with the Nazis and had offered resistance from the beginning to the end of the war. The Polish Righteous Among the Nations were also removed from the sphere of silence [...]."²³ Back then, the discourse, today refreshed by Grzegorz Górny and others, was to obscure the anti-Semitic campaign of March 1968. Nowadays, it is a screen, behind which are the images that the Poles began to confront with the publication of *Neighbours*.

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska*

²² Waclaw Poterański, *Walka warszawskiego getta* (Warsaw: Zarząd Główny ZBoWiD, 1963), p. 37.

²³ Piotr Forecki, *Od „Shoah” do „Strachu”. Spory o polsko-żydowską przeszłość i pamięć w debatach publicznych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), p. 100. More on the universalisation of the celebrations of the anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw ghetto uprising see Piotr Forecki's article "Kwietniowe gadanie. Polskie flagi nad gettem," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 10, vol. 2 (2014).