

# Chapter III

## The national debate on the crime in Jedwabne

### 1. The antecedents and the structure of the debate

In May 2000, the book by Jan Tomasz Gross entitled “Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland” was released by Pogranicze Publishing House.<sup>426</sup> Its author addressed the subject of the crimes committed by the Polish citizens of Jedwabne village against their Jewish neighbours. The publication of the book, and the events it depicted, sparked off a stormy and multi-threaded national debate. This became the longest and most intense debate about the attitudes of Poles towards the Holocaust and pre-war Polish-Jewish relations that had ever taken place in Poland and the one involving the greatest number of participants.

Additionally, its uniqueness stemmed from the type and importance of the problem that Poles had to face. Claude Lanzmann and his “Shoah” had already mentioned the sensitive topics of pre-war Polish-Jewish relations and Poles as witnesses of the Holocaust. Jan Błoński in his brilliant essay “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto” had brought public attention to the Polish shame of indifference towards dying Jews, and conflicts over the Auschwitz concentration camp upset the self-image of Poles as the main – if not the only – victims of the Nazis. However, Jan Tomasz Gross was the one who confronted Poles with the problem of direct Polish involvement in the Holocaust. Thus, as Sławomir Sierakowski noted, the debate on the Jedwabne massacre was “an attempt to imagine oneself in the role of ‘executioner’.”<sup>427</sup>

The problem of Polish involvement in the Holocaust had already appeared in public discourse some time earlier. It was raised by a young historian, Michał Cichy, whose review of Cael Perchodnik’s wartime diaries was published by the daily newspaper, “Gazeta Wyborcza” in December 1993<sup>428</sup>. Depicting the wartime experiences of the author, Cichy noted that Perchodnik, who managed

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426 J. T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka*, Sejny 2000 [English: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, first published: 2001, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press]

427 S. Sierakowski, *Chcemy innej historii*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 11 VI 2003, p. 15.

428 See: C. Perchodnik, *Czy ja jestem mordercą?*, Warszawa 1995.

to outlive other members of his family by two years, “lived through the Warsaw Uprising, when the AK [Polish resistance Home Army] and the NSZ [National Armed Forces] wiped out many survivors of the ghetto.”<sup>429</sup> These unsettling words reached their readers a few months before the planned commemorations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising and sparked a very strong response. Numerous readers expressed their indignation in letters, often in an anti-Semitic tone, sent to the editorial office of “Gazeta Wyborcza”. Cichy’s words were considered a lie, an insult to the memory of the insurgents, and above all, an attack on one of the key events of the Polish “historical canon” which held a place of honour in the collective memory of Poles.

In response to the wave of protests, the editors of “Gazeta Wyborcza” described Michał Cichy’s words as an “unacceptable generalisation”.<sup>430</sup> Answering to these accusations, Cichy published an article in “Gazeta Wyborcza” in which he presented all the documents and testimonies on which he based his “unacceptable generalisation” (for which he also apologised). However, in his article, “Poles and Jews: Black Pages in the Annals of the Warsaw Uprising”, the author demonstrated that during the uprising, AK soldiers murdered around 20-30 Jews.<sup>431</sup> The article, prefaced by Adam Michnik<sup>432</sup>, evoked a stormy debate, not only among readers of “Gazeta Wyborcza”, but also by readers of other Polish newspapers.<sup>433</sup> As the psychologist Michał Bilewicz aptly noted: “It was the biggest blow struck at the social memory, cultivated by Poles, of the occupation years”, and at the “sanctum sanctorum of Polish national identity”.<sup>434</sup> As it turns out, Cichy’s text and the discussion over it were a “dress rehearsal” for the stormy debate on the Jedwabne massacre.<sup>435</sup> Undeniably, it was the first public debate in which the Polish nation faced a new role, which was not about contemplating the wrongs done to the Polish nation as cultivated in Polish historiography: not the role of victims, but perpetrators who murdered Jews during the Holocaust.

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429 M. Cichy, *Wspomnienia umarłego*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 15 XII 1993, p. 4.

430 Such an opinion was expressed in the editorial preface to article by Michał Cichy. See: M. Cichy, *Polacy-Żydzi: czarne karty Powstania*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 29 I 1994, p. 13.

431 Ibidem, p. 13

432 A. Michnik, *Polacy-Żydzi: czarne karty powstania*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 29 I 1994, p. 12.

433 A selection of articles discussing Cichy’s text was published by “Midrasz” magazine. See “Midrasz” 2007, No. 3.

434 M. Bilewicz, *Wyjaśnianie Jedwabnego: antysemityzm i postrzeganie trudnej przeszłości*, [in:] *Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie. Raport z badań*, I. Krzemiński (ed.) Warszawa 2004, p. 251.

435 P. Paziński, *Przeprosiny za “czarne karty”*, “Midrasz” 2007, No. 3, p. 8.

The debate about Cichy's article is different from the debate over the Jedwabne massacre because of the completely different character and scale of the events and, in particular, because of the limited scope and short duration of the former debate. Nonetheless, the debate did happen and the defenders of Poland's good name had a good chance to mobilise while Michał Cichy, the young adept of history, "the teacher of life", was subjected to the criticism of experienced and respected historians and learnt how high the price is for an "untimely" publication in Poland.<sup>436</sup>

There is also a supplement to this story. Very unexpectedly, after 13 years, Michał Cichy decided to apologise for his article. "I Apologise to the Insurgents", published in the Christmas edition of the "Gazeta Wyborcza" daily, not only withdrew from some of his previous claims, but also expressed a form of self-criticism.<sup>437</sup> The content of this intriguing confession caused nothing less than astonishment and confusion among those who considered his original article and the debate over it to be a symbol of courage and honesty in Polish discourse on the disgraceful attitudes of Poles toward Jews during the Holocaust. Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz could not hide his amazement, pointing out that the author "need not have apologised" because the murders of Jews during the Uprising "were facts".<sup>438</sup> Neither could Helena Datner, who commented on the author's confession in an issue of "Midrasz" magazine devoted to this apology: "it increases the feeling of hopelessness if the author draws unexpected conclusions from his own, dramatically true diagnosis of the situation and while apologising to some [insurgents – author's note], he sentences others [Jews – author's note] to non-existence".<sup>439</sup>

There were some readers, however, who welcomed this apology with enthusiasm, as if it were the return of the prodigal son who finally understood that

436 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir paid attention to it in her brilliant critique regarding "the responsibility of Polish historians for what Poles do not know about the Holocaust". According to Tokarska-Bakir, this responsibility concerns, above all, "the sin of omission, which may be a consequence of the historians' innate caution, discouraging them from certain topics (...) Historian, as well as every other academician, above all wants to be 'serious'. 'Serious' in Poland means 'uncontroversial'. The uncontroversial Polish historian looks with indulgence at those who are in a hurry". J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia*, Sejny 2004, p.14.

437 See M. Cichy, *Przepraszam powstańców*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 23 XII 2006, p. 16; Michał Cichy justified his decision to make a public apology and self-criticise in an interview given to Stanisław Tekieli, See: *Z Michałem Cichym rozmawia Stanisław Tekieli*, "Midrasz" 2007, No. 3, p. 21-24.

438 E. Koźmińska-Frejłak, P. Paziński, *Sprawiedliwy z Żoliborza*, rozmowa z K. Dunin-Wąsowiczem, "Midrasz" 2007, No. 1, p. 24

439 H. Datner, *O pewnych przeprosinach*, "Midrasz" 2007, No. 3, p. 25.

national sanctities are not to be sullied. From such a perspective, Piotr Semka named Cichy's apology "the best Christmas gift for many Warsaw insurgents".<sup>440</sup> The critics of "Gazeta Wyborcza", who regard the newspaper as Philo-Semitic or simply Jewish, the opponents of the idea of engaging with the difficult Polish-Jewish past and ordinary anti-Semites were also given another present by Cichy: this was the interview that he gave to Cezary Michalski for the "Dziennik" daily.<sup>441</sup> The interview itself and the discussion around it are a different and more complex story, although Michał Cichy did refer to "The Black Pages...", saying: "There is the truth of facts, and the truth of facts is that all the Jews shot by people with AK and NSZ badges, whom I described, were shot indeed. But there is also the spiritual and symbolic truth which is as follows: this text should not have been published in 1994 in the 'Gazeta Wyborcza' daily, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising".<sup>442</sup> It was not only Michał Cichy who learned how high the price for an "untimely" publication in Poland was. Jan Tomasz Gross also realised that, but fortunately he never apologised. Incidentally, "Neighbors" was not Gross' first publication released in Poland that touched on the problem of the difficult Polish-Jewish past and sparked off a debate. A selection of essays published a few years before, entitled "Ghastly decade: Three essays on stereotypes about the Jews, Poles, Germans, and Communists" in which Gross wrote about the attitudes of Poles towards the Holocaust, anti-Semitism during the German occupation and the stereotype of "Jewish communists" [żydokomuna], are still present in Polish minds.<sup>443</sup> However, the discussion about "Ghastly decade" involved only a narrow circle of intellectuals.<sup>444</sup>

It was not until the publication of "Neighbors", which Ilya Prizel found to be one of the most important events in recent historiography, that a debate was sparked off, drawing the attention of Polish and international public opinion and involving numerous participants of different professions.<sup>445</sup> Jan Tomasz Gross had, however, mentioned the Jedwabne massacre in his earlier article published in a multi-authored book: "Non-provincial Europe". The book was dedicated to

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440 P. Semka, *Prezent dla powstańców*, "Rzeczpospolita" 27 XII 2006, p. XI.

441 See. C. Michalski, *Wojna pokoleń przy użyciu cyngli*, an interview with M. Cichy, "Dziennik" 21 II 2008.

442 Ibidem

443 See. J. T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939-1948*, Kraków 1998.

444 See: *Polacy i Żydzi w "Upiornej dekadzie"*, "Więź" 1999, No. 7, p. 4 -22.

445 I. Prizel, *Jedwabne: Will the Right Question be Raised?*, "East European Politics and Societies" 2002, vol. 16, No. 1, p. 278.

Prof. Tomasz Strzembosz, who later turned out to be one of the staunchest adversaries of Gross.<sup>446</sup>

Other historians, journalists and witnesses had also mentioned beforehand that about 1,600 Jews, citizens of Jedwabne, had been burnt in a barn. Not all of them, however, pointed at Poles as the direct perpetrators and their reports never became a subject of public debate and popular accounts.<sup>447</sup> The historian Szymon Datner mentioned the Jedwabne massacre in his article published in 1966 in “Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego” (“The Jewish History Quarterly”) but he avoided answering the question, ‘who carried it out?’<sup>448</sup>, as did the authors of a reportage “...aby żyć” [“...in order to live”] published by the “Kontakty” weekly on 10 July 1988.<sup>449</sup> The answer was provided by the “Jedwabne. History and Memorial Book” published in 1980 in the USA and Israel, which included testimonies of the eyewitnesses of the massacre who pointed to Polish citizens of Jedwabne as the perpetrators.<sup>450</sup> It was also signalled in a documentary by Agnieszka Arnold titled: “...Gdzie mój syn najstarszy Kain?” [“Where is my eldest son, Cain?”], broadcast on Polish public television (TVP 1) on 18 April 1999. The documentary, concerning wartime Polish-Jewish relations, included a part about Jedwabne. In her film, Agnieszka Arnold used extensive quotations from a testimony about the Jedwabne pogrom given by Szmul Wasersztajn before the Jewish Historical Commission in Białystok. Agnieszka Arnold verified the information contained in the testimony by talking to the citizens of Jedwabne who, as it turned out, knew very well about the massacre.<sup>451</sup>

446 See: J. T. Gross, *Lato 1941 w Jedwabnem. Przyczynek do badań nad udziałem społeczności lokalnych w eksterminacji narodu żydowskiego w latach II wojny światowej*, [in:] *Europa nieprowincjonalna. Przemiany na ziemiach wschodnich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, K. Jasiewicz (ed.), Warszawa 1999.

447 A detailed analysis of who, where, when and what wrote or spoke about the Jedwabne massacre and how it was interpreted has been presented by Tomasz Szarota. See: T. Szarota, *Mord w Jedwabnem. Dokumenty, publikacje i interpretacje z lat 1941-2000*, [in:] *Wokół Jedwabnego. Studia*, P. Machcewicz, K. Persak (ed.), Warszawa 2002, Vol. 1, p. 461-489.

448 See: Sz. Datner, *Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej w okręgu białostockim*, “Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego” 1966, No. 4, p. 3-50.

449 D. i A. Wroniszewscy, *...aby żyć*, “Kontakty” 10.VII.1988, p. 6. Quotation after: T. Szarota, *Mord w Jedwabnem...*, p. 480.

450 Publishing memorial books of this kind, [Yiddish: jizkor-buch], was a particular way for Landsmanschafts to commemorate killed Jewish townsmen after World War II. The memorial book devoted to Jews from Jedwabne is available online: [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Jedwabne](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Jedwabne) [accessed: 10.V.2007].

451 Agnieszka Arnold made a film titled “Neighbors”, which was devoted to the events of 10 July 1941 in Jedwabne. Jan Tomasz Gross used the same title with her consent.

It was this testimony, given by the eyewitness Szmul Wasersztajn on 5 April 1945 and available in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, that Jan Tomasz Gross used as one of his essential sources when writing “Neighbors”. Clearly, it was not the only source. Gross, apart from the memorial book devoted to the Jews from Jedwabne and the accounts given by the characters of Agnieszka Arnold’s documentary, also used files from two legal proceedings taken in Poland after the war.<sup>452</sup> In addition, he went to Jedwabne and talked to its inhabitants. Among them were the elderly, who remembered the massacre, and the young, who inherited knowledge of it. As one can easily guess, not everyone was willing to speak about it and not everyone shared a belief in the liberating force of the truth. Consequently, they constructed narratives about events that happened in Jedwabne on 10 July 1941 in a way that was comfortable for them and for the Polish nation. Many of them did much to preserve the meaning of the words inscribed on the stone monument funded in 1963 by the Łomża section of ZboWiD [The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy] to the memory of the Jews murdered in Jedwabne. The inscription read: “Site of a massacre of the Jewish population. The Gestapo and Nazi military police burned 1,600 people alive on 10 July 1941”.

The macabre crime described in “Neighbors”, as well as attributing the perpetration to Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne, turned out to be a real shock for Poles. Nonetheless, it was nominated for the 2000 Nike Literary Award. Lidia Burska, who discussed the nominated works, aptly observed, however, that “Neighbors” was not among them as a book of exceptional literary value but rather as a “conscience-pricking book” whose “task was to change something in our consciousness”. Małgorzata Dziewulska expressed a similar opinion, stating that “Neighbors” was not a personal opinion expressed in a literary form but a historical intervention into the conscience of every one of us individually and all of us as a community.<sup>453</sup>

Gross’s book is definitely not a personal literary statement of the author and, generally, it is difficult to classify it unequivocally within one genre. In fact, it has been classified in different ways: as an academic monograph, a his-

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452 See: K. Persak, *akta procesu z 1949 roku dwudziestu dwóch oskarżonych o udział w zbrodni na ludności żydowskiej w Jedwabnem*, [in:] *Wokół Jedwabnego. Dokumenty...*, p. 415-713; K. Persak, *akta procesu z 1953 roku Józefa Sobuty oskarżonego o udział w zbrodni na ludności żydowskiej w Jedwabnem*, [in:] *Wokół Jedwabnego. Dokumenty...*, p. 713-817; K. Persak, *akta śledztwa z lat 1967-1974 prowadzonego przez Okręgową Komisję Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Białymstoku w sprawie zbrodni na ludności żydowskiej w Jedwabnem*, [in:] *Wokół Jedwabnego. Dokumenty...*, p. 817-863.

453 *Laureat zawsze cierpi. Nagroda “Nike” 2001*, (editorial interview), “Res Publica Nowa” 2001, No. 10, p. 69.

torical essay, a documentary reportage, historical journalism, but also a parable or a morality play. Some, e.g. reviewers and journalists motivated by a desire to belittle the publication, regarded it with disdain as a poor quality historical journalism devoid of cognitive value. For others, the dilemma of how to categorise Gross's book partly resulted from its structure. Gross's book seems to consist of two parts although in fact it is not formally divided into two. This duality was apparent in Dorota Kawczyńska's words when she wrote: "it combines the features of a historical description and an analysis of actual events as well as of a historical-philosophical treatise of a universal character."<sup>454</sup>

The first part of "Neighbors" consists of "the historical description and the analysis of actual events" which occurred in Jedwabne on July 10, 1941 after the Soviet occupation of those lands had come to an end. According to Jan Tomasz Gross's findings, this was the day when many Polish residents of Jedwabne, "roughly 50 percent of the adult men", participated in a bestial murder of Jews.<sup>455</sup> Gross pointed at the mayor of the time, Marian Karolak, as the one who coordinated the massacre. He also listed the names of others, the most distinguished anti-heroes of the crime.<sup>456</sup> It was on the mayor's order that on 10 July, before noon, the majority of Jews from Jedwabne were rounded up in the square in front of the town hall, ostensibly for some cleaning duty. In the meantime, however, the rest of Jedwabne became an arena of savage acts committed by Polish neighbours. Gross writes: "On this day a cacophony of violence swept through the town. It unfolded in the form of many uncoordinated, simultaneous activities over which Karolak and the town council exercised only general supervision (...). They monitored progress and made sure at critical junctures that the goal of the pogrom was advanced. But, otherwise, people were free to improvise as best they knew how."<sup>457</sup>

In a few pages of his book, Gross reconstructed the chaos of the pogrom, the individual initiatives taken by the locals, and how, all day long in Jedwabne, in different parts of the town and in different ways, Jews were being murdered by their Polish neighbours. Finally, however, Polish torturers realised that this method of killing was not effective and would not let other locals finish their work before dawn, which was the time limit set by the German troops stationed in Jedwabne. Instead, they decided to kill all the remaining Jews by burning them alive, in the same way as in Radziłów a few days earlier. Gross also wrote

454 D. Kawczyńska, *Prawdy ukryte na powierzchni*, "Res Publica Nowa" 2001, No. 1, p. 89.

455 J. T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 87.

456 *Ibidem*, p. 73, 76, 77.

457 J. T. Gross, *Neighbors*...., p. 95.

that “carts full of people from nearby villages” who found out about the Jedwabne pogrom on 10 July 1941, “had been converging on the town since early dawn” and that probably, “some of these people were veterans of other pogroms that had recently been carried out in the vicinity.”<sup>458</sup> Let us turn, however, to the culmination of the Jedwabne pogrom.

After the barn was chosen, all Jews brought to the square who were still alive were driven into it. Beaten and ridiculed by the neighbours who were escorting them, the Jews were forced to carry around Lenin’s statue, which was broken into pieces, and to sing “The war is because of us, the war is for us”. “A thick crowd” shoved the Jedwabne Jews inside the barn. The barn was doused with kerosene and lit.<sup>459</sup> On that day, Gross claims and the above-mentioned stone monument confirms, about 1,600 Jews were murdered. Only a few more than a dozen survived, including seven who were hidden in the nearby Janczewo by the Wyrzykowski family. Thus, as Gross noted, on 10 July 1941 in Jedwabne, a mass murder took place “in a double sense, on account of both the number of victims and the number of perpetrators.”<sup>460</sup>

In the historical part of his book, which reconstructs the events from several decades ago, Jan Gross raised an important, unavoidable question which (not without a reason) was the main subject of the debate that followed the publication of “Neighbors”. Clearly, it is the question of the German presence in Jedwabne and their participation in the collective murder of 10 July 1941. On the basis of available sources, particularly Szmul Wasersztajn’s testimonies, Gross claimed that on the day of the pogrom or the day before, a few Germans, probably Gestapo men, arrived in town “by taxi”. Moreover, there was “an outpost of German gendarmerie, staffed by eleven men”.<sup>461</sup> Therefore, on the ill-fated day there were hardly any Germans in Jedwabne, maybe a few more than a dozen – at least according to the picture given by Gross’s “Neighbors”.

Jan Tomasz Gross has never denied that “the town council signed some agreement with the Gestapo”.<sup>462</sup> What kind of agreement this was and what it concerned, we do not know for the lack of reliable sources. It seems, according to one account that “the municipal authorities were given a certain amount of time – eight hours (...) to get rid of the Jews as they pleased.”<sup>463</sup> But who took the initiative to commit the mass murder? Clearly, Gross formulated such a question but he did not find a definitive answer: “Where the initiative came from

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458 Ibidem, p. 90.

459 Ibidem, p. 99.

460 Ibidem, p 87.

461 Ibidem, p.76.

462 Ibidem, p.75.

463 Ibidem, p. 76.

– whether it originated with the Germans (as Wasersztajn suggested, saying: ‘such an order was issued by the Germans’) or with the town council of Jedwabne is impossible to settle once and for all. But it is also an academic question, since both sides apparently quickly agreed on the matter and on the method of its implementation.”<sup>464</sup>

Nevertheless, Gross excluded the possibility that the Germans participated in the implementation of the massacre, noting that “As to the Germans' direct participation in the mass murder of Jews in Jedwabne on July 10, 1941, [...] one must admit that it was limited, pretty much, to their taking pictures.”<sup>465</sup> Analysing testimonies from the Łomża trial, however, he also signalled that individual gendarmes (witnesses frequently spoke of one) accompanied the members of the town council ordering the Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne to watch over Jews gathered in the square and then to escort them to the barn. Gross also determined that it was the Germans who were the “undisputed bosses over life and death in Jedwabne” and “they were the only ones who could decide the fate of the Jews. It was within their power also to stop the murderous pogrom at any time. And they did not choose to intervene”.<sup>466</sup> As a matter of fact, assuming that the Jedwabne massacre was not initiated by the Germans, but by the Polish neighbours, it was only Germans in occupied Poland who could have intervened and prevented it. Besides, as Jan Tomasz Gross also noted, had Hitler’s mind not given birth to the satanic idea of the Holocaust, had the war not broken out, had the Nazis not invaded Poland or occupied Jedwabne, the Jews of Jedwabne would not have been murdered by their neighbours. Therefore, Gross concluded, “the tragedy of Jedwabne Jewry is but an episode in the murderous war that Hitler waged against all Jews”<sup>467</sup>.

In any case, Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne and its environs, and not the Germans, were direct perpetrators of the massacre and it was their motivations that Gross found puzzling. Was it some sort of atavistic anti-Semitism seeping from the pages of “Rycerz Niepokalanej” [a Polish Catholic monthly] and present in the ideology of the National Democrats? Or was it just greed and desire to take over Jewish possessions? Gross does not give a definite answer, although, apparently, he seems inclined to choose the latter.<sup>468</sup>

All this Jan Tomasz Gross wrote in the first part of his book, including a historical reconstruction and description of the events that occurred on 10 July

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464 Ibidem, p. 77.

465 Ibidem, p. 78.

466 Ibidem, p. 77.

467 Ibidem, p. 78..

468 Ibidem, p. 110.

1941. The other part can be seen as a sort of historical-philosophical commentary or treatise with a universal meaning. Of numerous considerations given to the subject, two deserve particular attention as they both became the subject of public debate in Poland: collective responsibility and the necessity for a new approach to primary and secondary sources.

Considering the crime committed by Poles in Jedwabne as well as other crimes against Jews committed by Poles during the occupation and, generally, the disgraceful attitudes of Polish society towards dying Jews, it is no surprise that Jan Tomasz Gross raised the problem of collective responsibility. However, he was far from identifying it with collective guilt. “When reflecting about this epoch, – Gross notices – we must not assign collective responsibility. We must be clearheaded enough to remember that for each killing only a specific murderer or group of murderers is responsible.”<sup>469</sup> The author, however, raises another question which is worth quoting: “Can we arbitrarily select from a national heritage what we like, and proclaim it as patrimony to the exclusion of everything else? Or just the opposite, if people are indeed bonded together by authentic spiritual affinity – I have in mind a kind of national pride rooted in the common historical experiences of many generations – are they not somehow also responsible for the horrible deeds perpetrated by members of such an ‘imagined community?’”<sup>470</sup>

The answer he gave can be summarised as follows: despite the fact that everyone lives and acts according to their own responsibility and their own actions, “our deeds and omissions contribute to common tradition and patrimony, preserved and shaped in collective memory”. Therefore, when glorifying Frédéric François Chopin or John Paul II and regarding them as “ours” we should also be aware of the fact that “mass murders” committed by Karolak, Laudanski and other “anti-heroes” from Jedwabne concern all of us and burden us all in a way. They are also “ours”.<sup>471</sup>

The problem is, many participants in the debate on “Neighbors” seemed to omit these aspects of Gross’s considerations, focusing on and quoting only a fragment of the last sentence of Gross’s book [the Polish edition] in which he stated that 1,600 Jedwabne Jews were murdered by “society” [społeczeństwo]<sup>472</sup>. This quotation, taken out of context, was used to prove the wickedness of Gross’s accusations against Poles. Moreover, it was intended to cast him in a role of a ruthless advocate of the rule of collective responsibility. Indeed he had

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469 Ibidem, p.134

470 Ibidem, p. 135

471 *Sąsiedzi*, p. 98-99

472 Ibidem, p. 170.

used the term, but in a completely different context, analysing responsibility without guilt.

In the second part of “Neighbors”, Jan Tomasz Gross also raised the problem of *terra incognita* and the distortions in Polish historiography, postulating “revision in the approach to sources”.<sup>473</sup> In Gross’s opinion, the Jedwabne massacre “opens up the historiography of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War” and “sedatives that were administered” by historians and journalists for several dozen years “have to be put aside”<sup>474</sup>. The image of the German occupation painted by them, in which Polish Jews were murdered solely by Germans assisted by Latvians, Ukrainians and *szmalcowniki*, could no longer be sustained. According to Gross, this “opening”, symbolised by the public disclosure of the Jedwabne massacre, calls for a rethinking of both wartime and post-war Polish history or, as he wrote elsewhere, for a retelling of the history in order to be able to get it back.<sup>475</sup>

To fill in the blanks in historiography, Gross postulated revision in the approach to sources. He wrote about himself and other historians dealing with World War II: “When considering survivors’ testimonies we should be well advised to change the starting premise in appraisal of their evidentiary contribution from a priori critical to in principle affirmative. By accepting what we read in a particular account as fact until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary, we would avoid more mistakes than we are likely to commit by adopting the opposite approach, which calls for cautious skepticism towards any testimony until an independent confirmation of its content can be found.”<sup>476</sup>

Such an approach, in Gross’s opinion, can be principally justified by two arguments. One concerns the above-mentioned “blank pages” in Polish historiography and the shortcomings of historical studies – such as the fact that so far there have been no publications concerning the participation of the Polish population in the Holocaust of Polish Jewry even though there would be sufficient sources. In the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw alone one can find over seven thousand depositions collected directly after the war from survivors of the Holocaust who told their wartime biographies.<sup>477</sup>

The other argument supporting the new approach refers to the very nature of the sources, that is, the “very immanent character of all evidence about the destruction of Polish Jewry”.<sup>478</sup> All the collected depositions were given not by a

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473 Ibidem, p. 141.

474 Ibidem, p. 138.

475 Ibidem, p. 117.

476 Ibidem, p. 140.

477 Ibidem, p.141.

478 Ibidem, p. 141.

representative sample of the Jewish fate but “by a few who were lucky enough to survive”.<sup>479</sup> Gross observes: “it is all skewed evidence, biased in one direction: these are all stories with a happy ending”.<sup>480</sup> In addition, “statements from witnesses who have not survived – statements that have been interrupted by the sudden death of their authors, who therefore left only fragments of what they wanted to say” are also “incomplete”. That is why, Gross notes, “we must take literally all fragments of information at our disposal”<sup>481</sup>.

The publication of Gross’s “Neighbors” in May 2000 sparked off the deepest and most significant public debate, which Joanna Michlic named “the most profound battle over the memory of Polish-Jewish relations and the Polish collective self-image.”<sup>482</sup> It was compared to the discussion in Germany initiated by Daniel Goldhagen’s book, “Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust”<sup>483</sup>. Andrzej Leder raised a question in “Res Publica Nowa” journal, “Could the Jedwabne Pogrom be a Polish Dreyfus affair?”<sup>484</sup>. As a matter of fact, it was difficult not to notice that the Polish release of “Neighbors” was a significant editorial and academic event. Also, the debate that it sparked off became an important social fact that influenced the self-image of Poles and their attitude towards their own past. It was not only debaters who highlighted it but also the authors of scholarly analyses of the debate, which were conducted after the discussion came to an end.<sup>485</sup>

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479 Ibidem, p.142.

480 Ibidem, p.141.

481 Ibidem, p. 142.

482 J. Michlic, *Coming to Terms with "Dark Past": The Polish Debate about the Jedwabne Massacre*, “Acta. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism” 2002, No. 21, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, p. 7.

483 D. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and The Holocaust*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1996.

484 A. Leder, *Jedwabne: polska sprawa Dreyfusa?*, “Res Publica Nowa”2001, No. 7, p. 13-19.

485 See: J. Michlic, *Coming to Terms with the "Dark Past": The Polish Debate about the Jedwabne Massacre*, “Acta. Analysis of Current Trends in Anti-Semitism” 2002, No. 21, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; A. Polonsky, J. Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond. The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2004; P. Ciołkiewicz, *Debata publiczna na temat mordu w Jedwabnem w kontekście przeobrażeń pamięci zbiorowej*, “Przegląd Socjologiczny” 2003, No. 1, p. 285-306; P. Ciołkiewicz, *Poszukiwanie granic odpowiedzialności zbiorowej. Debata o Jedwabnem na łamach “Gazety Wyborczej”*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2004, No. 1, p. 122-141; S. Zgliczyński, *Antysemityzm po polsku*, Warszawa 2008, p. 74-96; S. Kaprański, *Trauma i pamięć zbiorowa. Przypadek Jedwabnego*, [in:] *Stawianie się społeczeństwa. Szkice ofiarowane Piotrowi Sztompce z okazji 40-lecia pracy naukowej*, Kraków 2006.

Historians and other researchers, journalists, politicians, state and Church representatives all participated in the debate about “Neighbors”, as did Polish symbolic elites and active participants of public life and even named and anonymous Poles, who sent letters to different newspapers or magazines. For almost two years, the debate continued in numerous Polish dailies, weeklies and monthlies, on the radio and on TV. Gross’s book inspired hundreds (or maybe even thousands) of discussions, reviews, critical articles, essays, columns, interviews, reports of editorial discussions, and declarations by various personas and organisations. It would be impossible to count all the interviews, commentaries, radio or TV discussions. Moreover, the release of “Neighbors” contributed to several important discursive events in which the leading roles were played by state and Catholic Church officials. On 10 July 2001, in Jedwabne, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pogrom, ceremonies were held with the Polish president, Aleksander Kwaśniewski in attendance, and on 27 May 2001 a special penitential Mass was celebrated at the Church of All Saints in Warsaw. During the ceremony, Church officials apologised to God for the Jedwabne massacre. Both events were widely commented upon.

Clearly, the debate about the Jedwabne massacre went through different stages and had certain dynamics reflected in the number of articles, controversial statements and the above-mentioned contentious events. Researchers who analysed the trajectory and dynamics of the “Neighbors” debate distinguished its several stages in a few different ways.

Paweł Ciołkiewicz differentiates three such stages. The first began with the publication of Gross’s book in May 2001 and lasted until November. It was in this period that the first approaches towards the Jedwabne pogrom crystallised, and although initial press reportages appeared, generally, relatively little was written about it. At this stage of the debate, voices were dispersed, and for this reason Ciołkiewicz named it a “scattered stage”.

The second stage began in November 2000 and lasted until April 2001. During this period, newspapers such as “Gazeta Wyborcza” and “Rzeczpospolita” started a regular discussion. Both dailies frequently published numerous articles and a lot of information regarding Gross’s book. In a way, they became central actors of the debate and other disputers started to refer to them. More and more articles on the subject were also published in other newspapers and magazines, such as: “Polityka”, “Wprost”, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, “Nasz Dziennik”, “Życie” and “Najwyższy Czas”. After some time, the viewpoints polarised. Ciołkiewicz distinguishes two sides: “the main arena” and “the alternative arena” of the debate, using the domineering attitude towards the participation of Poles in the Jedwabne pogrom as a criterion for the division. While in the “main arena” (“Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Wprost”, “Polityka”, “Rzeczpospolita”, “Tygodnik

Powszechny”, “Znak”) Polish participation is generally not denied, in the “alternative arena” (“Nasza Polska”, “Myśl Polska”, “Najwyższy Czas”, “Nasz Dziennik”, “Życie”, “Niedziela”, “Głos. Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowy”) the dominating opinion is that Poles were either not involved in the crime or that they were forced to commit it.

Paweł Ciołkiewicz considers the beginning of the third phase to be the publication of “Inny obraz sąsiadów” [“A Different Picture of Neighbors”] by Tomasz Strzembosz in April 2001 in “Rzeczpospolita”. The article inaugurated a polemic between Gross and Strzembosz, to which many debaters referred by commenting on it and arguing about the versions of history presented by the two historians. Ciołkiewicz named this phase “the two standpoints stage” and regarded the ceremonies at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pogrom on 11 July 2001 as the end of this stage. “Since then”, he stated, “the debate has weakened (when measured by the number of articles devoted to Jedwabne) and it is undoubtedly entering a new stage”.<sup>486</sup>

A slightly different chronological categorisation of the debate about “Neighbors”, with regard to its trajectory and dynamics, was offered by Joanna Michlic. Similarly to Ciołkiewicz, she regards the release of Gross’s book as the beginning of the early stage of the debate and justifies this choice likewise. The second stage, labelled by Michlic as “intensification of the debate”, lasted between November 2000 and May 2001. It was in November 2000 when “Gazeta Wyborcza” published Jacek Żakowski’s article titled “Každy sąsiad ma imię” (“Every Neighbour Has a Name”), which sparked off fierce criticism. Besides, as one can guess, the second stage is also marked by numerous articles and commentaries published at the time and in the heat of the discussion. The debate indeed intensified.

The third stage distinguished by Michlic was marked by discussions of the penitential Mass celebrated at the Church of All Saints in Warsaw in May 2001 and the commemorative ceremony of 10 July 2001 involving the President, Aleksander Kwaśniewski. Both events aroused strong emotions, elicited various responses and were broadly commented upon for a long period of time. For that reason Joanna Michlic situated this stage between May and September 2001.

The last stage distinguished by Michlic ran between October 2001 and July 2002 and was characterised by a relatively small number of publications about “Neighbors” in comparison to the previous stages. Nonetheless, it was during this period that the investigation into the Jedwabne pogrom, held by the Main Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation of the Insti-

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486 See P. Ciołkiewicz, *Debata publiczna na temat mordu w Jedwabnem w kontekście przeobrażeń pamięci zbiorowej*, “Przegląd Socjologiczny” 2003, No. 1, p. 294-296.

tute of National Remembrance (IPN), was most discussed and written about. It was also the time when Leon Kieres, the president of the Institute, presented the annual IPN report to the Parliament (Sejm) and thereby sparked off a heated parliamentary debate. The event of this period most commented upon, however, was the presentation of the final findings of the IPN investigation by prosecutor Radosław Ignatiew, who supervised the inquiry. Prosecutor Ignatiew informed the public opinion about the final findings on 9 July 2002.<sup>487</sup>

All the threads and events constituting respective stages of the debate will be developed and described later in this chapter. The analysis of the public debate elicited by “Neighbors” will not, however, follow its chronology or dynamics (although, clearly, it would be difficult to ignore them). I will, rather, analyse the topics of the debate, present controversial elements and, above all, reconstruct various standpoints.

I consider the publication of the Polish edition of “Neighbors” in May 2000 as the beginning of the debate and the presentation of the final findings of the IPN investigation by prosecutor Radosław Ignatiew in July 2002 as its end. In December 2002, the Institute of National Remembrance published a selection of documents under the title “Wokół Jedwabnego” (English: “Around Jedwabne”). This monumental, two-volume publication consisting of studies and documents became a sort of “white paper” on the Jedwabne pogrom and the outcome of the finished investigation into this case.<sup>488</sup>

Reconstruction of the discussion about Gross’s findings and opinions, which was held by professional historians, is proposed herein as a starting point of the analysis of the debate around “Neighbors”. Pointing at important gaps and distortions in prevailing Polish historiography and postulating radical changes in the approach to sources, Gross himself provoked them to participate in the debate. It would be difficult to disagree with Tomasz Szarota’s findings, who stated that however visible the historians’ participation in the debate was, it did not dominate the discussion – but there are still two reasons why I believe it was important.<sup>489</sup> Firstly, it was historians who, owing to their profession, were considered by most participants and by the public particularly entitled to be involved in the polemics against Gross and to criticise his book. They were regarded as experts with the right competences and academic tools. Besides, as

487 See J. Michlic, *Coming to Terms with “Dark Past”: The Polish Debate about the Jedwabne Massacre*, “Acta. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism” 2002, No. 21, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, p. 11-13, 22, 19-31.

488 P. Machcewicz, K. Persak, (ed.), *Wokół Jedwabnego. Studia, Vol. 1*, Warszawa 2002; P. Machcewicz, K. Persak, (ed.) *Wokół Jedwabnego. Dokumenty, Vol. 2*, Warszawa 2002.

489 T. Szarota, *Debata narodowa o Jedwabnem*, “Więź” 2001, No. 4, p. 38.

Andrzej Leder aptly noted, it was mostly them who had the power of “reviving the events” and who could somehow decide “what sort of killer figure would emerge in front of us here and now”.<sup>490</sup> In the end, however, they did not actually have the power to influence who would be trusted by the participants and the public and what sort of “killer figure” would appear in front of their eyes.

We thus move towards another argument supporting the significant role of historians in the debate about the Jedwabne pogrom. Almost every participant (and probably also the public) had “their own” historian adopting a certain standpoint on the issue. In addition, the attitudes and intentions of particular historians were evaluated and verified during the debate.

Another area of the analysis of the debate around “Neighbors” is the response to the Jedwabne pogrom from other participants in the debate. The standpoints revealed in the course of the debate can be categorised according to the characteristic attitudes/narratives of the participants.

The first narrative can be labelled “a moral discourse”. This label is not in the least accidental – it refers to the groundbreaking and continually discussed essay “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto” written by Jan Błoński, the outstanding literary critic. In his essay, Błoński proposed an approach to the troubled history of Polish-Jewish relations and to anti-Semitism, which promised to change the prevailing attitude – a never-ending process of listing damages and sorrows, mutual reproaching for sins and the use various defensive strategies.<sup>491</sup> Clearly, the new attitude proposed by Błoński evoked the necessity of adapting a language, which I will call here “the language of morality”. As Michał Głowiński noticed in his article, Błoński’s essay was written in this very language.<sup>492</sup>

The attitude of the debaters who spoke this language can be also described as self-critical or “affirmative”, as Andrzej Paczkowski suggests.<sup>493</sup> Affirmative debaters agreed with Gross, supported the arguments developed in his book and dismissed the critical remarks concerning “Neighbors” and its author. They claimed that in the light of revelations of the massacre, factual details and meth-

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490 A. Leder, *Jedwabne: polska sprawa Dreyfusa?*, “Res Publica Nowa” 2001, No. 7, s. 16-17.

491 See: J. Błoński, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, No. 11/1/1987, p. 1-4.

492 Michał Głowiński commented on the language of Błoński’s essay saying it was “neither a language of accusation nor a language of apology (...), nor a language of polemics with accusations nor a language of accusations of the polemics (...). He [Błoński] speaks about the problem of Polish-Jewish relations and about the Polish view of the Holocaust in a language of morality”. M. Głowiński, *Esej Błońskiego po latach*, “Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały” 2006, No. 2, p. 16.

493 A. Paczkowski, *Debata wokół “Sąsiadów”*: próba wstępnej typologii, “Rzeczpospolita”, 24 III 2001, p. 16.

odological shortcomings are less important. They placed emphasis on the moral aspects of revealing the Jedwabne pogrom and the consequences of this revelation for Poles.

The attitude of the debaters who took defensive positions will be a separate subject of analysis. I call their approach a “defence of the Polish innocence paradigm”, while stressing that this stance is not at all homogenous but that there are significant differences of cognitive perspectives. According to Sławomir Sierakowski, the Jedwabne question divided debaters and society into “well-informed citizens” and “humiliated patriots”; however, this seems to be too simple a bipolarity.<sup>494</sup> Both groups had their own divisions and “well-informed citizens” often adopted the positions of “humiliated patriots”.

Therefore, It should be firmly stated that defensive attitudes revealed during the debate can be divided into two types: moderate and radical defence or moderate and offensive defence. While debaters from the former group usually did not question the participation of Poles in the Jedwabne pogrom but demonstrated various extenuating circumstances and searched for them with stronger or weaker determination, the latter minimised the participation or even called it into doubt. In addition, they considered Gross’s publication to be a part of a wider attack against Poland and Poles and they in turn responded with an attack. They often used anti-Semitic rhetoric and beneath the surface of their formulated opinions, numerous stereotypes and prejudices were hidden. Discourses corresponding to these two defensive attitudes could be respectively named a “yes, but” and a “no, it’s them” discourse.

The last aspect under consideration will be the debaters’ responses to the two acts of apology for the Jedwabne massacre. One was initiated by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski and the other by the Cardinal-Primate of Poland, Józef Glemp; that is, by the highest state and Church officials. Debates and conflicts concerning these events, that is, “reconciliatory practices” as Bjoren Krondorfer would call them, or “political rituals of atonement” using Hermann Lübbe’s terminology,<sup>495</sup> will be discussed. As one might expect, the initiatives provoked very diverse responses and judgements, from total approval to accusations of high treason.

494 S. Sierakowski, *Chcemy innej historii*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 11 VI 2003, p. 15; using the term “well-informed citizens” in inverted commas, Sławomir Sierakowski must have referred to Alfred Schütz and his essay: *The Well-Informed Citizen. An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge*, “Social Research”, No. 13/1946, 463-78.

495 See: B. Krondorfer, *Remembrance and Reconciliation: Encounters Between Young Jews and Germans*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1995, p. 20; B. Korzeniewski, *Polityczne rytuały pokuty w perspektywie zagadnienia autonomii jednostki*, Poznań 2006, p. 19-20; K. Wigura, *Wina narodów. Przebaczenie jako strategia prowadzenia polityki*, Gdańsk-Warszawa 2011, p. 35-67.

## 2. Historikerstreit in Polish

Gross's revelations of the crime committed in Jedwabne and his criticism of the omissions in prevailing Polish historiography provoked many Polish historians into a discussion. Although both parts of "Neighbors" were discussed, the way Gross presented the massacre and its circumstances dominated the debate. The structure of the debate mirrored the structure of the book and the problems raised by Gross.

The historians' dispute obviously had its own trajectory, dynamic and turning points. It was determined to a large degree by a succession of new discoveries, documents and information that appeared during the course of the investigation into the Jedwabne massacre led by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN).<sup>496</sup> The results of the investigation were instantly commented upon and used by the historians. Some of the information and documents, and the preliminary hypotheses based on them, were subsequently found to be false and aroused only temporary emotions. Thus, the analysis of the historians' reactions to each and every new piece of information would be meaningless.

The greatest influence on the course of this debate stemmed, however, from the presentation to the public by historians of the professional opinions and studies of the problem Gross had raised. Besides, it was historians, as experts, who disputed the methodological construction of "Neighbors" – although they finally reached agreement on this matter.

The historians' dispute about "Neighbors" was initiated by the discussion between Tomasz Szarota and Jan Tomasz Gross in "Gazeta Wyborcza" daily. In an interview given to Jacek Żakowski, Szarota did not question elementary facts presented in Gross's book but considered them shocking, irrefutable and requiring a change in the prevailing "opinions about the attitudes of Poles during World War II".<sup>497</sup> Consequently, he regarded the publication of "Neighbors" as

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496 31 August 2001, the head of the Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against the Polish Nation, Witold Kulesza, commissioned the IPN branch in Białostockie to start an investigation into the Jedwabne massacre. Radosław Ignatiew was appointed public prosecutor in the case. During the investigation, a few dozen witnesses were examined, archive materials were analyzed, both Polish (IPN Archive, New Files Archive, Public Archives in Białystok, Elk and Łomża, Jewish Historical Institute Archive) and foreign (Ludwigsburg, Freiburg, Berlin, Jerusalem, Minsk, Grodno); there was also an exhumation in Jedwabne. Documents and scientific studies related to the investigation were discussed and published. See: P. Machcewicz, K. Persak (ed.), *Wokół Jedwabnego. Studia, vol. 1*, Warszawa 2002; (Idem), *Wokół Jedwabnego. Dokumenty, vol. 2*, Warszawa 2002.

497 J. Żakowski, *Diabelskie szczegóły*, interview with T. Szarota, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 18-19 XI 2000, p. 10-12.

Gross's undoubted contribution since the author had initiated a discussion on an important but neglected subject that should be studied rather than avoided. Szarota, however, cast doubts on Gross's academic reliability and accused him of writing "Neighbors" too hurriedly and of studying "the Jedwabne question" too superficially. His remarks referred mostly to the sources Gross included or omitted, as well as to Gross's lack of response or inadequate response to questions Szarota regarded as significant.

As for the sources used by the author to reconstruct the events in Jedwabne, Szarota's doubts concerned the accounts provided by the survivors of the massacre, stored in the Jewish Historical Institute and written in the Memorial Book of Jedwabne Jews. Szarota agreed with Gross that "in 1945, the survivors could not have lied" but suggested that they might have been wrong about some details owing to the emotions raised by the tragic stories they were telling. He also criticised Gross for not including in his book Szymon Datner's article on the Jedwabne massacre, published in "Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego" (Jewish Historical Institute Quarterly), or the publication by Waldemar Monkiewicz, the prosecutor in the Jedwabne trial of 1949. In his article (published in 1983) the prosecutor argued that on the day of the massacre, over 200 Germans, commanded by Wolfgang Birkner from the Warsaw Gestapo, arrived in Jedwabne in army trucks. They were supposed to co-found the so-called Commando Białystok, with Birkner in command, which according to Monkiewicz participated in other murders of Jews in the region.<sup>498</sup>

According to Tomasz Szarota, Gross should not have ignored this information but should have tried to obtain the documents that could prove the presence of Germans in Jedwabne and their role in the pogrom. He should have researched the materials in order to establish whether the massacre was committed spontaneously by neighbours with the consent of the few Germans who were in the town or by "some scum commanded and inspired by a German commando sent to Jedwabne".<sup>499</sup> According to Szarota, the author of "Neighbors" also belittled the effect of the Soviet occupation of the area and one of the interpretations of the hatred towards Jews, according to which it was revenge for the attitude of some of them under Soviet rule. Although he agreed with Gross that Jews had also been victims of the Soviet system and that to generalise their attitude might

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498 Ibidem.

499 Szarota stated that "every solid historian" would try to find these documents before publishing a book, while "Gross as a sociologist and a journalist must have decided it was not necessary to explain the case". He also claimed, however, that even if it had been established that the order to kill Jedwabne Jews had been given by the Germans, it would not have "devaluated the horrible meaning of the facts" but "significantly modified them". J. Żakowski, *Diabelskie...*, p. 10-12.

stereotype them, in his opinion such a “generalised observation” supported by individual experiences became a source of hatred and violent acts against Jews.<sup>500</sup>

Tomasz Szarota also pointed out other pieces of information missing from “Neighbors” and at the hastiness of the author’s conclusions but he never questioned that the massacre in Jedwabne had been committed by Poles. He recommended further research and his main message could be summarised with his own words: “That Poles murdered is indisputable. But to fully understand what happened, one should study the circumstances in detail. What Gross wrote in ‘Neighbors’ is enough to shake our conscience. But to understand the whole situation, one has to know the details. Every historian knows that the devil is in details”.<sup>501</sup>

In response to the interview with Tomasz Szarota, Jan Tomasz Gross published an article, also in “Gazeta Wyborcza”, with a meaningful title “Mord ‘zrozumiały?’” (“‘Comprehensible’ Murder?”).<sup>502</sup> Gross undermined the significance of prosecutor Monkiewicz’s publication, arguing that he had “nothing to say about what happened in Jedwabne and was only presenting his own deductions”, which were not confirmed by eyewitnesses, or Jedwabne inhabitants. Besides, Gross stated, Monkiewicz was not actually the prosecutor in the Łomża trial. The author agreed, however, that the “Jedwabne affair” could be analysed “more painstakingly” and the book could have been written less hurriedly. He regretted not having noted Datner’s article which, he said, only confirmed his thesis. He noticed, however, that it would also be possible to read “Neighbours” more painstakingly and less hurriedly. The last comment is obviously directed at Tomasz Szarota, who accused Gross of not including some information and of presenting argumentation that was not well-grounded. Gross also dismissed Szarota’s question about why Jedwabne Jews on this day did not attempt “to defend themselves or even to flee”, finding it “entirely unhistorical”.<sup>503</sup>

In response, Tomasz Szarota admitted his minor mistake of attributing the role of the prosecutor in the 1949 Łomża trial to Monkiewicz. However, he repeated his suggestion for further research, which could help determine the Germans’ role in the pogrom and understand what happened on 10 July 1941 in Jedwabne. In his polemic, Szarota included two significant statements that clearly defined his standpoint. Firstly, he classified “Neighbors” among classic liter-

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500 Ibidem.

501 Ibidem.

502 J. T. Gross, *Mord “zrozumiały?”*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 25 XI 2000, p. 14, see also: <http://wiesz.free.ngo.pl/jedwabne/article/11.html>

503 Ibidem.

ary works, such as “Campo di Fiori” by Czesław Miłosz, “Medallions” by Zofia Nałkowska, “Życie na niby” (“Life As If”) by Kazimierz Wyka and “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto” by Jan Błński, which “becoming popular, are persistently referred to in continuing discussions.” Secondly, he again categorically stated that it was Gross who was right about the perpetrators of Jedwabne murder and not Monkiewicz, who pointed at the Germans.<sup>504</sup>

The polemic between Tomasz Szarota and Jan Tomasz Gross inspired other historians to join the debate surrounding “Neighbors”, to point at numerous circumstances or details Gross had overlooked, to criticise his methodology, the theories he had formulated or conclusions he had drawn. Although all of them stressed they only wanted reliable research in order to get closer to the truth, it is difficult to trust these declarations. Their statements repeatedly disclosed quite a different reason for their involvement in the debate, which was a personal desire to protect the good name of the Polish nation. In order to achieve this, they attempted in various ways to (more or less) belittle Gross’s book and his findings. In addition, they looked for various extenuating circumstances and arguments that could mitigate the blame. They also insisted, however, that they did not question the crime but condemned it and all they wanted was to get the full picture of the events and the truth – exact and historical, not some comfortable truth, of course.

Among the historians adopting a defensive position in the debate about “Neighbors”, one could find Tomasz Strzembosz, Piotr Gontarczyk, Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Bogdan Musiał, Leszek Żebrowski, Marek Wierzbicki, Adam Cyra, Sławomir Radoń and Krzysztof Jasiewicz. Their articles were usually published in popular national daily newspapers such as “Rzeczpospolita”, “Życie”, “Nasz Dziennik”, but also in magazines. It is important to analyse these articles and the press interviews with their authors to find out the content and the form of their criticism for “Neighbors”.

The main objections to Gross’s book that the above-mentioned historians raised concerned historical sources. They pointed at sources that Gross overlooked but should have included, and doubted the validity of the sources on which “Neighbors” had been based. As for the former, most of these were documents of the Jedwabne murder accessible in German archives. The critics accused Gross of not following the trace of Monkiewicz’s publication and not verifying the question of the German presence in Jedwabne and their role in the events. Other sources that the author did not study (but should have) were documents and testi-

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504 T. Szarota, *Czy na pewno już wszystko wiemy?*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2-3 XII 2000, p. 21.

monies about Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet rule, particularly those concerning how the Jews acted at the time.

Much more serious objections, however, concerned the sources Gross had actually used but which were almost unanimously discredited by his critics. Tomasz Strzembosz, as well as Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Piotr Gontarczyk and Sławomir Radoń expressed their doubts about the credibility and thus significance of the documents from the investigations of 1949 and 1953. They noted the haste of the investigation led by the Security Service (UB) as well as the use of torture, which forced the accused to change the testimonies they had previously given. However, the key argument used by the critics to discredit these sources was their very origin. For example, Tomasz Strzembosz commented that he considered the value of UB materials to be “particularly low, because people could have said exactly what they were told.”<sup>505</sup>

All the above-mentioned historians also questioned the credibility of the accounts of survivors of the massacre. Some of them considered the key witness Szmul Wasersztajn’s testimony to be not entirely reliable. Adam Cyra stressed that Wasersztajn was a “long-time UB officer in Łomża”<sup>506</sup>; Marek Chodakiewicz suggested the account was not even Wasersztajn’s but given by “a woman related to NKVD”<sup>507</sup>; and Tomasz Strzembosz described Wasersztajn’s account as “too lengthy, too ample, too omniscient” and therefore raising reasonable doubts.<sup>508</sup>

A generalising opinion about the accounts of the Holocaust survivors was expressed by Piotr Gontarczyk, who claimed that the various historical commissions that had acquired testimonies “cared about their political or propagandist interests more than the truth” and, besides, these sources contained “huge emotional baggage and hasty judgments resulting from dramatic experiences”. Gontarczyk also questioned the value of the accounts written after the war in the USA – he did not consider them as narratives of “the bygone reality” but rather “an opportunity to express dislike or simply hostility towards Poland and Poles, so called ‘anti-Polonism’”.<sup>509</sup> It is safe to say that by writing this he also meant one of the sources used by Jan Tomasz Gross, that is the *Yedwabne History and Memorial Book* edited in the USA. Anyway, this source was openly criticised by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, who claimed that all the memorial books he had

505 E. Isakiewicz, *Szubienica i huśtawka*, an interview with T. Strzembosz, “Gazeta Polska”, 17 I 2001, p. 12.

506 A. Cyra, *Zapomniana relacja*, “Nasz Dziennik”, 29 III 2001, p. 11.

507 M. Rutkowska, *Jedwabne to dopiero początek*, interview with M. J. Chodakiewicz, “Nasz Dziennik”, 3-4 III 2001, p. 15.

508 E. Isakiewicz, *Szubienica i huśtawka...*, p. 12.

509 P. Gontarczyk, *Gross kontra fakty*, “Życie”, 31 I 2001, p. 16.

ever read were similar and contained “almost always the same accusations against Poles”. He also questioned the testimonies of Jewish witnesses who “very often emphasise Polish collaboration in the massacre and their co-responsibility for the Holocaust”. He also suggested, like Gontarczyk, that Jewish historical commissions had acquired the accounts of Holocaust survivors after the war acting under special instructions and that part of these accounts served “communist propaganda or even UB activity”, not science.<sup>510</sup>

The historians who took the defensive stand and doubted the reliability of the Holocaust survivors’ accounts also referred to Gross’s affirmative approach to these testimonies. Marek Wierzbicki suggested that the author’s choice of historical sources had been arbitrary and biased. While he acknowledged and affirmed survivors’ accounts of the anti-Semitic attitudes of Poles before the German occupation, Gross did not recognise or give credibility to the accounts by Poles of the “pro-Soviet and anti-Polish attitude of Jews before the Soviet occupation”.<sup>511</sup> Piotr Gontarczyk even reviewed Gross’s approach “against the principles of the historical profession”, stating that sources should be studied objectively “regardless of the author’s ethnic origin.”<sup>512</sup> Similarly, Marek Jan Chodkiewicz postulated that Jewish memories should be treated and verified the same way as any other account, saying: “This group [Jews – author’s note] must not be academically differentiated by the arbitrary ‘affirmation’ of their testimonies.”<sup>513</sup>

The one who gave the greatest deal of attention to Gross’s new approach to sources, however, was Bogdan Musiał. In his article titled “Histografia mityczna” (“Mythical Historiography”) Musiał considered the topic of the Americanisation of the Holocaust and the process of making the Holocaust American Jewry’s “substitute religion”, which cemented their community and common identity in an era of the disintegration of traditional social bonds. According to the author, the existence of such a phenomenon can be observed in the processes of sacralisation, instrumentalisation, commercialisation and politicisation of the Holocaust. In his opinion, one of the doctrines of this lay-religion of the Holocaust is “the uncritical approach to the accounts of its survivors”. Hence, Musiał

510 M. J. Chodakiewicz, *Kłopoty z kuracją szokową*, “Rzeczpospolita” 5 I 2001, p. 13.

511 T. M. Płużański, *Wybiórcze traktowanie źródeł*, an interview with M. Wierzbicki, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 2001, No. 9, p. 15.

512 “Did the author of *Neighbors* – Gontarczyk asked – consider for a moment what would happen if an author of a unique account turned out to be of unknown or uncertain origin? Should we then search for other accounts or for the witness’s birth certificate?” P. Gontarczyk, *Gross kontra fakty*, “Życie” 31 I 2001,

513 M. Rutkowska, *Jedwabne to dopiero początek*, an interview with M.J. Chodakiewicz, “Nasz Dziennik” 3-4 III 2001, p. 15.

did not regard Gross's postulate to be a new, revealing "pattern to follow in Holocaust historiography" but only a repetition of "a doctrine already in force in the USA". What is more, this doctrine is harmful because, Musiał writes, a scholar should be characterised by "professional scepticism and careful analysis of any account" instead of the affirmative approach to the Holocaust survivors' testimonies, proposed by Gross.<sup>514</sup>

Apart from Gross's approach to sources, the above-mentioned historians also pointed at other drawbacks of his book. The main objection they raised was the lack of a reliable answer to the question of the participation and role of Germans in the Jedwabne pogrom. The critics generally did not question the participation of a certain number of Poles in the massacre, often stressing it was only "the dregs of society", but it was Germans to whom they attributed the inspiration for the crime, as well as its organisation and supervision. There were exceptions, however. In one of the interviews, Tomasz Strzembosz expressed his doubts about the assertion that Jedwabne Jews had been murdered by Polish hands, saying he was in possession of materials that allowed him to think that it had been Germans, not Poles, who had burnt the Jews in the barn.<sup>515</sup> Leszek Żebrowski also pointed at Germans as the direct perpetrators of the massacre.<sup>516</sup>

Another objection against "Neighbors" and its author was that he had abstracted the Jedwabne pogrom and Polish-Jewish relations from a wider historical background – only sketching the context cursorily, if not completely ignoring it. What the critics meant were not the pre-war Polish-Jewish relations, but rather the period of Soviet occupation of Jedwabne and other lands in the northern east of Poland. According to them, it was the events from this period that could provide a more convincing explanation for the Jedwabne crime than either anti-Semitism or the desire for profit. The significance of these events and their explanatory power were recklessly belittled by Gross, they said, and Piotr Gontarczyk even called it "one of the major drawbacks" of the book.<sup>517</sup>

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514 B. Musiał, *Historiografia mityczna*, "Rzeczpospolita" 24 II 2001, p. 11.

515 E. Isakiewicz, *Szubienica i huśtawka*, an interview with T. Strzembosz, "Gazeta Polska" 17 I 2001, p. 12.

516 W. Moszkowski, *Jedwabnym szlakiem kłamstw*, an interview with L. Żebrowski, "Nasz Dziennik" 31 III-1 IV 2001, p. 1, 14-15.

517 P. Gontarczyk, *Gross kontra fakty*, "Życie" 31 I 2001, 15; Actually it's not quite true because "Neighbors" contains a short passage entitled "Soviet occupation, 1939-41". However, Gross left out an in-depth analysis of what had happened in Jedwabne under Soviet occupation and on the basis of a few accounts and documents he drew a conclusion that there is no reason to single out Jedwabne as a place where relationships between Jews and the rest of the population were more antagonistic than anywhere else at the time." J. T. Gross, *Neighbors...*, p. 33.

Both Gontarczyk and all other above-mentioned historians stressed that it had been acts of Jews under the Soviet occupation that had generated or intensified Polish hatred towards them. The Soviet occupation was a time when Jews became engraved into Polish memory as the traitors of the Polish nation and brutal torturers who had cordially welcomed Soviet occupiers, collaborated with them and helped them organise the expulsions of Poles. The evidence for these events was supposed to be found in the accounts of Polish witnesses, but was ignored by Gross. It was for instance Marek Wierzbicki who spoke about Soviets and Jews collaborating and equally enjoying Polish tragedies. He also claimed that even in September 1939, Jews revealed “very strong feelings of hostility towards Poland and the Polish nation”.<sup>518</sup> Other historians also suggested that any analysis of the Jedwabne crime should include the thread of the Polish revenge for the attitudes of some Jews under Soviet occupation and it should not ignore Polish accounts of these disgraceful attitudes – which Gross’s investigation did, by ignoring these accounts and these facts.

The main advocate of such an opinion and the main critic of Gross’s omissions and play-downs was Tomasz Strzembosz, who expressed his views in an article under the very meaningful title: “Przemilczana kolaboracja” [“The Ignored Collaboration”]. In the introduction he declared: “Nothing can justify killing men, women and children only because they represent some social class, some nation or some religion, for any application of justice must have an individual character”. The author then presented the multitude of miseries Poles suffered under the Soviet occupation, also because of the Jews who actively and eagerly collaborated with Soviet occupiers. He wrote about the Jewish population who “participated en masse in giving welcome to the invading army and in introducing the new order, also by violent means”, which was “confirmed by thousands of Polish, Jewish and Soviet testimonies.” He wrote about Jews who “undertook acts of rebellion against the Polish state”, “executing the representatives of the Polish state authority, and attacking (...) units of the Polish Army”, Jews “wearing red armbands and armed with rifles” who “in large numbers took part in the mass arrests and deportations”, etc. Moreover, based on a few accounts acquired in the 1990s, he claimed that Jedwabne Jews had also followed this type of attitude of Jewry under the Soviet occupation.<sup>519</sup>

Despite Strzembosz’s standpoint expressed in the introduction, the article could have made an impression on its reader that it was an expiation of guilt and that the author attempted to dissolve the crime in an ocean of mutual, Polish-

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518 T.M. Płuzański, *Każdy morderca ma imię*, an interview with M. Wierzbicki, “Najwyższy Czas!” 10 III 2001, p. XXVIII.

519 T. Strzembosz, *Przemilczana kolaboracja*, “Rzeczpospolita” 27 I 2001, p. 9-10.

Jewish bad deeds. One of those who got such an impression was the historian Israel Gutman. He noted that indirectly, in some way, the expressions used in the article “suggest some sort of calculation about Jedwabne: you to us, we to you!” Moreover, Gutman noticed that the “rumours and vague accusations Strzembosz constantly quotes are flights of the imagination and are not worth referring to.”<sup>520</sup> The commentary provoked Strzembosz to respond and “Więź” magazine became a battleground for the two historians.<sup>521</sup>

To conclude, historians who took a defensive stand criticised “Neighbors” mostly for methodological mistakes, sources of uncertain reliability, for ignoring important sources and belittling the historical context of the events. Sławomir Radoń accused Gross of “a lack of academic reliability” and of jumping to conclusions. He also suggested that his book equated Poles and Germans as the perpetrators of the Holocaust.<sup>522</sup> Piotr Gontarczyk accused the author of using “undocumented statements and facts”, a “biased choice of sources”, ignoring or altering whatever challenged his theories and building the historical narrative “on the basis of stereotypes, prejudice and ordinary gossips”. For all these reasons, he stated in the last words of his article that “Jan Tomasz Gross’s book cannot be the basis of any serious debate about our history”.<sup>523</sup>

These and similar objections towards Gross were also raised by his other declared critics. Unlike Tomasz Szarota, who classified Gross’s book among “The Poor Poles...” by Błoński or “Campo di Fiori” by Miłosz, due to its significance, some compared “Neighbors” to the article by Michał Cichy, “Czarne karty powstania”<sup>524</sup> [“The Black Pages of the Uprising”] and Gross to Daniel Goldhagen.<sup>525</sup> These comparisons, obviously, never referred to the academic achievements of the authors but rather to their alleged offhandedness, lack of academic credibility and a reckless way of formulating opinions. Bogdan Musiał compared “Neighbors” to the controversial German exhibition from 1995, “Wehrmacht crimes 1941-1944” which, according to him, “after a detailed analysis of photographs and documents” turned out to be a “primitive manipulation of the sources” and an example of “how often facts are subjected to ideological

520 I. Gutman, *Krzyk i cisza*, “Więź” 2001, No. 4, p. 35.

521 See T. Strzembosz, *Panu Prof. Gutmanowi do sztambucha*, “Więź” 2001, No. 6, p. 92-97; I. Gutman, “Oni” i “my”, “Więź” 2001, No. 8, p. 22-32.

522 R. Graczyk, *Pochopne sądy Grossa*, an interview with S. Radoń, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 20-21 I 2001, p. 25.

523 P. Gontarczyk, *Gross kontra fakty*, “Życie” 31 I 2001, 15-16.

524 See W. Moszkowski, *Jedwabnym szlakiem kłamstw*, an interview with L. Żebrowski, “Nasz Dziennik” 31 III-1 IV 2001, p. 14.

525 See N. Finkelstein, *Goldhagen dla początkujących*, “Rzeczpospolita” 20 VI 2001, p. 9-10.

pressure". Musiał suggested that this should not be forgotten in the debate about Jedwabne.<sup>526</sup>

Between May 2000 and March 2001, more historians joined the above-mentioned debaters. Some, like Tomasz Szarota, postulated the necessity of further research and expressed their objections towards Gross's book by referring mostly to missing sources, to methodological problems or ignoring circumstances they found important. Paweł Machcewicz, for example, pointed out the materials Gross had never found but should have, and criticised simplifications and generalisations made by the author. Machcewicz accused Gross of not reflecting enough on the role of Germans in the Jedwabne events. Moreover, the historian noted, the author had never provided an answer to the question of the motives of the crime, while according to Machcewicz one of the key motives must have been the revenge on Jews for their "collaboration with the Soviet occupiers".

Although many of Machcewicz's objections had already been raised by other critics of Gross, whom I quoted earlier in this book, the context was different: the tone of his statement was more moderate, less aggressive and definitely less defensive. Machcewicz never doubted that "Jedwabne Jews had been killed by their Polish neighbors" and that the possible German inspiration or the revenge motive could not change "the moral judgment of what happened in Jedwabne" nor "justify the murderers". He found that Gross's book was needed, for "shaking our consciences" and making it necessary to deconstruct the heroic image of Poles under German occupation, in which, until then, there had been no space for the participants of anti-Jewish pogroms or szmalcownik. He was concerned, however, what the reception of "Neighbors" would be in Germany and in the USA, when the book was translated into other languages. He also wondered whether Gross's intrepid book would not interrupt Polish-Jewish dialogue because of its simplifications and generalisations or whether it would not postpone "the moment Poles are ready to confess their sins".<sup>527</sup>

In other words, there were different forms of criticism towards "Neighbors" and various responses by historians to the crime it had revealed. Among the most radical critics and the most determined protectors of Poland's good name were undoubtedly Jerzy Robert Nowak and Ryszard Bender. Although other historians aspired to be members of this group and, on the basis of what they wrote, could be assigned to it, the two scholars mentioned above distinguished themselves as particularly virulent, basing their opinions on anti-Semitic clichés and often using anti-Semitic rhetoric. Their standpoint towards Gross's book could be summarised in one sentence: the Jewish historian Gross wrote a book made

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526 B. Musiał, *Historiografia mityczna*, "Rzeczpospolita" 24 II 2001, p. 11.

527 P. Machcewicz, *W cieniu Jedwabnego*, "Rzeczpospolita" 11 XII 2000, p. 7.

up of lies and slanders, which is another proof of the common western phenomenon – anti-Polonism, and whose main aim is to hold Poles co-responsible for the Holocaust, label them as genetically anti-Semitic and force them to pay damages and give the Jewish possessions back.

There were also historians whose evaluation of the methodology of “Neighbors” was utterly different or who completely ignored this aspect of the book, focusing on the meaning and contexts of the revealed massacre. According to some of them, “technical” flaws of the book, discussed in public, were often of secondary importance and seen as a secondary concern.

Gross’s book was, for example, regarded as “an example of good methodology” by Andrzej Żbikowski. In his opinion, “Gross conducted a very careful analysis of the available sources, examined the dynamics of the events, reconstructed the most dramatic moments and determined the perpetrators of the murder”. According to Żbikowski, there was little to add to Gross’s findings until new sources were discovered which would correct Gross’s thinking and narration. In his article, Żbikowski disagreed with the theory of revenge for Jewish actions under the Soviet occupation, which was popularised by other historians. While he did not question the fact that some Jews had indeed supported the new rule, had been active in its structures and co-founded the apparatus of violence, he stressed that there had not been many of them and their attitude had not been the reason for pogroms in the Białostockie region, including the Jedwabne pogrom. On the basis of analysis of the accounts available in the Jewish Historical Institute he argued that “all murderers used the popular belief in the Jewish collaboration with the Soviets as a pretext to rob and murder with impunity.”

Żbikowski referred to the act of questioning the accounts of the Jewish survivors and searching for evidence of a German presence in Jedwabne as “burying one’s head in the sand”. Neither the German presence nor their granting of permission for killing Jews could change Żbikowski’s opinion that Germans had not forced the Jedwabne inhabitants to murder their Jewish neighbours.<sup>528</sup> The conclusion of Żbikowski’s words was quite clear: it must have been the locals who wanted it.

A similar opinion was expressed by Jolanta Żyndul in her analysis of the mechanism of pogroms based on the example of the Przytyk pogrom. She argued that it mattered little whether pogroms were organised or spontaneous or what their motives were. Even if in some cases a pogrom was indeed revenge, the crowd did not search for factual perpetrators of treason or crime, but instead punished the whole Jewish community. Rather, it was the circumstances that mattered each time. It was important whether “the atmosphere of antipathy in a

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528 A. Żbikowski, *Nie było rozkazu*, “Rzeczpospolita” 4 I 2001, p. 7.

given community was strong enough to make relatively calm people assault, beat without restraint or even kill every Jew who was within their reach". And so it was in Jedwabne, according to Jolanta Żyndul. Even if revenge for Jewish "collaboration" under the Soviet occupation played some part, the vindictive crowd did not look for the actual traitors but punished the whole Jewish community of Jedwabne.<sup>529</sup>

Another historian, Marcin Kula, shared this view. Even if the Jedwabne pogrom had been inspired by the Germans, their inducement must have met "favourable conditions", Kula wrote, interpreting the Jedwabne murder as an "extreme display of hatred", characteristic of the "Eastern European Plain" – the "traditional" area of pogroms. Another cause of the pogrom, according to Kula, apart from the favourable conditions to kill Jews, was rooted in the Christian command to love applying only to "their people" and excluding Jews. Poles and Jews were "neighbours" only in "the spatial sense", but in fact there was distance and strangeness between them.<sup>530</sup>

Analogously, another debater, Israel Gutman, stated that Jedwabne citizens who had murdered Jews had not perceived them as human beings. They were fed with pre-war anti-Semitism, according to which Jews posed a threat that one should be rid of. Under the favourable circumstances created by the Germans who "made the basis for evil and murder", Jedwabne citizens "felt they could commit it". According to Gutman, they took advantage of the situation and murdered their Jewish neighbours who were "beyond the area of moral responsibility".

Gulman also argued with Tomasz Szarota's opinion, presented in "Gazeta Wyborcza" daily, that one should first find out the "devilish details" to reconstruct the full picture of the Jedwabne massacre and to understand it properly. In Gutman's opinion, "in such terrible events people are devilish and not details" while the details Szarota demanded to take into account were classified by Gutman as wishful thinking. Although Gutman never regarded "Neighbors" as complete, elaborate or answering all possible questions, he was certain about one thing: the disclosure of the Jedwabne massacre made Błoński's statement "we didn't take part in the genocide"<sup>531</sup> invalid.

All the above-mentioned views of the historians who took different stands in the debate about "Neighbors" were presented in public discourse between May 2000 and March 2001. The time frame is important because at the end of March 2001, there was an important turning point in the historical dispute and, in gen-

529 J. Żyndul, *Jeśli nie pogrom, to co?*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 8 III 2001, p. 18.

530 M. Kula, *Ludzie ludziami*, "Rzeczpospolita" 17-18 III 2001, p. 8-9.

531 J. Błoński, *The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto*, op. cit.

eral, in the trajectory of the Jedwabne debate. Namely, the historians were granted access to the files from the 1949 Łomża trial of the Jedwabne murderers. Until then, the documents could not be used for two reasons: first, the Main Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, which kept the files, was in the process of liquidation and reorganisation; second, the files were later taken over by the prosecutor Radosław Ignatiew, who held the inquiry into the Jedwabne case.<sup>532</sup> It was these files that Jan Tomasz Gross used as one of the sources on which he based his book. No other historian taking part in the debate analysed them or even had access to them for some time. Jan Tomasz Gross accessed the archives of the Main Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation when they were officially not accessible because of the liquidation of the Main Commission and the transfer of archives to the newly created Institute of National Remembrance. It was possible for him due to Andrzej Paczkowski, who he thanked in one of the footnotes in “Neighbors”.

For this reason, historians claimed that Jan Tomasz Gross had been in a privileged position – Tomasz Strzembosz emphasised the author had been in the possession of “secret knowledge” that no one else had access to. He could thus legitimise the course of events depicted in “Neighbors”, invalidate counterarguments and close his adversaries’ mouths.<sup>533</sup> As soon as the court records were accessible, the historians quickly caught up and undermined the credibility of Gross’s findings on the basis of the new materials. Tomasz Strzembosz did it in an article published in “Rzeczpospolita” daily, entitled “Inny obraz sąsiadów” [“A Different Picture of Neighbors”] as did Piotr Gontarczyk in his article “Gross przemilczeń” [“Gross’s Concealments”], published in “Życie” daily.<sup>534</sup>

What both historians concluded from the court records was that the analyses of the witnesses’ and defendants’ testimonies about the Jedwabne massacre contradicted Gross’s main theory and allowed the opposite reassessment of the Jedwabne events. Quoting extensively from the testimonies, both Strzembosz and Gontarczyk decided that the key role in the Jedwabne massacre was played by the Germans. The content of the testimonies was supposed to confirm that it

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532 E.g. Paweł Machcewicz mentioned it during a discussion held in “Rzeczpospolita” editorial office. See *Jedwabne, 10 lipca 1941 – zbrodnia i pamięć*, “Rzeczpospolita” 3 III 2001, p. 12-16.

533 T. Strzembosz, *Inny obraz sąsiadów*, “Rzeczpospolita” 31 III 2001, p. 9-11; This issue was also raised by some participants in the debate about the Jedwabne massacre held in the “Rzeczpospolita” editorial office. See *Jedwabne, 10 lipca 1941 – zbrodnia i pamięć*, “Rzeczpospolita” 3 III 2001, p. 12-16.

534 See T. Strzembosz, *Inny obraz sąsiadów*, “Rzeczpospolita” 31 III 2001, p.; P. Gontarczyk, *Gross przemilczeń*, “Życie” 31 III – 1 IV 2001, p. 11-13.

were Germans who, along with the town authorities, participated in escorting the Jews in the square and guarding them; they were also supposed to have forced the Poles to seize the victims from town. Both historians also tended to agree that on the day of the massacre there had been more Germans than the mere dozen or so which Gross claimed; what is more, their role had not been limited to “filming”. Germans, Gontarczyk wrote, “were initiators and the causative force behind the Jedwabne tragedy. It was they who dragged Poles out of their homes, and stood behind Karolak, Bardoń and their companions”.<sup>535</sup>

Tomasz Strzembosz went even further in his conclusions, claiming that Germans were not only “inspirers, organisers and co-perpetrators” but it was they, not Poles, who burned the Jews in the barn. It did not seem possible to Strzembosz that “Germans, who controlled the whole preparation processes, left the ultimate execution of the murder to Poles”.<sup>536</sup> What role did Poles play in the Jedwabne crime then? According to Piotr Gontarczyk, “a few people” participated voluntarily and their motive was revenge for the Jewish attitude under Soviet occupation and “the savagery of war”. The remaining Poles – “at least a dozen or so” – were forced by the Germans to “gather” Jews in the square, guard them and, later, to escort them to the barn. According to Gontarczyk, there were still those in this group who escaped, not willing to carry out their task, and those who helped the Jews. None of them was ever “aware of the tragic fate of their neighbors”.<sup>537</sup> Tomasz Strzembosz’s view of the Polish role in the massacre was similar. He emphasised the small number of Polish co-perpetrators and that they acted under German duress.<sup>538</sup>

Both historians accused Jan Tomasz Gross of manipulation. According to them, Gross ignored the testimonies of the witnesses and defendants from the 1949 trial, which contained statements of the causative role of the Germans, and he had included only those blaming Poles. In other words, his choice of sources was subordinate to the theory that Jedwabne Jews were murdered by

535 P. Gontarczyk, *Gross przemilczeń*, “Życie” 31 III – 1 IV 2001, p. 12.

536 T. Strzembosz, *Inny obraz sąsiadów*, “Rzeczpospolita” 31 III 2001, p. 9; According to Tomasz Strzembosz, the theory that it was Germans who burned the Jews in the barn was grounded in one of the accounts, and supported by the fact that the shells, found at the massacre site during the exhumation could have belonged only to Germans who had been the only ones equipped with firearms. Further investigation, however, demonstrated that the shells probably originated from weapons used during World War I. See P. Semka, *Mijanie się z faktami*, an interview with T. Strzembosz, “Życie” 31 III – 1 IV 2001, p. 13.

537 P. Gontarczyk, *Gross przemilczeń*, “Życie” 31 III – 1 IV 2001, p. 12.

538 P. Semka, *Mijanie się z faktami*, an interview with T. Strzembosz, “Życie” 31 III – 1 IV 2001, p. 13.

the “Polish society”. Other sources used by the author were supposed to back up this critique: their value had been already undermined by Gontarczyk, Strzembosz and other historians. The two scholars criticised them again, adding that Szmul Wasersztajn could not have been an eyewitness to the events he had spoken of in his account; some of the witnesses Gross referred to had not been in Jedwabne that day; someone counted by Gross as a perpetrator had been severely ill on the day in question and had not left their home and therefore could not have participated in the massacre, etc. All of these minutely-listed shortcomings and inaccuracies served only one purpose: to make Gross’s findings invalid and prove that this sociologist, who was not a historian, simply made a mistake. His main and conscious – as was highlighted – mistake was thought to be his wrong assessment of the role the Germans played in the Jedwabne crime. The consoling discovery that Gross had made a mistake was announced in a triumphant and relieved tone by Tomasz Strzembosz, whose article “Inny obraz sąsiadów” [“A Different Picture of Neighbours”] proclaimed: “And so: the Germans!”<sup>539</sup>

“And yet, Neighbours” – Jan Tomasz Gross answered in his article under the same title [“A jednak sąsiedzi”] and a few other texts published in Polish press. The author disputed the assertions made by Strzembosz and Gontarczyk and other objections raised by his adversaries.<sup>540</sup> Gross pointed out that he had never ignored any accounts and that he had highlighted in his book that more than ten Germans were in Jedwabne that day and some of them, along with local authorities, participated in recruiting Poles to escort the Jedwabne Jews to the square and to guard the Jews rounded up there. Gross based his depiction of the role played by the Germans on the accounts of the witnesses and defendants of the Łomża trial. Because of this, the author stated that Tomasz Strzembosz could find these testimonies in “Neighbors” and that neither Strzembosz nor Gontarczyk had discovered anything new. Quoting himself, Gross also reminded that he had noted in “Neighbors”: “At the time the overall undisputed bosses over life and death in Jedwabne were the Germans. No sustained organized activity could take place there without their consent. They were the only ones who could decide the fate of the Jews. It was within their power also to stop the murderous pogrom at any time. And they did not choose to intervene.”<sup>541</sup>

539 T. Strzembosz, *Inny obraz sąsiadów*, “Rzeczpospolita” 31 III 2001, p. 9.

540 J. T. Gross, *A jednak sąsiedzi*, “Rzeczpospolita” 11 IV 2001, p. 10-11;

541 J. T. Gross, *A jednak sąsiedzi*, “Rzeczpospolita” 11 IV 2001, p. 10; J. T. Gross, *Neighbors...*, p. 77.

Therefore, Jan Tomasz Gross called Tomasz Strzembosz's revelations "empty words" serving only "to mess with people's minds".<sup>542</sup> Court records which Strzembosz used to sketch his "Different Picture of Neighbours" had been included in Gross's book. Besides, as Gross noted, they referred only to "one phase of the murder" which was "the way some of the defendants had got to the square".<sup>543</sup> Moreover, Gross observed, court testimonies differed from those acquired during the investigation process. The latter were ignored by Strzembosz, who considered them forcefully extorted.<sup>544</sup> In any case, Gross's main conclusion was that his theory had not been undermined whatsoever. Admittedly, he acknowledged a few minor mistakes; however, in his opinion, they were insignificant for the key findings of "Neighbors". Jedwabne Jews had been murdered by their Polish neighbours who had not been forced to do so, he repeated once more.<sup>545</sup>

Jan Tomasz Gross did not, however, confine himself to defending his book from the attacks of its leading critic, Tomasz Strzembosz. The author also asked how it was possible that his adversary, who had been professionally researching the period of the occupation in Białostockie and Podlaskie regions for many years, had never mentioned the fate of Jedwabne Jews or the fate of the Jews from the whole region in any of his works. Did his silence stem from ignorance? Or did Strzembosz know but decided not to write anyway? Gross never answered these questions directly, although he was clearly inclined to give a positive answer to the last one. Considering previous statements given by Strzembosz and concerning the Jedwabne massacre, particularly his article "The Ignored Collaboration", Gross called him "an author full of prejudice" and accused him of using anti-Semitic clichés and generalisations on the subject of Jewish attitudes under Soviet occupation.<sup>546</sup> He also stated that both Tomasz Strzembosz and other authors of "right-wing, national orientation" tried to "divert attention from the horrendous Jedwabne massacre, shifting the debate to the 1939-1941 period".<sup>547</sup> Besides, according to Gross, they never wanted the truth about Jedwabne and only wanted to keep the status quo: the perception of the occupation period based on an irrefutable axiom that Poles fought and suffered while Jews were killed by the Germans and only by the Germans. In one of the

542 P. Wroński, *Podtrzymuję swoje tezy*, an interview with J. T. Gross, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 3 IV 2001, p. 16.

543 Ibidem

544 J. T. Gross, *A jednak sąsiedzi*, "Rzeczpospolita" 11 IV 2001, p. 10-11.

545 See: J. Pleszczyński, *Nie zlekceważyłem żadnych relacji*, an interview with J. T. Gross, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 30 III 2001, p. 3.

546 J. T. Gross, *A jednak sąsiedzi*, "Rzeczpospolita" 11 IV 2001, p. 12-13.

547 Ibidem, p. 13.

interviews, Gross reproached Strzembosz for “trying to belittle the case and demonstrate that the Jedwabne pogrom was no different from any other murders of Jews committed in the region”.<sup>548</sup>

After the polemic provoked by Tomasz Strzembosz and seconded by Piotr Gontarczyk, Jan Tomasz Gross stopped expressing his opinions in public for a longer time and the debate carried on without him. Before that, asked by a journalist whether the meaning of “Neighbors” might change because of the ongoing investigation, such as the exhumation of the bodies of the Jews burnt in the Jedwabne barn, the searching of archives and debates in general, he gave the opinion that even if the number of victims was established and lowered it would not change the fact that the whole population of Jedwabne Jews had been murdered by their Polish neighbours.<sup>549</sup> His predictions proved to be true; however, he desisted from further discussion.

Among those who continued to participate in the debate, a clear division emerged between the supporters of Jan Tomasz Gross’s stand and those who considered Tomasz Strzembosz the authority in the Jedwabne case. Not without reason did Paweł Ciołkiewicz name this stadium of the debate, inaugurated by the Strzembosz versus Gross polemic, “the two-stands phase”.<sup>550</sup> Although other historians also participated in the debate and argued with one another, they usually repeated, developed or completed the theories of the two scholars. They used similar narratives, taking either Gross’s or Strzembosz’s stand. Almost until the very end of the debate, these two views on the Jedwabne massacre were reproduced in the public discourse by the multi-voiced participants. Therefore, the public image of the pogrom and its social representations originated from trusting one of the two historians or putting one’s faith in other participants of the debate who also supported one of the two. That is why the role of historians in the debate should not be belittled even if their voices were not unanimous and sometimes drowned out.

### 3. Jedwabne in the moral discourse

Earlier in this book, I defined moral discourse as a particular attitude typical to some of the participants of the debate about “Neighbors” and the rhetoric style

548 P. Wroński, *Podtrzymuję swoje tezy*, an interview with J. T. Gross, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 3 IV 2001, p. 16.

549 J. Pleszczyński, *Nie zlekceważyłem żadnych relacji*, an interview with J. T. Gross, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 30 III 2001, p. 3.

550 P. Ciołkiewicz, *Poszukiwanie granic odpowiedzialności zbiorowej. Debata o Jedwabnem na łamach “Gazety Wyborczej”*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2004, No. 1, s. 125.

related to it. Such a definition neither determines the morality of the participants nor is it evaluative—its function is purely analytical. In order to grasp the specific moral discourse of the debate, I propose to focus on a few questions raised by the participants: first, the evaluation of Jan Tomasz Gross's book and the meaning assigned to its publication; second, the attitude towards the crime revealed in "Neighbors" and the facts related to it; third, the confession of Polish sins as a result of this revelation; and finally, the problem of the collective responsibility for the sins of our ancestors.

In the moral discourse, the historical sources on which "Neighbors" was based were never questioned. Rare comments on the author's methodological mistakes were not usually regarded as significant compared to the scale of the Jedwabne massacre. Moreover, it was highlighted that "Neighbors" was intended to provoke a discussion that had not yet been initiated by any of the balanced and elaborate but unnoticed publications by other authors, which also touched on the sensitive topic of the Polish-Jewish past. Gross's methodology, by the way, was considered innovative in Polish historiography and his proposal to revise the approach to sources gained its followers. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir saw it as a type of remedy for the gaps in Polish collective memory, which is "a place where there are no Jews". She added that "we all need a revision in the approach to sources". However, she noted, "the new approach to sources" proposed by Gross could persuade only someone who was already convinced for some time: for example, the addressee of Jan Błński's essay "Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto".<sup>551</sup> Generalising, one could say that in the moral discourse, assessment of the methodological aspect of "Neighbors" was almost completely absent. Gross's book was evaluated in terms of its significance for Polish readers and the debate it sparked off.

Numerous debaters emphasised that "Neighbors" evoked shock in Poland and was personally shocking for them, too. That is why they interpreted its release and the public debate around it as a turning point or a breakthrough. While Marek Ostrowski pointed out that revealing the Jedwabne crime was "a turning point in Polish-Jewish relations"<sup>552</sup>, some stressed that Jedwabne was not a Polish-Jewish problem but solely a Polish one and Poles should deal with it by themselves. Michał Głowiński and Paweł Śpiewak emphatically stated that, as did Adam Krzemiński, who emphasised that "the present debate about the Jedwabne pogrom sets a turning point for Polish self-awareness".<sup>553</sup>

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551 J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Obsesja niewinności*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 13 I 2001, p. 13.

552 M. Ostrowski, *Dobrzy ludzie siedzą cicho*, "Polityka" 21 IV 2001, p. 38.

553 See A. Krzemiński, *Inna zemsta, inne wesele*, "Polityka" 28 VII 2001, p. 45-46.

Revealing the Jedwabne massacre was considered as a problem but also a challenge that Poles – and others – had to face. The debate over the Jedwabne pogrom was said to “allow for catharsis”<sup>554</sup>; to be “the national therapy” “the most important exam Poles have faced for the last decade”<sup>555</sup>; “the training ground to exercise Polish mentality”<sup>556</sup>; “the first attempt to look in the mirror after 55 years”<sup>557</sup>; or “the measure of Polish souls and characters, a great confessional and a collective shrink’s couch”.<sup>558</sup> Some of the participants perceived the debate as a continuation of the discussion about Polish attitudes to the Holocaust, inaugurated by Błoński’s essay, and they compared the significance of Gross’s book to “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto”. “Neighbors” was also situated next to other literary works, Polish and foreign, that handled a difficult past. The journalist Jerzy Sławomir Mac was certainly correct when he claimed that, in contrast to the debate sparked off by Błoński’s essay, involving only a narrow circle of intellectuals, the discussion about Jedwabne “reached a wide audience”.<sup>559</sup> It was also rightly noticed that while Błoński in his essay confronted Poles with the problem of the indifference of Polish eyewitnesses of the Holocaust, Jan Tomasz Gross went much further in raising the problem of Polish participation in the Holocaust, confronting us with a much more difficult and as yet unknown truth.

Thus, in the moral discourse, some sort of gratitude – for lack of a better term – was expressed to Gross for forcing Poles to engage in a necessary and long-postponed exploration of their own past and to redefine their national identity. In other words, Poles were forced to verify the dominant paradigm in Polish historiography and consciousness, according to which they had only ever been victims and had never hurt anyone in the past. The ultimate end of this paradigm was described by the journalist Halina Bortnowska and the historian of ideas, Marcin Król, who announced “the end of a possibility for Poles to think about themselves” in such a way.<sup>560</sup> To quote Adam Michnik, In “Neighbors”, Gross

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554 A. Sabor, ks. A. Boniecki, *Głęboki wymiar pamięci*, an interview with L. Kieres, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 17 VI 2001, p. 11.

555 A. Magdziak-Miszewska, *Najpoważniejszy egzamin*, “Więź” 2001, No. 4, p. 48

556 P. Pytlakowski, *Wasze ręce mają znaki*, “Polityka” 17 III 2001, p. 15.

557 W. Amiel, *Prawda lustra*, “Wprost” 4 II 2001, p. 30.

558 J. S. Mac, *Test z Jedwabnego*, “Wprost” 18 III 2001, p. 74.

559 J. S. Mac, *Test z Jedwabnego*, “Wprost” 18 III 2001, p. 74

560 See H. Bortnowska, *Gdy sąsiad nie ma imienia*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 27-28 I 2001, p. 24; Such a words were used by Marcin Król during the editorial discussion on pages of “Res Publica Nowa”. See *Akt skruchy i co dalej?*, “Res Publica Nowa” 2001, No. 7, p. 7.

revealed “this snippet of the truth we never wanted to hear about. This truth is bitter, bitter as medicine – unpalatable, painful but needed”.<sup>561</sup>

Many other debaters wrote about the need for publications that expose the painful truth. For them, the debate inspired by Gross’s “Neighbors” was a landmark that provoked national introspection and had therapeutic value. Within the moral discourse, there was no doubt that Gross’s book was needed because it forced Poles to necessarily and publicly account for their difficult past and to purify their collective memory. Some lamented that the book had not been written by a Polish writer or that a similar debate had not been held earlier. Distrust for the state of Polish historiography was expressed: Polish historians were criticised for their negligence, and history textbooks for their heroic and martyred vision of national history. In this context, by revealing the Jedwabne massacre and provoking a national debate, Gross’s book was considered an even greater contribution. This “irrefutable” value was often mentioned in the moral discourse while little attention was paid to analysis of the methodological aspects of the book.

Such an approach to the meaning and value of “Neighbors” is not, however, a distinguishing criterion of the moral discourse (at least not the only one); it fails to demonstrate the unique character of this discourse that is different from other narratives. A key criterion is surely the attitude of debaters towards the crime described by Gross and to the facts related to it. In the moral discourse, Polish participation was never questioned, belittled or excused by extenuating circumstances. On the contrary, representatives of the moral discourse disapproved of all those who attempted to play down Polish participation in the crime in the name of a discourse of innocence. In other words, the moral discourse related to the Jedwabne pogrom was a discourse without any “yes, but” – a “but” which often marks anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Unlike other participants, debaters using the moral discourse did not magnify the role of the Germans in the Jedwabne massacre; their presence, inspiration or possible co-participation was considered neither an extenuating circumstance nor an excuse. Therefore, they did not support historians searching for evidence that the German role had been crucial or that there had been more Germans than Gross suggested or that the role of Poles in the crime was minor.<sup>562</sup> The debaters perceived the role played in the murder by the Germans in the same way as the

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561 A. Michnik, *Rachunek polskiego sumienia*, “Rzeczpospolita” 5 IX 2001, p. 7.

562 Reverend W. Lemański used the term “devil’s arithmetic” to describe the practice of overestimating the number of Germans present in Jedwabne and underestimating Polish presence and perpetration in the crime. W. Lemański, *Chrystus w zgliszczach stodoły*, “Więź” 2001, No. 6, p. 80.

author did. Therefore, they wrote about “a pogrom licensed by the German occupier”<sup>563</sup> or about a murder committed by Poles with “presumably little” participation of the Germans.<sup>564</sup> German patronage, inspiration or obvious permission were not excluded but perceived as having nothing to do with the fact that the role of murderers was played by the local, Polish residents. Unlike the other narratives I will later analyse, the moral discourse labelled Poles as murderers and the German role as peripheral. This bitter truth was indisputable.

Not only did the moral discourse never shift the burden of the murder to the Germans, there were also no attempts to make this murder easier to bear by categorising the Polish perpetrators as anti-Semitic, primitive scum or a social margin. If the perpetrators were removed beyond the borders of the national community, assigned a marginal status and deprived of Polish nationality, all the remaining, non-anti-Semitic, cultured and good Poles, city dwellers and university graduates could sigh with relief since they had nothing to do with the Jedwabne massacre. The temptation of such thinking was interpreted as an easy escape from the sense of responsibility and a comfortable ritual of washing hands. Therefore, one of the journalists noted that in a barn in Jedwabne “not a margin but a strap of the Polish nation burned a part of the Jewish nation.”<sup>565</sup>

In addition, the motive of revenge on Jews for their attitude under the Soviet occupation – an avenue of interpretation proposed by Tomasz Strzembosz and used by other debaters – was viewed as an attempt to find extenuating circumstances. This particular deductive system was interpreted as an endeavour to excuse or even justify the murderers and to shift the blame to the victims. There was no acceptance for attempts to de-emphasise the necessity of a moral appraisal of the murder committed by Poles by referring to the alleged motive of revenge and thereby shunting aside the debate over it.

There were some who became involved in a polemic against Strzembosz’s theory that attempted to excuse the murder in its context. They questioned the validity and sense of his arguments and accused the academic, who had analysed the Białostockie region under the occupation, of ignoring the wartime history of Jews in the region (“he failed to link the history of Jews with the history of Poland”<sup>566</sup>). Artur Domośławski even risked an analysis of the stand taken by Strzembosz in the debate over “Neighbors” from the perspective of the author’s personal biography, which received criticism, not only from those who identi-

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563 H. Bortnowska, *Gdy sąsiad nie ma imienia*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 27-28 I 2001, p. 24.

564 S. Musiał, *Jedwabne to nowe imię Holokaustu*, “Rzeczpospolita” 10 VII 2001, p. 12.

565 W. Kuczyński, *Plonąca stodoła i ja*, “Wprost” 25 III 2001, p. 56.

566 J. Lewandowski, *Historia Polski po Jedwabnem będzie wyglądała inaczej*, “Rzeczpospolita” 15 II 2001, p. 7.

fied with Strzembosz's views.<sup>567</sup> Much more often, however, the disputants pointed out that whether the Jedwabne victims had been treated as "recent supporters of the Bolshevik rule" or "local representatives of little business" or even as someone else, did not matter at all. "Any attempts to calculate mathematical proportions for such feelings", wrote Archbishop Józef Życiński, "are automatically doomed to fail. They contribute little to the moral appraisal of the situation as it would be mad to think there are any reasons that can justify the collective burning of human beings in barns".<sup>568</sup> Similar views were shared by other debaters, who found the motives of the crime insignificant as none of them could explain the murder, Revenge on neighbours was no justification.

In the moral discourse, criticism was also directed at what Piotr Pytlakowski described as "coldness" in the debate, that is, technical and mathematical deliberations about the number of Jews murdered in Jedwabne.<sup>569</sup> It was often noted that any sort of calculations related to counting victims or – as Agnieszka Arnold named it – "the cynical counting of skeletons" served only to belittle Gross's findings or sometimes even to reduce the scale of the massacre.<sup>570</sup> What was found particularly outrageous and immoral were speculations about the size of the barn – whether it had been large enough to fit the number of Jews suggested by Gross and inscribed on the Jedwabne monument.

Therefore, a great dose of scepticism, not to say disapproval, was expressed about the exhumation of the bodies of Jews burnt in the Jedwabne barn, initiated by the Institute of National Remembrance.<sup>571</sup> This scepticism or disapproval

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567 See A. Domosławski, *Kustosz Polski niewinnej*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 19-20 V 2001, p. 14.

568 J. Życiński, *Banalizacja barbarzyństwa*, "Więź" 2001, No. 3, p. 28.

569 P. Pytlakowski, *Wasze ręce mają znaki*, "Polityka" 17 III 2001, p. 16.

570 J. Paradowska, *Liczenie szkieletów*, an interview with A. Arnold, "Polityka" 14 IV 2001, p. 17.

571 The exhumation conducted during the IPN investigation was the subject of justified controversies. Jewish law (Halakha) forbids disturbing the peace of the deceased and allows exhumation only in a few circumstances treated as a state of necessity. They did not apply to the case in Jedwabne. Therefore a conflict arose between the Halakha and the Polish legal procedures that order exhumation in such cases. Eventually, the Warsaw and Łódź rabbi Michael Schudrich (who could not consent to exhumation for religious reasons) and the Minister of Justice Lech Kaczyński reached a compromise. Exhumation was decided to be conducted only partially, by only exposing the corpses of the murdered without disturbing or extracting them. In addition to IPN prosecutors and experts, Michael Schudrich, rabbis from Great Britain and Israel as well as experts on Halakha burial law participated in the exhumation. The results of the exhumation indicated that there had been about 200-250 victims in two graves – one inside the barn and another placed along its foundations. As the chief of the IPN investigation department,

stemmed mainly from a conviction that the main aim of supporters of the exhumation was not the IPN investigation and the discovery of the historical truth, but rather to disprove the number of victims (questioned since the very release of “Neighbors”) in order to belittle Gross’s theories. That is why Konstanty Gebert warned against an exploitative attitude to the bodies of murdered Jews, intended to convince those who remained unconvinced and to help change the opinions of people “of bad will and a dirty conscience”.<sup>572</sup> The journalist Józefa Hennelowa added that for people who demanded the exhumation most fiercely, the number was the most important, as if a smaller figure “could change anything about our guilty conscience for those who committed it [the pogrom – translator’s note]”. She also noticed that beforehand, no one had questioned the figure of 1,600 victims inscribed on the Jedwabne monument because at that stage the blame was attributed to the Nazis, about which the inscription on the monument informed.<sup>573</sup> In the moral discourse, it was considered obvious that the mercifully lower number of victims could neither change the moral appraisal of the murder committed by Poles nor question Gross’s main theory.

Considering what has been said so far about the moral discourse and its approach to the attempts to find extenuating circumstances for the Polish perpetrators of the Jedwabne crime, it seems that one thing needs further explanation. One might think that the criticism towards the endeavours undertaken to reduce the role and participation of Poles in the crime meant that historical research and the IPN investigation were considered insignificant. Nothing could be further from the truth. The need for further research was often mentioned and treated as the responsibility of historians and investigators. There were no doubts within the moral discourse, however, that the current knowledge of the Jedwabne massacre was enough to view Poles as perpetrators and draw correct conclusions from this knowledge. Thus, if some historians were criticised *ad personam*, it was only for their blind determination in the search for any evidence of extenuating circumstances intended to confirm Polish innocence. This attitude of some

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Witold Kulesza, stressed, this was only an approximate number because the exhumation had not been completed. Moreover, the presence of other corpses buried elsewhere in Jedwabne could not be ruled out. Thus, the exhumation significantly revised the number of 1,600 victims given by Gross and inscribed on the monument in Jedwabne. There were also numerous gun shells around the barn and one on the corpse of a victim. In the grave inside the barn a partly melted bullet jacket was also found. Some people believed these findings to be an obvious proof of the German participation in the massacre. However, these hopes proved to be vain.

572 K. Gebert, *Ekshumacja*, “Rzeczpospolita” 15 VI 2001, p. 9.

573 J. Hennelowa, *Ciszej nad Jedwabnem*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 3 VI 2001, p. 3.

historians and other debaters who “fanatically supported them” was considered a significant barrier to the recently started self-examination.<sup>574</sup>

Polish self-examination and the confession of crimes against Jews are an important element of the debate that helps to strengthen and more precisely define the border between the moral discourse and other narratives about Jedwabne. The moral discourse considered the revelation of the Jedwabne crime by Jan Tomasz Gross to be a necessary confrontation with a difficult past, hitherto shrouded in silence and rejected. Literally and symbolically, Jedwabne was viewed as a challenge to see all the dimensions of the national past in full light. Also, it was regarded as an opportunity to enrich the cognitive perspective by noticing different attitudes of Poles towards Jews: not only those that make us proud but also those that bring shame and dishonour and to see ourselves in a new role: not as victims, but the culprits of someone else’s misery. In other words, Jedwabne was considered a necessary stimulus and imperative for complete Polish self-knowledge.

Therefore, users of this discourse called for re-evaluating the past, for a national self-evaluation and for acknowledging and confessing Polish sins. This process was considered necessary, not only for the sake of the international image of Poland and Poles, but primarily for the national community, which should learn the truth about itself and be able to speak about it. Quoting Dariusz Czaja, “sins never confessed and atrocities never realised do not descend into nothingness. They are stuck in the subconscious, corrupting it from the inside.”<sup>575</sup>

It was reminded, however, that this way of dealing with the past is not a Polish specificity: many other nations had to deal with their burdensome legacy. Poles were neither the first nor the last to experience the revenge of suppressed memory, to face the truth of the past and to recall from oblivion what would be comfortable to forget. These issues were also the aims of a series of interviews conducted by Jacek Żakowski for “Gazeta Wyborcza” daily, with historians, sociologists and philosophers (e.g. Paul Ricoeur, Yehuda Bauer, Charles Maier) about the rising wave of historical revisions and accounting for history in different parts of the world, about a sudden revision of the difficult past and the mechanisms to handle it. In the moral discourse, there were attempts to outline which conditions would give the opportunity to confess sins in an honest way. A key condition was what Jan Błoński suggested in his essay: stop listing sorrows and beating the breasts of others. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, for example, pointed out that all previous debates over Polish-Jewish relations in the context of the

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574 Z. Nosowski, *W perspektywie sumienia*, “Więź” 2001, No. 6, p. 72.

575 D. Czaja, *To nie “oni”, niestety*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 16-17 12 2000, p. 21.

Holocaust used to change into a “confession of someone else’s sins”.<sup>576</sup> They were held in a “yes, but” mode in which everything that was said after “but” depreciated, deadened or invalidated “yes”. Some debaters also emphasised that masking/hiding Polish sins with the glory of Polish Righteous Among the Nations was meaningless because – as one of the journalists noticed – “the good does not cancel out the evil” and “history is not arithmetic”.<sup>577</sup>

Users of the moral discourse did not restrict themselves to the calls for Polish self-examination, declaration of guilt or the conditions of an honest confession of national sins against Jews, but instead started this confession. The Jedwabne massacre was defined as an end of the myth of Polish innocence, as a “new truth about our nation”<sup>578</sup> and as “a goodbye to the messianic myth of the ‘Christ of Europe’”.<sup>579</sup> It was emphasised that so far, *szmalcownictwo* [demanding money from Jews under threat of informing Nazis about them] had been considered the worst atrocity in the spectrum of Polish attitudes towards the Holocaust and even this phenomenon had been often marginalised. The Jedwabne pogrom made *szmalcownicy* yield their victory palm of Polish dishonour and see Poles in an unknown role, which had always been strongly denied. “Jedwabne”, reverend Stanisław Musiał wrote, “is a new name for the Holocaust”<sup>580</sup>. He was not the only one to draw such bitter conclusions from the book. The journalists wrote about “our genocide”<sup>581</sup>, “a genocide committed by Polish hands”<sup>582</sup>, or simply “a participation in the Holocaust”.

The Jedwabne case served also as a stimulus to more general deliberations about Polish-Jewish relations in Poland in the interwar period, particularly about the problem of anti-Semitism. Many debaters tended to think that it was the anti-Semitism, flowing from church pulpits and Catholic press and inscribed into the National Democrats’ ideology that contributed to the fact that in Jedwabne, Polish neighbours burnt their Jewish neighbours in a barn. The contribution of anti-Semitic rhetoric – tolerated, nearly omnipresent and legitimised also by the authority of the Church – created an environment conducive to the incubation of murderous instincts and an atmosphere of an implied consent to kill. That is why some looked for the origin of Jedwabne pogrom in this very atmosphere. For example, Krystyna Skarżyńska tended to agree with Gross that the Jedwabne Jews were murdered by “society”; she noted that, in the light of psychological

<sup>576</sup>J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Obsesja niewinności*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 13-14 I 2001, p. 22.

<sup>577</sup> M. Zieleniewski, *Brakujące ogniwo*, “Wprost” 28 I 2001, p. 3.

<sup>578</sup> S. Musiał, *Dla Gazety*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 14 III 2001, p. 2.

<sup>579</sup> A. Szostkiewicz, *Inna zemsta, inne wesela*, “Polityka” 28 VII 2001, p. 45.

<sup>580</sup> S. Musiał, *Jedwabne to nowe imię Holokaustu*, “Rzeczpospolita” 10 VII 2001, p. 12.

<sup>581</sup> W. Kuczyński, *Plonąca stodoła i ja*, “Wprost” 25 III 2001, p. 56.

<sup>582</sup> W. Amiel, *Prawda lustra*, “Wprost” 4 II 2001, p. 30.

knowledge, “it is very likely that people murdering their Jewish neighbours had a sense of support from their neighbours and authorities who – as they believed – thought similarly to them. They could have even thought they were completing a mission as the only virtuous and truly Catholic Poles, the only righteous,”<sup>583</sup>

The self-examination in the moral discourse also included confessing other sins committed by Poles against Jews, such as other pogroms. Confessions were accompanied by a polemic against the national myth of an innocent victim: the myth of Poland as a “Christ of Europe” and a country that was solely aggrieved and that suffered. Blind defence of the paradigm of national innocence was seen as a result of this powerful auto-stereotype constituting Polish identity and posing a serious barrier to acknowledging and confessing Polish sins. In other words, the almost panicky “innocence obsession”<sup>584</sup> was seen as a dam, separating Poles from the purifying truth about themselves; an obstacle standing in the way to the multi-dimensional past.

The reckoning with the Jedwabne massacre and other Polish sins against Jews, postulated and carried out in the moral discourse, resulted from the belief that even if individual responsibility and personal blame for the pogrom rested with its direct perpetrators, the burden is placed on the whole national community. Among the users of the moral discourse, there was no doubt that the Jedwabne murders also burdened contemporary Poles and, in some way, made them responsible for it. Although there were different definitions of such responsibility, it would be hard to disagree that there was an implied community of sense regardless of the diversity of terminology.

Therefore, the moral discourse included terms such as “responsibility”, “collective responsibility”, “responsibility for the community”, “national responsibility” and, the most frequent, “moral responsibility” for the deeds committed by the members of the national community we all belong to. At times, however, the term “responsibility” was given up. Wojciech Sadurski questioned its usability in the context of the debate, arguing that what stems from accepting responsibility are “some duties of practical action, compensation for damages or punishments” while when it comes to Jedwabne it would be better to speak of shame and to use the first person singular.<sup>585</sup> Jan Nowak-Jeziorański also used the word “shame” in writing about a “sense of national shame for disgraceful deeds” and

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583 K. Skarżyńska, *Zbiorowe wyobrażenia, wspólna wina*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 25 XI 2000, p. 16.

584 J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Obsesja niewinności*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 13-14 I 2001, p. 22.

585 W. Sadurski, *Duma, wstyd i Jedwabne*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 3-4 III 2001, p. 22.

about the necessity of confessing to “Polish Cains”.<sup>586</sup> Others, who avoided the word “responsibility” without giving any specific reason, used such phrases as: “the burden of the legacy of blame”<sup>587</sup>, “the burden of the blame for crimes”<sup>588</sup> or “the burden of our ancestors’ sins”<sup>589</sup> and believed that collective memory should include not only remembering national heroes, glorious events and honourable achievements but also the memory of murderers and national disgrace.<sup>590</sup> Sometimes, however, acknowledging responsibility or accepting the burden of blame for the Jedwabne massacre was expressed by saying “we” instead of “them”. “We, fellow brothers of murderers” – signatories of the letter “To the Jedwabne Jews” wrote.<sup>591</sup>

The debaters used some varieties of the term “responsibility” to make it clear that what they meant was neither a legal definition of this word nor the individual and direct responsibility of the contemporary generations for their ancestors’ guilt. These debaters who never used the term were exempt from such explanations. This way or another, both groups spoke of the same thing, that is, of the duty of burdening a nation as a collective subject to accept its legacy in its full and heterogeneous form: not only our ancestors’ merits but also their guilt. It was stressed that the privilege of enjoying the part of the national heritage that is a cause for pride requires taking on the duty to accept the inglorious part of the inheritance: the embarrassing and troublesome past. This question was raised by the Executive Board of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) in its open letter to “the members and sympathisers of SLD”<sup>592</sup>, and the then prime minister Jerzy Buzek stated that although the Jedwabne massacre had been committed “neither in the name of the Polish nation nor the Polish state”, as a nation, “if we have a right to be proud of the Poles who risked or even gave their lives to save Jews, we also have to acknowledge the guilt of those who participated in murdering them.”<sup>593</sup>

Other debaters also referred to such a “conditional”, let us say, right to be proud of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations or other great Poles such as

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586 J. Nowak-Jeziorański, *Potrzeba zadośćuczynienia*, “Rzeczpospolita” 26 I 2001, p. 5.

587 H. Bortnowska, *Białe nasiona*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 29 IV 2001, p. 5.

588 (ks.)W. Lemański, *Chrystus w zgliszczach stodoły*, “Więź” 2001, No. 6, p. 83.

589 (ks.)M. Czajkowski, *Czysta Nierządnicza*, “Tygodnik powszechny” 27 V 2001, p. 1.

590 K. Janowska, P. Mucharski, “Świadkowie”, an interview with M. Edelman, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 25 III 2001.

591 *Do Żydów w Jedwabnem*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 13 IV 2001, p. 2.

592 See *Dziedziczymy nie tylko chwałę. List otwarty do członków i sympatyków SLD*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 16 III 2001, p. 4.

593 *Oświadczenie premiera*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 7 III 2001, p. 1.

John Paul II, Frédéric Chopin, Nicolaus Copernicus and Hugo Kołłątaj as well as nameless Polish heroes.

The idea of the responsibility of the Polish national community for the sins of previous generations, accepted and postulated by the moral discourse, resulted from acknowledging the consequences of belonging to this community: privileges as well as duties and obligations. Janusz Majcherek stressed that this rule applied also in relation to other communities, religious for example, with which we identify and which we choose or affirm the choice once made for us (e.g. baptism).

In each case, being a part of a community involves taking some obligations and “joint participation”, Majcherek pointed out, “means joint responsibility – unless it is enforced.”<sup>594</sup> Dawid Warszawski wrote about it in the first person singular, declaring: “the same degree to which I identify with a community, I bear – knowingly and wilfully – the responsibility for its actions, good and bad, now and in the future.”<sup>595</sup> Other debaters also had similar arguments.

In other words, the discussions about Polish responsibility for Jedwabne held in the moral discourse defined responsibility as following from belonging to a national community. Thus, the journalist Janusz Majcherek considered a paradox in which the same people who emphasised their close connection with the nation and with the Catholic Church as particularly significant communities, and whose identity was defined through these communities, tried to absolve themselves from the sense of shared responsibility for the Polish murderers from Jedwabne.<sup>596</sup> In the moral discourse, however, the contrary was the case: the inclusion of knowledge about the Jedwabne massacre and about other Polish sins in the collective memory of Poles was considered necessary for Polish national identity. As Dariusz Czaja noted, fragmentary and imputed collective memory leads to a “cripple identity” – individual as well as collective.<sup>597</sup> Completing and correcting this memory was seen as *sine qua non* to strengthen national identity for Poles’ own sake.

Everything said so far about the moral discourse proves its specificity and dissimilarity to the stand and rhetoric of other participants of the Jedwabne debate. This difference will become even clearer against a background of the opinions formulated by the opponents. Sometimes they emphasised it themselves, naming the dispersed voices of the moral discourse “flagellants”.

594 J. A. Majcherek, *Kto jest z ojczyzny mojej*, “Rzeczpospolita” 12 V 2001, p. 8-9.

595 D. Warszawski, *Odpowiedzialność i jej brak*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 9-10 XII 2000, p. 20.

596 J. A. Majcherek, *Kto jest z ojczyzny mojej*, “Rzeczpospolita” 12 V 2001, p. 8-9.

597 D. Czaja, *To nie “oni”, niestety*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 16-17 XII 2000, p. 21.

#### 4. The defence of the Polish innocence paradigm

Among the responses to the release of “Neighbors” and the revelation of the massacre committed in Jedwabne, one could also observe in the public debate both strong and weak mechanisms of self-defence and repression. As they differed in some aspects, it would be hard to assume their complete homogeneity. Andrzej Paczkowski was surely right to introduce a classification of the defensive attitudes revealed during the Jedwabne debate into “open”, “closed” and “rejecting”.<sup>598</sup> Without doubt, Joanna Michlic was also right when she classified the “defensive camp” into a “soft” and a “hard” side, on the basis of the possible inclinations to use anti-Semitic rhetoric and the attitude to the key theories proposed in Jan Tomasz Gross’s book.<sup>599</sup>

Without question, the debaters from the defensive camp differed according to the type of rhetoric they used, the contexts they referred to and, above all, their attitude to Gross’s book and their level of acceptance of the theories it presented. Besides, one would not expect that most of the articles published in periodicals of evidently national-Catholic origin, such as “Nasza Polska”, “Myśl Polska”, “Głos. Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowego”, “Nasz Dziennik” would be accepted and published in more moderate “Życie” and “Tygodnik Solidarność”. Also, there are differences between the rhetoric of Antoni Macierewicz, Ryszard Bender and Jerzy Robert Nowak, who expressed radical views, and the rhetoric of Ryszard Bugaj and Tomasz Strzembosz, who tried to maintain moderation. One could observe, however, that the defensive camp shared many views and suggestions and that sometimes, hidden below moderate and measured narrations, there were radical opinions formulated directly, openly and firmly. Moreover, in many cases it would be difficult to demarcate a boundary between a “soft” and a “hard” defensive attitude – for example, in the case of debaters who tended to acknowledge some participation of Poles in the Jedwabne massacre but at the same time used openly anti-Semitic clichés.

Therefore, considering all that have been said, I propose to describe this heterogeneous defensive discourse by defining its characteristic ways of invalidating “Neighbors” and the knowledge this book delivers: attempts to discredit the value of the content of Gross’s book and its author; attempts to question the major theory of the voluntary participation of Poles in the Jedwabne crime, presented in “Neighbors”; and various ways of presenting extenuating circumstances for Polish perpetrators. An issue deserving special attention is an aggressive

598 See A. Paczkowski, *Debata wokół “Sąsiadów”*: próba wstępnej typologii, “Rzeczpospolita” 24 III 2001, p. 16.

599 See J. Michlic, *Pamięć o mrocznej przeszłości. Intelktualiści o Jedwabnem*, “Midrasz” 2003, No. 4, p. 34-35.

defence which was characteristic/typical for this discourse, and which consisted in the “confession of someone else’s crimes” – that is, giving an answer to the question: What should Jews apologise to Poles for? Moreover, one should not ignore a very specific interpretive pattern that is characteristic of the “defensive camp”, which I will call “a conspiracy theory”.

The processes of discrediting “Neighbors” were noticeable, for example, in what the book was called, such as: “a journalistic text”,<sup>600</sup> a “para-historical” book,<sup>601</sup> a “pseudo-scientific humbug”,<sup>602</sup> an “outwardly scholarly elaboration”,<sup>603</sup> a “dishonourable lampoon”,<sup>604</sup> “a crowning achievement of anti-Polonism in recent years”,<sup>605</sup> a “martyrological-fiction”.<sup>606</sup> The list could definitely be longer. In the defensive camp, no one appreciated the value of “Neighbors” – by comparing it with Błoński’s memorable essay, for example. If some analogies were made, the book was rather compared with “The Painted Bird” by Jerzy Kosiński, that is, a symbol of anti-Polish literary fiction in the nationalist discourse.

In this manner, “Neighbors” was deprived of academic status and, as a result, of a cognitive value. A journalist from the right-wing weekly, “Nasza Polska”, even noted that Leszek Bubel [a journalist and publisher of anti-Semitic press; author’s note] was also perfectly able to “feign reliable academic research” with a few annotations.<sup>607</sup> As with historians representing the defensive attitude, the defensive camp pointed at methodological mistakes committed by the author: mostly omitting certain sources (e.g. the findings of prosecutor Waldemar Monkiewicz, failing to search through German archives) or selective use of the sources. The last objection concerned mostly the testimonies from the 1949 Łomża trial of the Jedwabne murderers. During the trial, some witnesses and defendants unequivocally pointed at the role of the Germans as inspirers and executors of the murder on Jedwabne Jews. Gross was accused of ignoring these elements of the testimonies as they conflicted with his main theory that Poles were the ones who committed the murder.

Mostly, however, it was the testimony of Szmul Wasersztajn that was questioned. Wasersztajn was presented as an unreliable witness due to his work in the security police after the war. The trust that the right-wing press put in the document from the Stalinist period in Poland, while deprecating Szmul Waser-

600 P. Semka, “*Sąsiedzi*”: koniec czy początek?, “*Życie*” 2 III 2001, p. 16.

601 A. Wernic, *Człowiek honoru*, “*Tygodnik Solidarność*” 2001, No. 18, p. 19.

602 A. Echolette, *Gross pod murem*, “*Nasza Polska*” 19 VI 2001, p. 8.

603 Z. Szuba, *Jak zaszczytują ludzi w Jedwabnem*, “*Myśl Polska*” 18 III 2001, p. 8.

604 (WAB), “*Nie jesteśmy sami!*”, “*Myśl Polska*” 10 VI 2001, p. 3.

605 M. Piskorski, *Sabat bez Grossa*, “*Myśl Polska*”, kwiecień-maj 2001, p. 2.

606 J. Pawlas, *Dialog*, “*Nasz Dziennik*” 19 IV 2001, p. 11.

607 J. Womalski, *Falszywe dowody, falszywe zeznania*, “*Nasza Polska*” 19 VI 2001, p. 7.

sztajn as a security police officer, is puzzling. In “Nasz Dziennik” daily there was even a caricature of Jan Tomasz Gross sitting in an armchair and looking like an Orthodox Jew while two bow to him and kiss his feet. The caption said: “Brilliant! A testimony of one security police officer was enough to vilify a whole nation!”<sup>608</sup>

The defensive camp did not accept by any means Gross’s postulate of a “new approach to the sources”, which they found abused the elementary demands of academic reliability and whose premises were considered racist because they favoured victims of the Holocaust, that is, Jewish witnesses and Jewish sources. One of the “Najwyższy Czas!” journalists even stated that instead of “a new approach to the sources”, Gross’s methodological directives should be called “a triumphal return to the Nuremberg Laws”.<sup>609</sup> While criticism towards Gross’s methodological mistakes, his selective attitude to historical sources, hasty generalisations and biased conclusions were characteristic of the whole defensive camp, it was only its radical wing that attempted to prove the anti-Polish and lampooned nature of the book. Although the reasons for using such terminology are intuitive and easy to understand, they will be précised later in this chapter. It is worth mentioning here, however, the ways in which the authority of the author of “Neighbors” was questioned.

The key method of deprecating Jan Tomasz Gross was stressing that he was not a professional historian but a sociologist, which was obviously supposed to prove his lack of competence and explained the scholarly offhandedness of which he was accused. The author was also called “an amateur historian”, “an ahistorian”,<sup>610</sup> “a pseudo-historian”,<sup>611</sup> “lying-professor”,<sup>612</sup> “a provincial American sociology professor”,<sup>613</sup> “a journalist”,<sup>614</sup> “a spiritual father of Jedwabne”,<sup>615</sup> “an anti-Pole”,<sup>616</sup> or a “scholar”, but always in inverted commas.<sup>617</sup> An impressive list of epithets describing Gross’s attitude was presented by Jacek Wagner in “Tygodnik Solidarność” weekly. One could find such descriptions as:

608 See “Nasz Dziennik” 24 V 2001, p. 16.

609 L. Stępniewski, *Cud Purymowy i inne historie*, “Najwyższy Czas!” 7 IV 2001, p. XXXIV.

610 P. Jakucki, *Nagonki ciąg dalszy*, “Nasza Polska” 3 IV 2001, p. 1.

611 P. Mikucki, *Historia, czy dyletanctwo?*, “Nasz Dziennik” 7 VI 2001, p. 3.

612 J. M. Jaskólska, *Sąsiedzi sąsiadów*, “Nasz Dziennik” 9-10 VI 2001, p. 28.

613 J. Womalski, *Falszywe dowody, fałszywe zeznania*, “Nasza Polska” 19 VI 2001, p. 7

614 J. Wegner, *Antypatie Grossa*, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 2001, No. 33, p. 20.

615 R. Pazio, *Kości zostały rzucone*, “Najwyższy Czas!” 21-28 VII 2001, p. XII.

616 J. R. Nowak, *Dyletanci atakują. Jedwabne a zbrodnie na kresach*, “Głos. Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowy” 10 III 2001, p. 14

617 M. Pigalski, *Szalbierstwo*, “Głos. Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowy” 12 V 2001, p. 3.

“an apostate, renegade, traitor and turncoat, an advocate of someone else’s interests, a bird that fouls its own nest, etc.”<sup>618</sup>. All of them were aimed at portraying Gross’s attitude to the nation he came from. Other epithets referred to the lies the author supposedly enclosed in his book: “an obscene liar”,<sup>619</sup> “a notorious humbug”,<sup>620</sup> “an impostor from Overseas”,<sup>621</sup> or “the chief calumniator”.<sup>622</sup> Even the popular saying “to lie like a dog” was replaced with a new, spontaneously created version: “to lie like Gross”.<sup>623</sup>

Moreover, Gross’s own biography was supposed to be an element discrediting his book, which Antoni Zambrowski tried to prove in an article in “Tygodnik Solidarność” and an interview in “Najwyższy Czas!” weekly. Zambrowski suggested that Jan Tomasz Gross, arrested in 1968, “broke during interrogation and incriminated his friends”.<sup>624</sup> The defensive camp, often employing the anti-Semitic rhetoric, did not fail to reproach Gross for his Jewish roots, which was obviously supposed to be significant for the debate about “Neighbors”. Gross’s origin was believed to confirm the anti-Polish attitude of Jews (particularly American Jews), which was taken as an axiom: in other words, the example of Gross provided evidence for an implicit rule and vice versa. As a resident of the USA, Gross met all necessary criteria of the supposed hostile attitude of Jews to Poland and Poles and his origin fully explained his “true” intentions. Also, it was noted that he was an author of a “number of anti-Polish books”<sup>625</sup> and was generally known for his negative attitude to Poles and, particularly, to the Catholic Church. Negative attitude of Jews towards Christianity and the Church were suggested as well. Nevertheless, the defenders of the Polish innocence paradigm mainly tried to undermine the key thesis of Gross’s book regarding the participation of Poles in the Jedwabne massacre. There were attempts to diminish the participation and the blame of the inhabitants of Jedwabne, mostly by minimising or even negating this participation in various ways.

The whole “self-defence camp” agreed wholeheartedly that Germans must have been the chief architects of the murder and it had been their inspiration that

618 J. Wegner, *Antypatie Grossa*, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 2001, No. 33, p. 20.

619 W. Wybranowski, *Jedwabne – dobry geszeft*, “Nasz Dziennik” 7 XI 2001, p. 16.

620 W. Wybranowski, *Krokodyle lzy Grossa*, “Nasz Dziennik” 3 VII 2001, p. 16.

621 J. R. Nowak, *Dyletanci atakują. Jedwabne a zbrodnie na kresach*, “Głos. Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowy” 10 III 2001, p. 14.

622 J. R. Nowak, *Zapomniany heroizm Jedwabnego*, “Niedziela” 17 VI 2001, p. 8.

623 A. Zambrowski, *Gross kłamstw*, “Najwyższy Czas” 15 IV 2001, p. XV.

624 See A. Zambrowski, *Żdźbło w cudzym oku*, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 2001, No. 32, p. 19; T. M. Płuzański, *Od sypania do “Sąsiadów”*, an interview with A. Zambrowski, “Najwyższy Czas!” 30 IX 2001, p. XI-XII.

625 W. Wybranowski, *Krokodyle lzy Grossa*, “Nasz Dziennik” 3 VII 2001, p. 16

made it all happen: they were supposed to be the coordinators and at least direct participants of the pogrom. Therefore, any spontaneous participation of Polish neighbours in the crime was out of the question, not to mention a rank-and-file initiative. The Polish role in this German scenario was described by the defensive camp in at least two different ways. Those who were inclined to acknowledge Polish voluntary participation stressed that those Poles had been a small and vicious margin or, as a “*Życie*” journalist noted, they represented the local “mob”.<sup>626</sup> Guided by the desire for a quick profit and/or revenge for Jewish attitude under Soviet occupation, they played the role of “avengers-volunteers”.<sup>627</sup>

Oftentimes, however, Polish participation in the crime was depicted not as voluntary, but forced by the Germans: executing commands was necessary as disobedience meant death. Besides, some strongly stressed that Polish participation had not involved the act of murder but only its organisation; moreover, Poles had not even been aware of the aim of the preparations that they had been forced to participate in by the Germans. Therefore, they played their auxiliary role unwittingly and, for certain, unintentionally.

Needless to say, these two variants of the Polish role in the Jedwabne pogrom, observable in the defensive camp, were only ideal types. To begin with, the boundaries between them are blurred. Their characteristic narratives frequently coexisted in the opinions expressed by the debaters and took on hybrid shapes, such as an assumption of a spontaneous involvement in the crime by some Poles, motivated by revenge, and a forced help of other Polish participants. Anyway, the defendants of Polish innocence considered Germans to be the inspirers, organisers and at least the main co-perpetrators of the murder in Jedwabne, as if the drama involved only them and the murdered Jews. Sometimes, Polish participation was denied completely, and Germans were made out to be the only ones responsible for initiating and realising the plan for the extermination of the Jedwabne Jews.

Hence, the debaters from the defensive camp referred to the historians who also represented this trend and argued the key role of the Germans in the Jedwabne crime, minimised the role of Poles and wrote much about the disgraceful attitudes of Jews under the Soviet occupation. The unchallenged authority for the whole “self-defence camp” was undoubtedly Tomasz Strzembosz, whose opinions and statements were set against Gross’s views, unmasking his “distortions” and refuting his theories. Also Piotr Gontarczyk, Marek Jan Chodakiewicz and historians more radical in their views, such as Leszek Żebrowski and

626 R. Krasowski, *Jedwabny supel*, “*Życie*” 9 III 2001, p. 14.

627 R. Włast Matuszak, *Bajka o złotej rybce*, “*Tygodnik Solidarność*” 2001, No. 32, p. 18.

Ryszard Bender, played a similar role of academic authorities whose texts invalidating the findings of Jan Tomasz Gross could be quoted. The true oracle for the radical wing of the self-defence camp, however, was Jerzy Robert Nowak. His numerous articles and commentaries were systematically published in "Głos", "Nasz Dziennik" and the Catholic weekly "Niedziela", in which the author initiated a whole series of publications, titled: "100 kłamstw Jana Tomasza Grossa" [eng. "100 Lies of Jan Tomasz Gross"], later released as a book<sup>628</sup>. It was not the only book undermining almost everything Gross stated in "Neighbors" and exposing the "implicit intentions" of the author, which was released during the debate<sup>629</sup>.

The defenders of Polish innocence faithfully supported those historians who attempted to demonstrate that the German role in the Jedwabne massacre was not limited to taking photographs and filming. Although new circumstantial evidence that appeared in the course of the investigation was never confirmed, it was used, together with documents which never truly undermined Gross's key findings and were not contradictory to them, as a pretext to triumphantly reinterpret the events, with a sense of relief. These processes are noticeable if only in the titles of press articles: "Germans were there",<sup>630</sup> "Germans burnt...",<sup>631</sup> "The murder was committed by Germans",<sup>632</sup> "Germans were in Jedwabne",<sup>633</sup> "Great mystification",<sup>634</sup> "Without Polish Participation",<sup>635</sup> "Innocent nation" and "Gross was wrong".<sup>636</sup> Certainly, Gross's book contained some proven inaccuracies and mistakes, one of which even resulted in a libel action brought against him. These did not, however, concern his key findings. Anyway, each mistake or inaccuracy was greeted with enthusiasm by the defensive camp and treated as evidence of Gross's lies and his false, unsubstantiated accusations.

The crowning evidence of Gross's 'falsification' and, at the same time, of Polish innocence and German perpetration, was supposed to be the results of the

628 See J. R. Nowak, *Sto kłamstw J. T. Grossa o Jedwabnem i żydowskich sąsiadach*, Warszawa 2001.

629 See J. Wysocki, *Jedwabne kłamstwa*, Koszalin 2001; H. Pająk, *Jedwabne geszeftzy*, Lublin 2001; L. Niekrasz, *Operacja "Jedwabne". Mity i fakty*, Wrocław 2001; E. Marciniak, *Jedwabne w oczach świadków*, Włocławek 2001.

630 W. Kaminski, *Niemcy tam byli*, "Życie" 16 III 2001, p. 1.

631 A. Gryczka, *Niemcy spalili...*, "Życie" 27 III 2001, p. 1.

632 (H.P.), *Zbrodni dokonali Niemcy*, "Nasz Dziennik" 17-18 III 2001, p. 16.

633 T. M. Płużański, *Niemcy byli w Jedwabnem*, "Tygodnik Solidarność" 2001, No. 13, p. 13.

634 K. Karsicki, *Wielka mistyfikacja*, "Nasza Polska" 3 IV 2001, p. 1, 8-9.

635 M. Wójcik, *Bez udziału Polaków*, "Nasz Dziennik" 27 III 2001, p. 1, 2.

636 K. Wełnicki, *Gross się pomylił*, "Nasz Dziennik" 25 III 2001, p. 2.

exhumation undertaken by IPN, which discovered that about 200-250 bodies had been buried at the site of the burnt barn. Moreover, in the vicinity of the barn, numerous shells and a bullet fragment were found in the collective grave. In the opinion of the defenders of Polish innocence, the reduction of the 1,600 victims Gross had reported was a crucial evidence of his misrepresentations while the shells overwhelmingly proved German complicity in the murder as only they could carry firearms. An example of such conclusions can be found in the words of Jan Engelgard, the chief editor of "Myśl Polska": "All the myths and lies promoted stubbornly by Jan Tomasz Gross dispelled. The myth of 1,600 dispelled, the myth of the unassisted Polish perpetration without German compliance – dispelled."<sup>637</sup>

Behind the utterances of some journalists there was an implicit suggestion that the reduction of the number of victims not only undermined Gross's findings but also belittled the significance of the Jedwabne massacre: changed its overtone, made it less exceptional. How else to interpret such statements as: "the conducted exhumation lets us speak of only about 250 victims of the murder"<sup>638</sup>; or "the number of murdered Jews was supposed to prove the bestiality of this deed (...), the investigation revealed that only about 200 Jews were killed"<sup>639</sup>? It is also hard to determine the source of the information published by "Nasza Polska" that "among the victims there were also bodies of Catholics which prove that Poles were forced to participate".<sup>640</sup> The aim of this publication, however, is very clear: "Catholic corpses" were supposed to prove that Poles had been forced to help the Germans and the Jedwabne barn became a Polish-Jewish grave, which was obviously very significant from the perspective of the perpetual Polish-Jewish rivalry over the amount of experienced suffering. Also, the members of the Polish American Public Relations Committee and the Committee to Defend the Good Name of Jedwabne stated in their declaration that Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne had been murdered for their refusal to participate in the massacre.

The whole self-defence camp were united in pointing at the motives of the Jedwabne massacre: in fact, at one prime motive, the supposed cooperation of Jews with the communists between 1939 and 1941 (the "ignored collaboration"), was disregarded by Gross but recognised by Tomasz Strzembosz. This issue was analysed by both moderate and radical defenders of Polish innocence. Some depicted the sheer pandemonium experienced by Poles between 1939 and

637 J. Engelgard, *Granice podłości*, "Myśl Polska" 17-24 VI 2001, p. 1.

638 D. Kołakowska, *Zdradza ich płaszcz pocisku?*, "Życie" 6 VI 2001, p. 3.

639 P. Krukowski, *Jest kij na Polaka*, "Nasz Dziennik" 8 VI 2001, p. 16.

640 A. Kolatorski, *Siewcy kłamstwa*, "Nasza Polska" 7 XI 2001, p. 10-11.

1941 from Jewish and Soviet communists acting arm-in-arm. Jews were portrayed as traitors who had denounced Poles and made lists of their Polish neighbours assigned to be deported to the USSR and as ruthless tormentors of the Polish nation characterised by particular cruelty. In other words, the pens of numerous journalists painted a picture of murders and harm suffered by Poles from their Jewish neighbours as if they were settling accounts by counter-accusation.

Although the majority of debaters who touched upon the subject of Jewish attitudes under Soviet occupation emphasised that their purpose was only to show the motive of the murder and consider its wider context – not to justify its perpetrators – in many cases it was hard to trust the honesty of those declared intentions. There were also some debaters, however, who never even tried to hide behind such a rhetorical facade: according to them, the revenge motive was an extenuating circumstance for the murder and somehow justified its perpetrators. Maciej Giertych was representative of such an attitude: he claimed that “[Jewish – author’s note] collaboration with the occupier was not an isolated phenomenon and must have caused aversion among the ‘neighbours’. It could have been a reason for lynchings, if there were any, and every normal court would acknowledge it as an extenuating circumstance. But Gross obviously does not care.”<sup>641</sup>

It is somehow comprehensible that those defenders of Polish innocence, who agreed that some Poles had taken part in the pogrom, interpreted their motives as a revenge for the Jewish attitudes under the Soviet occupation. It is paradoxical, however, that the same argument was used by the group of defenders who denied Polish compliance. If, as they claim, Poles had been forced to help the Germans and were only background actors in the massacre, they would not have had any motives. Therefore, the whole context of Jewish attitudes under Soviet occupation should lose its validity as a mitigating factor.

However, all descriptions of the disgraceful attitude of Jewish communists towards Poles between 1939 and 1941 were only part of a more developed indictment against Jews for their numerous crimes against the Polish nation, brought by some of the defenders of Polish innocence. This “confession of someone else’s crimes” was certainly characteristic of this wing of the defence. It was an attempt to depict Jews as perpetrators, not victims, and often consisted of categorical calls for Jews to account for their own past and to confess their sins against Poles. So what should Jews apologise to Poles for in that case?

The argument most often used, already stated above, concerned Jewish behaviour under the Soviet occupation 1939-1941: not only how they “whole-

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641 M. Giertych, *Jedwabne prostuje kręgosłupy*, “Myśl Polska” 19 VIII 2001, p. 16.

heartedly” welcomed the Soviet army, but also committed all other sins against Poles from this period – which the journalist Helena Pasierbska in “Nasz Dziennik” explained by referring to the “everlasting anti-Polonism” deeply grounded in Jewish mentality.<sup>642</sup> The whole defensive camp seemed to use, in one way or another, the argument of Jewish attitudes under the occupation which served a function of an overarching topos.

The list of all charges against Jews was much longer, however, and difficult to reconstruct in detail. Accusations of disgraceful attitude included almost all periods of the twentieth-century history of Poland, starting from the interwar period and ending at the alleged support given by the Jews to the Round Table arrangements. Jews were reproached for their pre-war participation in the Communist Party of Poland and held responsible for installing the communist system in postwar Poland. In “Nasz Dziennik”, Jerzy Pawlas reminded the readers how Jews in 1939 had “celebrated the fall of the Polish state and joined the NKVD (...) betrayed their country and their neighbours”.<sup>643</sup> Antoni Macierewicz noted that Poland regained its independence in 1989 “after a 50 year occupation led by communists of Jewish origin who supported Russian bolshevism”.<sup>644</sup> There were even attempts to prove that communism was a Jewish idea and creation, which was supposed to be verified by Karl Marx’s origin and an exceptional susceptibility of Jews to the “Hegelian bite”.<sup>645</sup> There were texts about nameless Jews from NKVD and Cheka, Jews in UB and SB [secret police] and the crimes they were supposed to commit. Concrete examples were also used, with the names and surnames of the Jewish communists responsible for suffering and death of many Poles: Salomon Morel, Anatol Fejgin, Helena Wolińska, Jakub Berman, Stefan Michnik and many other Jewish murderers, given a symbolic status in the national-Catholic discourse.

Much attention was devoted to the postwar period of violence: the Stalinist era in Poland. Violence was attributed to Jewish communists, who were members of the justice administration and state security service. Piotr Semka even suggested that their inclination to violence could have been the result of some post-Holocaust trauma. “How many of the UB officers of Jewish origin” – Semka asked – “tried to get over the war oppression, fighting with ‘fascists’ from AK [Armia Krajowa – underground forces loyal to the Polish government in exile]? (...) Wasn’t it true that people shocked by the enormity of murder they

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642 H. Pasierbska, *Antysemityzm czy antypolonizm?*, “Nasz Dziennik” 22 VI 2001, p. 10.

643 J. Pawlas, *Dialog*, “Nasz Dziennik” 19 IV 2001, p. 11.

644 A. Macierewicz, *Rewolucja nihilizmu*, “Głos. Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowy” 3 II 2001, p. 10-11.

645 A. Kolatorski, *Siewcy kłamstwa*, “Nasza Polska” 7 XI 2001, p. 10-11.

saw during the Holocaust found some sort of relief in their postwar cruelties?”<sup>646</sup> Other debaters did not always analyse the causes of these cruelties, focusing instead on exemplifying them or only reminding readers about them.

This particular category, “confession of someone else’s crimes”, also included Jewish sins committed against Poles during World War II. For example, the journalist Krystian Brodacki wrote in his extensive article published in “Tygodnik Solidarność” that Jewish police, ordered by the Gestapo, carried out two public executions of Poles in Cracow.<sup>647</sup> Numerous and cruel murders of the Polish civilian population, allegedly committed by Jewish partisans together with Ukrainians, Belarusians or Soviets, were also recalled. In addition, the decision to murder Polish officers in Katyń was attributed to Jews. One of the journalists announced that in Western Europe “they evilly do not want to acknowledge that the Holocaust was meant for Poles and for Poland. And that it was committed with the hands of Germans, Russians and, in the end, Jews from UB.”<sup>648</sup> There were even some voices that “Jewish Gestapo” denounced Poles who hid Jews during the German occupation.

Let us finish here, however, this laconic and incomplete deliberation about harm supposedly done to Poles by Jews and extensively described by the radical defenders of Polish innocence. They used the Jedwabne pogrom and the public debate around it as an excellent opportunity to recall the amount of Polish suffering for which Jews were supposed to be responsible. One “Głos” journalist wrote about it openly: summarising the public dispute over the Jedwabne massacre he noticed only one advantage of the debate: “The Jedwabne case” – he pointed out – “allowed us to remember the enormity of Jewish murders (...). It reminded us about Jewish participation in the physical extermination of the best sons of the Polish Nation, as well as in the destruction of Polish culture and science, the falsification of history, the persecution of the Church and the twisting of the minds of a few generations of Poles.”<sup>649</sup>

In the radical defence camp, “Confessing someone else’s sins” was not limited to listing Jewish sins against Poles: Jews were also accused of supporting Germans in the Holocaust and advised to come to terms with this part of their inheritance instead of accusing Poles of their complicity. The evidence that Jews had contributed to the Holocaust and supported Germans in its every stage was offered by referring to the Jewish police in ghettos, the Jewish Gestapo,

646 P. Semka, *Bez tematów tabu*, “Życie” 18 V 2001, p. 15.

647 See K. Brodacki, *Co z tymi napisami?*, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 2001, No. 25, p. 6-7.

648 M. Prałat, *Czy pieniądze zamkną Wam usta?*, “Nasz Dziennik” 3 IV 2001, p. 16.

649 R. Dybczyński, *Pokłosie sprawy Jedwabnego (3)*, “Głos. Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowy” 22 IX 2001, p. 14.

Judenräte, members of Sonderkommando and many other manifestations of alleged Jewish collaboration with Nazis. Referring to “Eichmann in Jerusalem” by Hannah Arendt, famous for her controversial views on the Jewish role in the Holocaust, Teresa Kuczyńska, quite freely interpreting Arendt’s book, claimed that Germans would not have been able to murder so many Jews without Jewish assistance as “there would not have been enough people to murder”. It was not only Kuczyńska who quoted Arendt as a “great Jewish philosopher” who, thanks to her origin and academic authority, was supposed to give credibility to the author’s own judgements.<sup>650</sup> One of the journalists of “Najwyższy Czas!” also extensively quoted Arendt to finally conclude that “it would be naive to wait for a debate about Jewish collaboration with the Nazis as intensive as the one about Jedwabne.”<sup>651</sup> “Nasza Polska” weekly went even further. Not only did it attempt to prove the Jewish collaboration with the Nazis, but also claimed that the Nazis simply had Jewish roots.

If we add to this register of Jewish sins against Poles the problem of Israeli policy towards Palestine within their own nation, often stressed by the defenders of Polish innocence, and if we see modern Jews in the role of armed oppressors, then Jews as the victims of Jedwabne or even the Holocaust will be pushed into the background. In front of our eyes we will see the picture, painted by the multiple voices of the debaters, presenting Jews as oppressors. This was probably one of the aims: to push the debate over Jedwabne into the background; to replace national self-examination with “the confession of someone else’s sins”; to hide the Jedwabne massacre behind a smokescreen of Jewish crimes against Poles by applying the “you did it to us, we did it to you” logic; to let the Jedwabne crime dissolve/cross-fade in a sea of mutual harm and to replace the necessity of accounting for and revaluing the difficult past of the Polish nation with a call for Jews to confess their crimes first.

There is yet another important question to solve. If “Neighbors”, in the opinion of radical defenders of Polish innocence, offered no academic value and its author committed a number of lies and manipulations, what was his real aim? In other words, how were Gross’s intentions and his book interpreted? The answer was partly signalled in the analysis of the ways “Neighbors” and its author were referred to. In both cases, the “anti-Polish” character of “Neighbors” and Gross’s attitude were stressed. Generally, “anti-Polish” was a key word in the rhetoric of the representatives of the radical defence camp.

In most general terms, one could say that “Neighbors” was interpreted as an attack on the good name of Poland and the Polish nation by accusing Poles of

650 T. Kuczyńska, *Nauka o holokaucie*, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 2001, No. 18, p. 16.

651 T. Kornaś, *I tak winni są Polacy...*, “Najwyższy Czas!” 17 II 2001, p. XXXI-XXXII.

participating in the Holocaust. The book was seen as another piece of faked evidence of the supposed Polish atavistic and “drunk with mother’s milk” anti-Semitism, and as yet another anti-Polish campaign led by Jews after the dispute about the Carmelite Sisters’ convent and the religious symbols in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Gross’s book was also perceived as evidence of Jewish hatred and prejudice against Poles and another manifestation of the slandering and humiliating of the Polish nation. What is more, in the debate over Jedwabne, a conspiracy theory was gradually emerging. “Neighbors” was supposedly the integral element of the conspiracy against Poles and Gross the co-conspirator.

The existence of such a secret plan or plot was suggested for example by the Archbishop of Warsaw, Cardinal Józef Glemp, who said in the “Józef” Radio that a year before he had been informed by a “solemn Jew that the Jedwabne case would be publicised soon”.<sup>652</sup> Two months later in an interview for the Catholic News Agency he stated that “Neighbors” had clearly been written “on order”.<sup>653</sup> He did not specify, however, on whose order. Similarly, Bishop Ordinarium of Łomża Stanisław Stefanek confessed in his sermon that he had already found out about the approaching “great attack on Jedwabne” from his Warsaw friends, “in a discreet conversation, with lowered voices”. But that was not all that Bishop Stefanek had to say in his Jedwabne sermon: he also argued that the assault on Jedwabne was actually “an attack on our understanding of World War II” and that we all were “in the middle of an enormous storm whose initiators mean to inflame our minds with a spiral of suspicions and hatred”.<sup>654</sup> Unfortunately, neither the Bishop nor the Cardinal specified who these initiators were. Mystery and ambiguity are fundamental principles on which conspiracy theories are based. Conspiracy theorists trust their recipients’ intuition and leave them a margin of freedom in interpreting their words. Therefore, both Glemp’s and Stefanek’s words were quoted in press as evidence that “the attack on Jedwabne” had been prepared much earlier.

There were also some journalists, however, who openly and directly wrote about “Operation ‘Jedwabne’”, as “Myśl Polska” called it<sup>655</sup> and who represented a strong, defensive attitude. Occasionally, they used different rhetoric, but were virtually unanimous in analysing the reasons behind Gross’s decision to

652 (KAI), *Wina uznana sprawiedliwie. Wystąpienie prymasa Polski kardynała Józefa Glempa*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 5 III 2001, p. 6.

653 *Żydzi powinni uznać, że są winni wobec Polaków. Wywiad Prymasa Polski ks. kardynała Józefa Glempa dla KAI*, “Nasz Dziennik” 15 V 2001, p. 10.

654 See *Moralny obowiązek dochodzenia do prawdy. Homilia JE ks. biskupa Stanisława Stefanek, ordynariusza łomżyńskiego, wygłoszona 11 marca 2001 r. podczas mszy św. w kościele parafialnym w Jedwabnem*. As cited in “Nasz Dziennik” 13 III 2001, p. 4.

655 J. Engelgard, *Operacja “Jedwabne”*, “Myśl Polska” 18 III 2001, p. 1.

write “Neighbors”. The analysis of press articles and other public utterances shows two main motivations attributed to Gross’s decision. First of all, revealing the Jedwabne pogrom was intended to: hold Poles responsible for the Holocaust; deprive them of pride in their heroic actions during World War II; destroy the national axiom that Poles had never fallen into the disgrace of collaboration with the Nazis; and question the status of Poles as solely victims of Hitler rather than perpetrators. A lot was written on this subject in the national-Catholic press, but not only there: Jarosław Kaczyński at the Law and Justice political campaign inauguration also stated that in Poland there were powers “trying to defame us, make us Hitler’s accomplices” and received a loud ovation for these words.<sup>656</sup> Although his statement referred to some local “powers”, it fitted the wider context created by other debaters in other countries who went much further, crossing Polish borders with their conspiracy theories.

Some of them made an effort to keep alive the narrative typical of the March 1968 propaganda. Following the example of March orators, they suggested that the purpose of accusing Poles of the Jedwabne massacre and, ipso facto, participation in the Holocaust, was to relieve the Germans of the burden of their responsibility for murdering Jewish people by making Poles co-perpetrators.

Therefore, there were attempts to prove some sort of Jewish-German pact, which Jews entered into in exchange for substantial war reparations. In their open letter to “Brother Jews”, the members of the Journalist Circle of the Polish People’s Party wrote about the sole responsibility of the “forces influenced by the Germans” for the “propaganda war” unleashed against “the good name of our Nation”. They clearly stated that “one of the reasons for this war was German determination to conceal the unique character of the German state’s anti-Semitism and its murders from the period 1939-1945, in which the entire, culpable German nation participated”. In the opinion of the Circle members, it was “the German intriguers and Polish political ignoramuses who supported them” who decided to put Jedwabne on the “list containing symbols of the alleged genocide committed by Poles under the German occupation.”<sup>657</sup>

Much more often, however, it was suggested that accusing Poles of the Jedwabne crime and complicity in the Holocaust was intended to facilitate the process of paying financial claims made by Jews against the Polish state. Here we can see the other motive attributed to Gross’s decision to write his book and, at the same time, an attempt to confirm the conspiracy theory about greedy Jews:

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656 As cited in P. Wroński, *Marsz Kaczyńskich*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 11 VI 2001, p. 6.

657 Do Braci Żydów, *List otwarty Kola Publicystów PSL we Wrocławiu*, “Nasz Dziennik” 19 III 2001, p. 11.

Jedwabne was called “a good speculation”,<sup>658</sup> a “Holocaust-speculation”,<sup>659</sup> “Jewish cheek”, or even a “financial assassination of Poland”.<sup>660</sup> Moreover, in the opinion of some debaters, the fact that the Jedwabne case saw the light of day at the very moment of the debate about the re-privatisation bill could not have been accidental. In one way or another, many defenders of Polish innocence tried to prove that there was in fact “a Holocaust Industry” behind Gross’s accusation of the Jedwabne massacre against Poles; that the book was a product of “Shoah business”; and that Gross himself played a menial role in the Jewish financial claims on the Polish state. The phrases quoted were invented neither by Polish journalists nor during the Jedwabne debate – but gained immense popularity at the time. The author of the phrase “Holocaust industry” is the American political scientist of Jewish origin, Norman Finkelstein, who has been claiming for years that “Holocaust memory is an ideological construct of vested interests” of Israel and American Jews. His main thesis is that “the Holocaust industry” ruthlessly exploits the memory and tragedy of the Holocaust victims, attempting to “extort money from Europe in the name of ‘needy Holocaust victims’”.<sup>661</sup>

Interspersed with numerous footnotes, Norman Finkelstein’s book titled “The Holocaust Industry” was released in Poland in 2001, and the author of the useful theory became an unquestioned authority for many Jedwabne debaters. He played the role of a “good Jew” who unmasks his brothers and their real intentions with the use of scientific methods. Therefore, Finkelstein was referred to, quoted and treated as if he had been a real expert on “The Holocaust Industry”. “Rzeczpospolita” daily even published an interview with Norman Finkelstein in which he explained what the industry had been like, how it had functioned, and referred to the Polish context saying: “‘Neighbors’ has the easily recognisable trade mark of the Holocaust Industry”.<sup>662</sup>

Some debaters admittedly never used Norman Finkelstein’s terminology or tried to validate their words by his findings, but were clearly inclined to acknowledge that accusing Poles of participation in the Holocaust and of anti-Semitism were closely related to the debate about the re-privatisation bill and Jewish financial claims on Poland. For example, Ryszard Bugaj believed that the stereotype of anti-Semitic Poland, strengthened by emotions and supported by “powerful interests”, served some countries to hide “the dark pages of their

658 W. Wybranowski, *Jedwabne – dobry geszeft*, “Nasz Dziennik” 7 XI 2001, p. 16.

659 J. M. Jaskólska, *Sąsiedzi sąsiadów*, “Nasz Dziennik” 9-10 VI 2001, p. 28.

660 M. Twaróg, *W Będzinie tak jak w Jedwabnem*, “Myśl Polska” 5 VIII 2001, p. 16.

661 N. Finkelstein, *Przedsiębiorstwo holokaustu*, Warszawa 2001, p. 15, 20.

662 N. Finkelstein, *Goldhagen dla początkujących*, “Rzeczpospolita” 20 VI 2001, p. 7; K. Darewicz, *Kto czerpie korzyści z holokaustu?*, an interview with N. Finkelstein, “Rzeczpospolita” 26 IV 2000, p. 7.

histories” out of sight and to “justify their financial claims on Poland”.<sup>663</sup> What Ryszard Bugaj wrote in “Gazeta Wyborcza”, was commented upon by the chief editor of “Myśl Polska”, Jan Engelgard, who used a truly Marxist phrase in noting that the Jedwabne case served to create “an ideological superstructure aimed at facilitating the process of laying financial claims on Poland.”<sup>664</sup>

Probably quite involuntarily, Ryszard Bugaj pointed at yet another function of the Holocaust Industry, attributed to it by other debaters. The real purpose of the accusations against Poles of their anti-Semitism, participation in the Holocaust and the Jedwabne pogrom was supposedly to divert attention from the Israeli policy towards Palestinians and the problem of Jewish participation in the Holocaust.

This is what the narratives woven by many participants of the debate and conventionally called “a conspiracy theory” looked like. Its purpose was to explain the origin of “Neighbors” and the intentions of its author, Jan Tomasz Gross, accusing him and his book of a wide range of anti-Polish actions. Obviously, even the most radical defenders hardly ever used the “conspiracy” word. Much more often they wrote about a “crusade”, “an attack”, “a campaign” or speculated about some mysterious “defaming plan” of which Poles were the victims.<sup>665</sup> Some even argued that Jedwabne was only a prelude to far-flung actions against Poland.

Debaters presenting opposing arguments were constantly criticised by the defenders of Polish innocence. To quote Maciej Łętowski, they were defined either as “national flagellants”<sup>666</sup> or just co-founders and co-participants of the anti-Polish campaign. Needless to say, most objections were raised towards “Gazeta Wyborcza”, but also “Tygodnik Powszechny”, “Wprost” weekly, “Znak” and “Więź” magazines; the “Freedom Union” party, the left wing in general; Leon Kieres, Maria Janion, Reverend Stanisław Musiał and all the others who never sprang to defend the Polish innocence paradigm but who took part in the debate and were visible; those who beat their own breast instead of the breasts of others, or who deliberated not on the Holocaust industry but on the moral responsibility of the Jedwabne citizens for the murder of Jews. The debaters who denied Polish voluntary participation in the massacre or claimed that Poles had never taken any part in the pogrom even under compulsion, felt they were relieved of responsibility. The rest of the defenders, who were inclined to

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663 R. Bugaj, *Prawda historyczna i interes materialny*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 6-7 I 2001, p. 20.

664 J. Engelgard, *Operacja “Jedwabne”*, “Myśl Polska” 18 III 2001, p. 1.

665 A. Zambrowski, *Plan zniesławiania*, “Najwyższy Czas!” 9-16 VI 2001, p. L-LI.

666 M. Łętowski, *Przedsiębiorstwo “Pokuta”*, “Tygodnik Solidarność” 2001, No. 6, p. 5.

acknowledge the participation of a small social margin, questioned the national responsibility of the local scum and the very idea of collective responsibility. Both, however, almost at every step, reminded readers about the Polish Righteous Among the Nations and Polish trees in Yad Vashem: the proofs of Polish sacrifice and heroism and Jewish ingratitude.

## 5. Disputes over reconciliation rituals

Although the debate over the Jedwabne massacre had already been active for a few months, it was only in March 2001 that the Polish president and the Primate of Poland took the floor. In an interview for the Israeli daily “Jedijot Achronot”, the President Aleksander Kwaśniewski stated that “regardless of the inspirations, sources and historical background” that led to the murder and that were being dealt with by the Institute of National Remembrance, the Jewish citizens of Jedwabne “deserve to be paid the greatest homage” and announced that “the commemorations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murder will be an opportunity to make such an apology.”<sup>667</sup>

The President confirmed the position he adopted on the case, and developed it in a few statements given to Polish television, radio and press. He stressed that his intention was neither to “extend the collective responsibility” for the Jedwabne massacre to all Poles nor to admit the full responsibility for it, nor to “alter historical evaluations” by claiming co-responsibility for the Holocaust. He argued, however, that regardless of all the circumstances, the Jedwabne massacre had been committed by Poles and for this reason “it is necessary to do what one should do in situations like this: apologise and ask for forgiveness”. The President did not forejudge the form of such an apology or express any expectations about the number of guests at the commemorations planned for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jedwabne pogrom. He also left the decision for the Church’s potential participation solely in the hands of the Church’s own hierarchy.

President Kwaśniewski’s standpoint was supported by the management of Democratic Left Alliance: the Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek spoke about “the duty to appropriately honour the memory of the victims” and “for the nation to acknowledge the guilt of those who murdered Jews”<sup>668</sup> while Bronisław Geremek, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, issued a letter to the president in which he asked him to initiate a meeting of the leaders of all political parties in

667 As cited in *Zbrodnia pozostaje zbrodnią*. An interview with president A. Kwaśniewski, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 5 III 2001, p. 6.

668 See *Oświadczenie premiera*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 7 III 2001, p. 1.

order to adopt a common standpoint regarding the Jedwabne massacre.<sup>669</sup> In the end, no such meeting ever took place and no common stance of Polish political elites was agreed upon. Some politicians, e.g. Stefan Niesiołowski, Michał Kamiński or Zbigniew Romaszewski openly, but for different reasons, criticised the President's announcement about the apology. Generally, however, Polish politicians were not particularly visible in the Jedwabne debate and apparently avoided expressing their opinion in public. It is not unlikely that the politicians were silent for pragmatic reasons, since they were aware of the emotions arisen by the revelation of the crime and stimulated by the temperature of the dispute, and conscious of the social divisions caused by it. They were afraid to take a position in such a difficult case. Reportedly, Leszek Miller said that every use of the "Jedwabne" word cost him 2 percent decline in his support level. The sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis noticed that the members of Civic Platform did not use this word whatsoever.

Almost at the same time as President Kwaśniewski's speech, the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp took the podium. In his speech to the Warsaw station "Józef Radio", he clearly stated that "the murder committed by burning alive the Jewish population, driven to the barn by Poles, is undeniable" and that "the collective murderer is known". This way, he confirmed Polish participation and perpetration, which should be considered significant, taking into account the authority of the speaker and numerous attempts of the debaters to question Polish compliance. In his speech, he also pointed to the need to claim generational responsibility, that is, "the apology to God for the sins of our ancestors and to apologise to the victims' descendants". The Cardinal also enthusiastically referred to the letter of Michael Schudrich, a Warsaw rabbi, who suggested joining together in common mourning for the unnecessary loss of many human beings<sup>670</sup> on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jedwabne massacre in one of the Warsaw churches, the synagogue, or at the Warsaw Ghetto Monument. At the same time, the Cardinal disapproved of politicians' attempts to impose on the Church the manner of "performing/accomplishing the act of repentance" and the ideology "in which the prayer of atonement should be wrapped". He claimed that such pressure was exerted by "a few important politicians" and that the Jedwabne case is to some extent political. Moreover, in his speech given to "Józef Radio", the Cardinal mentioned that, a year before, a "serious Jew" had informed him that the problem of Jedwabne would be publicised soon, suggesting there was

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669 See B. Geremek, *Dajmy znak*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 16 III 2001, p. 4.

670 See *Rabin pisze do prymasa*, "Życie" 6 III 2001, p. 6.

some sort of secret plan.<sup>671</sup> Nonetheless, a senior Church official stated that neither the Jedwabne massacre nor Polish participation in it could be questioned, which was often referred to and appreciated. Some debaters noted, however, that when the Primate had mentioned the “prayer of atonement” he also warned against getting involved in the projects of some politicians, which was a clear reference to Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s initiative. Indeed, the Primate spoke about “the prayer of atonement” in Warsaw and not in Jedwabne. The twisted casuistry and rhetoric of the Cardinal’s speech was criticised as well.

As opposed to Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who only strengthened and explained his original words in the course of the debate, the Primate of Poland personally belittled the meaning of his own words and, above all, gave reasons to doubt the honesty of his intentions. He also altered the meaning of the decision made by the Episcopal Conference about a penitential service to be held on 27 May 2001 in the Warsaw All Saints’ Church, to which rabbi Michael Schudrich would be invited and during which the bishops would “apologise to God for the murders of Jews committed in Jedwabne and other towns”.<sup>672</sup> Announcing this decision, Primate Glemp stated that the prayer would not be only for Jedwabne victims but also for “other sins, against Polish Catholics, committed partly by Polish Jews”. According to Glemp’s explanations, he only wanted to extend “the formula of the meeting” and that the bishops would also apologise to God for “all manifestations of hatred which resulted in human suffering”, including Poles who “were for example murdered by the Nazis for saving Jews or suffered because of wrong done by Jews, e.g. during the establishment of communism”. “I expect”, Glemp continued, “that the Jewish side will carry out a self-evaluation and apologise to Poles for these crimes”.<sup>673</sup>

In other words, the memorable phrase from the historical letter from Polish bishops to German bishops: “we forgive and ask for forgiveness” underwent a peculiar transformation and took a conditional shape: “we apologise and expect an apology”. In Jasna Góra, on 3 May 2001, a day after expressing his expecta-

671 As cited in: (KAI) (Catholic Information Agency), *Wina uznana sprawiedliwie. Wystąpienie prymasa Polski kardynała Józefa Glempa*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 5 III 2001, p. 6; (KAI), *Prymas Polski kard. Józef Glemp w radiu “Józef”* (4. 03. 2001): *Nie chodzi o krzykliwą pokutę*, “Gazeta Polska” 7 III 2001, p. 19.

672 The decision about this penitential service was made on 2 May during the 311th plenary session of the Polish Episcopate Conference. On the next day Primate Glemp announced it in his sermon held at Jasna Góra.

673 All said on 2 May 2001 during a press conference held directly after the closing of the plenary session of the Polish Episcopate Conference. As cited in (WK, PAP, KAI), *Przeprosić Boga*, “Życie” 4 V 2001, p. 1; (JAK, PAP), *Za winy nasze i winy wasze*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 4 V 2001, p. 1.

tion of a Jewish apology to Poles, Cardinal Glemp said in his sermon that “history and memories also record Jews destroying their own compatriots”. Therefore, he argued that this was something they should apologise for. He also suggested that the Jedwabne affair was part of a particular campaign. Referring to the dispute about the location of the Carmelite Sisters’ convent in Oświęcim [Auschwitz], Glemp stated that “now that the Weiss [a controversial rabbi who actively protested against the location of the convent – author’s note] vs. Carmelites bonanza is over; the time has come for Gross and Jedwabne”<sup>674</sup>.

Numerous controversial statements and anti-Semitic clichés could also be found at the same time in the interview given by the Primate of Poland to the Catholic News Agency in the middle of May. He spoke for example about a continuous “crusade” against the Church, aimed at forcing an apology for Jedwabne; about “Neighbors” which was written “on order”; about Jews who were not liked before the war for their “odd folklore” and Bolshevik sympathies; about the economic background of the pre-war Polish-Jewish relations – because Jews were “more cunning” than Poles and were able to take advantage of them; about the anti-Judaism that he could not see, although he could see the problem of anti-Polonism. Moreover, Primate Józef Glemp once more raised for consideration the proposal that Jews should acknowledge and confess their sins against Poles and stated that President Aleksander Kwaśniewski did not have “a formal title to speak in the name of the nation”.<sup>675</sup> By the way, he had already announced in one of the television interviews that he would not go to Jedwabne on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre because he did not want to participate in a “spectacle”.<sup>676</sup>

All of the Primate’s statements were intensively commented upon and variously evaluated. While for some, the Primate’s proposal that Jews should confess their sins against Poles was fully justified and understandable, others pointed out that disinterest was a condition of honest apology and that it could not be a tie-in agreement. “Trading in moral acts” – Reverend Stanisław Musiał wrote – “should not be known to Christianity, which is based on gratuitousness of God’s redemption.”<sup>677</sup> Glemp’s announcement of his absence in Jedwabne on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre was also widely discussed. As one of the

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674 See *Wychodzić spod władzy ciemności. Homilia Prymasa Polski ks. kardynała Józefa Glempa, wygłoszona na Jasnej Górze 3 maja 2001r.*, “Nasz Dziennik” 5-6 V 2001, p. 17.

675 As cited in *Żydzi powinni uznać, że są winni wobec Polaków, Wywiad Prymasa Polski ks. kardynała Józefa Glempa dla KAI*, “Nasz Dziennik” 15 V 2001, p. 10.

676 See (PAP), *Nie robić widowisk*, “Rzeczpospolita” 14 IV 2001, p. 2.

677 (ks.) S. Musiał, *Prosimy, pomóżcie nam być lepszymi*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 21V 2001, p. 24.

“Wprost” journalists aptly predicted, this forewarned absence of the head of the Catholic Church was interpreted by part of public opinion as a heroic resistance to the Jewish pressure and the ongoing crusade.”<sup>678</sup> Following such logic, “Myśl Polska” weekly found Cardinal Glemp’s refusal to be a very important declaration and a “signal that the actions of some circles that planned the ‘Jedwabne’ operation and wanted to involve the President, Prime Minister, Parliament Speakers and the Primate of Poland into the ‘act of penance’ are slowly collapsing.”<sup>679</sup>

Let us, however, skip detailed reconstructions of the panoply of opinions towards the Primate’s standpoint and the Episcopal decision. Various utterances of senior Church officials clearly demonstrate that, since the beginning of the Jedwabne debate, there had been no unanimous voice of the Church; consequently, the hierarchs’ opinions about the validity and formula of the symbolic expiation were varied. Without doubt, Archbishops Józef Życiński, Henryk Muszyński, and Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek<sup>680</sup> consistently supported the idea of unconditional apology, ‘act of penance’, ‘asking for forgiveness’ and ‘clearing the conscience’, that is, acknowledging Polish guilt and moral responsibility for the sins of past generations. Contrary to them, but similarly to Primate Glemp, Bishop Bronisław Dembowski demanded an apology “from representatives of the Jewish nation for their membership in the NKVD and UB”.<sup>681</sup> Also, Bishop Stanisław Stefanek in his sermon in Jedwabne mentioned that the “best profit is now to be made on the innocent blood of murdered Jews” (he called it “Shoah business”) and “the attack on Jedwabne” was all about money. The bishop did not say anything about Polish guilt but suggested that someone “unwound a spiral of hatred – hatred that made Nero burn Rome and slander Christians.”<sup>682</sup>

The narratives of individual priests were also diverse. Suffice to say that the rector of Jedwabne parish, Edward Orłowski, and Reverend Waldemar Chrostowski found the idea of saying “we apologise and ask for forgiveness” to

678 See W. Amiel, *Narodowa terapia*, “Wprost” 20 V 2001, p. 28.

679 J. Engelgard, *Stop dla prowokatorów*, “Myśl Polska” 29 IV- 6 V 2001, p. 1.

680 See (abp) J. Życiński, *Banalizacja barbarzyństwa*, “Więź” 2001, No. 3, p. 27-32; (ks.) A. Boniecki, M. Okoński, *Biedny chrześcijanin patrzy na getto*, an interview with abp. H. Muszyński, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 25 III 2001, p. 12; M. Olejnik, *Za zbrodnie trzeba przeproszać*, an interview with bp. T. Pieronek, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 8 III 2001, p. 6.

681 These words were said by Bronisław Dembowski on 3 May during the service held by him in Włocławek. As cited in *Biskupi o sprawie Jedwabnego*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 4 V 2001, p. 4.

682 See *Biskup przestrzega przed próbą nowego wypaczenia historii, Homilia biskupa Stanisława Stefanka wygłoszona w Jedwabnem 11 marca 2001 r.*, “Niedziela” 25 III 2001, p. 6, 8.

Jews “pathological”, one-sided and humiliating for Poles. Like the Primate of Poland, Reverend Chrostowski demanded reciprocity for a list of Jewish sins against Poles.<sup>683</sup> Prelate Henryk Jankowski from the Saint Bridget’s Church in Gdańsk did not disappoint his supporters and joined the debate using his characteristic methods: he manifested his credo through the Easter decoration of the miniature Holy Sepulchre. There was a miniature, charred barn placed on one side of the altar, surrounded by candles, with a skeleton protruding from it, and a figure of Jesus Christ surrounded by numerous skulls on the other. Under the peculiar installation the inscription read: “Jews killed Jesus Lord and the prophets; they also prosecuted us” and “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Providing the interpretation is right, this was the way in which Prelate Henryk Jankowski demanded an apology from Jews for their sins dating back to the distant past but also for more contemporary wrongs listed minutely by many of the debaters. There were also other priests, however, such as Reverend Stanisław Musiał and Reverend Michał Czajkowski, who did not take any evasive actions, did not try to relativise Jedwabne and had no doubts about which standpoint to adopt towards it.

To put aside the opinions expressed by senior Church officials and by individual priests, the fact remains that by Episcopal decision, an expiatory service was planned to be held on 27 May 2001 in the All Saint’s Church, Warsaw, and the bishops declared they would apologise to God for the Jedwabne massacre. Another apology, but at a different time and in a different place, was announced by the Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski. Secular and religious powers differed in styles of speech, arguments and the choice of time and place for performing their act of repentance but both declared the same aim and the belief that the murder had been committed by Poles.

The two proclaimed acts of symbolic apology received mixed reception; however, they soon became key elements of the debate – particularly the President’s apology, which became a dividing line. Needless to say, the clearest division was between the defenders of Polish innocence and the moralists, called “national flagellants” by the former group. A positive attitude towards the President’s idea came from those acknowledging Polish participation in the Jedwabne massacre and the fact that our national legacy consisted not only of pride in our great compatriots but also of disgrace for the crimes of ordinary citizens. A critical attitude was simply a consequent continuation of taking the defensive stand: that is, minimising or questioning Polish participation in the Jedwabne massacre. Nonetheless, there were also debaters who had no doubts about the

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683 P. Paliwoda, *Kto utrudnia dialog?*, an interview with ks. W. Chrostowski, “Życie” 10 IV 2001, p. 15.

perpetrators of the Jedwabne massacre and never defended against taking the responsibility for the sins committed by past generations, but expressed certain fears concerning the apology announced by the President. It would be impossible, however, even to compare these doubts with the rhetoric used by declared opponents of the President's initiative, whose standpoint is worth considering. Those who questioned any Polish participation in the Jedwabne massacre considered the President's apology in the name of the nation to be an "absolutely unjustified"<sup>684</sup> act, to quote Andrzej Chrzanowski, a Member of Parliament from the Christian National Union party, who wrote these words in his letter to the President. Much more often, however, the debaters believed that the massacre had been committed by only a margin of Polish society and stressed that the President had no right to apologise in the name of Poles and that the blame should not be put on the whole nation. The announcement of the President's apology was interpreted as acknowledging and extending the blame for Jedwabne to all Poles, including those who had saved Jews during the war or were born after the war. Some even maliciously asked whether apologising in the name of all Poles included the name of Emmanuel Olisadebe, a popular Nigerian-born Polish footballer.<sup>685</sup>

Many of the debaters, including those who had no doubts about Polish perpetrators and did not call them a "social margin", referred to the argument that blame and responsibility can only be individual and therefore rebuffed the assumption that the President's initiative accepted the collective responsibility. Additionally, some of them stressed that using the term "national guilt" was nationalistic: they found it an *à rebours* manifestation of ethnocentrism; an absolutisation of the idea of nation and an example of "pars pro toto". "Najwyższy Czas!" even published an example letter to the President declaring denial of the rule of collective responsibility and asking him to emphasise that his apology for the Jedwabne crime in the name of the Polish nation did not include the name of the sender.<sup>686</sup>

Apparently, under certain conditions, some were inclined to acknowledge some sort of national responsibility but the fact that the murder was committed by a "social margin" – a small, pathological group of social scum – was the reason not to apologise. "I can apologise for what is typical of my nation" – a "Życie" journalist wrote – "but not for the attitudes of social margins".<sup>687</sup>

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684 As cited in (PAP), *Protest posła*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 10 VII 2001, p. 2.

685 S. Karczewski, *Olisadebe w Jedwabnem?*, "Nasz Dziennik" 5 VI 2001, p. 16.

686 See (*wzór listu do prezydenta Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego*), "Najwyższy Czas!" 24 III 2001, p. XXXII.

687 R. Krasowski, *Jedwabny supel*, "Życie" 9 III 2001, p. 14.

Another argument used by the critics of the President's planned apology concerned the moment of its announcement, which was prior to the completion of the Jedwabne investigation by the Institute of National Remembrance. In other words, the President rushed too much, did not wait for the investigation findings, decided about Polish guilt and determined the time of the act of penance on his own.

Not only was the apology considered untimely, but also not yet grounded in facts, as Jarosław Kaczyński prompted.<sup>688</sup> It is doubtful, however, whether the critics who used this argument would have been inclined to support the apology initiative even if the results of the investigation had confirmed the words of Jan Tomasz Gross. It was one of numerous arguments intended to prove that Poles should not apologise to Jews rather than applying the 'evidence first, penance later' rule. Considering the numerous accusations against the IPN president, Leon Kieres, it would be difficult to expect common willingness to acknowledge the findings of the IPN conclusive and ultimate.

The announcement of the President's apology was also questioned by claiming that Aleksander Kwaśniewski was not entitled to give it – either as an official or as a person. As for the former, it was stressed that the Jedwabne massacres had not been committed in the name of the Polish state or on the state order; no public institutions had been involved. Thus neither the President, as the head of state and its highest official, should apologise for this murder nor should anyone demand such an apology. Besides, it was noted, the position of President did not authorise Kwaśniewski to exercise moral authority. Ewa Czaczkowska, for example, stated that the whole debate was “all about the wrong attribution of moral authority to the state which has no competence in the fields of morals.”<sup>689</sup>

Much more often, however, the problem of Aleksander Kwaśniewski's legitimacy to apologise for Jedwabne in the name of the Polish nation was linked to the President's political biography. It was suggested to Kwaśniewski, as a former member of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and a post-communist, that he, together with other members of his political formation (“the heirs of communist murders”), should first of all “apologise for the atrocities of their ideological ancestors.”<sup>690</sup>

Ryszard Bugaj, referring to the President's apology, which, *nota bene*, he considered a manifestation of “political calculation”, subtly and aptly noted that

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688 See D. Wielowieyska, W. Załuska, *Rzeczpospolitej trzeba się bać*, an interview with J. Kaczyński, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 16-17 VI 2001, p. 15.

689 E. Czaczkowska, *Morderca wyrzeka się człowieczeństwa*, “Rzeczpospolita” 21 IV 2001, p. 9.

690 P. Jakucki, *Wyrok na Polskę*, “Nasza Polska” 27 III 2001, p. 1.

it was the party in which Aleksander Kwaśniewski “later made such a brilliant career” that launched an anti-Semitic campaign in 1968.<sup>691</sup> Considering that, at more or less the same time, the “Gazeta Polska” daily revealed that the head of the Foreign Office of the Chancellery of the President was Andrzej Majkowski, who actively participated in this campaign, Bugaj’s remark was hardly incidental or neutral. Majkowski’s case and particularly Kwaśniewski’s decision not to remove him from office inspired some journalists to accuse the President of an asymmetric attitude: on one hand, he announced the apology for Jedwabne, on the other, he turned out to have understanding for the anti-Semitic past of a state official. The accusation of inconsistency was clearly meant to undermine the honesty of the President’s intentions and to question his legitimacy to apologise to the Jews.

The apology announced by Aleksander Kwaśniewski was also criticised using openly anti-Semitic rhetoric. It was insinuated that the President took the Jewish side instead of defending Polish honour; that he represented Jewish interests in Poland; worked for the “Holocaust industry” and that the purpose of his apology was only to help Jewish financial claims — the apology was a prelude to their reparation demands. In “Nasza Polska” daily it was suggested several times that Aleksander Kwaśniewski was simply a Jew, which was naturally supposed to explain his attitude. He was called to respond to the charges brought against his father, whose “real” name was Stolzman, who “was an NKVD officer and betrayed Polish patriots to the Soviets.”<sup>692</sup> The journalist Leszek Czajkowski offered his readers a riddle: “If President Kwaśniewski expresses the need to apologise in the name of his nation... who is actually going to apologise to whom?”<sup>693</sup>

Opponents of the apology also stated that such an act could doubtlessly be interpreted as the confirmation of Polish compliance in the Holocaust, which should never be allowed to happen. In consequence, various petitions, open letters and declarations that aimed to dissuade the President from his plans appeared. Some debaters, objecting to the announced acts of expiation (both Presidential and Episcopal), emphasised that Poles had already apologised enough on numerous occasions and it was time for Jews to apologise to them. Even Lech Wałęsa said this.<sup>694</sup>

691 R. Bugaj, *Zbyt wiele emocji*, “Życie” 16 III 2001, p. 15.

692 (zespół redakcyjny), *Scenariusz znany od lat*, “Nasza Polska” 13 III 2001, p. 1.

693 L. Czajkowski, *Zagadka*, “Nasza Polska” 17 IV 2001, p. 5.

694 “I apologised as President. I apologised many times” – Lech Wałęsa said when asked about Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s initiative – “and not a single Jew has apologised to Poles (...). There are Jewish losers who only reopen old sores and earn from it by writing books (...). This is repulsive and we should have gotten it over with a long time ago. Na-

Some opinions focused on the reciprocity rule that many demanded be applied to the potential apology. Such an attitude was represented, for example, by a member of Parliament from the Christian National Union party, who made the following declaration for “Nasza Polska” magazine: “I am ready to say the words ‘I apologise’ – but on two conditions. First, I need to know what I am apologising for. I am apologising for a handful of outcasts. Second, I may do that if someone from the Jewish side apologises for what the Jews did under the Soviet occupation between 1939 and 1941: for the massive collaboration of the Jewish population with the Soviet occupier; for fighting against Polish underground forces in the area; and finally – for murdering Poles.”<sup>695</sup>

Thus, Michał Kamiński went one step further than the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp, who, admittedly, demanded reciprocity and acknowledgment by Jews of their sins against Poles and an apology for them, but did not make this a condition of the expiation act of Polish bishops. Besides, he never spoke of “a handful of outcasts”. Nonetheless, the Primate’s idea also gained its admirers among the debaters for whom only a reciprocal apology made good sense.

Obviously, the above-mentioned arguments, undermining the point of the apology in the name of the whole nation, did not necessarily mean that their users represented the defensive stand. This reservation particularly refers to those debaters who questioned the President’s initiative only because of their disagreement with the rule of collective responsibility, which, according to them, the act of apology represented. Often, however, the “individual responsibility” banner was only a useful liberal facade behind which there were attempts to defend Polish innocence.

The symbolic acts of expiation announced by secular and religious powers also met with the approval of some debaters, however, who were not uncritical or free from important doubts and fears. Their approval originated from acknowledging that what a community, such as a nation, inherits from previous generations, is not only glory but also disgrace: according to this rule, the apology was considered obligatory. Besides, as Wojciech Sadurski wrote, for example, an act of apology did not necessarily mean claiming collective responsibility – because an apology could also be “a manifestation of shame, not necessarily guilt”.<sup>696</sup>

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tions who paid such a price should have understanding for each other and should understand that there were scoundrels on both sides”. As cited in: (PAP), *Kiedy przeprosiny drugiej strony?*, “Nasz Dziennik” 10-11 III 2001, p. 3.

695 K. Bogomilska, *Polacy stawiani pod ścianą*, an interview with M. Kamiński, “Nasza Polska” 13 III 2001, p. 10.

696 W. Sadurski, *Przeprosiny są potrzebne nam samym*, “Rzeczpospolita” 24 III 2001, p. 6.

Long before the President's, Primate's and Bishops' declarations, some of the debaters addressed representatives of local authorities and Church officials asking them not to procrastinate but to take some action as soon as possible. For example, one of them was Jan Nowak-Jeziorański who, in a few different declarations published at the same time, proved with determination the necessity of pleading guilty. He pointed out that the existing situation created "a burning need for some symbolic act that would become a manifestation of sorrow and compensation for the massacre and cruelty inflicted by our compatriots."<sup>697</sup> Suffice to say, due to his consistent stand he was cursed by the national-Catholic press, which called him nothing but a traitor, while the then president of the Polish American Congress, Edward Moskal, accused him of working for the Germans during the war, as "their trusted and loyal administrator of confiscated Jewish properties."<sup>698</sup>

Considering all the appeals and the fact that for a long time the President, the Primate and the Episcopate were silent and only in March 2001 did they decide to speak in public and announce their apology initiative, it is understandable that some debaters accused the secular and religious powers of indolence. They also lamented the Primate's decision not to attend the ceremony in Jedwabne on 10 July, which suggested that he had questioned the significance of the event, refused to give Church support to the President and also left a space for speculation.

One way or another, both announced acts of symbolic expiation also met with approval, although their supporters expressed certain doubts. President Kwaśniewski's competence to apologise in the name of the nation was not questioned; however, some debaters were afraid that although he was going to do a lot of good, his voice would not be widely accepted because of his limited moral legitimacy in the eyes of many people. In this context, one observed a lack of Polish authorities whose standpoints could receive the support of the majority of society and whose voice would unite beyond any division. The debaters were mostly concerned, however, whether the President's apology would become only "a tool of social engineering, a PR event" with regard to Poland's image in the world.<sup>699</sup> Even this function of the ceremony was appreciated; however, there were warnings not to reduce it to a political profit and loss account. It was noted that a critical assessment of the national past, its re-evaluation, the confes-

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697 As cited in: (PAP), *Oświadczenie Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 12 III 2001, p. 2.

698 E. Moskal, *Faryżejskie wzywanie innych do przeprosin*, "Nasz Dziennik" 25 IV 2001, p. 10.

699 See Z. Nosowski, *W perspektywie sumienia*, "Więź" 2001, No. 6, p. 69.

sion of sins and asking for forgiveness had to be honest, as they were needed by us and not by international public opinion. In concern for the collective, national identity, honest self-examination and purification were advised, which could not be replaced with any symbolic gestures or rituals. “Official speeches, apologetic gestures is one thing”, Adam Krzemiński wrote, “democratic psychotherapy – another.”<sup>700</sup>

Therefore, some debaters were afraid that these announced acts of apology would precede “democratic psychotherapy”, which should come first. Had the Jedwabne massacre ever been regarded as a Polish disgrace, they wondered? Had it been a subject of individual reflection, sorrow, repentance, some sort of atonement? Had the ritual and symbolic act of apology replaced true, national self-examination? Would it become a comfortable alibi? What is more, wouldn’t this symbolic gesture close the debate and squander the chance for national catharsis given by the debate belated by almost half a century? In other words, the apology to be proclaimed for the Jedwabne massacre was feared to be premature – not because the Institute of National Remembrance had not yet finished its investigation but simply because one needs to be mature to apologise.

These fears were in fact more than empty moralising. In April 2001, almost half the Polish population (48%) surveyed by the Centre for Public Opinion Research believed that Poles should not apologise to Jews for the Jedwabne massacre; over one-third (34%) claimed it had been committed only by the Germans. Polish and German complicity was presumed by 14% and only 7% believed that only Poles had committed this crime.<sup>701</sup> In other words, according to the survey, every third Pole claimed that only Germans should be charged with the massacre. In this context, Mark Edelman’s words, “no one should apologise because an apology does not help in anything”, gains deeper meaning although the commemorations planned for 10 July in Jedwabne received his recognition.<sup>702</sup>

Despite the controversies appearing over the course of the debate about the two apologies for Jedwabne, particularly over the President’s apology, both came into effect and both on schedule. Chronologically, the penitential service organised on 27 May 2001 under the auspices of the Polish Episcopate in the All Saints’ Church in Warsaw was first. Neither the choice of date nor of place was accidental. While the choice of place was somehow symbolic, as the Church used to border the ghetto wall during the war, the choice of time was purely practical, indeed scheduled because of another event. The day after, in Warsaw,

700 A. Krzemiński, *Okaleczeni milczeniem*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 28 VII 2001, p. 18.

701 CBOS: *Polacy wobec zbrodni w Jedwabnem*, kwiecień 2001, Warszawa.

702 S. Rejak, *Z fanatykami nie ma o czym mówić*, an interview with M. Edelman, “Rzeczpospolita” 12 V 2001, p. 5.

a meeting of the Polish Episcopate on the occasion of the anniversary of Stefan Wyszyński's death was scheduled: in other words, bishops were intending to go to Warsaw anyway.

The Primate's decision about the time and place of the service, however, turned out to be very controversial, since the Jewish holiday, Shavuot, fell exactly on 27 May. Jews celebrate this day by praying in Synagogue, which excluded the possibility that the invited rabbi, Michał Schudrich, or any other Jews would attend it.<sup>703</sup> Another blunder resulted from the choice of place for the service. In the basement of the Church in which the bishops decided to apologise to God for Jedwabne, there was an impressively huge and patriotic bookshop called "Antyk" ("Antique"), stocked with anti-Semitic literature. The Church officials did not react, however, although they had been informed about it before the planned celebration.<sup>704</sup>

Regardless of all the controversies and negligence, on 27 May in All Saints' Church, a few dozen bishops in black cassocks apologised to God for the murdered Jews in Jedwabne and elsewhere. In the introduction to the inaugurating prayer, Bishop Stanisław Gądecki talked about the necessity to "purify the memory" and the difficult tasks of "purifying the conscience". Moreover, he declared in the name of the Episcopate: "As the Shepherds of the Polish Church, we want to stand in truth, in front of God and the people, above all, our Jewish brother and sisters, to express our sorrow and repentance for the massacre that happened in July 1941 in Jedwabne and elsewhere. Its victims were Jews and among the perpetrators there were also Poles and Catholics – people who were baptised."<sup>705</sup> Not only were these words heard by the bishops – whose numbers were not at full strength that day – but also by Leon Kieres, Władysław Bartoszewski, Maciej Płażyński and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who all attended the service. In front of the church, on the other hand, the defenders of Poland's good name protested and objected to "apologising to Jews for deeds not done."<sup>706</sup>

Over the next few days, the Warsaw service was a subject of numerous comments and although highly positive reviews predominated, critical ones appeared as well. While in the opinion of Jan Turnau from "Gazeta Wyborcza", in All Saints' Church a "prophet's voice" could be heard, comparable even to the

703 See K. Gebert, *Zmarnowana okazja*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 24 V 2001, p. 15.

704 The open letter in this issue was written e.g. by Sergiusz Kowalski from "Otwarta Rzeczpospolita – Stowarzyszenie przeciwko Antysemityzmowi i Ksenofobii" (Open [Polish] Republic: Association Against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia". See S. Kowalski, *Fasada i zaplecze*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 11 V 2001, p. 2.

705 *Wprowadzenie do modlitwy bp. Stanisława Gądeckiego*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 28 V 2001, p. 6.

706 As cited in A. Szostkiewicz, *Na kolanach*, "Polityka" 2 VI 2001, p. 17.

reconciliation letter of 1965 from the Polish bishops to German bishops, in the opinion of his colleague, Roman Graczyk, this prophecy was missing. And while the Episcopate's letter from 1965 demonstrated that the "moral consciousness" of bishops had emerged earlier than "the moral consciousness of Poles", the Jedwabne case proved that anti-Semitism brought the Episcopate closer to "common knowledge: facing the truth with reluctance and reservations."<sup>707</sup> These two very different opinions, which referred to the same event and the Episcopate's attitude, say a lot about the atmosphere after the Warsaw service and comments formulated at the time.

Between the penitential service celebrated by bishops in Warsaw's All Saints' Church and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jedwabne massacre commemorated by the President, another disagreement that divided observers arose. This concerned the content of the inscription on a new monument set up to commemorate the Jedwabne Jews. It was intended to replace the old monument, pulled down in March 2001, which had stood at the crime scene since 1962. The old inscription read: "Site of the Suffering of the Jewish Population. The Gestapo and the Nazi Gendarmerie Burned 1,600 People Alive on 10 July 1941."

The publication of "Neighbors" invalidated these words, although no one had doubted them for years. Unfortunately, years later, The Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites attempted to replace the lie inscribed in stone using a dodge which was called a "compromise". The new inscription was suggested to be: "In memory of Jews from Jedwabne and environs, men, women and children, co-masters of this land, murdered and burned alive at this spot on 10 July 1941. As a warning to posterity so that the sin of hatred enflamed by German Nazism might never set the inhabitants of this land against each other. Jedwabne, 10 July 2001."

The above-mentioned evasion, comfortable for the Jedwabne citizens, for the local rector and generally for numerous people critically oriented towards Gross's book, was the latter part of the proposed inscription that said nothing about the direct perpetrators of the massacre but pointed only at Nazism, enflaming "the sin of hatred" as the cause of the crime. One could get the impression that it was the Nazis who murdered local Jews; thus, the new inscription was in fact hardly different from the old one. Let us skip, however, detailed descriptions of the debate over this problem, in which one side demanded an inscription closer to the truth, and the other, that is, the defendants of Polish innocence, were afraid that Poles would be mentioned as perpetrators. Suffice to say that finally the epitaph was changed – only the first and uncontroversial part was

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707 J. Turnau, *Głos biskupów jasny i mocny*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 9-10 VI 2001, p. 25; R. Graczyk, *Zabrakło prorocstwa*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 9-10 VI 2001, p. 24.

saved – and the decision was made a few days before the planned commemorations.<sup>708</sup>

Before the celebrations were held, however, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, in an article published in “Polityka” daily, explained why he had decided to apologise, in whose name he was going to apologise and what the word “apology” meant in the context of the Jedwabne massacre. He also wrote that Jedwabne turned out to be the greatest challenge of his presidency, as Poles for the first time had been so severely confronted with “another face of our actions.”<sup>709</sup> On 10 July 2001, the planned ceremonies took place in Jedwabne. Among the participants, in addition to the President, there were politicians from the Democratic Left Alliance and the Freedom Union, Władysław Bartoszewski, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Marek Safjan, Leon Kieres, Jan Tomasz Gross, the Israeli ambassador Szewach Weiss, leaders of the World Jewish Congress and the European Jewish Congress, representatives of the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum, of the Lutheran Church, the Protestant Reformed Church and the Evangelical Methodist Church, Rabbi Jacob Baker, other rabbis, families of the victims, Poles and Jews.

True to his word, the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp, did not appear in Jedwabne. Other bishops followed his decision. Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, parliamentary speakers and right-wing politicians were absent, too, as was the Jedwabne rector; the local citizens’ attendance also left a lot to be desired. Instead, in some home and shop windows, posters appeared which read: “We do not apologise. It was Germans who murdered Jews in Jedwabne. Let the slanderers apologise to the Polish nation.”

In the Jedwabne square where the local Jews had been gathered on 10 July 1941 and where 60 years later the commemoration began, Aleksander Kwaśniewski took the floor.

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708 Finally, the inscription on the monument at the site of the burnt barn reads as follows: “In memory of Jews from Jedwabne and environs, men, women and children, co-masters of this land, murdered and burned alive at this spot on 10 July 1941.”

709 This is how the president Aleksander Kwaśniewski explained the meaning and legitimacy of his apologies: “I can hear questions or even accusations about whether the president should apologise in the name of the nation. Here is my answer: The president apologises as a person shocked by what happened in Jedwabne and other towns. The president apologises in the name of those who have a sense of guilt for the crime committed by a handful of our countrymen. The president has an obligation to apologise as the head of the Polish state. (...) What other word, if not an apology, would be proper in this situation? An apology is not an accusation – it is supposed to be a bridge to reconciliation.” A. Kwaśniewski, *Co to znaczy przepraszać*, “Polityka” 14 VII 2001, p. 13.

In his speech, there were words of apology for the Jedwabne massacre: “(...) as a citizen and as the President of the Republic of Poland, I apologise. I apologise in my own name and in the name of the Poles whose conscience has been touched by that crime, in the name of those who believe that we cannot be proud of the grandeur of the Polish history without experiencing the pain and shame because of the evil committed by Poles against others.”<sup>710</sup> Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s speech, although doubtlessly the most anticipated, was not the only moving statement heard that day in Jedwabne. The ambassador Szewach Wesiss and Rabbi Jacob Baker (born in Jedwabne) also addressed the crowd.

It is impossible to summarise each of the commentaries that appeared in press after the event, and there were many. Their reading, however, allows one to draw a general conclusion. These commentaries clearly reflected the spectrum of attitudes revealed during the debate and originated from them. In other words, the attitudes towards the ceremony in Jedwabne, and particularly to President Kwaśniewski’s speech, were analogical to the attitudes towards Gross’s “Neighbors” and the revelation of the massacre. Thus, it is no surprise that while Andrzej Friszke wrote “we can be proud that the Polish state, represented by its highest officials, did not attempt to belittle Polish guilt but decided to face the painful truth”,<sup>711</sup> Antoni Macierewicz accused the President of treason and stated that “whatever there is to say about traitors in Polish history, such an atrocity had never happened before”.<sup>712</sup> “Nasz Dziennik” daily added that it was “cheek to disgracefully apologise for the crimes the Polish Nation is not guilty of.”<sup>713</sup>

Needless to say, the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jedwabne massacre met with radically different responses. Admittedly, sometimes even declared opponents of the President’s apology openly admitted their recognition of the Kwaśniewski speech. Regardless of all the commentaries, 10 July 2001 was without doubt a day that proved the courage of the President, who managed

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710 In his speech Aleksander Kwaśniewski also raised the issue of Polish responsibility for the Jedwabne massacre. He said: “(...) One is not allowed to talk about a collective responsibility that would burden the citizens of a town or the whole nation. Every human being is responsible only for his/her own deeds. The sons do not inherit the guilt of their fathers. But are we allowed to say: ‘it was a long time ago’ or ‘it was them’? The nation is a community. It is a community of individuals, a community of generations. That is why we have to face the truth. Every truth. We have to say: that’s what happened. Our consciences will be clean if looking back to these days we shall always feel horror and moral indignation in our hearts.” See *Sąsiedzi sąsiadom zgotowali ten los, Przemówienie Prezydenta RP Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 11 VII 2001, p. 4.

711 A. Friszke, *10 lipca w Jedwabnem...*, “Więź” 2001, No. 8, p. 3.

712 A. Macierewicz, *Zdrada, państwo i niepodległość*, “Głos” 21 VII 2001, p. 2.

713 W. Wybranowski, *Jedwabna demokracja*, “Nasz Dziennik” 11 VII 2001, p. 16

to go against the stream of prevailing opinions. He steadfastly fulfilled his declaration of intent to apologise and did not give in to the pressure from all those people who had, one way or another, tried to dissuade him from doing so. His speech was a symptomatic example of the “language of morality” in contrast to the “yes, but” narrative. The message was clear and gave no illusions about the author’s intention.

Some participants in public life, however, believed that 10 July 2001 had brought dishonour on the highest officials of the Catholic Church, as the absence of the Primate of Poland and Polish bishops could not be justified by the penitential service organised in Warsaw sometime beforehand. While both expiation ceremonies could have been complementary, the impression was they were mutually exclusive. Moreover, the absence of Church officials at the site marked with death, at the collective tomb of the murdered, on the anniversary of their death, in the company of their families, by the side of rabbis and Jews, disturbed the message of the Episcopal prayer in May in Warsaw’s All Saints’ Church. It gave reasons to doubt the honesty of the bishops’ intentions. Besides, considering the spiritual rule that the Catholic Church imposes upon Poland, it is a pity that none of its officials stood by the President in Jedwabne. It would have been a signal for all the people who did not trust “Neighbors” but trusted the Church. Unquestionably, Maciej Giertych could not then have commented that their absence “was the most meaningful commentary.”<sup>714</sup>

Having said all this, it would be hard to disagree with Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, who commented on the absence of the leading Church shepherds: “If it is true that there was not one representative of the Polish Episcopate at the funeral in Jedwabne, the May service in All Saints’ Church can be interpreted as a classic example of a premature apology, which brings relief at first but delays real reconciliation in the long term.”<sup>715</sup>

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After a wave of comments about the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jedwabne murder, the debate over “Neighbors” began to fade away. Admittedly, there was a discussion about anti-Semitism in Poland in “Gazeta Wyborcza”, and “Rzeczpospolita” published several articles about the character of Polish historiography and the view of Polish history; however, the very problem of the Jedwabne massacre disappeared from the first pages of newspapers. Extensive articles and polemic essays on the Jedwabne pogrom were replaced by shorter pieces of infor-

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714 M. Giertych, *Jedwabne prostuje kręgosłupy*, “Myśl Polska” 19 VIII 2001, p. 16.

715 J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Pułapki wczesnego przebaczenia*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 11-12 VIII 2001, p. 20.

mation and commentaries on the findings of the IPN investigation, carried out since August 2000. Their temperature increased when Radosław Ignatiew, the prosecutor running the investigation, informed the public in December 2001 that, according to the results of criminological research, the shells found near the barn had not come from 1941 and had not been shot by the Germans.<sup>716</sup> Thus, vain were the hopes of those who believed these shells to be the key evidence of German perpetration and Polish innocence.

The heightened emotions aroused by the IPN investigation also accompanied its annual report, presented by its president, Leon Kieres, on 27 February 2002 in the Polish parliament. Although his report related to the entirety of the IPN activities, it was the Jedwabne investigation that sparked off a heated discussion. In fact, it instead became a trial of Leon Kieres. The prosecutor's role was played by the deputies from the League of Polish Families who, for example, asked the IPN president about the origins of his submission to Jews and the lack of interest in the crimes committed by Jewish communists on Poles. Antoni Macierewicz accused Leon Kieres of the "unfounded and unlawful" burdening of Poles with the murder committed by Germans and of falsifying history. According to Macierewicz, Kieres had also begun "stoning the Polish Nation", the culmination of which was President Kwaśniewski's speech. Moreover, the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jedwabne massacre was described by the MP Antoni Strykowski as "Jewish cheek."<sup>717</sup>

After 9 July 2002, a moment came when the subject of the Jedwabne massacre again appeared in the first pages of newspapers. It was the day when the prosecutor Radosław Ignatiew informed the public about the final findings of the investigation into the Jedwabne massacre, during which dozens of witnesses had been interrogated, Polish and German archives probed and an exhumation had been conducted. Summarising the findings, prosecutor Ignatiew emphasised that the massacre had been planned and organised. He confirmed the decisive role of the Polish population in "conducting the criminal act", whose direct perpetrators were "Polish citizens of Jedwabne and its environs: at least forty men." Prosecutor Ignatiew broadly attributed to the Germans the responsibility for the crime, that is, their consent to and inspiration for the massacre. He also stated that "Germans, who were probably in a small group, assisted in driving the people who were being persecuted to the market place and their active role was limited to that. It is unclear, in the light of the evidence collected, whether the Germans took part in escorting the victims to the place of mass murder, and whether

716 (IPN o Jedwabnem), *Nie te luski*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 20 XII 2001, p. 1.

717 See szerzej, *Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 15. posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniach 27, 28 lutego i 1 marca 2002 r.*, Warszawa 2002..

they were present at the barn. Witness testimonies vary considerably on this question”.<sup>718</sup>

In other words, the IPN investigation confirmed Jan Tomasz Gross’s main thesis: Jedwabne Jews had been murdered by their Polish neighbours. It could not be proved that Germans had committed the crime or that Polish perpetrators only obeyed the orders under the guns of German soldiers. The number of murdered Jews given by Gross, however, was verified. Prosecutor Ignatiew, on the basis of the exhumation findings, estimated that the number of victims was around 350 although he did not rule out that it could have been larger. He also noted that “before the people were taken away from the market, individual murders had been committed.”<sup>719</sup>

Considering the already mentioned attitudes of the participants in the debate about the Jedwabne massacre, it is easy to guess the responses to the final findings of the IPN investigation. While for some they were only a confirmation of the sad truth they had already acknowledged, others only interpreted them as fabricated evidence to support some arbitrary thesis with an anti-Polish undertone. Newspaper headlines published immediately after the press release on the final findings of the investigation were very meaningful by themselves: “Neighbours Murdered”,<sup>720</sup> “Neighbours After All”,<sup>721</sup> “Jedwabne – Let us Accept it with Humility”,<sup>722</sup> “Jedwabne massacre, Slippery Investigation”,<sup>723</sup> “Humorous Investigation”,<sup>724</sup> “IPN Findings a Bungle”,<sup>725</sup> “The Crime of the Jedwabne Investigation”,<sup>726</sup> “Crusade Against Poles”,<sup>727</sup> “How IPN Absolved the SS”.<sup>728</sup> While the debaters representing “critical patriotism” realised that the content of “Neighbors” was confirmed, they drew a conclusion from that knowledge and, like the chief editor of “Znak”, Stefan Wilkowicz, asked: “what next?”,<sup>729</sup> the defenders of the Polish innocence paradigm wrote serial open letters to the Insti-

718 As cited in P. Machcewicz, *Wokół Jedwabnego*, [in:] *Wokół Jedwabnego. Studia.*, P. Machcewicz, K. Persak (red.), Warszawa 2002, t. 1, p. 17.

719 As cited in P. Machcewicz, *Wokół...*, p. 17.

720 U, Arter, *Mordowali sąsiedzi*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 10 VII 2002, p. 1.

721 E. Południk, A. Kaczyński, *Jednak sąsiedzi*, “Rzeczpospolita” 10 VII 2002, p. 1.

722 J. Paradowska, *Jedwabne – przyjąć z pokorą*, “Polityka” 20 VII 2002, p. 13.

723 In Polish, the word “jedwabne” means “silky” – a slippery material; Polish title is “Jedwabny mord, jedwabne śledztwo”.

724 M. Walaszczyk, *Niepoważne śledztwo*, “Nasz Dziennik” 10 VII 2002, p. 1, 2.

725 R. Popielewicz, *Ustalenia IPN to fuszerka*, an interview with J. R. Nowak, “Nasz Dziennik” 12 VII 2002, p. 1, 3.

726 Z. S. Zdrojewski, *Zbrodnia śledztwa w Jedwabnem*, “Nasza Polska” 31 VII 2002, p. 1, 4.

727 S. Zawadzki, *Nagonka na Polaków*, “Nasz Dziennik” 11 VII 2002, p. 1, 3.

728 W. Lehr-Splawiński, *Jak IPN rozgrzeszył SS*, “Nowa Myśl Polska” 18-25 VII 2002, p. 7.

729 See S. Wilkanowicz, *Jedwabne – co dalej?*, “Znak” 2002, nr 9, p. 5-7.

tute of National Remembrance, accusing it of mistakes in the investigation and lies in their final findings. They demanded a re-examination and completion of the exhumation process. They stubbornly defended “Poland’s good name” and, obviously, would never agree with Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s opinion: “the investigation showed Polish credibility”.<sup>730</sup>

In December 2002, the Institute of National Remembrance released a two-volume collection of studies and documents titled “Wokół Jedwabnego” [“Around Jedwabne”] – the fruits of the almost two-year investigation into the Jedwabne massacre. Not only did these documents and analyses confirm the key thesis of Jan Tomasz Gross, but also significantly completed and enriched the contents of “Neighbors”. Historians and prosecutors extended their area of interest to other towns in the Łomżyńskie and Białostockie regions, where the locals participated in pogroms of their Jewish neighbours and where the scenarios of all murders were amazingly alike. The Jedwabne massacre, although unquestionably the most tragic and best documented, was not an isolated episode. Thus, reading the two volumes of “Around Jedwabne” is even sadder and more paralyzing than Gross’s book, as it shows that Jedwabne was only the tip of the iceberg.

The debate over the Jedwabne massacre has been by far the longest, deepest and intensive debate about the Polish-Jewish past. Among the participants were journalists, journalists, priests, the highest Church and state officials, symbolic elites and ordinary citizens, sending letters to numerous newspapers and magazines. Undoubtedly, the debate was also held in many Polish homes, as it had been the first time when Poles were confronted on such a scale with a picture of war completely inconsistent with the cultivated narrative about national valour and suffering. Polish perpetrators of someone else’s suffering, so far removed from sight, replaced Polish heroes and victims – or, in fact, appeared alongside them. Therefore, those debaters who considered the debate a challenge to face the unwanted and denied past were correct. Jedwabne finally closed the door on nearly half a century of shameful repression, occasionally interrupted with the voices of Polish intellectuals who were appreciated only in narrow circles. At last, not only the readers of “Tygodnik Powszechny” had a chance to hear about Jedwabne, which was confirmed by a CBOS survey conducted in 2001: 80% of Poles declared they had heard about the Jedwabne massacre.<sup>731</sup> It could not be otherwise: the Jedwabne issue was subjected to comment on television and ra-

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730 (PAP), “Gazeta Wyborcza” 10 VII 2002, p. 2.

731 When asked “Have you heard of Jedwabne?” 83% of the respondents answered in the positive. CBOS: *Polacy wobec zbrodni w Jedwabnem*, kwiecień 2001, Warszawa.

dio, and hundreds of Polish press articles formed, as Dariusz Stola brilliantly noted, “a monument made of words, a tumulus made of newsprint”.<sup>732</sup>

On the other hand, an image of a deeply divided nation emerged from the cacophony of different voices. At least “two Polands” could be seen. One was the Poland ready to face the challenges posed by Jan Tomasz Gross, acknowledge the painful truth of the national past, retell history and include Jedwabne in collective memory, together with the Polish Righteous Among the Nations, the heroes of the Warsaw Uprising and Maria Skłodowska-Curie. Another Poland remained stuck in the victim and hero syndrome: it attempted, with determination and in the name of self-defence, to belittle and minimise the Jedwabne massacre and to prove Polish innocence. This Poland was represented by Tomasz Strzembosz, Jerzy Robert Nowak and many other historians, journalists and priests, for example the rector of Jedwabne, reverend Edward Orłowski and the Bishop of Łomża Stanisław Stefanek. Although the defensive camp had different faces, what united them was the building of fortifications to entrench themselves in the position of an innocent victim. Inability to overcome this syndrome became, in my opinion, the main obstacle to viewing Poles as the perpetrators of the Jedwabne massacre.

The debate over “Neighbors” revealed, however, not only the divisions related to the attitudes to the national past but also the vitality of a particular mentality, dating back to the 1930s or even to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A litmus test of this mentality was the language used during the debate by some of its participants. It was this language that loudly echoed the legacy of National Democracy with all its reservoir of anti-Semitic clichés and stereotypes. Unfortunately, it was not restricted only to the journalists of “*Nasza Polska*”, “*Nasz Dziennik*” or other press considered marginal despite their large circulation and common availability. The Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp, also used this language – not for the first time, by the way – and he was one of those who legitimised the process of incorporating this language into the national-Catholic press. Glemp and numerous other Church and state officials supported the attack by the Polish innocence defenders camp, to which they often belonged.

Regarding Polish elites, yet another disturbing phenomenon, by no means new, could be observed in the debate. The problem of the attitude of elites towards the people or, in other words, the division between “lords” and “boors” was revealed with a vengeance. How else could one explain that the perpetrators of the Jedwabne massacre were believed to be a social margin, mob, scum and generally, people of second category? Needless to say, the purpose of such endeavours was to remove the burden of the Jedwabne murder, to wash ones hands

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732 D. Stola, *Pomnik ze słów (cz. I)*, “*Rzeczpospolita*” 1 VI 2001, p. 14.

of it. At the same time, however, by introducing this dichotomy, the Polish elites exposed their perception of society and the nation.

A few years have passed since the national debate over the Jedwabne massacre ended. The disclosure of the crime has resulted in several significant publications, whose authors carefully examined the subject raised by Jan Tomasz Gross.<sup>733</sup> Nonetheless, the most important question is whether the Jedwabne pogrom and the debate over it have in any way contributed to Polish self-knowledge. Has the Jedwabne murder been inscribed in Polish “collective memory”? Answers to these questions are not obvious. The results of the OBOP survey conducted in November 2002, that is, after the IPN press release on the final findings of the investigation and the publication of “Around Jedwabne”, do not give reasons for optimism. Half the respondents were unable to answer the question as to who had murdered the Jedwabne Jews: the majority of those who had an opinion on the matter claimed the perpetrators were German rather than Polish.<sup>734</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know what answers would be given by Poles today. We can only hope that the debaters, who prophetically claimed that Jedwabne would be forgotten after some time, were not absolutely right.

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733 See e.g. A. Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego*, Warszawa 2004; A. Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego*, Warszawa 2006.

734 TNS OBOP: *Polacy o zbrodni w Jedwabnem*, grudzień 2002, Warszawa.