

RESEARCH BEFORE CONCLUSION: THE PROBLEMS OF SHOCK THERAPY IN JEDWABNE

Prior to the opening of the Communist archives, Jan Tomasz Gross's *Revolution from Abroad* was practically the only solid study of the Soviet occupation of Poland's Eastern Borderlands between 1939 and 1941. Equally valuable is his work on central Poland under Nazi occupation.¹

His latest book, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Neighbors: The Story of the Annihilation of a Jewish Town), is a case study of Jedwabne in the county of Łomża, the Province of Podlasie. An expanded English-language version will be published in April by Princeton University Press.² Jan Tomasz Gross based his study on a few Jewish recollections and selected depositions of Polish witnesses, at least some of whom had testified under torture by the Communist secret police. After only such preliminary research, Professor Gross arrived at a shocking conclusion about the alleged mass participation of the "Polish society" of Jedwabne in the Holocaust. He argued that neither the Nazis, nor some Poles led by the Nazis, but "the [Polish] society" of Jedwabne spontaneously murdered its Jewish neighbors. According to Professor Gross, on July 10, 1941, without any German prompting, the local Poles *en bloc* attacked the Jews. They allegedly humiliated them, abused them, beat them, murdered some of them in the most gruesome manner, including mutilation and decapitation, and, finally, herded the remainder, about 1,600 people, into a barn and burned them alive.

As someone who has admired his scholarly work for quite some time now, I was delighted that Gross focused on regional history. I had expected a trailblazing case study that would again dazzle me with its methodology and analysis.³ I still admire Gross as a brilliant polemicist and journalist. Alas, from the professional vantage point of a historian, I was sorely disappointed. I can therefore relate to the opinion expressed by the liberal scholar, Paweł

¹ See Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society Under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939-1944* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

² Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000) [afterward *Sąsiedzi*]. The Polish version of this book as well as most of the articles in Polish on this topic are posted on the internet at www.pogranicze.sejny.pl/jedwabne/index.html.

³ I had been looking forward to compare Gross's methodology and analysis to my own as presented in my doctoral dissertation, which is also case study of a Polish locality: the county of Janów Lubelski-Kraśnik. See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, "Accommodation and Resistance: A Polish County During the Second World War and Its Aftermath," (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, New York, 2000).

Machcewicz, who wrote that “Gross’s book is very necessary. It shocks our conscience,” but who also concluded that now “we need true scholarly research” to discover what really happened in Jedwabne.⁴ Gross’s *cri de coeur* is an inadequate methodological tool for a historian. And it certainly does not prove his thesis about the spontaneous and mass participation of the “Polish society” in the Holocaust in the case of Jedwabne.

The Game of Memory

Most methodological discourses exhaust a non-specialist and often fail to sway him one way or another. Nonetheless, without lifting the curtain of secrecy which veils the historian’s craft, it is impossible to comprehend the entire intricate and complex process that leads to a particular, and not any other, way of processing the raw data, of presenting the material, and of drawing conclusions. Simply put, the historian has a sacred duty to research the broadest possible spectrum of documents, primary sources, and opinions, as well as secondary sources, in order to address the questions: what? when? how? where? and why?

Hundreds of Jewish memorial books (*yizkor bukher*) and even more numerous testimonies of Jewish witnesses abound in frequent accusations of alleged Polish participation in crimes against the Jews. Thus, the co-responsibility of the Poles for the Holocaust is a common *leitmotif* of these sources. Claims that ethnic Poles participated in the killing of Jews are plausible enough. After all, war often turns human beings into beasts. Under such circumstances practically anything is possible. However, it is the duty of a historian to separate fact from fiction.

Oral history (whether Polish, Jewish, or any other – without regard to the ethno-religious background of the deponent) can and should be used, albeit with a great deal of caution. In each instance, if at all possible, we must attempt to verify the sources, testimonies, recollections and memoirs against other documents. However, first, we need to reconstruct the general historical context of the events and in the process remove the crippling legacy of Communist propaganda that still pervades the stereotypes regarding our understanding of the Second World War and its aftermath. Then, we need to apply a rigorous litmus test to each testimony by checking it against other witness accounts and contemporary documents: Jewish, German, Polish, and Soviet Communist. Finally, we need to divide

⁴ Paweł Machcewicz, “W cieniu Jedwabnego,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 11 December 2000.

recollections into first- and second-hand observations and classify their reliability accordingly.⁵

This scholarly process is largely absent from the pages of *Neighbors*. Instead, Professor Gross proposes a new methodology. “As far as the craft of the historian who deals with the era of the [gas] ovens is concerned, I think we must radically alter our attitude toward the [primary] sources. Our initial attitude toward each testimony of near victims of the Holocaust should change from the inquisitive to the affirmative.”⁶ This is a startling statement because it would be practically tantamount to abandoning the scholarly standard. All sources are considered raw data until they have been carefully examined and cross-checked with others.

As Professor István Deák taught me at Columbia University, “we must treat recollections very critically. People tend to forget and confuse facts; they often make mistakes.” A survivor of the Holocaust, Dr. Samuel Gringauz, put it much more forcefully in an article published in *Jewish Social Studies* in 1950:

The difficulties in studying the great Jewish catastrophe are manifold. There is the vast geographical area of the disaster and the enormity of personal suffering and of social and emotional upheavals brought about by the events of the catastrophe. The political and social reverberations of the catastrophe cannot yet be fully encompassed. Lacking too are the methodological foundations for the study of *Jewish* sociology in general and the cataclysm in particular. Last but not least, there is what perhaps may be termed, they hyperhistorical complex of the survivors. Never before was the event so deeply sensed by its participants as being part of an epoch-shaping history in the making, never before was a personal experience felt to be so historically relevant. The result of this hyperhistorical complex has been that the brief post-war years have seen a flood of ‘historical materials’ – rather ‘contrived’ than ‘collected’ – so that to-day one of the most delicate aspects of research is the evaluation of the so-called ‘research material.’

The hyperhistorical complex may be described as *judeocentric*, *lococentric*, and *egocentric*. It concentrates historical relevance on Jewish problems of local events under the aspect of personal

⁵ Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne: “Żab” przeciw dwu wrogom*, 2nd edition (Warszawa: Fronda, 1999), 76-89, 113-19, 94-101, 309-22, 332-38, 347-55.

⁶ Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 94.

experience. This is the reason why most of the memoirs and reports are full of preposterous verbosity, graphomaniac exaggeration, dramatic effects, overestimated self-inflation, dilettante philosophising, would-be lyricism, unchecked rumors, bias, partisan attacks, and apologies. The question thus arises whether participants of such a world-shaking epoch can at all be its historians and whether the time has already come when valid historic judgement, free of partisanship, vindictiveness and ulterior motives is possible.⁷
[emphasis in the original]

Bearing the cautions of Gringauz in mind, we must thus be mindful of the many psychological factors influencing the authors of testimonies in a variety of ways. Some talked and wrote a great deal; others remained silent for years. In the case of Poland, researchers have to approach the testimonies gathered immediately after the war with considerable caution. According to *The Instructions for the Collection of Ethnographical Materials from the Period of the German Occupation*, a methodological manual published in 1945 by the Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, “of course [only] if we deal with an initiated individual [*jednostka uświadomiona*], can we openly reveal to him the aims of our work and ask for cooperation.”⁸ Hence, we should realize that even those persons collecting testimonies may have been motivated by various factors. Some of them had little concern for scientific methodology. Some were in the service of Communist propaganda or even the secret police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa – UB).

In his 1988 monograph about the Łódź ghetto, Henryk (Icchak) Rubin stated that

human beings instinctively look for those responsible for their misfortune and in that search endeavor to generalize and to fantasize so as to supplement the details they are familiar with from their own experience. Therefore, in both testimonies and memoirs, the dominant tendency is to provide a total picture of conditions in the ghetto. The

⁷ Samuel Gringauz, “Some Methodological Problems in the Study of the Ghetto,” *Jewish Social Studies: A Quarterly Journal Devoted to the Historical Aspects of the Jewish Life* [New York], no. 12 (1950): 65-66.

⁸ “Metodyczne wskazówki dla wypełniających kwestionariusz etnograficzny wydany przez C.Ż.K.H.,” in *Instrukcje dla zbierania materiałów etnograficznych z okresu okupacji niemieckiej*, zeszyt 2 (Łódź: Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich, Komisja Historyczna, 1945), 6.

character and content of such testimonies were decisively influenced by the time period when they were written. They were thus influenced by the same political forces that directed the general thrust of the scientific research. The functionaries of the Jewish Committees who were nominated by the Communist party, and who collected these testimonies, pointed out to the authors of the accounts which parties were guilty and how they deserve to be treated. Therefore almost all the testimonies contain identical appraisals and are stereotypical in the way their content was written. They strike one as being dictated [by the functionaries]. The authors wanted to endear themselves to the organizers of the drive to collect the testimonies, and they very often were afraid to write anything different than what was suggested by the latter.⁹

Collection 301

The use of primary sources in *Neighbors* fails to adhere to the methodological criteria preferred by Professor Deák, Dr. Gringrauz and Dr. Rubin.¹⁰ The key documents are found in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.¹¹ The testimonies of Szmul Wasersztejn (Shmuel Wasserstein), aka Stanisław Całka, are available in a short and long version. Both are unsigned translations from the Yiddish filed in the Testimonial Collection 301 (Zespót Relacji) of the archive, as is the account of Menachem Finkielsztejn (Menachem Finkelstein). How reliable are they?¹²

⁹ Icchak (Henryk) Rubin, *Żydzi w Łodzi pod niemiecką okupacją, 1939-1945* (London: Kontra, 1988), 38.

¹⁰ Professor Gross expressed regrets that he had missed several important secondary sources but so far offered no apologies about his failure to verify Jewish testimonies adequately. He also claimed to have researched the reports of the Nazi police but it is unclear whether he meant research in the archives or in the published primary sources. See Jan Tomasz Gross, "Mord 'zrozumiały,'" *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 November 2000; Sławomir Mac, "Próba sumienia: Rozmowa z profesorem Janem Tomaszem Grossem," *Wprost*, 10 February 2001; Jan Tomasz Gross, "Poduszka pani Marx," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 11 February 2001.

¹¹ Some of those materials were published in the memorial books of Jedwabne and Grajewo. See Julius J. Baker and Jacob L. Baker, eds., *Yedwabne: History and Memorial Book* (Jerusalem and New York: Yedwabner Societies in Israel and the United States of America, 1980) [afterward *Yedwabne*]; George Gorin, ed., *Grayevo Memorial Book* (New York: United Grayever Relief Committee, 1950).

¹² See Menachem Finkielsztejn, Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Warszawie [afterward AŻIH], file 301/1846; Shmul Wasserstein, AŻIH, sygn. 301/152 (long version) and file 301/613 (short version). See also Chaja Finkielsztejn, Yad Vashem Archives [afterward

American historian John Lowell Armstrong, who conducted research in the Testimonial Section 301 of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, states that

this is a strange collection because there are different testimonies with the same file and document number [*sygnatura*]. ... However, there is also a *de facto* sub-file called ‘copies’ which contains different versions of the testimonies (authored by the same person and having the same file and document number but different content). I asked an employee of the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute why it is so. He let me know that during the Communist period there were purges and corrections of the testimonies. This indeed took place but it does not undermine the usefulness of the collection. However, I’d like to stress that we must approach it with exceptional caution. There are true pearls in the collection but when there are two testimonies by the same person and one of them is a hand-written original on a piece of paper that turned yellow with age and the other one is a Xerox copy of a typescript, I would trust the former.¹³

The author of the first serious study of the inter-war “pogrom” in Przytyk, Piotr Gontarczyk expressed similar reservations. In fact, he claims that practice of correcting the testimonies continues.¹⁴ Moreover, writing in the Oxford periodical *Polin*, David Engel has sharply criticized a leading scholar of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw for, to put it mildly, too vigorously exercising his censorship skills while editing a war-time Jewish memoir, which also is deposited in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute. This charge related to, among other things, the segments describing the attitude of the Jews toward the Soviet occupation of Poland. Once again, in some places, the published version differed substantially from the

YVA], no. 033033-2636/255; the testimonies of Wasersztejn and Finkielsztejn can be found online at www.radzilow.com and in Jan T. Gross, “Lato 1941 w Jedwabne: 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 (Białoruś, Litwa, Łotwa, Ukraina, wschodnie pogranicze III Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) w latach 1772-1999*, ed. by Krzysztof Jasiewicz (Warsaw and London: IS PAN, Rytm, and Polonia Aid Foundation Trust, 1999), 1097-1103.

¹³ Letter from John L. Armstrong to M.J. Chodakiewicz, 9 December 2000.

¹⁴ Piotr Gontarczyk, “Gross kontra fakty,” *Życie*, 31 January 2001; Piotr Gontarczyk, *Pogrom? Zajścia polsko-żydowskie w Przytyku 9 marca 1936 r. Fakty, mity, dokumenty* (Biała Podlaska-Pruszków: Rekonkwista-Rachocki i s-ka, 2000).

original.¹⁵ Concern about odd discrepancies in multiple versions of testimonies by the same witness was voiced by such disparate authorities as the late Professor Teresa Prekerowa of Warsaw and the late Stanisław Aronson of Tel Aviv.¹⁶

When I myself conducted research at the Jewish Historical Institute in the mid-1990s, among the documents obtained with the assistance of Marek Józwiak, I found the “testimony” of a Jewish partisan named Izaak Klejnman. Later, with help from Professor Szymon Rudnicki, I obtained the “same” testimony from Yad Vashem in Israel. The Warsaw version had been altered.¹⁷

The Witnesses from Jedwabne

Many historians in Poland noticed problems with the testimonies of Wasersztejn and Finkielsztejn. One of the main scholarly complaints concerns the discrepancy in the number of victims, which ranges from 500 to 1,600. There is another serious implausibility. Jewish witnesses claim that between 900 and 2,800 persons were burned alive in a barn belonging to Bronisław Śleszyński. The problem is that the barn was much too small to accommodate so many people. Śleszyński was a carpenter who supplemented his income by farming. He owned barely two hectares (four acres) of land and was too poor to afford a gargantuan warehouse or to have any use for it.

Moreover, the Soviet census conducted in 1940 counted only 1,400 Jews in the Jedwabne region, which also included the outlying villages of Radziłów and Wizna. This puts into serious question the magnitude of the massacres carried out in Jedwabne, where allegedly 1,600 perished, and also in Radziłów, where a few days earlier allegedly 1,500 Jews were also burned

¹⁵ David Engel, “The Boulderization of a Holocaust Testimony: The Wartime Journal of Calek Perechodnik,” *Polin*, vol. 12 (1999): 316-29.

¹⁶ Professor Prekerowa was closely connected to the Jewish Historical Institute. Stanisław Aronson was a Polish-Jewish underground fighter of the Home Army. See Teresa Prekerowa, “Stosunek ludności polskiej do żydowskich uciekinierów z obozów zagłady w Treblince, Sobiborze i Bełżcu w świetle relacji żydowskich i polskich,” *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu – Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, vol. 35 (1993): 105; Stanisław Aronson, “Nie zwracać głowy faktami,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15-16 April 1995; Leszek Żebrowski, *Paszkwil Wyborczej: Michnik i Cichy o Powstaniu Warszawskim* (Warszawa: Burchard Edition, 1995), 78-80.

¹⁷ The Yad Vashem copy is signed and refers to “Jewish partisans;” the one from Warsaw is unsigned and mentions Communist partisans. Compare: Jankiel Kleinman, account recorded as no. 4, 10 September 1944, YVA, file 0-16/348; and Jankiel Kleinmann [sic], AŻIH, file 301/11.

in a barn. The detailed necrology in the Hebrew portion of the town's *yizkor bukh* lists no more than 600 victims of the Holocaust who perished in Jedwabne.¹⁸ Thus, original estimates by Polish scholars that between 500 and 900 people perished in Jedwabne and approximately 650 in Radziłów seem to be closer to the target.¹⁹

Furthermore, Jewish testimonies concerning some significant details of the tragedy are conflicting. According to Szmul Wasersztejn, Poles allegedly looked on passively or even jeered as two Jewish women committed suicide by drowning themselves. Wasersztejn insists he himself witnessed the event, but, in fact, he arrived in Jedwabne several later. Further, Rivka (Rywka) Fogel, who was there at the time, maintains that Poles attempted to save the women by jumping into the pond and retrieving them. Next, according to the Jewish memorial book of Jedwabne, the Catholic bishop of Łomża, Stanisław Kostka Łukomski (who is not mentioned by name), accepted a tribute of money and silver artifacts from the Jews in exchange for a promise to stave off the impending pogrom. However, the bishop's memoirs clearly show that in October 1939, because of threats from the Soviet secret police, he had gone into hiding in the distant countryside and returned to his residence in Łomża only in August 1941. Unless the location of his hideaway was common knowledge among the Jewish population, it is hard to imagine how a delegation of Jews ever found the bishop.²⁰

And what is one to do with the Polish testimonies that claim that it was the Nazi policemen who perpetrated the crime in Jedwabne and that some Poles only helped? According to the testimony of a Righteous Gentile, Aleksander Wyrzykowski, who saved Szmul Wasersztejn, the Nazis carried out the murder with some Polish participation. A Polish cook, Julia

¹⁸ A transliteration of the necrology is posted at www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/jedwabne/yed075.html.

¹⁹ For some statistics concerning the Holocaust in the county of Łomża in general and Jedwabne in particular see Michał Gnatowski, *W radzieckich okowach Studium o agresji 17 września 1939 r. i radzieckiej polityce w regionie łomżyńskim w latach 1939-1941* (Łomża: Łomżyńskie Towarzystwo Naukowe im. Wagów, 1997), 140 [afterward *W radzieckich okowach*]; Zdzisław Sędzia, "Napiętowani znakiem śmierci," *Ziemia Łomżyńska* [Łomża] 2 (1986): 185-97; Waldemar Monkiewicz, "Zagłada skupisk żydowskich w regionie białostockim w latach 1939, 1941-1944," *Studia Podlaskie* [Białystok], vol. 2 (1989): 241-46.

²⁰ The bishop returned to the city on July 9, 1941, but moved back to his residence only in August. Compare: Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 49-50; Baker, *Jedwabne*, 100; Stanisław Łukomski, "Wspomnienia," *Rozporządzenia urzędowe Łomżyńskiej Kurii Diecezjalnej*, no. 5-7 (May-July 1974): 61. On the bishop's attitude toward Jews during the war see Ryszard Bender et al., ed., *Słownik biograficzny katolicyzmu społecznego w Polsce*, vol. 2 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1994), 103.

Usunięto: .

Sokołowska, testified in court that she had prepared a meal that day for a large number of German policemen, who were the chief perpetrators of the crime.²¹

Another eyewitness, Leokadia Błajszczak, recalls the presence of the Nazi police and squarely blames a local *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic German) for leading the pogromists, most of whom were not local Poles at all but “outsiders” most likely of Polish nationality. The local resident Jan Sokołowski also provides a very similar version of events. Kazimierz Laudański claims that the Polish community was cowed into obedience by the Germans, who forced them to participate passively. The Poles were unaware that the climax of the anti-Jewish abuse would be mass murder of the entire community by the Nazi perpetrators.²² Irena Reniewska-Chrzanowska, who as a child watched the unfolding tragedy with horror, insists that Jedwabne “was swarming with them [the Nazis].... Germans chased Poles to guard the Jews on the market square. They pursued the Poles with whips in their hands.”²³ The aforementioned Leokadia Błajszczak also says she saw Polish men being ordered to leave their homes and assemble in the market square. Finally, Professor Tomasz Strzembosz cites an eyewitness who maintains that only about 20 or 30 Polish thugs (and not the entire “society” of Jedwabne) abused the Jews, but it was the Germans who herded about 800 (and not 1,600) of them into the barn and burned them alive.²⁴ Thus, most Polish testimonies given freely flatly contradict the Jewish accounts.

Some Polish witnesses are also astounded that their Jewish counterparts could record the events in such detail when in fact the Jewish

²¹ Professor Gross quotes the testimony of Aleksander Wyrzykowski to underscore the persistence of ugly anti-Semitism in the Jedwabne region even after the war. Alas, Gross failed to include in his lengthy quote Wyrzykowski’s assertion that the Jews of Jedwabne were murdered by the Germans with some Polish assistance. Further, Professor Gross analysed but rejected the testimony of Sokołowska, who claimed that she had cooked a meal for “60 Gestapo men” on the tragic day. Both accounts thus flatly contradict the central thesis of *Neighbors*. See Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 57, 87-88; Aleksander Wyrzykowski, AŻIH, file 301/5825. By the way, Wyrzykowski’s testimony is also suspicious. Only “copy III” is available. Where is the original?

²² See Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 57; Leokadia Błajszczak, “Tragedia Żydów w Jedwabnem,” manuscript, 1 July 2000 (a copy in my collection); Jan Sokołowski to Andrzej Kaczyński, editor of *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 May 2000; Adam Cyra, “Jedwabne – Oświęcim – Sachsenhausen,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 February 2001.

²³ Irena Reniewska-Chrzanowska quoted in Monika Rotulska, “Dyrektywy z Nowego Jorku,” *Nasz Dziennik*, 19 February 2001.

²⁴ An interview with Tomasz Strzembosz by Elżbieta Isakiewicz, “Szubienica i huśtawka,” *Gazeta Polska*, 17 January 2001.

witnesses usually ran away very early on and hid in places from which it was rather difficult to observe the unfolding tragedy (e.g. in the cellars of their Polish rescuers' homes). According to Leon Dziedzic, Szmul Wasersztejn was not a local Jew but, rather, arrived in Jedwabne from Radziłów barely a day before the massacre. He hid safely in a stable belonging to Dziedzic three kilometers away from the scene of the atrocity yet his testimony is full of intimate details he had allegedly witnessed, including events that had transpired before his arrival in the town and the names of the real and alleged Polish perpetrators whom Wasersztejn likely had not known at all. Finkielsztejn was also a Radziłower Jew and a stranger in Jedwabne, arriving in town a day prior and hiding away from the slaughter, and thus could not have seen intimately at least some of the things he describes. The same concerns arise regarding the testimony of Wiktor Nieławicki, aka Awgidor Kochav, from Wizna; albeit he had close family in Jedwabne and therefore he was probably familiar with some of the locals. Further, at least one Polish source claims that the key Jewish witness, Szmul Wasersztejn, learned only after the war about the alleged scenario of the events in Jedwabne from a Jewish woman, Zejer, who was connected to the NKVD.²⁵ Thus, the historian is faced with a Rashamon-like labyrinth of infuriatingly contradictory stories. Whom does one believe? The Jews who saw only early fragments of the tragedy but defend the memory of the slaughtered? Or the Poles who witnessed the massacre but may want to deny or minimize Polish complicity? Available oral depositions clearly do not pass the scientific litmus test and need further verification.

Likewise, court testimonies and interrogation records of the real and alleged perpetrators should at least give us reason to pause. One of the accused, Jerzy Laudański, was a Home Army soldier captured by the Gestapo and incarcerated at Auschwitz. After the war, he was arrested by the Communist secret police and tortured to extract a confession about his complicity in the Jedwabne tragedy. Laudański recalls that the interrogating officer smashed his head against the wall, yelling at him “You asshole, too bad the Germans did not gas you at Auschwitz so I wouldn’t have to strain myself with you now.”²⁶ Under the circumstances most would have confessed to anything, whether guilty or not. Professor Gross himself admits

²⁵ Adam Willma, “Broda mojego syna,” *Gazeta Pomorska*, 4 August 2000, 5; Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 49; Teodor Eugeniusz Lusiński to the Instytut Żydowskiej Historii [sic], 20 March 1995 (a copy in my collection); Leszek Żebrowski to M.J. Chodakiewicz, 3 February 2001.

²⁶ Jerzy Laudański quoted in Adam Cyra, “O sprawiedliwy osąd historii,” *Nasz Dziennik*, 20 February 2001.

that in some cases the accused retracted their “confessions” in court. This was not only an act of self-defense. It was also a sign of bravery. After all, the accused were immediately returned to the tender care of secret police officers, who had tortured the confessions out of them in the first place. The confessions, by the way, tallied with the preordained scenario unofficially promoted by the Communist leadership who deeply believed that the “Polish society” was “fascist” and “reactionary” and therefore its representatives in Jedwabne spontaneously murdered Jews. I would like to stress that at least some of the accused most certainly participated in the beatings of Jews and even the murder of some of them. However, was it necessarily in the manner established by the secret police officers during the pre-trial investigation that lasted barely two weeks or during the trial itself that lasted a whole single day?²⁷

The contradictions in the Jewish and Polish accounts as well as the circumstances under which the confessions were obtained from at least some Polish witnesses should alert us to the fact that the time to state categorically what transpired in Jedwabne has not yet arrived. We need much more in-depth research. However, there is no reason to question the fact that on July 10, 1941, the Jews of Jedwabne were killed.

A Small Town and a Shtetl

Aside from a critical approach to witness testimonies, we must also devote much more time and space to a discussion of the period preceding the tragedy in Jedwabne. What was life like in the shtetl before the war? A thorough search of the archival documents administrative, judicial, and security authorities is needed to draw a broader picture, to restore Jewish and Polish life to their richness, and to find the possible roots of conflict (or to ascertain the lack thereof).

Neighbors leave us largely in the dark about life before death. For instance, Professor Gross included a school picture of what is alleged to be a “Jewish class.” However, the Catholic Pole Jan Sokołowski, currently a resident of Białystok, looks at us from the photograph along with Polish, Jewish, and even ethnic German children. This should come as no surprise: the seven-class public school in Jedwabne was not ethnically segregated. No

²⁷ See Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 16-24. Equally brutal treatment was meted out to the accused pogromists in Radziłów and elsewhere in the Łomża area. See Stanisław Dąbrowski, “Mordowali ‘nasi’ i ‘nie nasi’,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12 December 2000; Wacław Bagiński, interview with Richard Tyndorf, 21 October 2000.

Polish state schools were. True, religious instruction was held separately for each denomination and Jewish children also had the option of attending a heder with their own malamed (teacher).

Economic arrangements in Jedwabne were largely a throwback to the pre-industrial times. Commerce was firmly in Jewish hands. Most artisans were Jews as well, and craftsmen such as tailors and cobblers competed with each other for Jewish and Gentile business. However, a few artisans were Christian, the smith in particular. Further, the Polish cooperative movement began making inroads into the traditionally Jewish domain of trade. Nonetheless, Jews interacted daily with Gentiles in Jedwabne and nearby villages on the commercial field. Otherwise they led separate lives.

We know precious little about the political scene in the town. Paweł Machcewicz claims that the far-right National Radical Camp was active in the environs of the Jedwabne. Sebastian Bojemski flatly denies this.²⁸ It is a pity that no one has published the results of the last local self-government elections before the war, which were probably won by the Piłsudskite Camp of National Unity. According to regional historian Jerzy Ramotowski, the Piłsudskites dominated Jedwabne politics in earlier periods (probably in alliance with the Orthodox Agudah Israel), although the right-wing National Party and the left-wing Peasant Party “Liberation” also enjoyed a following. In fact, the Łomża area was a traditional stronghold of the former. The Communists were practically non-existent (12 Jews and 14 Polish peasants in 1933). The Marxist Bund enjoyed considerably more influence in the Jewish community.²⁹ But we learn nothing of this from *Neighbors*.

At this point it is premature to say whether conflict or harmony prevailed between Poles and Jews in pre-war Jedwabne.

Under the Soviet Occupation

Were Jewish-Polish relations in Jedwabne during the Soviet occupation (1939-41) truly as uneventful as rabbi Herschel Baker, the editor of the town’s memorial book, claims? We are left in the dark about the broad context of those events, the Soviet nationalities policy in particular. On September 20, 1940, the head of the NKVD for the Łomża area, where

²⁸ Paweł Machcewicz, “W cieniu Jedwabnego,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 11 December 2000; Sebastian Bojemski to the editor, *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 December 2000.

²⁹ Jerzy Ramotowski, “Ze wsi – przez osadę – do miasta,” *Ziemia Łomżyńska*, vol. 2 (1986): 156-63.

Jedwabne was located, stated that “The Jews have supported us and only they have been visible at all times. It’s been fashionable for every supervisor of a [state] institution or an enterprise to brag that not a single Pole is employed with him. Many of us simply have feared the Poles.”³⁰ Hence, the occupiers relied upon the “Jewish proletariat” to do their bidding. It was deliberate Soviet policy to exacerbate the antagonisms between the various ethnic groups. Nonetheless, without willing collaborators Stalin’s task of subjugating eastern Poland would have been harder to accomplish.

The Hoover Institution archives shed some light on this painful period. The testimonies of Marian Łojewski, Józef Rybicki, Tadeusz Kiełczewski, Kazimierz Sokołowski, and others fill in important gaps including, in one instance, the names of the “Jewesses” – the Nejmank sisters – who, along with the Polish woman Krystowczyk – were Communist propagandists.³¹ Otherwise the Jewish actors in Polish testimonies remain mostly anonymous. Although their veracity also needs to be rigorously scrutinized, Polish witnesses recalled that many Jews of Jedwabne welcomed the Soviets and some participated actively in establishing the Soviet regime, including the terror apparatus which arrested dozens of Poles.

The carpenter Rybicki confirmed that “the Red Army was welcomed by the Jews who built [triumphal] arches. [The Soviets] substituted the old town authorities with new ones composed of the local population (Jews and communists).” The self-government employee Kiełczewski stated that the local Communists spontaneously established the town revolutionary committee. It was headed by the Pole Czesław Krystowczyk and its remaining members were Jews. The worker Sokołowski confirmed that the composition of the town’s red militia was also “mostly Jewish.” However, according to Professor Tomasz Strzembosz, the Polish Communist Czesław Kurpiewski was its commander.

The militia as well as some local citizens assisted the NKVD in its work. Roman Sadowski, whose wife was deported to the Gulag from Jedwabne, claims that “it was the Jews who jointly with the NKVD prepared the lists of those to be interned (deported).” The militiamen searched the Polish households for hidden weapons. The carpenter Aleksander Kotowski testified that “Jews and Polish Communists were allowed to take power and

³⁰ Quoted in Gnatowski, *W radzieckich okowach*, 159.

³¹ The testimonies from the Hoover Institute Archives, Polish Government Collection and the General Anders Collection, Ministerstwo Informacji i Dokumentacji, pp. 43-44, 48, can be also found on microfilm at the Archiwum Wschodnie in Warsaw and at www.sfpol.com, a web site run by Andrzej Listwan.

they led the NKVD to the apartments and houses and denounced Polish citizens and patriots.” More specifically, according to Rybicki, Polish “policemen and teachers were arrested.”³² Kazimierz Laudański testified that his father had been seized already in the fall of 1939 because he had been the most active of the Catholic laymen in Jedwabne. He was denounced because of his involvement with raising funds for the construction of the local church as well as for his political beliefs. In June 1940 the NKVD arrested and killed Laudański’s sister for her involvement with the underground as well as the elementary school principal Bronisław Skarzyński “for educating the youth in patriotism.” Laudański’s mother and two brothers barely avoided deportation to the Gulag because they fled to the forest. The witness squarely blames a local “Communist organization,” and in particular “its voluntary militia composed of a few Poles and many communized Jewish youth.”³³

This is confirmed by the testimonies collected independently in Poland and published in 1988 in *Kontakty*: “I remember when the Poles were being carted off to Siberia. On each wagon there was a Jew with a rifle. Mothers, wives, and children were kneeling down before the wagons, begging for mercy and help.”³⁴ In conjunction with the crackdown on the Polish independentist underground in general, and the Union of Armed Struggle (Związek Walki Zbrojnej -- ZWZ) in particular, the NKVD stormed a nearby guerrilla base and killed many of the defenders, taking others prisoner. Also, the Catholic parson of Jedwabne, Rev. Marian Szumowski, was arrested and shot as one of the leading conspirators. Although it was the Soviet security officers that headed the operations, all Polish witnesses stress the presence of their ubiquitous Jewish helpers.³⁵ Nonetheless, at least one Polish witness stresses that “the excesses [*wybryki*] of the [Communist] cell were opposed by the older part of the Jewish community.”³⁶

³² All testimonies quoted in Tomasz Strzembosz, “Przemilczana kolaboracja,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 January 2001.

³³ Adam Cyra, “Jedwabne – Oświęcim – Sachsenhausen,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 February 2001.

³⁴ Danuta and Aleksander Wroniszewski, “... aby żyć,” *Kontakty – Łomżyński Tygodnik Społeczny*, 10 July 1988.

³⁵ On the independentist underground in the Jedwabne area during the Soviet occupation and its infiltration by the NKVD see Tomasz Strzembosz, “Uroczysko Kobielno: Z dziejów konspiracji i partyzantki nad Biebrzą, 1939-40,” *Karta* [Warszawa] no. 5 (May-July 1991): 3-27; and the letter of the Consul General of Belarus in Białystok I. Khodasevich to Father Edward Orłowski of Jedwabne, 26 October 1994 (a copy in my collection).

³⁶ Adam Cyra, “Jedwabne – Oświęcim – Sachsenhausen,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 February 2001.

Research by Henryk Milewski, Gabriela Szczęsna, Tomasz Strzembosz, and Timothy Ryback provides more evidence to contradict the opinion that the Soviet occupation of Jedwabne was of no significance for the relations between Jews and Poles. On the contrary, they seriously deteriorated.³⁷ “Naturally, this does not justify anything [i.e. the killing of Jews in July 1941] but ... such facts should not be overlooked.”³⁸ Alas they were.

After the Tragedy

The treatment of the history of Jedwabne after June 1941 is likewise based on very few sources. What happened during the Nazi occupation? What was Communist rule like?

Significantly, it seems that a few hundred local Jews managed to save themselves, if temporarily, from death. Some hid with their Polish neighbors. Others trusted the swiftness of their feet and ran away. Only after the fury of killing was spent in the late summer 1941 did the Jews reemerge from hiding. While a few returned to live in Jedwabne, most moved to Łomża, Białystok, and other ghettos. Nearly all of them died in subsequent round-ups, executions, and gassing in death camps in 1942 and 1943. Very few managed to run away again and hide. A small number of the survivors

³⁷ Henryk Milewski, “Sytuacja poprzedzająca zesłanie i warunki bytowe zesłańców polskich w ZSRR w latach 1940-1946,” in Michał Gnatowski, ed., *Studia Łomżyńskie: Łomżyńskie Towarzystwo Naukowe im. Wągów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995), vol. 5: 109-117; Gabriela Szczęsna, “Jedwabna krew,” *Kontakty*, 4 May 2000; Timothy W. Ryback, *The Last Survivor: In Search of Martin Zaidenstadt* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 154-55. On ethnic relations in Eastern Poland during the Soviet occupation see Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim: Stosunki polsko-białoruskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką, 1939-1941* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 2000); Bogdan Musiał, “Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na kresach wschodnich R.P. pod okupacją sowiecką 1939-1941,” *Biuletyn Kwartalny Radomskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, no. 1, vol. 34 (1999): 103-125; Mark Paul, “Jewish-Polish Relations in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland, 1939-1941,” *The Story of Two Shtetls Brańsk and Ejszyszki: An Overview of Polish-Jewish Relations in Northeastern Poland during World War II*, part 2 (Toronto and Chicago: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1998), 173-230, 243-44 [afterward *The Story of Two Shtetls*]; Mark Paul, *Neighbours on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Toronto: PEFINA Press, 2001); Jerzy Robert Nowak, *Przemilczane zbrodnie: Żydzi i Polacy na Kresach w latach 1939-1941* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo von borowiecky, 1999); Jerzy Robert Nowak, *Polacy i Żydzi na Kresach w latach 1939-1941* (Warszawa: von borowiecky, 2001).

³⁸ Richard Tyndorf, a letter to the editor of *Rzeczpospolita*, which was rejected by that paper but subsequently published in *Frona*, no. 19/20 (2000): 477-79.

of the Jedwabne massacre, including Szmul Wasersztejn and Menachem Finkielsztejn, hid with their Christian friends and survived the war.

While the Nazis attempted to exterminate all the Jews of Jedwabne without any distinction, they also continued the Soviet policy of annihilating the Polish Christian elite. A few dozen were shot; a few score were thrown into Nazi jails and concentration camps. Further, from the start the Nazis exploited the Polish population economically to the point of pushing most to the brink of starvation. German food quota parties seizing grain, potatoes, and domestic animals from recalcitrant peasants were a common sight in the environs of Jedwabne. Moreover, after their Jewish slaves were exterminated in the Holocaust, the Nazis pressed thousands of Poles into forced labor locally and sent hundreds of them to work in the Reich. Finally, Nazi terror metastasized to embrace the common Polish people as well. Perhaps two hundred local Poles were killed in Jedwabne and outlying villages; hundreds were sent to labor and concentration camps. Finally, the Nazi policy of extermination and exploitation led to the breakdown of law and order. Security was lacking in the countryside as fugitives, bandits, and various partisans vied with each other for survival and attacked Polish peasants to secure supplies, thus clashing with the independentist underground that protected Polish villages. This crucial background is altogether lacking in *Neighbors*, which is rather a pity because the reader should know why the Poles, including the real and alleged perpetrators of anti-Jewish violence, also considered themselves victims of the Second World War.

It seems that the local Poles reacted to Nazi terror by accommodating and resisting. Most opposed the Nazis spontaneously in an unorganized manner by sabotaging their orders. However, some joined the underground. The old Piłsudskite Union for Armed Struggle (ZWZ) joined with the right-wing National Military Organization (Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa -- NOW) to form the Home Army (Armia Krajowa). Other rightists established the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne -- NSZ) which however subordinated themselves to the AK in 1944. The populist Peasant Battalions (Bataliony Chłopskie) were rather weak in the Jedwabne area and the Communist underground virtually non-existent. After the Soviet return, the Polish independentist underground split anew. The Piłsudskites reconstituted themselves as the Citizen Home Army (Armia Krajowa Obywatelska -- AKO), which was later converted into Freedom and Independence Union (Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość -- WiN). The rightists founded the National Military Union (Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe -- NZW).

Immediately after the Soviet entry, the NKVD and Polish Communist security police commenced arrests, deportations, and assassinations of the independentists. Perhaps 50 opponents of the regime died and hundreds were seized. The new regime also antagonized the common people by demanding forced food quota in quantity exceeding that extorted by the Nazis. Some peasants were also dragooned into forced labor by the Communists.

Most importantly, from the point of view of the Polish inhabitants of the town, after the Jewish survivors complained to the authorities, the Communist security forces commenced investigations of the massacre in Jedwabne and elsewhere in the area. Already by the end of 1945 or at the beginning of 1946, according to a Polish witness, a special secret police team, allegedly headed by “a Jewish prosecutor” (*prokurator Żyd*), arrived in Łomża and launched its operations. “Many [extrajudicial] executions” occurred as the UB pursued real and alleged perpetrators.³⁹ “Jews” were even falsely suspected of the revenge killing of the wife of a Polish official implicated in the pogrom.⁴⁰ All in all, many persons were seized for interrogation. For example, in Radziłów, “after the 'liberation' many local Poles were arrested by the security forces (UB) in connection with the pogrom and taken to the jail in Grajewo, where they were beaten and tortured; they faced trials in Grajewo and Ełk and were imprisoned. Józef Kosmaszewski, who was beaten with chains and therefore admitted to anything and everything, was imprisoned in Wronki for many years.”⁴¹ Likewise, the real and alleged pogromists of Jedwabne were seized, interrogated, and tortured. At least some of them drew lengthy jail sentences.

Nonetheless, at this point it is nearly impossible to disentangle the security police actions against the local underground from its undertakings against the suspected pogromists of Jedwabne and Radziłów. It must have been convenient for operational and propaganda purposes to lump both categories together as “fascists” and “reactionaries.” Finally, it is doubtful

³⁹ See Stanisław Dąbrowski, “Mordowali ‘nasi’ i ‘nie nasi’,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12 December 2000.

⁴⁰ According to police records, Julia Karolak, the wife of the Polish mayor who participated in the mass murder of Jews in July 1941, was killed by “unknown attackers” on November 1, 1945. In fact, she was assassinated by the independentists for collaborating with the Communist security forces. Thus, one should be careful before blaming “Jewish avengers” or the secret police for all extrajudicial killings in the area. See Raport za czas od 1.11.45r. do 30.11.45r., Raporty sytuacyjne Komendy Powiatowej MO o stanie bezpieczeństwa, 1944-1948, Archiwum Państwowe w Białymstoku, Oddział w Łomży, file 59, subfile 9, 12; Leszek Żebrowski to MJCh, 20 November 2000.

⁴¹ Wacław Bagiński, interview with Richard Tyndorf, 21 October 2000

justice was served because the extrajudicial killings, interrogation methods, and the nature of the trials themselves were blatant Stalinist violations of all civilized norms of conduct. We certainly cannot be sure if all of the accused were guilty, and to what extent, and how many (a few at least) real perpetrators were let off the hook because they collaborated with the Communist secret police. Thus, the outcome of the police and judicial actions on behalf of the victims was less than satisfactory. However, the Jewish search for redress certainly infuriated those Poles who had nothing to do with the pogromists but who nonetheless experienced the fury of the secret police directly or indirectly. Undoubtedly, both the guilty and the guiltless blamed Jews and Communists for their misfortune.

None of this can be found on the pages of *Neighbors*. The little that we can read about the new Soviet occupation after 1944 is often mistaken. For example, Professor Gross wrote about the killing of Jews in the area by the Nationalist underground in the aftermath of the war. As his source, he cited several pages from a doctoral thesis of Tadeusz Frączek. The problem is that there is no such data on most pages indicated by Gross, and in any event, such information as we can find there is highly unreliable because it is based largely on secret police documents. In the one instance that can be cross-checked at the moment, Gross relies on Frączek in blaming the National Armed Forces (NSZ) for the “murder” of several Jews in Sokoły in February 1945. However, according to the foremost authorities on the underground in the Białystok region, Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski, a Home Army unit was responsible for that incident. Moreover, those Jews perished during an assault on a Communist police station and assassination of Soviet security agents. Although some details of the operation are still unclear, it is hard to impute a racially motivated “murder” in this instance. Other cases mentioned in *Neighbors* are likewise problematic.⁴² For example, where Professor Gross sees an independentist

⁴² Dealing with the killing of Jews after the war, Professor Gross based himself on the doctoral thesis of Tadeusz Frączek. The pages (150-51) cited by Gross deal with the intelligence section of the National Military Organization (NOW) during the Nazi occupation, and not the killing of Jews. On p. 187 we can read about the initial stage of the NOW partisan operations in 1942. Information on p. 194 deals with a secret police report that mentions the alleged killing of three Jews, not after but during the war (1944). On p. 254, again according to a secret police report, Frączek talks about the killing of a six-member Jewish family in Sokoły on February 17, 1945, allegedly by the NSZ, when in reality the Home Army (AK) unit of Second Lieutenant Kazimierz Kamieński (“Huzar”) was responsible. The killings occurred during an operation against the local police station and alleged agents of the Soviet secret police. Finally, on p. 257, based on an underground report, there is a record of the killing of a Jewish woman and the wounding of four other persons in Siemiatycze on April 6, 1945, but Gross neglected to mention that this occurred

underground attack motivated by anti-Semitism upon a family of good Samaritans who had shielded Jews during the Nazi occupation was, according to a Polish witness, a common bandit attack driven by avarice in pursuit of “the Jewish gold” that the Wyrzykowskis allegedly took for saving Szmuel Wasersztejn.⁴³

Some may consider such remarks as nitpicking. Nonetheless, such details indicate that *Neighbors* lacked proper scholarly editing and peer review, not to mention that the topic of the independentist underground in the Białystok area is still quite underresearched. Finally, the nature of a case study is such that it should be based on a very close reading of minute details, a rule grossly neglected in *Neighbors*.

The Suspects

Despite the paucity of sources on Jedwabne, we can chart out a course to continue the study of Jedwabne at the point where Jan Tomasz Gross left off. Currently, there are three main schools of thought on the subject. The first claims that the Jews of Jedwabne were murdered by the Germans alone with marginal Polish participation. Its main representative is Waldemar Monkiewicz.⁴⁴ The second school, led by Professor Gross, believes that the “Polish society” spontaneously and without any German prompting

during an NSZ assault on an arms convoy and an ensuing fight with the Soviet and Polish Communist security forces, including the Jewish self-defense. A Jewish source unknown to Gross claims falsely that the latter attack was carried out by the Home Army. See Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 60 n. 63; Tadeusz Frączek, “Formacje zbrojne obozu narodowego na Białostocczyźnie w latach 1939-1956,” (Ph.D. thesis, Wojskowy Instytut Historyczny, Warsaw, 1996), 150-51, 187, 194, 254, 257; Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski, *Białostocki Okręg AK-AKO, VII 1944-VIII 1945* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen and Dom Wydawniczy Bellona, 1997), 168-209, 240-41; Eliezer Tash (Tur-Shalom), ed., *The Community of Semiatych* (Tel Aviv: Association of Former Residents of Semiatich in Israel and the Diaspora, 1965), xiii; Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, “Sources of Conflict: The Polish Independentist Insurgency and the Jews in the Provincial Setting, 1944-1947,” TMs, s. 136, 159.

⁴³ Gross uses Wyrzykowski as an isolated case of a Righteous Gentile who was persecuted after the war for having assisted Jews and was even forced to flee the area. However, according to Jewish and Polish witnesses, the Wyrzykowskis were indeed persecuted, and Aleksander’s wife even savagely beaten, by bandits who wanted to extort from them the “Jewish gold” that they falsely assumed the couple had received for helping Jews. Were the bandits anti-Semites? Perhaps so. Clearly, however, they were not motivated by a desire to punish the Wyrzykowskis for their rescue of Jews but by avarice. See Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, 87-88; Józef Grądzki, “Zaświadczenie,” 26 April 1967, AŻIH, file 301/5825; Jan Sokołowski to Andrzej Kaczyński, editor of *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 May 2000 (a copy in my collection).

⁴⁴ Waldemar Monkiewicz, “Zagłada skupisk żydowskich w regionie białostockim w latach 1939, 1941-1944,” *Studia Podlaskie* [Białystok], vol. 2 (1989): 241-46.

Usunięto:

murdered the Jews. The third school, which found support at least at one point in Szymon Datner,⁴⁵ holds that some Poles certainly participated in the crime against the Jews but that the current level of knowledge is insufficient to assess the extent of Polish involvement and guilt and sorely needs to be supplemented with further research.

Without taking sides in this debate, we can differentiate between the following categories of the participants in the events in Jedwabne. First, there were local and outside bandits and thieves, who felt they could rob and torment helpless people with impunity. Second, the opportunists – normally rather quiet citizens – joined the bandits and thieves. Third, the victims of Soviet terror and their relatives surfaced, some of whom had been freed from Communist jails, probably thirsty for revenge on the direct perpetrators of their misfortune, the Soviet secret policemen and their agents, but, in their absence, on any Jew symbolizing for them the hated Communist regime. Fourth, the members of the Polish citizens' guard took part in the events also. The guard was formed spontaneously following the Soviet flight but it was sanctioned by the Germans, who used its members to herd and guard Jews. Fifth, unwilling Polish “volunteers,” dragooned by the Nazis, were forced to participate, usually in a passive manner, in the spectacle of abusing and, later, killing the Jews. Sixth, it is possible that members of the Polish independentist underground were present; they likely assassinated a number of suspected Soviet collaborators in the environs of Jedwabne immediately following the Red Army's retreat, but not on the fateful day, July 10, 1941. Seventh, according to Nazi documents, the troops of the 316th and 322nd police battalions or of the so-called Białystok *Einsatzkommando/Kommando Białystok* may have been in the town. Their leader was supposedly Wolfgang Birkner (referred to in some sources as Wilhelm Buerkner).

The claim by Gross that on July 10 the SS-*Einsatzgruppen* were near Minsk, in Byelorussia, notwithstanding, the presence of at least of a part of those units in the Białystok area as late as the beginning of August 1941 is

⁴⁵ Initially, in 1946, having relied solely on the testimonies of Wasersztejn and Finkielsztejn, Datner arrived at similar conclusions as Gross. However, upon consulting Nazi materials, Datner appears to have changed his mind in the 1960s. Compare: Chapters 14 and 15 of [Szymon Datner,] “Zagłada Białegostoku i okolic Praca napisana przez dr Szymona Datnera, ku pamięci 200 000 Żydów z białegostockiego województwa zamordowanych przez Niemców,” Żydowska Wojewódzka Komisja Historyczna, Białystok, 26.11.1946, AZIH, R-1994/B, L.N. 187/46 (a copy in my collection); and Szymon Datner, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej w Okręgu Białostockim,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* [afterward *BŻIH*] [Warszawa], no. 4 (October-December 1966): 3-29. Alas, again only a typed-up copy of the 1946 essay of Datner is available. Where is the original?

confirmed by the Gestapo functionary Waldemar Macholla; by the war diary of the 322nd police battalion; by a study of the annihilation of the Jewish population in Choroszcz, a town not far from Jedwabne; by the investigation of Nazi crimes in the Białystok area conducted in the 1960s in West Germany; and by the research on the *Ordnungspolizei* published by Jürgen Matthäus.⁴⁶

Finally, there are the *Einsatzgruppen Reports*. Professor Gross is familiar with them and correctly stated that the published selection contains nothing on Jedwabne. Nonetheless, they do describe the *modus operandi* of the SS in relation to the Poles. The Nazis expected them, because of what had happened under the Soviet occupation, to denounce Communists and to attack Jews.⁴⁷ On July 1, 1941, the leadership of the SS stated: “Poles residing in the newly-occupied Polish territories may be expected, on the basis of their experience, to be anti-Communist and also anti-Jewish. ... They are of great importance as elements to initiate pogroms and for obtaining information.”⁴⁸ Himmler himself formulated the concept that informed his underlings’ next dispatch to the *SS-Einsatzgruppen* of July 2, 1941, namely “to incite pogroms surreptitiously.”⁴⁹

The Archives

⁴⁶ Szymon Datner, “Niemiecki okupacyjny aparat bezpieczeństwa w Okręgu Białostockim (1941-1944) w świetle materiałów niemieckich (opracownia Waldemara Macholla),” *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce* [afterward *BGKBŻHwP*], no. 15 (1965): 11; Kazimierz Leszczyński, “Dziennik wojenny Batalionu Policji 322 (opracowanie i tłumaczenie dokumentu),” *BGKBŻHwP*, no. 17 (1967): 216, 218, 222; Anatol Leszczyński, “Zagłada ludności żydowskiej miasta Choroszczy,” *BŻIH*, no. 3 (July-September 1971): 52 n. 16; “Pochopne sądy Grossa: Rozmowa z dr Sławomirem Radoniem,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 January 2001; Maciej Chołodowski, “Nowi świadkowie,” *Życie*, 1 February 2001; Jürgen Matthäus, “What About the ‘Ordinary Men’?: The German Order Police and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 134-150. See also *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen: Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen, 1945-1966*, 24 volumes (Amsterdam: University Press Amsterdam, 1976) and in particular case 444 in volume 14.

⁴⁷ In addition to various grudges from the period before June 1941, according to Bogdan Musiał, anti-Communism and anti-Semitism of the locals was also greatly exacerbated by the fact that the Soviet secret police slaughtered at least 10,000 political prisoners during its retreat. See Bogdan Musiał, *Konterrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu erschießen: Die Brutalisierung des deutsch-sowjetischen Krieges im Sommer 1941* (Berlin and München: Ullstein Verlag, 2000).

⁴⁸ Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski and Shmuel Spector, eds., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports* (New York: The Holocaust Library, 1989), 2.

⁴⁹ Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and The Final Solution* (London: The Bodley Head, 1991), 172.

Nonetheless, a discussion of the historiography, an enumeration of the categories of perpetrators, and a description of the *modus operandi* of the Nazis do not exhaust the suggested outline for further studies about Jedwabne. Conceptualization and theorizing cannot be a substitute for solid research. Therefore, as indicated by Polish scholars familiar with them, we must delve into the following depositories of primary sources.

First, according to Piotr Gontarczyk, the State Archive (Archiwum Państwowe) in Białystok contains some files of the pre-war administration of the region. Second, Leszek Żebrowski advises that there are unsorted collections of documents regarding Jedwabne in the county archive in Łomża. Third, Mariusz Bechta suggests consulting the archive of the Łomża dioceses for church records, including the bishop's papers, and the parish archive in Jedwabne for the parish chronicle. Fourth, we must peruse the Polish underground press at the National Library (Biblioteka Narodowa) in Warsaw because, as Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński has shown, some news from the Białystok region, including at times Łomża, can be found in *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (24 July, 14 and 21 August 1941) and *Walka* (8 August, 3 October and 7 November 1941) as well as other papers.⁵⁰

Fifth, the German state archive in Ludwigsburg contains information about the Białystok region, including Jedwabne (file 205 AR-Z 84/75 and file 205 AR – Z 233/74) and other nearby towns. Sixth, there are additional Nazi files on *Bezirk Bialystok* at the Archive of the Grodno Oblast in Belarus. Michael Gelb and Aaron Kornblum stated that at least seven rolls of microfilm from that collection are available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Seventh, according to Amir Weiner of Stanford University, many Soviet, Polish, and Nazi documents concerning eastern Poland are in the Russian archives, including, for instance, the Communist newspaper published in Łomża now deposited at the Moscow State Library.⁵¹

Eight, the Archive of New Acts (Archiwum Akt Nowych) in Warsaw boasts a collection of Nazi, Polish underground, farmer cooperative, and charity records about both the Soviet and Nazi occupations of the Łomża area, including Jedwabne. Ninth, more data can be found at the Archive of the Institute for the History of the Peasant Movement (Archiwum Zakładu

⁵⁰ See Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński, *W walce o Wielką Polskę: Propaganda zaplecza politycznego Narodowych Sił Zbrojnych (1939-1945)* (Warszawa and Biała Podlaska: Rekonkwista-Rachocki i s-ka, 2000).

⁵¹ Czesław Brodzicki, "'Wolna Łomża' – czasopismo sowieckie z lat 1939-1940," *Zeszyty Łomżyńskie*, no. 4 (8), 2 (November-December 2000): 18-19.

Historii Ruchu Ludowego). Tenth, the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji) contains the relevant operational files of the secret police, including denunciations, agent reports, and interrogation records. Eleventh, only having researched in all the aforementioned depositories, should we look again at the court and investigation records at the Archive of the Institute of National Memory and the Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against the Polish Nation (Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej-Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni nad Narodem Polskim). Finally, twelfth, a concerted effort must be undertaken to collect testimonies and depositions from the quickly dwindling pool of eyewitnesses of the tragedy in Jedwabne.

Historians thus have their work cut out for them. Juxtaposing the scholarly task still ahead of us with categorical statements about the “co-responsibility” of the “Polish society” (or its lack) for the Holocaust in Jedwabne calls for humility and patience.⁵²

Shock therapy

At this early stage of research, Jan Tomasz Gross appears to have formulated his conclusions rather prematurely. Nonetheless, Professor Gross has done a service to the academic community if only by paraphrasing the testimonies of Jewish victims and by ushering them under the scholarly microscope. Likewise, a few years ago, basing himself on unverified Jewish accounts, a journalist alleged that the independentist underground killed

⁵² Most scholars expressed their reservations about *Neighbors*. Some use Jedwabne as an excuse to discuss other controversial topics in Polish-Jewish relations. See Leon Kalewski, “Kresowe (po) rachunki,” *Nasza Polska*, 10 May 2000; Tomasz Szarota and Jacek Żakowski, “Pogrom w Jedwabnem,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 November 2000; Leon Kalewski, “Opowieści niesamowite,” *Nasza Polska*, 22 November and 19 December 2000 (2 parts); Tomasz Szarota, “Czy napewno już wszystko wiemy?” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1 December 2000; Krzysztof Jasiewicz, “Sąsiedzi niezbadani,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 December 2000; Tomasz Szarota and Krzysztof Masłoń, “Wstyd domowy: Rozmowa,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 9 December 2000; Andrzej Żbikowski, “Nie było rozkazu,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 5 January 2001; Sebastian Rzeczkowski, “Oskarżenia bez dowodów,” *Nasz Dziennik*, 30 January 2001; “Nie wolno się bać: O książce Jana Grossa i stosunkach polsko-żydowskich z Bogdanem Musiałem rozmawia Paweł Paliwoda,” *Życie*, 2 February 2001; Barbara Engelking-Boni, “Odwaga zbrodni: Wywiad z profesorem Israellem Gutmanem o zbrodni w Jedwabnem,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9 February 2001; Jerzy Jedlicki, “Polacy wobec Zagłady Żydów,” *Polityka*, 10 February 2001; Józef Lewandowski, “Historia Polski po Jedwabnem będzie wyglądała inaczej,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 February 2001.

Jews during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, and much valuable research resulted.⁵³

The haste with which *Neighbors* were published seems to find a perfect explanation in a footnote, where Professor Gross wrote: “We are on the verge, I believe, of a major reassessment of the epoch [1939-1948] by Polish historiography, and a new sensitivity and awareness concerning all matters Jewish among the Polish public.”⁵⁴ Plainly, Gross wanted to accelerate history. His aim was to undertake a shock therapy in Polish scholarship. He certainly has reason to be annoyed by the fact that the scholarship too often still pays tribute to Communist stereotypes and avoids controversial topics which challenge the stereotypes and myths, both Communist and nationalist, formed during fifty years of Communist dictatorship. The prevailing status quo must have pained him so much that, despite his excellent academic reputation and tradition of being a solid researcher, Gross decided to exchange his scholarly credentials for an editorial pen.

If the shock caused by the publication of Professor Gross’s book results in real and solid regional case studies, it will be a great benefit to the study of history. However, if it only results in more empty babbling and furious foaming by nationalist journalists and equally silly confessing of sins and chest thumping by leftist pundits, *Neighbors* will have helped to solidify already existing prejudices.⁵⁵ Similarly, not much will be done to further

⁵³ Compare: Michał Cichy, “Czarne karty powstania,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29-30 January 1994; and Janusz Marszałec, *Ochrona porządku i bezpieczeństwa publicznego w Powstaniu Warszawskim* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 1999).

⁵⁴ See Jan T. Gross, “A Tangled Web: Confronting Stereotypes Concerning Relations between Poles, Germans, Jews, and Communists,” in István Deák, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 129 n. 99. See also Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna dekada: Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów, 1939-1948* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998).

⁵⁵ Journalistic accounts may be helpful but they are often very partisan and emotional. By the way, initially most pundits embraced the thesis of Professor Gross. Most ponder deeper moral issues underlying Polish-Jewish relations using Jedwabne as the focal point. See Andrzej Kaczyński, “Całopalenie,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 5 May 2000; Jerzy Danilewicz, “Prawdy nie można zasypać,” *Super Express*, 25 May 2000; Jarosław Lipszyc, “Sąsiedzi i ich wnuki,” *Midrasz*, no. 6 (June 2000): 41-44; Andrzej Kaczyński, “Nie zabijaj,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 July 2000; (MK) [Maria Kaczyńska], “Ku przestrodze i pamięci,” *Gazeta Współczesna*, 11 July 2000, 1; Maria Kaczyńska, “Spalić Żydów w stodole,” *Gazeta Współczesna*, 14 July 2000; Adam Willma, “Broda mojego syna,” *Gazeta Pomorska*, 4 August 2000, 5; Krzysztof Różycki, “Sąsiad twój wróg,” *Angora* [Łódź], 17 September 2000; Jacek Żakowski, “Każdy sąsiad ma imię,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18-19 November 2000; Krystyna Skarżyńska, “Zbiorowe wyobrażenia, wspólna wina,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 November 2000; Marek Beylin, “Ja i my, a nie oni,” *Gazeta*

Jewish-Polish dialogue if scholars continue to ignore other controversial issues in the history of both nations. We might mention here, for instance, the well-documented cases of the slaughter by Soviet and Jewish partisans of the Polish population of the towns of Naliboki and Koniuchy in the Eastern Borderlands.⁵⁶

The lack of academic freedom in Poland for fifty years wreaked incredible havoc on scholarship. Only thorough and conscientious work, including in-depth research, will allow us to overcome that legacy.

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz

Wyborcza, 1 December 2000; Alicja Zielińska, "W cieniu zbrodni," *Kurier Poranny: Magazyn*, 1 December 2000, 11; Stanisław Krajewski, "Czas pokuty," *Wprost*, 5 December 2000, 30; Dawid Warszawski, "Odpowiedzialność i jej brak," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 December 2000; Tadeusz Płużański, "Jedwabne, czyli Gross, 'Wyborcza' i Kneset," *Najwyższy Czas!*, 9 December 2000, XXXII-XXXIII; Jacek Kurczewski, "Mord rytualny," *Wprost*, 10 December 2000, 36; Jan Engelgard, "Jedwabne a sprawa polska," *Myśl Polska*, 10 December 2000, 1; Ryszard Bugaj, "Prawda historyczna i interes materialny," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 January 2001; Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Obsesja niewinności," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12 January 2001; Zdzisław Krasnodębski, "Czerń w Jedwabnem," *Znak* (online, January 2001); Monika Rotulska, "Widmo Jedwabnego," *Nasz Dziennik*, 27-28 January 2001; Antoni Macierewicz, "Rewolucja nihilizmu," *Głos*, 3 February 2001; Walery Amiel, "Prawda lustra," *Wprost*, 6 February 2001; Marek Zieleniewski, "Brakujące ogniwo," *Wprost*, 9 February 2001; Zdzisław Skrok, "Prawda nie po naszej myśli," *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 February 2001; Robert Pucek, "O sensie odpowiedzialności," *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 February 2001; "Nienawiść do ofiary: O zbrodni w Jedwabnem z Jackiem Kuroniem rozmawia z Jan Tomasz Lipski," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 February 2001; Bogdan Skaradziński, "Zbrodnia i pokuta," *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 February 2001.

⁵⁶ See *The Story of Two Shtetls*, part 2, 110-116.