
Poles and Jews in the Second World War: the Revisions of Jan T. Gross

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- Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 261 pp., ISBN 0-691-08667-2.
- Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918–1955: Współistnienie – zagłada – komunizm* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Frondy, 2000), 731 pp., ISBN 8-391-25418-6.
- Leo Cooper, *In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle: The Poles, the Holocaust, and Beyond* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2000), 255 pp., ISBN 0-333-75265-1.
- Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), ISBN 0-312-22056-1.
- Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 8th edn (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1999), 508 pp., ISBN 0-803-21050-7.

Few if any narratives in contemporary European history are as fractured as that of Polish–Jewish relations in the Second World War. The ‘Polish’ side portrays Poles and Jews as equals in victimhood, admitting at best to a differing sequence in destruction: Jews first, Poles second. According to this version, Poles, deprived of state and army, hunted and starved, had no real opportunities to assist those scheduled to die first. Nevertheless, a substantial number did attempt to rescue Jews, at great personal risk, thus testifying to Poles’ basic sympathy for their Jewish neighbours. If antisemitism has little to no place in this ‘Polish’ account, the ‘Jewish’ counterpart finds it pervasive: in this view, Poles conspired with Nazi occupiers to identify, ghettoise, rob, and in many cases kill, Jews. During and after the war Poles shamelessly helped themselves to the possessions of their murdered neighbours, and then posed as Hitler’s ‘first victims’, counting Polish Jews as Poles where convenient (for example in the figure of six million ‘Polish citizens’ killed, half of whom were Jews).

These weighty and exclusive narratives have left little space to imagine alternatives or syntheses, let alone reconciliation. An indication of the irresistible bipolarity in Polish–Jewish history is the work of Jan T. Gross, a sociologist at New

I would like to thank Jeffrey Richter, Istvan Deak, Amir Weiner and Heide-Irene Schmidt for critical comments on this piece.

York University, an important figure in student protest in 1960s Poland (for which he served a prison term), and among the most original and productive thinkers on society under dictatorship. Early in his career Gross wrote a wide-ranging and imaginatively conceived history of Poland under Nazi occupation which stood squarely in the tradition of Polish patriotism.¹ Both the motive forces of the vast underground state (which included education, publishing and an army) as well as its achievements are portrayed here in positive light; Poles organised in order to maintain life as a collectivity, and in so doing achieved an unprecedented democratisation: ‘The most sweeping result of the occupation was the democratization of Polish society: differences of class, status, and power among Poles disappeared under the weight of German terror. This period also saw the mobilization of large masses of people into politics and the rapid growth of patriotic consciousness and national identification.’ Furthermore, by uniting against the evils of Nazi occupation, Poles fostered positive values among themselves: ‘only by opposing the Nazi conquest could people rescue values . . . the fight therefore was justice, freedom, culture, and morality versus their opposites’. Also strengthened through struggle were ‘Polish patriotic traditions’ and Polish culture’s ‘deep commitment to freedom and liberty . . . [with] roots . . . that reach back to the sixteenth century’.²

Although arguably the finest work to have appeared on the Generalgouvernement in any language, whether in originality of analysis, narrative flair, or scope, Gross’s book shared the tendency of mainstream Polish historiography to separate Polish Jews from a discussion of Polish society. This too seemed an outgrowth of Nazi policy: ‘the Jews were separated from the rest of the population and treated differently by the occupiers.’ Also in line with views popular in Poland, Gross imagined the two groups as on a par, because the occupiers made an ‘absolute distinction between Jews and Slavs on the one hand, and the nations of western Europe on the other.’³

These views undergo significant revision in Gross’s most recent work on the north-eastern Polish town of Jedwabne. Now we are told that the histories of Jews and Poles cannot be separated (*‘how can the wiping out of one-third of its urban population be anything other than a central issue in Poland’s modern history?’* (p. 9, emphasis in the original)) and are led to consider the ‘profound demoralization’ (p. 157) of Polish society produced by Soviet (1939–41) and Nazi (1939–45) occupations, manifested in such things as alcoholism, banditry and the ‘breakdown of moral taboos that prohibit the murder of innocent human beings’ (p. 158). As an example of the sweeping corruption of interhuman relations, Gross cites the case of a maid in a village in southern Poland who gave shelter to two children of her Jewish employer. Far from being supportive, her neighbours hounded her to get rid of the children, and did not give her peace until she claimed to have drowned them. These

¹ *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

² *Ibid.*, 291, 257, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, xii–xiii, xi.

neighbours were concerned that the Gestapo would punish them collectively if the Jewish children were discovered. In one of many stirring insights that suffuse this volume Gross concludes: 'we are left with a frightening realization that the population of a little village near Cracow sighed with relief only after its inhabitants were persuaded that one of their neighbours had murdered two small Jewish children' (p. 161).

If in previous work Gross was impressed by the dynamism and reach of Polish resistance to Nazism, now he is struck by the 'enthusiastic reception that the Germans received from the Polish population' (p. 153) and depicts a society that 'did not stand up particularly well' to the challenges posed by two totalitarian regimes (p. 157). If in earlier work he portrayed Polish collaboration with the Nazis as all but impossible Gross now urges a 'new historiography' of the war, including that previously taboo subject.

Gross's startling revisions of his own work derive from close study of Jedwabne, which fell under Nazi rule in June 1941, after having endured almost two years of Sovietisation. Soon after the Nazi conquest, on 10 July 1941, the Jews of this town were hunted down, humiliated and murdered with axes and scythes in a day-long pogrom. Unlike all other previously known mass killings of Jews in wartime Poland, however, this pogrom was not carried out by Germans, or their Lithuanian and Ukrainian accomplices, but by Poles. In a concluding act, the Poles of Jedwabne forced their Jewish neighbours into a barn and set it ablaze.⁴ At most a handful of over 1,000 Jedwabne Jews survived. The publication of Gross's book in the autumn of 2000 challenged one of the most sacred myths of modern Polish identity: namely that Poles, almost alone among the nations of Europe, had not collaborated with the Nazis. In debates that may be likened to the *Historikerstreit* in Germany and the controversy over Daniel Goldhagen's work in the United States, Poland's historians rushed to discover fault in Gross's account and rescue their country's good name.

Above all, Gross was accused of hurrying his book to publication and ignoring documentation that might have highlighted a more active German role in Jedwabne on 10 July 1941. Gross had insisted that the few Germans present in Jedwabne did little more than take pictures, and to date, after months of research in Polish and German archives, nothing has emerged to contest his version. Those hoping for evidence of German complicity were finally disappointed by a report of the Polish Institute of National Memory in December 2001, in which investigators determined that cartridges found near the killing spot could not have been fired in July 1941.

Thus Gross's basic account of the events that transpired in Jedwabne still stands. More importantly, his book has shifted the parameters among professional historians for thinking about the time of the war. Previously they took it for granted that Poles had sympathised with their Jewish neighbours, and if few were saved, that was because of penalties imposed by the Germans: death for the rescuer and his/her entire family. Polish historians tended to emphasise the cases in which Jews indeed

⁴ The precise number killed remains uncertain. Polish investigators have thus far located mass graves of some 500 people. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 December 2001.

survived, noting that Poles outnumber every other nationality among those honoured as 'righteous' at Yad Vashem. None of these certainties now seems certain. Was Polish passivity toward Jews not perhaps due more to indifference than threat of punishment? Were the rescuers motivated by altruism or by the promise of payment? And were the persecutors of Jews not a small fringe of extortionists (*szmalcownicy*) as previously thought, but actually thousands of Poles from all walks of life? An awareness is beginning to dawn that many Poles actively helped the Nazis in rounding up and killing Jews, in a variety of forms, from the Polish 'Blue Police' and Polish construction battalions [Baudienst], to the sort of savage 'neighbours' who carried out the pogrom in Jedwabne.

Now that they could imagine Poles as killers, Polish historians' next question became: was there more than one Jedwabne? They began scouring previously neglected documents, such as survivors' histories deposited after the war in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (in Yiddish), or records of trials of Nazi-era perpetrators in communist Poland or the Federal Republic of Germany. At the time of writing some twenty incidents have been identified in which Poles killed Jews, all of them in north-eastern Poland, all of them more or less at the same time.⁵ In the best-studied case of the nearby town Radziłów, the leading role of the Gestapo and SS are beyond question. There, on 7 July 1941, German officials and Polish accomplices forced the Jewish population into the town square, subjected them to beatings and other mistreatment, and in the end made the Jews enter a barn which was set on fire.⁶

In a sense the new research both confirms and refutes claims made by Gross. On the one hand it shows that indeed Poles murdered Jews to an extent previously not imagined, in and beyond Jedwabne. On the other hand the similarities of the pogroms in Jedwabne and elsewhere in occupied Poland and eastern Europe in the summer of 1941 were too great to be coincidental: they were orchestrated by the invader. Indeed, as Gross's critics have insisted from the beginning, the crime in Jedwabne cannot be comprehended outside the larger east European context. Immediately after overrunning Soviet-held territory in 1941, in a band stretching from the Baltic states, through eastern Poland and western Ukraine, and southward to Bessarabia, the Germans systematically fomented pogroms, and took measures to conceal their own role in these supposedly 'spontaneous' acts of violence. In Lithuania, for example, SS General Walter Stahlecker, gave orders 'to initiate self-cleansing actions [*Selbstreinigungaktionen*] and direct them into the proper channels, so that the goal of cleansing be achieved as quickly as possible. No less essential is that solid, irrefutable facts be created for posterity, showing that the liberated population embraced the harshest measures against Bolshevik and Jewish enemies,

⁵ I thank Dr. Paweł Machcewicz of the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej in Warsaw for sharing with me some of the findings that will appear in two volumes of essays and documents: K. Persak and P. Machcewicz, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002).

⁶ This account is based in part on the testimony of the survivor Chaja Finkelsztein, who identified a leading figure in the massacre – the SS-Obersturmführer Hermann Schaper – in an investigation that took place in Israel in 1963. See the interview with Tomasz Szarota in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 17 (2002).

and did this of its own initiative, without any German orders becoming visible.⁷ Evidence collected to date suggests the presence of several German agencies in north-eastern Poland that would have helped foment such pogroms: Gestapo from Białystok, Warsaw and nearby German towns (such as Allenstein in East Prussia), and so-called ‘auxiliary groups’ left behind by the SS Einsatzgruppe B as it moved through north-eastern Poland. Of areas further south-east, the German expert Dieter Pohl has written:

The decisive question is whether we can speak of spontaneous outbursts of violence of the local population. The fact that almost all pogroms happened at the same time and that the victims were so numerous make talk of ‘self-organisation’ of the population seem dubious. Evidence suggests that German agencies had been planning the pogroms for some time. This can also be our assumption in the comparable case of the Baltics.⁸

Holocaust historian Martin Dean has studied carefully killings in Belorussia and Ukraine in this period, and emphasises a limited German role (for example in the Belorussian towns of Mir, Borisov, Novogrudok, Jody). In general, Germans confined themselves to rounding up and escorting Jews to places where they were killed by locals. Survivors of the Jody massacre recalled: “‘There were very few Germans involved . . . They supervised the actions and the roundups. The mass killings were all done by Belorussians, Russians, and some Poles”’ (p. 52).

Such cases make one wonder whether debates on Jedwabne have not been misdirected: even with more Germans present and active, nothing suggests that fewer Poles would have taken part in the killing. In none of the locales mentioned did Germans have to force Belorussians, Russians or Poles to kill; they merely had to provide a context in which people could plunder and murder with no fear of retribution. The question then emerges as to why some east European Christians were more willing to murder their Jewish neighbours than others. What might have predisposed some communities to more, others to less, violence; in particular, what if anything helped forge bonds of solidarity across ethnic and religious lines? What is interesting about Jedwabne, in other words, is what made it exceptional.⁹

Gross cannot be faulted for failing to pursue such questions in a one-town study. However, historians have taken him to task for attempting to say more about the perpetrators in Jedwabne than his evidence will permit. One overstatement that especially grated was this: ‘half the population of a small east European town murdered the other half’ (p. 7). The book itself quickly undermines this claim, by identifying at most ninety-two participants, or approximately half the male Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne, and fewer than a quarter of the entire Polish population of the town. But even among these ninety-two many did little more than stand guard

⁷ *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, XXXVII* (Nuremberg: 1949), 682.

⁸ Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1997), 56.

⁹ Among the cases in north-eastern Poland explored by Polish historians Jedwabne had the most victims, and the least prominent role of the Germans.

(and testified to being forcibly recruited for this).¹⁰ Furthermore, it is not certain how many murderers came from Jedwabne, and thus constituted ‘neighbours’ (one of the most shocking implications of the book was that the perpetrators knew their victims): Gross notes that ‘carts full of people from nearby hamlets’ converged on the town after the dawn on 10 July. He suspects that there were in their number ‘a core group of plunderers’ who moved from town to town as pogroms swept the area (p. 90). The accused recalled ‘a large number of peasants who flocked into town from neighbouring hamlets’ (p. 87).

What further disturbed many Poles was Gross’s claim that the killers constituted not only ‘ordinary men’ but ‘ordinary Poles’: for him Jedwabne was not exceptional but representative. He based this conclusion on information about fifteen men detained in 1949 by Polish security police, among whom were farmers, shoemakers, locksmiths, a mason, a letter carrier, a carpenter, and a town-hall receptionist (p. 15). Aided by slippery rhetoric, Gross went on to ponder the larger implications of this crime:

When reflecting upon this epoch, 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. But we nevertheless might be compelled to investigate what makes a nation (as in ‘the Germans’) capable of carrying out such deeds. Or can atrocious deeds simply be bracketed off and forgotten? (pp. 134–5)

The slip in logic involved here is to imagine that unless one holds a nation collectively responsible for the deeds carried out by some of its members, one must forget these deeds.

Gross explicitly parallels his thin and fragmentary sample to that of Christopher Browning, who possessed detailed information on Party membership, age, and occupation of over 150 ‘ordinary’ men who served in the Reserve Police Battalion 101.¹¹ The parallel fails, however, not only on incommensurability of data. The point of Browning’s book is that the killers of Battalion 101 could have come from anywhere, not simply Germany: they were a cross-section of humanity and not just of Hamburg. Among other things, Browning based his analysis on the Milgram experiment, and provoked the well-known objection of Daniel Goldhagen, that the killers had been socialised in a specific kind of *German* anti-Semitism (‘eliminationist’), and were therefore ‘ordinary Germans’.¹²

While invoking Browning, Gross is thus actually closer to Goldhagen (though he does not cite him) in his ethnicisation of the crime. He calls the Jedwabne murderers ‘willing executioners’ (Goldhagen’s phrase), and in one mixed assortment of borrowings writes: ‘In Jedwabne ordinary Poles slaughtered the Jews, very much as ordinary Germans from the Ordnungspolizei Battalion no. 101 did in Józefów, as

¹⁰ For citations from testimony see Tomasz Strzembosz, ‘Inny obraz sąsiadów’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 31 March 2001.

¹¹ See his *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 47–8.

¹² Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

documented in Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* (p. 120).¹³ Also more reminiscent of Goldhagen is Gross's outright moral indignation and forceful argumentation (both authors are fond of formulations like 'we can only conclude', 'we should keep in mind that', 'How can we otherwise explain', etc.). Both privilege survivors' testimonies, and are uncomfortable with small, contingent explanations. Where Browning offers a dozen reasons for mass murder, Goldhagen and Gross have focused on single, large explanations: for Goldhagen the important catalyst was German anti-Semitism, for Gross it was European totalitarianism.¹⁴

Gross particularly discounts one long-standing, partial explanation for the violence against Jews in this period: the disproportionate Jewish support for the Soviet regime that had reigned in eastern Poland before the Nazi attack of June 1941. This support is accepted as fact by much of the historical community, including the early Gross. In 1983 he wrote: 'The Red Army was joyously welcomed by Jews. In practically every locality occupied by the Soviet armies groups of Jews, sometimes numerous, gave public expression to these sentiments.' Jews found their position improved, because they were 'not treated worse than other nationalities'.¹⁵ Indeed, because Poles, as former people of state, were now treated with suspicion by Soviet authorities, positions opened in the professions and state administration to members of other ethnic groups. Ben-Cion Pinchuk has written that Shtetl Jews provided a 'large reservoir of manpower, relatively well-educated, reliable . . . available and eager to cooperate'. Not surprisingly, therefore, 'Jews participated in disproportionate numbers in Soviet-established institutions'.¹⁶

Now, Gross resists the Jewish-communist nexus ('Judeocommune') as an explanation for the Jedwabne massacre because 'there is no reason to single out Jedwabne as a place where relationships between Jews and the rest of the population during those twenty months of Soviet rule were more antagonistic than anywhere else' (p. 43). To this Polish historians have responded that Poles in Jedwabne may nevertheless have perceived Jews to be more heavily involved in Soviet administration than they actually were; or that they may have derived their sense of Jewish support for the Soviet regime from sources beyond Jedwabne. In the most direct about-face from his earlier views, Gross went on to contend that 'enthusiastic Jewish response to entering Red Army units was not a widespread phenomenon at all . . . it is manifest that the local non-Jewish population enthusiastically greeted entering Wehrmacht units in 1941 and broadly engaged in collaboration with the Germans' (p. 155). Paweł Machcewicz has criticised this shift in argumentation as

¹³ In later sections of the book Gross approvingly cites Eric Voegelin's view that collaborators with the Nazi regime constituted 'rabble' (165). This view, however, contradicts Gross's own claims for the 'ordinariness' of the Jedwabne killers.

¹⁴ Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 76–9; Gross, *Neighbors*, 157–61.

¹⁵ Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, eds., *W czterdziestym nas matka na Sybir zesłali . . .*. *Polska a Rosja 1939–1942* (London: Aneks, 1983), 28, 31.

¹⁶ Ben-Cion Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule: Eastern Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 26.

'replacement of one stereotype – "Jewish Communist" sympathizers – with another stereotype, this time about Polish attitudes in support of the occupation'.¹⁷

Explanations for Gross's change in perspective must be speculative; perhaps extended engagement with public debate in Poland since 1989 has convinced Gross that commonly accepted 'explanations' like 'Judeo-commune' have become a substitute for thought, impeding deeper understanding. When Poland's 'national honour' is at stake, small explanations can serve as large justifications. For example, to say in the Polish context that Poles killed Jews because of anger over an alleged 'Soviet-assisted Communist takeover of Poland abetted by the Jews' (p. 151) is to imply that the killing was not only comprehensible, but somehow excusable.¹⁸ Intimate familiarity with this context may have convinced Gross that subtle, complex argumentation would be pointless. After all, stereotypes about the past were so firmly engrained in his own mind that four years elapsed before he understood that postwar testimony of one survivor (Szmul Wasersztajn) about the holocaust of Jedwabne's Jews had to be taken literally. An important staging post on Gross's own deconstruction of Poland's wartime mythology was the reading of the wartime diary of the Polish physician Zygmunt Klukowski. In entries from 1942, Gross discovered that the Jewish population of Klukowski's home town of Szczebrzeszyn had not been transported in secret to death camps, as traditional historiography had led one to believe, but rather had been rounded up and killed in broad daylight, and that Poles not only witnessed but participated in this *Aktion*. Klukowski noted: 'Quite a few Poles, especially boys, eagerly help in the search,' and 'News keeps reaching us from all directions about scandalous behavior of segments of the Polish population who rob emptied Jewish apartments.' In an essay originally presented in 1994, Gross concluded:

We learn from Klukowski a simple fact – that Poles have witnessed the Holocaust . . . in countless small towns, where from a few hundred to a few thousand Jews were confined to their quarters – by no means walled-in and out of sight of the Gentile population – a significant proportion, if not the majority, were killed right there. The Holocaust, in other words, was not confined to the pitch dark interiors of gas chambers and covered vans. It took place in full daylight, and was witnessed by millions of Poles who – and this will be a very minimalist interpretation – by and large did little to interfere with it. In Polish historiography, the significance of these circumstances has not been evaluated, and only barely recognised.¹⁹

¹⁷ <http://free.ngo.pl/wiez/jedwabne/article/19.htm/> Other authors confirm that eastern Poles generally felt relief at the entrance of German forces in June 1941. See Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi*, 112; Grzegorz Hryciuk, *Polacy we Lwowie 1939–1944* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 2000), 206.

¹⁸ See the argumentation on pp. 150–51. An indication of the belief that no punishment was too cruel for those adjudged 'Soviet stooges' is given in the letter of Marek Jan Chodakiewicz in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 May 2001: the murderers in Jedwabne 'had no right to harm anyone who was not a Soviet secret police stooge, his ethnic background notwithstanding'. The implication is that procedure is irrelevant, and that a lynch-mob can carry out justice.

¹⁹ Jan T. Gross, 'War as Revolution', in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder: Westview, 1997), 29–30. The extraordinary diary was published in Polish in 1959, and is available in English as Zygmunt Klukowski, *Diary from the Years of Occupation 1939–44*, trans. George Klukowski (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Soon Gross began revising his own revision, by confronting head-on the central alibi Poles give for failing to rescue more Jews: namely, the Germans' threat mentioned above to kill rescuers and their families. This 'explanation' likewise had long served to impede deeper thought. In an essay originally published in 1998, Gross noted that similar threats did not discourage Poles from massive participation in the underground conspiracy:

What differentiated conspiratorial work from helping out the Jews in Poland during the Second World War was not, primarily, the relative severity of sanctions if one were caught but that, by contrast with involvement in the anti-Nazi conspiracy, there were relatively few people involved in assisting the Jews and that they were not supported in their efforts by the surrounding milieu. Jews, by and large, were perceived as an alien element and they were either ignored or else the prevailing attitude toward them was hostile.²⁰

Alas, Gross's revolutionary challenge to a truly hegemonic discourse appeared tucked away in a thin paperback volume of essays, and like Klukowski's diary published many years before, it was little noticed. Soon afterwards, Gross discovered and investigated the Jedwabne story, and perhaps because of the immediacy of its message, his book could not be ignored. The ice was broken.

Just how thick and hard this ice was is suggested by a volume published the same year as *Neighbors* on the vast subject of 'Jews and Poles – 1918–1955', by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, who is of Polish origin but completed his doctoral studies and teaches in the United States. Written to correct 'anti-Polish stereotypes' (p. 347) of 'western' historiography, Chodakiewicz's massive tome makes a strong case for Polish non-involvement in the Holocaust and the equivalence of Polish and Jewish victimhood, though he does claim to recognise a basic distinction: that the Nazis aimed to make slaves of Poles, but 'fully [to] exterminate' (p. 109) Jews. As in standard Polish historiography Jewish experience often becomes relevant only when it highlights dimensions of Polish suffering, and the author's juxtapositions catch the reader by surprise. For example Chodakiewicz remarks that Jewish fathers who chose not to abandon their children in the Warsaw Ghetto are often exalted as heroes: 'but the same respect is also due a Polish father who did not want to abandon his wife and children when they were transported [by the Soviet authorities] to Siberia' (p. 161) He is careful to note that in the massacres triggered by the Nazis' Commissar Order of 1941, an inauguration to the final solution, also 'a certain number of Poles were shot' (p. 157). The difference of course is that they were shot not as Poles, but as communists. In Chodakiewicz's scheme the ultimate evil is totalitarianism, and that is what makes Poles and Jews victims of the same tragedy. If Poles therefore want to understand how the Nazis succeeded in suppressing Jewish resistance in 1943, they need only remember the effectiveness of the 'totalitarian art of crowd control' (p. 162) used against Poles by the communist

²⁰ Jan T. Gross, 'A Tangled Web: Confronting Stereotypes Concerning Relations between Poles, Germans, Jews, and Communists', in Istvan Deak, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 86–7. For the original Polish see *Upiorna dekada: trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939–1948* (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 1998), 50–51.

militia forty years later. The difference here, of course, is that murder was the exception in communist Poland, whereas in the Warsaw Ghetto it was the rule. Genocide is more than a form of crowd control.

Chodakiewicz does not deny the existence of antisemitism in Poland, but it seems irrelevant, marginal to explaining the success of the Nazis in killing the overwhelming majority of Polish Jews. Could Poles have done more to rescue Jews? This question looms over every discussion of Polish–Jewish relations during the German occupation. Chodakiewicz’s approach is novel yet revealing. In his view, Jews living in the underground were forced to commit crimes: ‘in order to survive, Jews had to steal food and other articles that belonged to peasants’ (p. 166). Thus, if little aid was forthcoming for Jews, that was because they were seen as bandits: in order to get food, Jews ‘often linked up with similar groups of escaped Soviet POWs and sometimes with Polish criminals as well’ (p. 166). Why not with the Home Army? What Chodakiewicz does not register is the basic lack of solidarity felt by Poles for Jews. After all, tens of thousands of Poles fled Warsaw after the Uprising in 1944 and found food and shelter in the Polish countryside without having to steal it.²¹ Basic evidence for this lack of solidarity has also been adduced by Jan Gross: those Poles who aided Jews kept their mouths shut after the war, because they were embarrassing evidence that more could have been done. The Poles who sheltered literary critic Marcel Reich (later Reich–Ranicki) swore him to secrecy after liberation by Soviet troops, knowing that their Polish neighbours ‘would never forgive’ this act.²² Rescuers subverted a nationwide conspiracy whose dearest, unquestioned assumption stated: to help Jews is to endanger ‘us’.

Even those Jews who did not have physical features or an accent considered Jewish, felt far from secure. Those who escaped the ghettos recall a sixth sense among Poles for Jews in their midst: they felt objects of constant observation; of hundreds of eyes sifting through the bustle of human activity on any given street for signs of foreignness; of immediate and efficient communication along local, long-standing ‘rumour mills’ of any new, unknown individual who might possibly be Jewish. Direct malice or intent to deliver outsiders to the Germans need not have been involved; once suspicion fell upon a Jew, it was only a matter of time before the fatal rumour made its way to those who, for whatever reasons, had no scruples about turning Jews over to the local authorities. In this sense Polish public opinion, with its common assumption of the essential otherness of Jews, and frequent Judeophobia, proved an effective net for catching Jews who eluded the Nazis.²³

²¹ Klaus-Peter Friedrich, ‘Über den Widerstandsmythos im besetzten Polen in der Historiographie’, 1999 *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, 13, 1 (1998), 48.

²² See the review by Neil Ascherson of *The Author of Himself: The Life of Marcel Reich-Ranicki* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) in the *New York Review of Books*, XLIX, 6 (11 April 2002), 56.

²³ See for example Adam Neuman–Nowicki, *Struggle for Life during the Nazi Occupation of Poland*, ed. and trans. Sharon Stambovsky Strosberg (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 62–4; Janina Bauman, *Winter in the Morning: A Young Girl’s Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond 1939–1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986); Miriam Peleg–Mariańska and Mordecai Peleg, *Witnesses: Life in Occupied Kraków* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991).

Despite its nationalist bias, Chodakiewicz's book does supply a wealth of information, and though at pains to rationalise shortcomings in Polish behaviour, he does recognise them as shortcomings, and not as 'justified' reactions.²⁴ He also writes on several under-researched components of that non-topic in Polish wartime historiography: collaboration of Poles with Germans. Collaboration has figured as a non-topic in part because the Nazis created no Polish state, and indeed permitted no Polish administration above the level of the village. The occupiers closed practically all Polish public institutions, such as universities, newspapers and political parties, but some forms of Polish administration did remain, and the Germans created others. Among the topics that have emerged in Chodakiewicz's and other recent work (especially of the German historian Klaus-Peter Friedrich²⁵) are: Polish village administration, Polish 'Blue Police' and 'construction units', and Polish assumption of Jewish property.

The Germans entrusted village administration with responsibility for delivering grain but also forced labour for the Reich. Commissions consisting of priests, teachers, large landowners and traders collected the produce and identified labourers.²⁶ Villages also fielded guard units (*warta wiejska*) in which all men were supposed to serve. Sometimes these units, commanded by the village mayors, helped to 'hunt down' Jews as well as 'secure' Jewish property.

More visible in wartime Poland were the Polish Police (called 'Blue' for the colour of their uniforms), who carried firearms and by 1943 counted some 16,000 men, about the size of the German Order and Security Police put together. In contrast to native forces under German occupation in western Europe there were no upper tiers to this police, and the local offices were subordinated to the Germans. Blue Police were used to search luggage, but also houses, and fought the black market as well as partisans, and helped guard and clear ghettos. At present little of a general nature can be said about the Blue Police: its ranks included many different types, from active collaborators and occasional sadists, to black marketeers, to those who continued prewar police careers, and thought of themselves as 'cops', to those who worked actively with the underground, and helped save potential victims of the Gestapo, including Jews.

Another under-researched organisation with which Poles collaborated were the Construction Service (*Baudienst*) units set up by the Germans for young Polish men, whom they conscripted and forced to live in barracks. Here they were fed vodka and a stream of anti-Jewish propaganda, and then put to use in a number of atrocities against Jews: catching those who attempted to escape from ghettos, providing assistance in mass killings (for example by leading the Jews to execution sites), assisting in deportations and in the 'liquidation' of ghettos. This last task involved searching houses and apartments for valuables left behind – and for Jews who may have been hiding. In June 1942, members of the Construction Service helped SS,

²⁴ This in contrast to the malicious writings of Jerzy Robert Nowak.

²⁵ See n. 21.

²⁶ Friedrich, 'Über den Widerstandsmythos', 49; Lewandowska, *Okupowanego Mazowsza dni powszednie 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1993), 50–51.

German and Polish police murder Jews in Tarnów (where some 40,000 Jews had been forced to live). By mid-1941 the Construction Service, whose primary purpose was to build public works projects, had 120,000 members.²⁷ As in the case of the Blue Police, little of a general sort can be said about these construction units.²⁸ How much they took part in killing, and whether their participation was voluntary, are unknown. According to physician and Holocaust survivor Ludwik Hirszfeld, one young Pole who refused to take part in executions was shot in the head; likewise, former *Baudienst* conscriptees interviewed in the 1970s recalled that a number of comrades who could not bear working at execution sites were themselves 'shot on the spot'. These stories cast doubt upon Jan Gross's claim that the Germans 'did not compel the local population to participate directly in the murder of the Jews' (p. 132).²⁹

Even less researched, but more pervasive were the 'aryanisations' and other seizures of Jewish property by Poles. The standard view in Poland was that Germans had expropriated Jewish property, and then taken everything of value with them to Germany.³⁰ In fact there lurks in Polish memory, similar to suppressed knowledge of crimes like Jedwabne, a recognition that much Jewish property found its way into Polish hands. Part of the reason for Poles' seizing these belongings was poverty, but another part was business, because whether or not they started out poor, many Poles got very rich selling Jewish furniture, jewellery, and furs.³¹

If these cases seem spectacular, that is only because of the uncontested assumption among Polish historians that no collaboration took place during the war. The subject is a new one, and should be studied exhaustively. Still, it will hardly lead to a major revision: what is remarkable in comparative perspective is still how little Polish society aided Germany's war effort. Other east European states such as Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia and Romania became Germany's allies and sent divisions of soldiers to fight the Soviet Union; they passed their own racial laws and in some cases delivered Jews to Germany. Other nations, such as Latvia or Ukraine, were not granted states, but also fielded police and military units to fight for the Nazis' cause, including their war against the Jews. Even Serbia and the Czech lands had collaborationist regimes.

Why the Poles collaborated relatively little is a point to be considered below; one observer little impressed by such a comparative perspective is Leo Cooper, a

²⁷ Friedrich, 'Über den Widerstandsmythos', 38–40; Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi*, 203; Mściśław Wróblewski, *Stuzba budowlana (Baudienst) w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1940–1945* (Warsaw: PWN, 1984), 157–62.

²⁸ The single monograph on them is Wróblewski, *Stuzba budowlana*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 157; Hirszfeld, *Historia jednego życia* (1989), 360, cited in Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi*, 203. Hirszfeld also recalled this incident in trial testimony in 1947, Wróblewski, *Stuzba budowlana*, 161. See also Friedrich, 'Über den Widerstandsmythos', 38–40.

³⁰ See for example A. Budzyński and J. Gmitruk, eds., *Pamiętniki nowego pokolenia chłopów polskich*, II (Warsaw: Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego SGH, 1997), 68. The issue of Polish participation in aryanisations has hardly been touched by Polish historiography. Friedrich, 'Über den Widerstandsmythos', 23.

³¹ This the conclusion of Klaus-Peter Friedrich from reading the Polish press: 'Über den Widerstandsmythos', 25.

Holocaust survivor who teaches Russian history at the University of Melbourne. If one wants to get a sense of the 'Western' historiography to which Chodakiewicz was responding, one can do no better than to turn to Cooper's recent volume on Polish–Jewish relations from the tenth century to the present. He deftly synthesises reams of work in several languages, with particular attention to the wrongs done to Jews, from the 'ghetto benches' of the interwar period, where Polish nationalist students forced Jews to sit during lectures, to inadequate assistance to Jews during the Holocaust and pogroms of Holocaust survivors after the war, to the most recent antisemitic campaigns of 1968. The book's many sources, including Polish scholarship, Yad Vashem files, and Cooper's own personal encounters, point toward one conclusion: Polish society was saturated with antisemitic feeling. This finding will hardly surprise readers in the West. Yet those familiar with the Polish literature know of other options in Polish society, and all but the historical determinist would ask why they failed. Within the Catholic Church, for example, there was an influential (though minority) current that condemned antisemitism ('*Odrodzenie*').³² In what spheres did it succeed, and why? How might its influence have been extended? Cooper devotes under two pages to the role of the clergy (citing two sources), and concludes simply that 'a more positive attitude of the Polish clergy toward Jews would have certainly saved many lives' (p. 173). This is undoubtedly correct, but much more remains to be said.

Cooper's approach therefore represents the opposite of Chodakiewicz's: if Chodakiewicz is unable to meet antisemitism head-on, and find in it an explanation for anything in Polish–Jewish relations, for Cooper it explains everything. If Chodakiewicz's goal is to exonerate Poland, Cooper's is to condemn it; for both, behaviour at odds with their general scheme is not seen as evidence of variety, but as exceptions that prove the rule. For example, after citing a few pieces of evidence on Polish collaboration during the war, Cooper pronounces Polish 'acceptance of German rule' (p. 139) Noting that more than 100,000 Poles signed the *Deutsche Volksliste* in the Generalgouvernement – thus declaring themselves German – Cooper takes this as 'another indication of acceptance of German rule' by the Polish population. In fact, this was less than 1 per cent of the population.³³ Cooper acknowledges the absence in Poland of a 'Quisling government during the war', something 'Polish historians are very proud of', but this failure of Poles to collaborate more actively

was not so much a result of Polish unwillingness to co-operate with the invader as of the German perception that they had no need of a Polish collaborationist government for their plans of exterminating the Jews: the Germans felt they had the tacit approval of the Polish population. (p. 137)

³² On this movement, which included important figures in postwar Poland, see Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933–1939* (Chur: Harwood, 1994), 387–94.

³³ For population figures (16 million total in 1941) see Jan Ciechanowski in R. F. Leslie, Antony Polonsky, Jan Ciechanowski, Z. A. Pelczyński, *The History of Poland since 1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 216. Hans-Christian Harten also regards the figure as low, especially given the potential material benefits at stake. See his *De-Kulturation und Germanisierung: Die nationalsozialistische Rassen- und Erziehungspolitik in Polen 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1996), 107–8.

If the blindness towards antisemitism in Chodakiewicz's account helps one comprehend frustrations on the Jewish side towards an unremorseful Poland, Cooper's ungenerous assessment of Polish opposition to Nazism helps one understand bitterness among Poles about widespread ignorance in the West and elsewhere, both of the scale of Nazi atrocities in Poland, as well as of Polish resistance.

Martin Dean's study of local police units (*Schutzmannschaften*) in German-occupied Belorussia and Ukraine suggests a fruitful perspective from which to think comparatively about the Polish collaboration that did exist. These units were staffed by Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Belorussians, as well as Poles, and among other things they participated in mass killings of Jews in 1941–3. Dean's dispassionate study, with its singular refusal to condemn or defend any particular ethnic group, surveys masses of newly available archival documents, and represents a leap forward in knowledge about the crimes perpetrated in this region, which have usually been ascribed to the German Order Police and *Einsatzgruppen*.

In some senses the men of the *Schutzmannschaften* indeed appear as 'ordinary men'. The earliest contingents joined in hopes of gaining food and pay, and 'with regard to occupation, nationality, and education, the *Schutzmannschaft* roughly corresponded to the overall population in the area (with the natural exception of the Jews)' (p. 74). Yet they did not comprise a cross-section of the local population: they were mostly young (25–30),³⁴ and in the words of one observer (Oswald Rufeisen), 'generally . . . not held in great esteem by the local population . . . Some of them were inclined to alcoholism' (p. 65). They tended not to be educated; in the Baranovichi area fewer than 5 per cent had 'more than a very basic education' (p. 74), but the NCOs had above-average education, many being sons of priests or having a trade. All in all they seem to tend to be more in the direction of the 'rabble' once conjured by Eric Voegelin, and approvingly cited in his newest work by Jan T. Gross.³⁵

One point of agreement between Browning and Goldhagen was that killers could have left their units if they wanted to. The picture here is more complex: until the summer of 1942, the police were recruited from volunteers, but after that point conscripted. By autumn 1942 it became difficult to leave. Still, 'no instances are known in which a local policeman was actually shot for refusing to shoot Jews' (p. 102).

The tasks of *Schutzleute* varied, from deporting and killing those Jews who remained after the executions of summer and autumn 1941, to hunting down partisans and persecuting the Polish intelligentsia, to drafting persons for work in Germany. Like Pohl and Browning, Dean hesitates to reduce the motives for killing to a simple formula, and urges 'careful differentiation': 'There is no doubt that many local policemen carried out these orders [to shoot surviving Jews] with ruthless enthusiasm, but it should be recognised that motives and degree of participation

³⁴ Successive cohorts were increasingly youthful; in 1944 only 6 per cent of the *Schutzleute* in the Mir region were over 35 years of age: 72.

³⁵ See n. 13.

varied according to specific circumstances' (p. 76–7). While 'anti-Semitic insults and beatings by the local police became regular occurrences . . . nevertheless, only a few names of individuals crop up repeatedly in connection with the beatings and killings. Other policemen appear to have been less active and employed as perimeter guards; they appear to have kept themselves out of trouble where possible' (p. 76). Dean does not deny a role to 'inherent local anti-Semitism' but notes that it was 'clearly exacerbated by the anarchic conditions of war, as had happened previously during the Russian Revolution and Civil War', and that 'German propaganda was successful in equating the Jews with a Bolshevik conspiracy' (p. 77). The approximately thirty local police who took part in the massacre of 9 November 1941 in the Belorussian town of Mir were 'mainly of Belorussian nationality, with a few Poles and Tartars. Some had had relatives deported to Siberia during the brief Soviet occupation and a few were known as aggressive anti-Semites' (p. 46).

One area in which Poles in the *Schutzmannschaften* stood out was in their greater propensity to collaborate with partisans. Of the Brest region Dean writes: 'many . . . were also secretly members of the Polish underground organization' (p. 74). Otherwise little distinguished the Poles: they entered the police units at a similar rate to Ukrainians, Belorussians, or Lithuanians, and like the others became involved in (or indeed constituted) the local underworld, enriching themselves on Jewish property, and extorting from the non-Jewish population. According to a report of the Polish underground on the clearing of the Brest ghetto in October 1942, the Polish members of the local police were 'often more zealous than the Germans' (p. 96).

Such reports challenge what has been said above about the hesitancy of Poles to collaborate with the Germans. In occupied Ukraine and Belorussia, little distinction can be detected in Poles' propensity to collaborate: it was about the same as that of the other ethnic groups, except of course the Jews. Yet in areas further west, in the Generalgouvernement, collaboration among Poles was much weaker. Why was this so? The most obvious reason, and one cited by authors such as Cooper, is that the Nazis did not desire Polish collaboration in those areas. This unwillingness to make greater use of Poles is sometimes attributed to some deeper anti-Polish animus among the German National Socialists.³⁶ Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, that animus did not exist in any crystallised form before 1939; indeed until that point the Nazis hoped to enlist Poland as an ally, much as they had other east European states.³⁷

What stands out in the Polish case was rather the decision of Polish elites, fully supported by the Polish population, not to accept German overtures after the Munich conference in autumn 1938. Uniting elites and population was a strongly felt nationalism, in particular an unusually intense attachment to state sovereignty,

³⁶ For example, Abraham Brumberg writes that 'it was largely the German policy of unmitigated terror that caused Poles to refuse outright military collaboration'. See his letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 April 2001.

³⁷ See my 'Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice', *Central European History*, 32, 1 (1999).

which acceptance of German offers of alliance (against the Soviet Union) and of their demands for an extraterritorial highway through the 'Polish corridor' would have infringed. Polish defiance enraged Hitler, and from spring 1939 he planned a campaign of destruction that knew no compromises: Poland would be annihilated as a state, exploited as an economy, eroded as a nation. Therefore a plan emerged not to involve elites in collaboration – of the sort seen from places as varied as the Czech lands, France or Serbia – but to destroy them.

The fantastic violence unleashed upon Poland in September 1939 subdued armed formations in a matter of weeks, but did not pacify the territory. Soon after the army's capitulation resistance emerged in the Polish countryside, and within weeks it grew into the massive conspiratorial movement described in the early work of Jan Gross. Gross described eloquently the positive thrust of the Polish underground, which existed not so much to oppose the Germans as to assert Polish communal life. Still, as an organisation that emerged in response to German aggression, it defined and enforced an ethos that was anti-German. This consequence of the German–Polish war explains the great collective resistance to collaboration in wartime Poland – and not some peculiarly Polish love of freedom, as nationalist accounts have suggested.³⁸ The underground was an anti-German institution that penalised and successively marginalised collaboration: every sentence meted out to a Pole acting as collaborator engendered retribution, and made the acceptable lines of behaviour much clearer to those who remained. As a result, those Poles who did work for the Germans attempted self-justification through conspiratorial activity, especially as the war drew to a close. If Poles were more willing to collaborate in occupied Ukraine or Belorussia, that was because the underground state's influence was weaker in those areas.

Perhaps the greatest challenge awaiting historians is therefore not to revise existing narratives of heroism or villainy, but to embed them in contexts that are more helpful in formulating larger explanations. Cooper's exclusive concentration on Polish–Jewish relations, for example, precludes sight of other factors that limited Polish collaboration with Germans. It was precisely the often chauvinistic Polish nationalism which he decries that produced such determined resistance. Not only were anti-Nazism and antisemitism not mutually exclusive in the Polish context, one was often closely linked to the other. Thus we have the odd fact that a country pervaded by antisemitism could also produce one of the strongest resistance movements in Nazi-occupied Europe.

Perhaps Jan Gross's book too will lead to more balanced historiography, by peeling away layers of mythology about Polish relations toward their neighbours, and breaking with obsessions and taboos. A re-publication of a major documentary collection on the Holocaust by Yad Vashem and the University of Nebraska Press suggests, however, that Gross's lasting contribution will be to widen parameters of

³⁸ This interpretation is inspired by Stephen Kotkin's approach to Soviet socialism in terms of what it was not: it was not capitalism. See his *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). Similarly, Polish behaviour was largely defined by what it could not be.

inquiry rather than significantly to revise the story of Polish Jewry. This story must still be understood primarily in the context of Jewish–German relations: in these pages we can trace in English translation the various German decrees that segregated Polish Jews, by forcing them to wear the star of David (in September 1939, earlier than elsewhere), to live in separate areas, travel in separate tram and railway cars, subsist on separate diets and then submit to a series of humiliating, debilitating and ultimately lethal decrees, culminating in the order to appear for deportations ‘to the east’ in 1942. This scheme accounts for the overwhelming majority of deaths among Polish Jews. The Poles who appear in this volume are almost exclusively what Raul Hilberg has described as bystanders: bystanders who could have done more. The volume reminds readers of the scanty supply of weapons provided by the Home Army to the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943: forty-nine weapons as of mid-March (without ammunition!). At that time the Home Army possessed thousands of rifles and pistols in stocks in and near Warsaw.

We also read the last letter of Szmul Zygielbojm, the Bund representative in the Polish National Council in London, who set himself alight outside the British parliament on 11 May 1943. This desperate attempt to awaken the West, which possessed solid evidence of the murder of European Jewry, reminds readers of the major sin of omission in the Holocaust: Western passivity. Had more Poles and other east Europeans been willing to assist Jews, perhaps some thousands, or tens of thousands more would have been saved; but the fate of millions of east European Jews could only have been altered by the Allies. Whether a more decisive stance, including the directed bombing of Germany urged by Jewish leaders in Warsaw, would have impeded the killing, remains uncertain. What is known is that the powerful West, unlike thousands of destitute Poles and other Europeans in Nazi occupied Europe, failed to lift a finger. This major component of the history of Poles and Jews in the Second World War is also not likely to be revised.

To sum up: the pictures emerging of Polish–Jewish relations during the Holocaust in this ‘post-ideological’ age will perhaps produce a more balanced synthesis of competing explanations. The readings surveyed above make it clear that new approaches will be more complex, combining elements previously thought incompatible, in particular Poles as both victimizers and victims. Also clear is that self-consciously national histories have reached a point of decreasing marginal returns. Gross’s brilliantly probing questions have short-circuited the efforts of Polish historians to preserve Poland’s ‘national honor’. Why, he asks, did the rescuers of Jews seek anonymity in postwar Poland? Why were Poles eager to risk their lives in conspiracy, but averse to sheltering Jews? Even in Poland, researchers have become more willing to think of Poles as having collaborated with the Germans in many ways, including assistance in their racial war.

At the same time, Poland remains a place that produced *relatively* little collaboration with the Nazis; indeed, it was the first society to defy Hitler. Poland in this sense, of course, means more than just ‘Poles’. Though victims of officially sanctioned discrimination, millions of Polish Jews were active in the political life of interwar Poland, and were trend-setting in culture, self-sacrificing in the military.

That Poland also included Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Belorussians and Germans, who, though victims of oppression, also contributed to the life of that state. The early Gross (1979) was correct to note that the stories of these various nationalities diverged after 1939, largely because of German policies of divide and conquer.

But the later Gross also seems right in stressing the need to view these groups as parts of a whole. For one thing, they did not live in complete separation during the war: economically or politically. More important, a search for the deeper sources of crimes such as the murder at Jedwabne must transcend ethnicised collectivities such as 'ordinary Poles'. Even in its local specificity, that event can only be understood with a view to larger contexts. Only by looking beyond Jedwabne, to other places in eastern Poland, Belorussia, Ukraine and areas further south, can one explore the forces which inclined people in some areas to sense solidarity with their Jewish neighbours, but in others to treat them as less than human.

A new historiography will therefore go beyond Poles and beyond Jews, but also beyond the boundaries of the prewar Polish state, considering like contexts where they might illuminate the most vexing question for Poland and all of east central Europe: how ethnic communities that had coexisted more or less peacefully for generations, often in fruitful cross-pollination, dissolved in fear, hatred and retribution from the middle of the twentieth century onward.