

# Presence and Absence. Jews in Consciousness of Poles – Results of Empirical Research

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## Memento Student's Association at the wall of the former ghetto in Warsaw





Synagogue in Zamość; general renovation July 2009 - summer 2010

Phot. JAJ

# Kraśnik (Krasznik)



**The Great Synagogue**

**1531 first note about Jewish presence in town**



2012; Photos: Archives of the FODŹ



Rymanów 2005  
synagoga / the synagogue



Rymanów 2012  
synagoga / the synagogue

Phot. FODŹ



Bobowa

phot. Marta Duch-Dyngosz



## Synagogue in Nowy Korczyn, 1936



Built in 1659



Phot. JAJ

## Bobowa Jewish cemetery



**1200 Jewish cemeteries in Poland; 400 destroyed; phot. Chris Schwarz**



**Jewish Cemetery in Starachowice (Phot. Sz. Beźnic)**



Agencja Gazeta

SOVIET OCCUPATION 1939-1941

GERMAN OCCUPATION STARTING FROM JUNE 1941

Cliché about collaboration between the Jews and the Soviets

Pogrom in Jedwabne  
15 days after the arrival of Germans





## Poles during the WWII

Czesława Kwoka, prisoner 26947 in  
Auschwitz German Nazi Camp  
(August 15, 1941 - March 12, 1943)

- 1.8 to 1.9 million Polish civilians were victims
- Nazi ideology viewed Poles as „subhumans”
- Initially focus on murdering leaders
- Later terror against randomly chosen individuals
- Since October 15, 1941 – death penalty for rescuing Jews
- Germanization of the annexed land
- Approx. 50,000 children were kidnapped from Poland
- At least 1.5 million Polish citizens were taken to Germany for labor
- One of the largest underground resistance movement in Europe
- August 1, 1944 - 63 days of an uprising in Warsaw against Germans

# What is specific about Poland?

- ❑ close to 90 % of the 3.5 million Polish Jews who inhabited Poland on the eve of WWII perished in the Holocaust
- ❑ of the 5.9 million Jews murdered during the war, about 80 % were killed on occupied Polish territory



# MAIN CAMPS AND KILLING SITES DURING THE HOLOCAUST

© 2006 Yad Vashem

- Camp
  Extermin. Camp
  Killing Site
- The Great Reich
  Satellite Countries
- German Civil Administration
  Allies
- German Military Administration
  Italy
- Neutral Countries
  Italian Occupation
- Borders: March 11, 1938



# **All six former German Nazi death camps are in today's Poland**

- Auschwitz-Birkenau
- Bełżec
- Kulmhof (Chełmno)
- Majdanek
- Sobibór
- Treblinka



**Kulmhof (Chełmno)**



**Sobibór**



**Bełżec**

**Auschwitz-Birkenau**

**Treblinka**

**Majdanek**





- The world's symbol of the Holocaust is Auschwitz, a camp initially set up for Polish prisoners
- Between June 1940 and January 1945 from 1.1 to 1.5 million people were murdered there, 90% of them Jews
- 140,000 to 150,000 Poles were taken to Auschwitz
- 70,000 to 75,000 died
- The largest Jewish cemetery in the world and also the largest Polish cemetery.
- It has become a universal symbol of terror

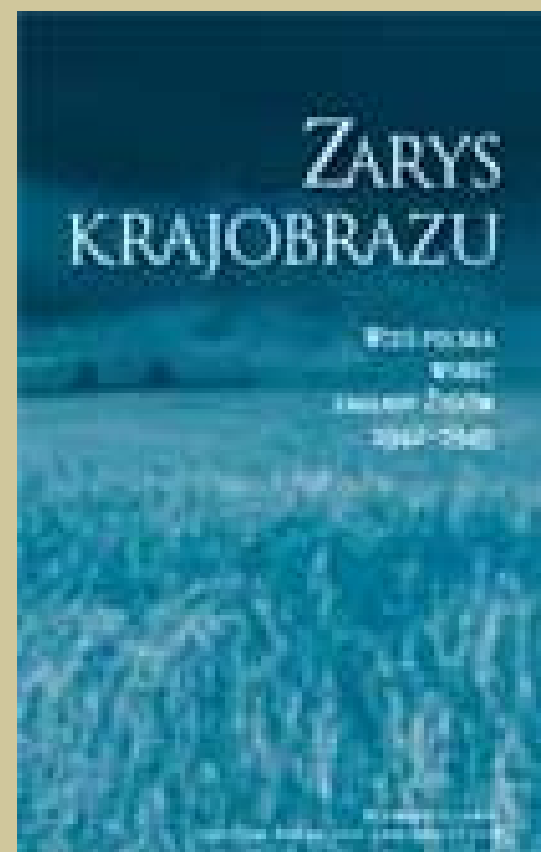
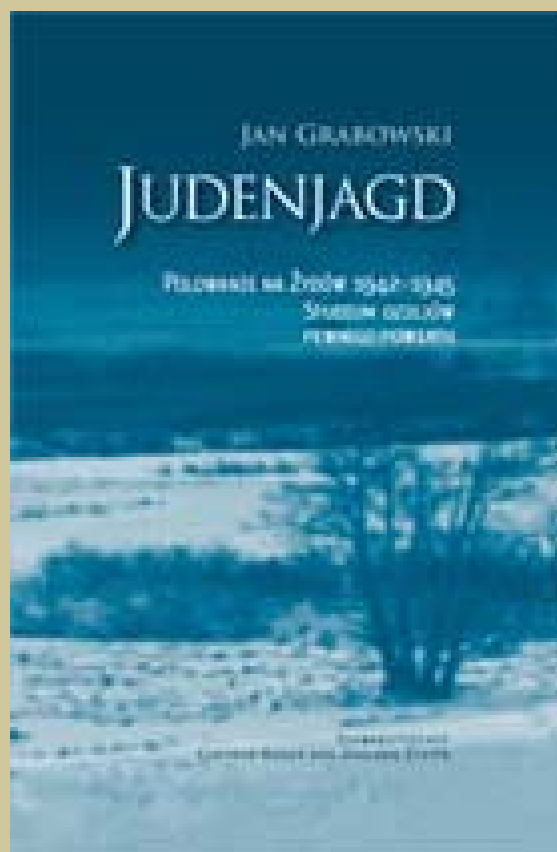
Phot. Chris Schwarz

It is estimated that after the Holocaust survived about 250,000 of Polish Jews, mostly in the Soviet Union

New studies estimated that 10% of Polish Jews have tried to escape, 250,000 searched for help, 30,000-60,000 survived among Polish population, 10,000-15,000 survived among partisans and in forests

175,000-210,000 died in the last, third phase of the Holocaust (Barbara Engelking-Boni, 2011).

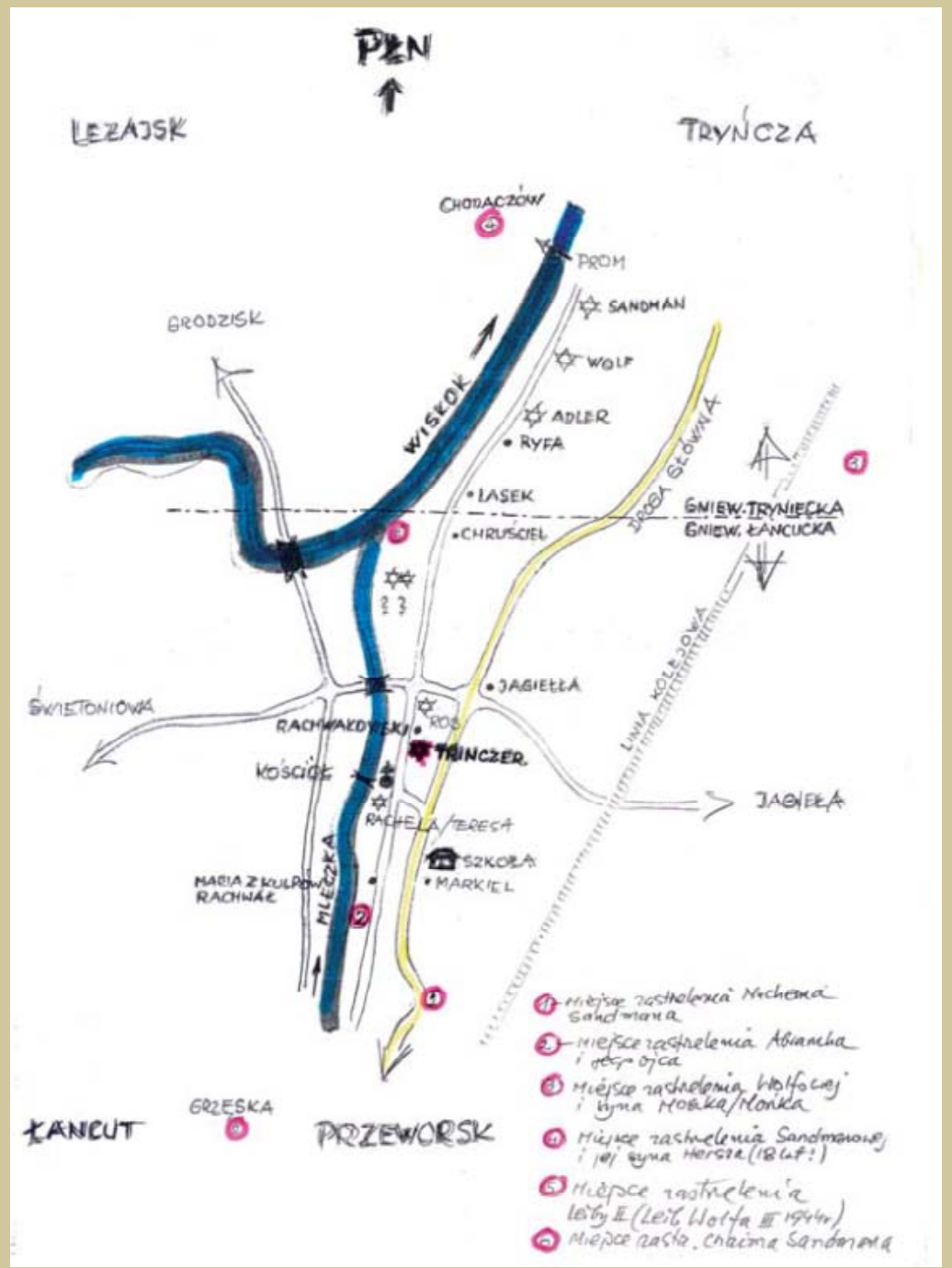
Poles had influence on the last phase of the Holocaust.



„Jakie to ma znaczenie, czy zrobili to z chciwości?”

Zagłada domu Trynczerów

TADEUSZ MARKIEL  
ALINA SKIBIŃSKA



- For 45 years, except for research, there was silence about Jewish subjects in Polish schools, the media, the Church and in families
- The national memory of the Holocaust was made officially non-existent
- Family memories and personal memories still vivid after WWII were suppressed, denied, distorted and falsified as the years went by
- The destruction of whole Jewish districts in Warsaw, Lublin and many other Polish towns and cities made it easier for society to forget



# Main trends in education about WWII in Poland

- narratives about Polish national martyrology
- focus on damages done by Nazis
- attention paid to defense
- tendency to avoid difficult topics: collaboration, anomie, common indifference and cases of individual and group (not underground state) active cooperation in the Holocaust

## **Causes of amnesia in ref. to the Holocaust in Poland (Kula)**

- Distance toward Jews, antisemitism, exclusion from the community
- Strong feeling of nationality among Poles
- Communist ideology censorship
- Lack of Jews, carriers of memory

## Three phases of memory formation related to WWII:

- I phase - “living memory” (1944/45-1949)
- II phase - “legalized memory” (1950-1979)
- III phase - attempt of “memory reanimation” (after 1980)

Robert Traba

II phase - confiscated memory (Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la Memoire*, Paris 1995)

## Polish remembrance of the WWII, survey and FGIs

- *The Polish collective memory of World War II integrates the Soviet occupation of the eastern areas, and the Nazi occupation in the west.*
- *Surveys carried out from 1965 to 2004 demonstrate that for the majority of Poles World War II gives them reason to be proud, and few see any cause for shame.*

Barbara Szacka, Polish Sociological Review, vol. 36, no. 4, Winter 2006/2007, 8-26.

# Antoni Sułek, lecture at the UW 15.12.2009

Jews are perceived as a threat to Polish national identity

Therefore memory of the Holocaust is:

- hardly being included to the community of memory
- being blocked by:
  - lack of closeness between Poles and Jews
  - strong (live) awareness of own suffering
  - assumption about particular martyrology of own nation

# RECOGNITION OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

July 10, 2001 Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski, apologized for the pogrom in Jedwabne





Phot. David A. Goldfarb

“The World Knew – Jan Karski’s Mission for Humanity” exhibition was officially opened at the United Nations on January 22, 2013.



Students from Kansas, discovered a Polish Catholic woman who saved Jewish children

# Ulm Family, Markowa



**Maria Janion, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 6 (2007), 8**

- ....“we will never be purified”
- „the Holocaust will remain a mourning without end”
- “the chance is not lost, and it is worth talking especially to young people”



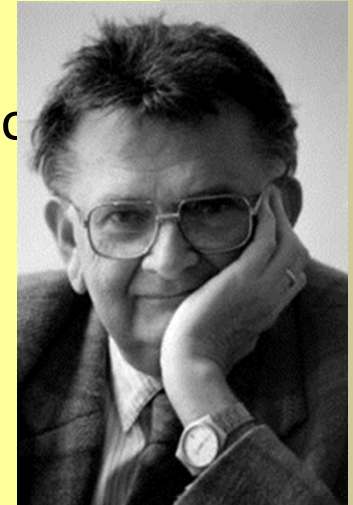
Maier Charles S., Hot Memory, Cold Memory....

Res Publica Nowa, July 2001.

- Modern memory cannot be universal
- *Communities of memory*
  - ◆ collective identity is created by common recollection of history
    - ☞ common - because members of the community are victims
- *Communities of memory* cannot empathize with the victims from other *communities of memory*

# Public debates

- Jan Błoński (1987), *Poor Poles are Looking at the Ghetto....*, Tygodnik Powszechny
  - Jews were excluded from the community of neighbors and co-citizens
- Jan Tomasz Gross (2000), *Neighbors*
- Jan Tomasz Gross (2007), *Fear*
- Jan Tomasz Gross, Irena Grudzińska-Gross, (2011), *Golden Harvest*



## Czesław Miłosz, *A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto*

(...)

Slowly, boring a tunnel, a guardian mole makes his way,

With a small red lamp fastened to his forehead.

He touches buried bodies, counts them, pushes on,

He distinguishes human ashes by their luminous vapor,

The ashes of each man by a different part of the spectrum.

Bees build around a red trace.

Ants build around the place left by my body.

I am afraid, so afraid of the guardian mole.

He has swollen eyelids, like a Patriarch

Who has sat much in the light of candles

Reading the great book of the species.

What will I tell him, I, a Jew of the New Testament,

Waiting two thousand years for the second coming of Jesus?

My broken body will deliver me to his sight

And he will count me among the helpers of death:

The uncircumcised.

Warsaw, 1943 (from *The Collected Poems: 1931-1987*, The Ecco Press, 1988)

The Shalom Foundation collected over 8.000 pictures that still existed 50 years after the Holocaust



Jacek Goldman and his sister Wanda, Kraków, 1924

# Museum of the History of Polish Jews

[www.jewishmuseum.org.pl](http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl)

- an international group of experts since 1999
- financed by the Polish State, the City of Warsaw, the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland and private donors
- The Museum's mission is *to present the history of the Jews on Polish soil and the richness of their culture, and to help young Jews and Poles break down prejudice and bias by showing the truth of their mutual relations*



(Fot. Stefan Romanik / Agencja Gazeta)

Chris Schwarz/Jonathan Webber, *Traces of Memory*  
permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum Galicia in Cracow  
[April 19, 2012 at the JCC in DC]



Stary Dzików near Jarosław, Poland

## "The Jews of Loslau" - open group for commemoration



*I just light a candle and put the stones in a place where Jews are buried in Loslau (Wodzisław)*

Grzegorz Meisel

## "The Jews of Loslau" - open group for commemoration.





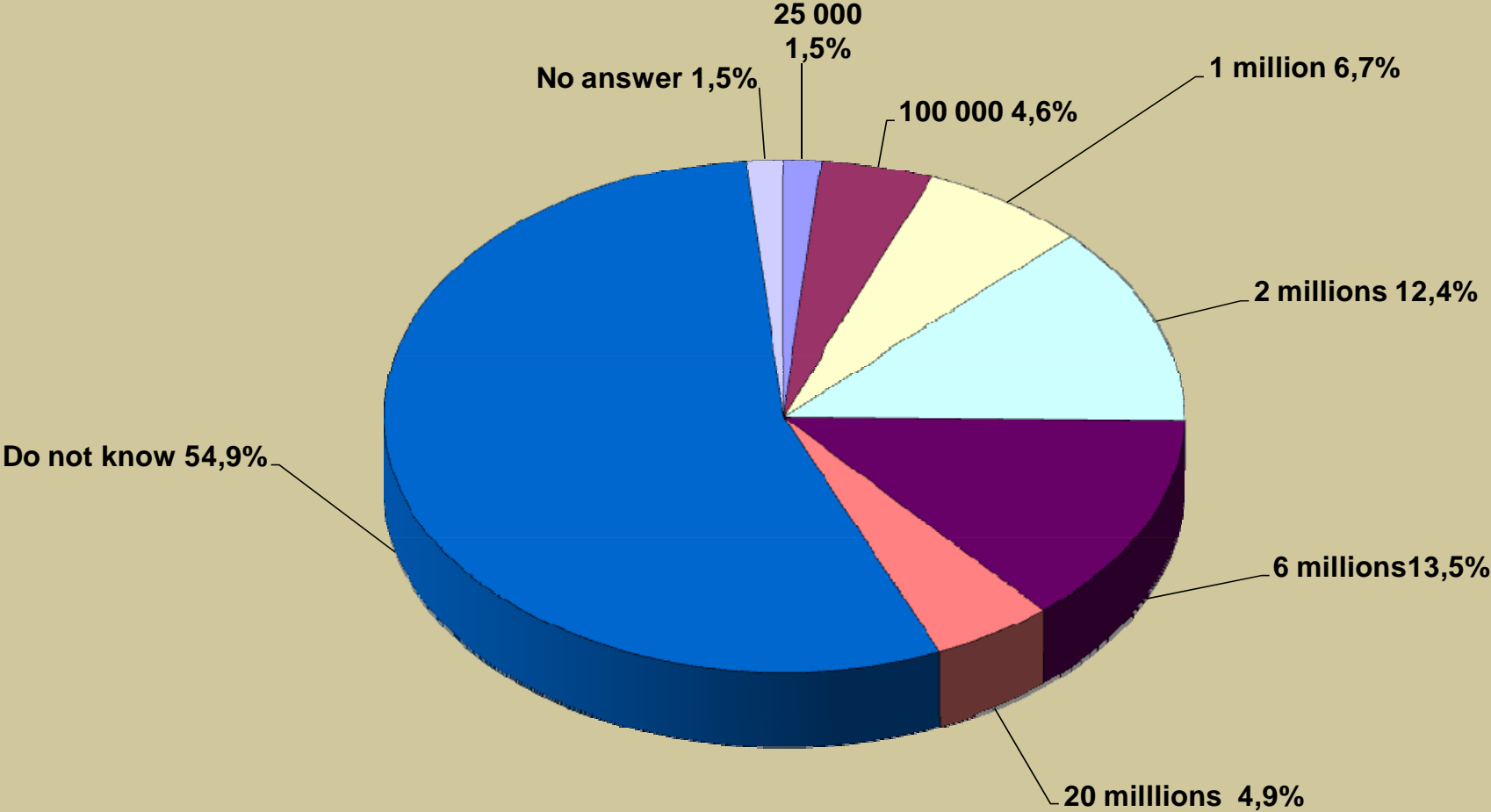
# **The March of the Living**

- **1988**
- **1998 – the invitation to Polish youth**



HEY, MARCH OF THE LIVING!  
COME INSIDE AND SEE SOME JEWISH LIFE

# How many Jews died during the World War II?



- The poll shows that for a majority of young Poles (85 percent) Auschwitz-Birkenau is the symbol of the Holocaust (Kucia, 2000)
- 89 percent (Kucia, 2000) and 47% (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, 2008) of the students surveyed know that most of the victims of Auschwitz were Jews
- In 2008 poll (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs) lower percentage of youth claims that Poles were the largest group of victims (10,4%) than in 2000 poll (Kucia) (26%).

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## Do you think that the Poles helped the Jews during the war?

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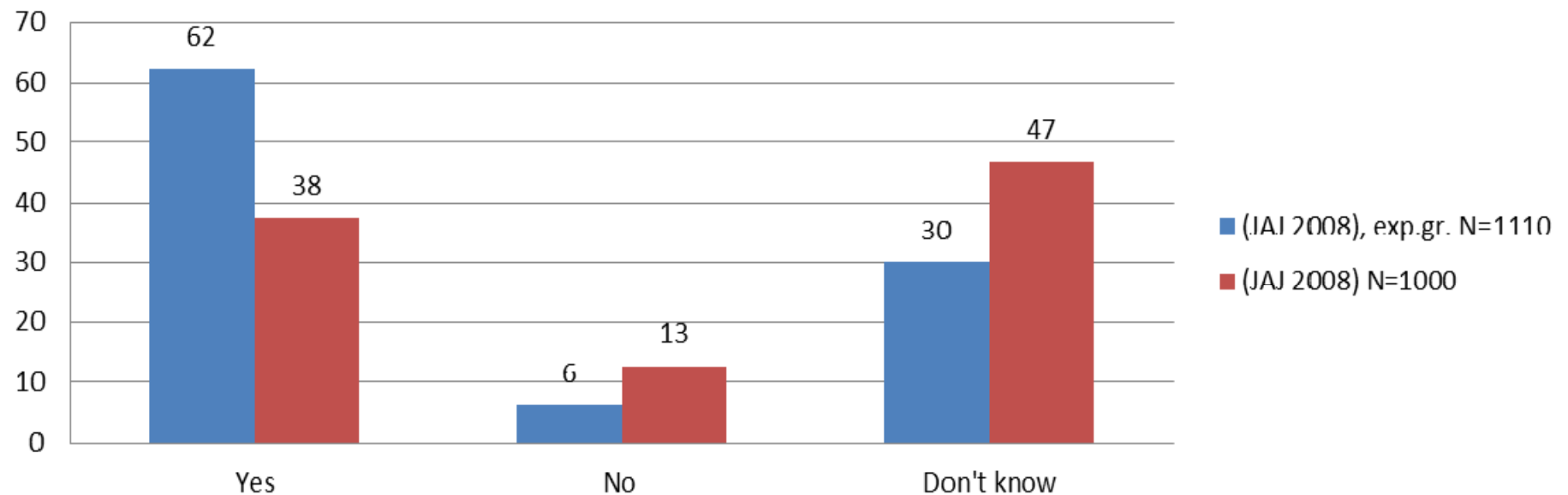
	1998		2008	
	N	%	N	%
Yes, as much as they could	444	46.2	522	51,9
They could have done more	89	9.3	108	10,8
They did not help at all	16	1.7	23	2,3
Hard to say	413	42.9	302	30,9
Total	962	100	955	100

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Discrepancy between research (Engelking, Żbikowski, Tokarska-Bakir, Skibińska, Petelewicz, Libionka, Grabowski and others) and education

Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, Project "Attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust among Polish Youth 2008-2010" Grant ITF, the Foundation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the Jagiellonian University

## Responses to the question: Is the memory of the Holocaust important for you? (%)



## How is the Holocaust taught in post-primary schools in Poland?

- "standard" indoor education (mostly based on the official curriculum)
- field education (school trips to memorial sites + NGO projects)

## **Educational challenges**

- Despite the effort of so many researchers, the genocide of Polish Jews is not integrated into the war narrative and martyrology of Polish nation





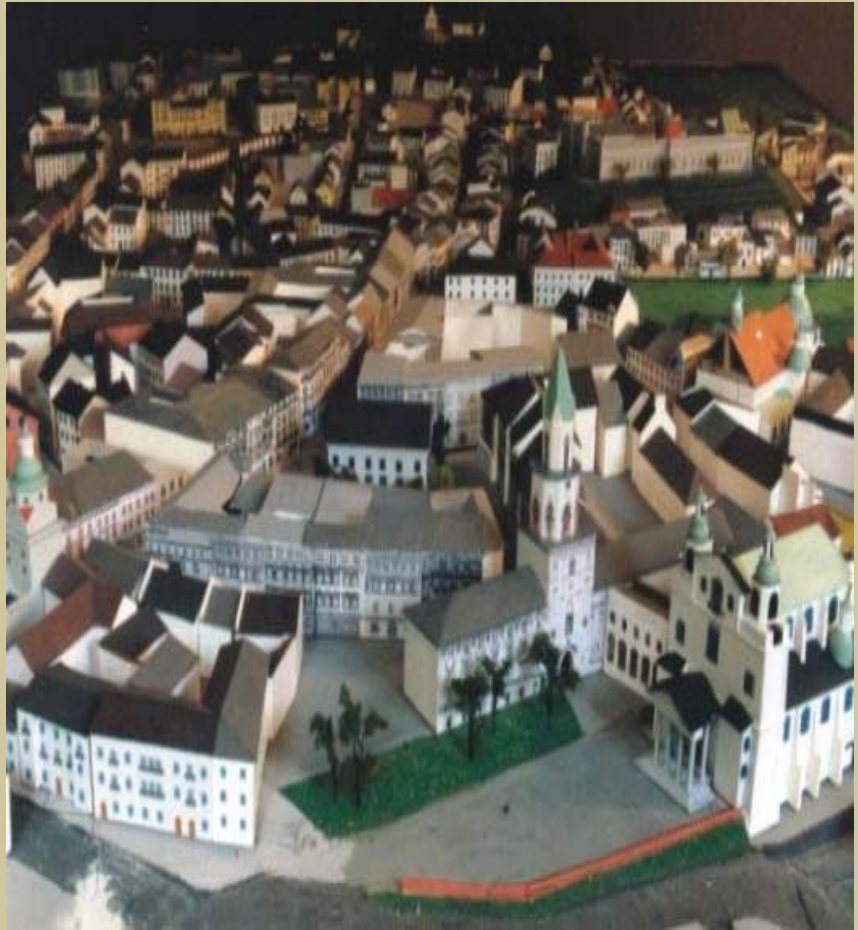
**March of Memory, Cracow**



**Reflection at the Jewish cemetery in Tykocin**

Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, Project "Attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust among Polish Youth 2008-2010" Grant ITF, the Foundation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the Jagiellonian University

# City Gate Theater NN



# Lublin, City Gate – Theater NN



Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, Project "Attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust among Polish Youth 2008-2010" Grant ITF, the Foundation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the Jagiellonian University

# „Letter to Henio” [Żytomirski] (since 2005) Grodzka Gate – Theater NN Association in Lublin



5th July 1939: Henio in front of the bank PEKAO in Lublin.  
In a couple of months, on the first of September 1939, he  
was meant to start school.

Phot. Szymon Beźnic

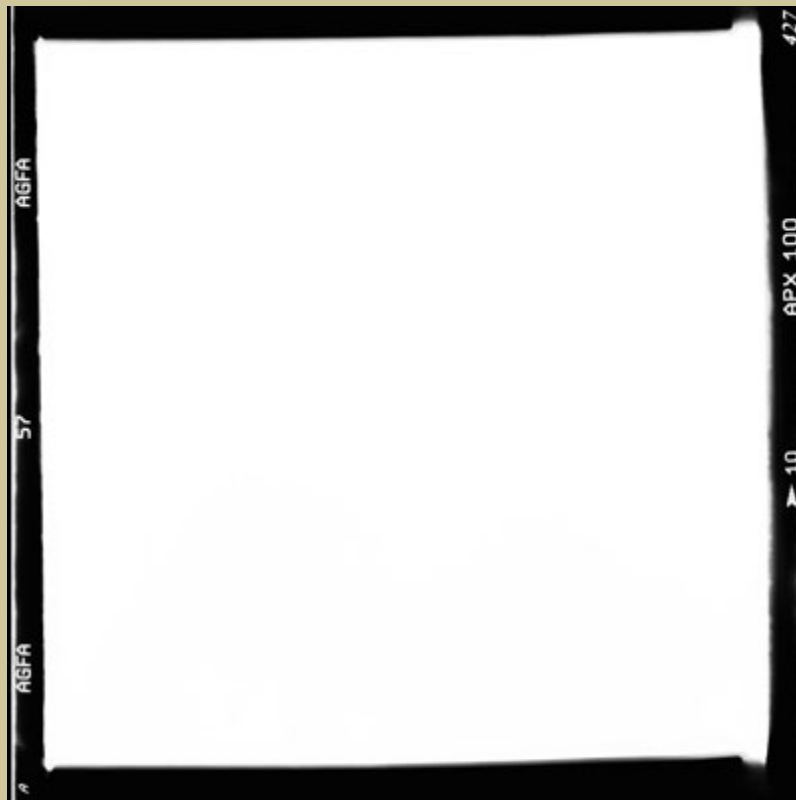
# Elżbieta Janicka



# Elżbieta Janicka, TREBLINKA II (10 07 2004)

from „Miejsce nieparzyste”/Odd Places

The photographs depict air (in Poland we breathe differently - says the artist)



**ŁUKASZ BAKSIK (born 1975)**  
**Matzevot for Everyday Use**

**Jewish tombstones convey information about the life of people, families and entire shtetls (towns).**

**During the World War II the Nazi occupants used matzevot to pave the courtyards of their new buildings, to lay roads or erect walls.**

**Poles continued this infamous practice after the war.**

**Matzevot were used, for instance, to line a water pool for fire fighters, a railway embankment or a riverbank. They were used as building material for furnaces, flooring and road curbs.**

ŁUKASZ BAKSIK

Matzevot for Everyday Use, cont.





# Interwar debate

Reminded by: Jacek Kurski, Wprowadzenie. [In:] Pamięć jako przedmiot władzy. Ed. by Piotr Kosiewski, Fundacja Batorego, Warszawa 2008.

Henryk Sienkiewicz

Stefan Żeromski

## Functions of history

to sustain hearts

to scratch national scars  
(rake the ashes)  
(flog a dead horse)

Two diverse visions and approaches to history and education

Education consequences  
Multicultural education  
Regional history presenting  
Jewish history and culture as a  
component enriching Polish history  
and culture

New historiographical research

**JOANNA MICHLIC**

**Remember to remember**

**Remember to benefit**

**Remember to forget**

**Memory of attitudes of Poles toward Jews during  
WWII**

Remember on the surface (openly)

Remember near the surface (using code)

Remember under surface (silence or remember  
selectively)

JAJ, Reference to Małgorzata Melchior's categories of survival

Private archives of: Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, Katarzyna Suszkiewicz, Marta Duch Dyngosz, Szymon Beźnic, Agnieszka Wilczyńska

The archives of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland

<http://www.krasnik.pl>

[http:// www.fzp.net.pl](http://www.fzp.net.pl)

[http:// www.sztetl.org.pl](http://www.sztetl.org.pl)

<http://www.nowykorczyn.pl>

[www.culture.pl](http://www.culture.pl)

[www.artnet.com](http://www.artnet.com)

<http://www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/memorials/hoheisel/brandenbug.html>

**Thank you for your attention!**



**Bodzentyn**

phot. Sz. Beźnic