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## Introduction

### *Imaginary Neighbors*

#### Toward an Ethical Community

DOROTA GLOWACKA AND  
JOANNA ZYLINSKA

In Anna Bikont's book *My z Jedwabnego* (Us from Jedwabne, 2004), an ethnographic-testimonial work on past and present Polish-Jewish relations, we are introduced to one of her interlocutors, Jan Skrodzki, a retired engineer from Gdańsk, whom she describes as "an ordinary Pole." Carrying a memory of the fact that during World War II his life was saved by a Jew, but also suspicious that his father may have taken part in the pogroms against the Jewish neighbors, he confesses to Bikont, "I feel responsible for Jedwabne, Radziłów, for everything that might yet come to light."<sup>1</sup> Skrodzki has made a considerable investment trying to determine the extent of his father's complicity. A well-meaning relative advises him, however, not to waste any money on traveling around Poland to uncover the truth about his father's possible involvement in the murders but instead to "give money in the intention of his father's soul and thus earn himself a clean conscience."<sup>2</sup> This anecdote poignantly illustrates the paradoxes of past and present Polish-Jewish relations. It shows that the (religiously inflected) ethos of neighborly hospitality, responsibility, and courage on which Poles often pride themselves nevertheless remains tainted with hostility, amnesia, and a desire to calculate meticulously all investments, losses, and gains in order to arrive at a "clean slate."

This is not to deny the fact that for centuries Poland was a land of hospitality to the Jews and that Poles were known to have acted as gracious

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hosts on numerous occasions. This tradition of hospitality nevertheless found itself on trial during the interwar period, and even more so as the events of the Shoah unfolded. Still, as Michael C. Steinlauf points out, the ambivalence of Polish-Jewish neighborly relations, frequently accompanied by the withdrawal of hospitality on the part of the Poles, must be examined in the broader context of the traumatic wounds that were inflicted on the Polish collective psyche not only during World War II but also before the war and for many decades thereafter. One of the most profound aspects of the war trauma suffered by the Poles was that, apart from being victims of Nazi expansionist politics, they found themselves in the position of “witnesses to the Holocaust, from beginning to end.” It can be argued that this act of involuntary witness to an almost total, carefully planned annihilation of their neighbors “at close range, for such a long time” has not been easily assimilated into Polish collective memory.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it continues to exert a powerful impact on the Polish nation. One can even go so far as to suggest that this unmourned, traumatic loss of the Jewish neighborly presence, combined with a sense of horror and guilt that remain unaccounted for, has contributed to the strengthening of the idea of the monocultural Polish community in the postwar period.

It is this concept of the national community, with all its violent, exclusionary founding mechanisms, that we take in this volume as a starting point for our investigations of Polish-Jewish relations. In his influential study *Imagined Communities* (1991), Benedict Anderson underscores the tremendous power of the idea of the nation *precisely as an idea, or image*, in shaping a community. Taking inspiration from Anderson’s eponymous concept, we have developed the notion of “imaginary neighbors” in order to describe Polish-Jewish coexistence before and during the Holocaust. Neighborliness serves here as more than a description of a material socio-historical community; it is also a politico-ethical concept that will allow us to articulate the difficulties, tasks, and responsibilities involved in the living together of the Poles and the Jews within the space of one fragile nation. According to Anderson, any national community is an imagined cultural and political artifact that provides a collectivity with a sense of

continuity and cohesiveness. The community proclaims itself through myth, which tells the story of the community's inauguration and its continuing existence. Its members identify themselves through their relation to this mythical foundation, as it is continuously repeated in the rituals of remembrance. The idea of the community is so forceful that it is possible for its members "to willingly die for such limited imaginings."<sup>4</sup> What will be of particular interest to us here in the exploration of recent Polish-Jewish history and memory is the myth-making quality of the narratives of Polish nationhood together with the mechanisms of fantasy, occlusion, and foundational violence that lie at the origin of any such myth.

We thus present *Imaginary Neighbors: Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations after the Holocaust* as a forum to explore the complexities of Polish-Jewish relations.<sup>5</sup> Without doubt, in the scholarship concerning the memory of the Shoah and its contemporary cultural constructions, this is one of the most important but also most divisive issues. In comparison with the large volume of works on the Holocaust in the West (the United States in particular), the discussion in Poland has been emerging rather belatedly. It has also been occurring within a very different set of parameters, largely because for Poles, unlike for Americans (for whom the Holocaust seems to have a certain mythic quality), the horrors of the war continue to be quite tangible—haunting the domestic landscapes and resonating with familiar names. And yet even in Poland, despite the geographical and historical proximity to the site of the trauma, Holocaust memory is becoming what Marianna Hirsch has dubbed "post-memory"—a vicarious construction predicated on the absence of the historical event. Not unlike in the United States, Polish memory of the Holocaust has been hypermediated by a variety of cultural productions, created by postwar generations and overdetermined by the concerns of the present rather than the past. But we do not attempt here to recover some mythical immediacy of the Holocaust experience in Poland—it is rather the complex and often convoluted processes of *mediation* involved in the construction of national history and memory that will be of interest to us.

The original impetus for this collection was provided by the publication of *Neighbors* (Polish edition 2000, U.S. edition 2001)—in which Jan

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Tomasz Gross discusses the murders of hundreds of Jews by their Polish neighbors on July 10, 1941, in the town of Jedwabne in northeastern Poland—as well as by the ensuing international debate surrounding Gross’s revelations. Both in Poland and abroad, the “Jedwabne controversy” has shown that Polish and Jewish memories of the war remain in conflict. Polish national narratives of heroism, oppression, and liberation have yielded stories of sacrifice for the fatherland, including tales of the selfless rescue of the Jews. They stand in stark contrast to the Jewish narratives of suffering, senseless death, and betrayal. Thus the debate surrounding Gross’s book has revealed once again the divisive nature of Polish-Jewish memory. It has also drawn attention, on the one hand, to the multiple images of Poland and Polishness circulating on both sides of the Atlantic in diasporic stories of survival, migration, and return and, on the other, to the various representations of Jews and Jewishness in the Polish cultural and historical imaginary.

Since imagination and narrative play a significant role in the emergence of political concepts, we consider it necessary to probe Polish-Jewish neighborliness, its history and memory, in the context of the narratives involved in the construction of Polish national identity. As many of our contributors argue in the volume, the Polish national narrative has been based on the romantic myth of sacrificial love for the fatherland, yet its force has been fueled by a sometimes vicious, even internecine, logic of exclusion. What Gross’s book has demonstrated is that xenophobic rage is a collateral symptom of an affective investment in messianic nationalism and that it may culminate in the murder of the other, as it did in Jedwabne. On July 10, 1941, that xenophobic hatred, which we can perhaps read as the flip side of the Polish love for the fatherland, unleashed its murderous force against the Jewish neighbor, who had been identified with a threat to the imaginary unity of the community. It was a unique “foreign” menace indeed, considering that in a large number of communities in Poland, Jews had lived next door to Poles for centuries. Frequently perceived as an alien and unwanted element in the fabric of Polish society, after 1936 in particular Jews were situated outside the communal bond, sometimes unwilling to participate and more often disallowed participation in the foundational myth.<sup>6</sup>

The national narrative, compounded with aberrations of communist rule in postwar Poland, thus culminated in a particularly skewed story of World War II. The elimination of the Jewish stranger from this narrative has been continually reenacted through the obliteration of the memory of the victim. This has led to what we may describe as a “pathological amnesia” about Jewish life and death. The exclusionary mechanism at work in the construction of historical memory in Poland may explain, at least in part, why what happened to the Jews during the Holocaust did not change Polish attitudes toward their (ex-)neighbors.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that the totalizing and exclusionary impulse of the national myth is even stronger when the idea of the nation is only a phantasm, and when it cannot be projected upon a concrete geopolitical configuration. Such was indeed the case in Poland, which since the end of the eighteenth century had suffered for extended periods under Russian, Prussian, and Austrian occupation. Thus when discussing the obliteration of the Jewish presence from memory in Poland, as well as when evaluating recent attempts at its resurrection, it is important to consider Poland’s history, Polish identity, and the Poles’ neighborly hospitality (or a lack thereof) in the context of their own historical situation. After all, at the time when the idea of nationalism was being consolidated in Europe, from the turn of the eighteenth century until the end of World War I, Poland as a nation-state did not exist on the map. Consequently, Poles’ sense of national identity must have developed as “imagined” in another, less figurative sense of the term—as a projection that compensated for this affective and symbolic void. Considering the unparalleled force of Polish patriotism and nationalist sentiment, we can speculate that the myth of collective “being-in-common”—to use the term of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy—operated even when, or especially when, the country did not exist as a sovereign political entity.

As both Anderson and Nancy point out, the national narrative requires that certain historical facts and certain people, national heroes in particular, be rescued from oblivion. They must be continuously “exhumed,” and their often violent deaths must be remembered as “our own”; others, however, must be forgotten. National narratives thus spring from such

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constitutive oblivion as much as they do from what has been immortalized in remembrance. This is why the resurrection of the Jewish martyrs (and here we should consider the symbolic dimension of the exhumation of Jedwabne victims' remains during the inquiry by the Polish Institute of National Memory), as well as of the Jewish cultural memory at large, is vital for the ongoing reevaluation of Polish national identity in Poland's postcommunist "return to Europe" period of the early twenty-first century.

Even though the idea of a national community seems to be based on foundational violence and constitutive exclusion, in *Inoperative Community* Nancy considers the possibility of rethinking community in a nontotalitarian way and of searching for a political space where the communal "we" would not be oppressive to those whom it identifies as its others. Such processes have both political and ethical significance. They are based on the ethical recognition that prior to an identity or substance, we are already "with" others, that we are "in-common." In other words, we always *share* the political space because we are constituted as subjects only as we appear in it with others. We thus remain exposed to others and are "re-sounding onto the outside."<sup>8</sup> This (inevitable) call for an ethical opening and ethical community, which we borrow from Nancy as much as from Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, is one of the driving forces behind this book. Via an engagement with the ethical philosophy of these thinkers, we hope to imagine neighborliness beyond the historical accusations of failed hospitality and to see it instead as an ethical project of living with others, while negotiating the antagonisms implicated in those complex relations of otherness in the transcultural spaces of the "globalized" world.

Christian theologian Henry Knight argues that in order to begin to heal the traumatic wounds inflicted by the Shoah, one must institute a new ethics of unconditional hospitality: "Hospitality heals when it restores alienated and marginalized others to the community."<sup>9</sup> If, even in the darkest moment and amidst the Holocaust horror, instances of such hospitality were recorded—as illustrated by the selfless acts of rescuers who adhered to such ethics with total disregard for their own safety—perhaps it is not

naïve to hope for glimpses of this today. On the other hand, we have to bear in mind that Antonina Wyrzykowska, honored as Righteous among the Nations for rescuing seven survivors of Jedwabne in 1941, had to leave her hometown for fear of retribution from her former neighbors and was afraid to show her face to the camera during the interview in Agnieszka Arnold's documentary on Jedwabne, *Neighbors* (1998). Also, we need to ask how such an ethics of hospitality can be concretely implemented in today's Poland, considering that the vast majority of Polish Jews have tragically disappeared. Can a more welcoming and more neighborly *memory* of the Polish Jews be considered as a form of hospitable abode, a phantom space of welcome?

Questions of ethics do not of course exist in a vacuum; they remain tied to specific historical events and memories. One of the basic questions of this volume is to what extent the Polish national narrative before, during, and after the war, as well as in postcommunist Poland, has been consolidated at the cost of eliminating the memory of Jewish life and Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. This leads to further, often uneasy questions about the extent and nature of Polish antisemitism, about the prevalence of antisemitic myths and images in the Polish cultural imaginary, and about the way they have contributed to the pathologies of Holocaust remembrance and commemoration in Poland. Conversely, considering the intransigent nature of the Jewish memory of Polish betrayal, we need to ask whether the Jewish narrative of continuing survival in the diaspora is not also, to an extent, grounded in the foreclosure of the Polish story. It is then likewise important to engage with Jewish representations of Poles and Poland, in which Poland is variously imagined as the place of origin, an absent presence, a site of trauma, or even a graveyard. In the accounts of survivors and their children, Poland tends to appear as an imaginary homeland, reconfigured in terms of narratives of exile and survival, of brotherhood and betrayal, of the possibility and impossibility of return. One needs to ask to what extent the narrative of Jewish identity after the Shoah, which invests in the story of shared suffering and death, is in turn predicated on the erasure of its links to the Polish past.

In that context, how are we to appraise the recent revival of interest in

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Jewish culture, history and religion in Poland, including a sudden popularity of Jewish writers and philosophers, courses in Jewish literature and history, conversions to Judaism, Jewish-themed cafés and restaurants in the reconstructed district of Kazimierz (a former Jewish district in Kraków), and the massively popular annual Festival of Jewish Culture? Are these phenomena an expression of fashionable cultural nostalgia, dependent on and arising from historical amnesia? Or do they signal that Poland as a nation is beginning to engage in a more profound work of mourning and to produce different narratives of loss and absence, in which not only historical but also moral justice is at stake?<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps we should also ask whether Poles can bear witness to Jewish suffering at all, and if so, what forms and specific configurations this witnessing can take. Further, to what extent is it necessary for Poles to do so in order to come to terms with the difficult past? Is such witnessing an option for second, third, and subsequent generations of Poles, for those increasingly sympathetic “witnesses without the event”?<sup>11</sup> Another difficult yet necessary question arising is whether such witnessing would have to be reciprocated by a Jewish witness, if only in the form of acknowledgment, to Polish suffering.

One may wonder about the viability of our premise of staging a Polish-Jewish ethical opening and reinstating at least a virtual neighborly community. Specifically, are the forgiveness and reconciliation between Poles and Jews that our contributors discuss possible or even desirable, and what do these terms mean, considering the post-Shoah history of irreconcilable differences? Eugene J. Fisher, of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, once commented: “I believe it is the height of arrogance for Christians to ask Jews to forgive them. On what grounds? We can, as established by evidence of changed teachings and changed behavior, work toward mutual reconciliation with Jews. But we have no right to put Jewish survivors in the impossible moral position of offering forgiveness, implicitly, in the name of six million. Placing a Jew in this anguished position further victimizes him or her.”<sup>12</sup> Would this alleged impossibility of asking for forgiveness invalidate President Kwaśniewski’s symbolic gesture of apologizing to the Jews on the occasion of the unveiling of the new

monument in Jedwabne in July 2001? Would it render null all efforts to instantiate a meaningful Polish-Jewish encounter? Finally, it is important to ask to what extent Poland's recent efforts to come to terms with its difficult past and to account for the disappearance of its Jewish culture may be related to the nation's desire to discard the legacy of the communist era and to become a strong presence in the rapidly changing economic and geopolitical landscape of Europe.

All these questions have been ardently raised, in one form or another, in Poland over the last few years, especially in the aftermath of the publication of Gross's *Neighbors*. The disintegration of the communist bloc and the opening of the archives have prompted reexamination of the narratives of the past. In Poland and abroad some of the "new historians," to use Gross's term, have explored the little-known historical facts, which has allowed them to confront the nation's collective memory, amnesia, and different manifestations of its "pervasive antisemitism." And yet it seems to us that Polish attitudes toward the Jews and Jewish conceptions of Poles and Poland have remained largely *untheorized*. For instance, many questions relating to Polish and Jewish cultural imaginary, the impact of conflicted memory on both individual and collective psyche, and the ethical as well as political implications of past events for the future, have been left in abeyance. Further, little attention has been given to the inscriptions of these questions in works of literature written in Poland, the United States, and elsewhere—even though several excellent critical analyses of "the representation of the figure of the Jew" in Polish literature have been produced in recent years.<sup>13</sup> As a result, not only has literature been disregarded in its ability to offer important insights into historical phenomena, but the aesthetic dimension of cultural representations has also been circumvented. Indeed the animated discussions in the wake of the revelations about Jedwabne have either been situated on the emotive plane or have been dealt with through more traditional historical and sociological analyses, with few attempts to examine critically the involved parties' motives and subject positions. Similarly, not much has been written about the tenuous space where national and religious narratives compete or about the causes of the antagonistic nature of this conjunction.

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By picking up these important questions from amidst the current debates and projecting them against a broader theoretical background afforded by different scholarly disciplines, our book is intended to fill these gaps. Drawing on a multiplicity of perspectives, the volume has been conceived as an animated conversation among cultural theorists, philosophers, literary critics, historians, theologians, and writers. Specifically, the authors draw on work in the area of literary theory (poststructuralism, hermeneutics), philosophy (questions of ethics, aesthetics, and axiology), psychoanalysis (Freudian and Lacanian), historiography, cultural anthropology, film studies, and cultural studies (debates around race, ethnicity, national identity, and their representations).

However, scholarly analyses are accompanied here by personal narratives. Bringing together on the pages of *Imaginary Neighbors* theoretical essays and literary and journalistic accounts has proved once again, we believe, that such distinctions are increasingly impossible to maintain and that any writing, be it in the most covert forms of theoretical analysis, engages the questions of individual and collective self-identity. This personal dimension underscores the importance of individual responsibility of *any* writing, which, in the face of crises such as Jedwabne, can no longer hide behind the presuppositions of value-free, scientific objectivity, on the one hand, and subjective experience, free from collective responsibility, on the other. The contributors come from different national, cultural, and religious backgrounds, although many are indeed Polish and Polish-Jewish expatriates of the first and second generation after the Shoah, and their respective commentaries reflect this variety. The book itself can thus be conceived as a form of imagined community of minds—engaged in a conversation, in a writing-in-common, and perhaps also in the performance of an ethics of hospitality and welcome. It is in this sense that it responds to the shattering wrought upon the Polish national myth by the Jedwabne crisis, after which any “imaginings” of national cohesion cannot be upheld in good faith.

In accordance with the themes delineated, we have divided the volume into three sections. The first, “History and Memory,” opens with an essay by Joanna B. Michlic, “The Dark Past: Polish-Jewish Relations in the

Shadow of the Holocaust.” It focuses on the implications of two opposite approaches to the difficult historical past: one claiming that this past has to be forgotten since it can only lead to a conflict-ridden, difficult presence, the other insisting that coming to terms with the historical past is the only way for Polish-Jewish relations to be normalized. The Polish anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir follows up with her piece, “Jedwabne: History as a Fetish,” in which she argues that Polish historians, constrained by the rules of scholarly objectivity, would not often admit to being touched, shaken, or horrified by the events under their investigation. Drawing on psychoanalysis and trauma theory, Tokarska-Bakir examines the consequences of this approach for analyzing traumatic events such as the “Jedwabne case,” and reflects on the possibilities of “doing history otherwise.” Her piece is followed by “Living with Antisemitism,” a poignant testimony by the writer Janina Bauman about her Jewish-Polish identity, which skillfully intertwines the personal and the political to convey her sense of loss, trauma, and mourning. In another personal account, “Notes for a Grave under Snow,” Andrew Jakubowicz explores the relationship between a Jewish family from Łódź, who escaped to Australia (via Lithuania, Russia, Japan, and China), and the Poland that they touched and that touched them in the sixty years after their flight. He draws on documents from Japanese, Polish, and Jewish archives, from original documents held by the refugees, and from interviews with survivors and Poles. A different historical perspective is provided by Erica Lehrer, whose chapter “Bearing False Witness? ‘Vicarious’ Jewish Identity and the Politics of Affinity,” focuses on the recently regained Jewish identity of Kazimierz, the historically Jewish quarter of Kraków and an exceptional place in Poland, where Jewishness emerges as a positive component of Polish self-conception. Lehrer argues that while the Jewish revival was orchestrated by non-Jewish Poles, the “Jewishness” of Kazimierz is an example of vicarious witnessing and an attempt at reconciliation and cultural pluralism rather than cultural appropriation. Terri Ginsberg’s chapter, “St. Korczak of Warsaw,” rounds off this section of the book. Ginsberg engages in a hermeneutic analysis of the film *Korczak*, directed by Andrzej Wajda in 1990, as the cultural artifact that largely defined the Holocaust for Polish audiences. She discusses the

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rift between the film's Judaic and Christian aspects and the way it reflected the ideological conflicts in Poland at a crucial moment in the history of postwar Eastern Europe.

The next section of the book, "Literary Encounters," opens with a piece by Geoffrey Hartman, "The Holocaust, Jedwabne, and the Measure of Time." Hartman's essay starts with a description of "the writing of the disaster," inspired by the French writer Maurice Blanchot's book of that title—a form of writing that, after the Holocaust, must convey the altered state of the world. Hartman attempts to situate Gross's *Neighbors* in the "disaster genre." Acknowledging how crude and cruel, how utterly inhuman the details of Gross's narrative are, he poses a provocative question: whether—despite the modern commitment to expose and publish the narratives of trauma—anything redemptive, or simply historically necessary, could come from knowing about this episode. This chapter is followed by "The Ceremony" by Eva Hoffman. It consists of excerpts from a play the author conceived of as a kind of spoken oratorio after the ceremony on July 10, 2001, in Jedwabne commemorating the horrific massacre that took place there sixty years earlier. "It Began with Pleasantries" is a poetic narrative by Anne Karpf about a seemingly innocent encounter between two children at a French village swimming pool. The singular event nevertheless throws up vexed questions about Polish-Jewish relations, commemoration, identification, and shame. In "Imagined Topographies: Visions of Poland in Writings by Descendants of Survivors" Marita Grimwood addresses questions about the role of Poland in the American-Jewish imaginary as constructed by the American descendants of survivors. She examines the memoirs and fictional accounts of authors such as Eva Hoffman, Lisa Appignanesi, Art Spiegelman, and Joseph Skibell and reflects on the way these narratives contribute to forging a productive future for Polish-Jewish relations. Alina Molisak's chapter, "Figures of Memory: Polish Holocaust Literature of the 'Second Generation'" explores the language of memory and of historical amnesia in the texts written by the new post-Shoah generation in Poland. By focusing on the recent novels by Piotr Szewc and Marek Bińczyk and situating them in the context of their German, French, and Israeli counterparts, Molisak traces the evanescent yet

intractable inscriptions of Jewishness in contemporary Polish literature and the Polish language.

As our inquiry into Polish-Jewish relations takes place under the aegis of ethics, the title of the last section, “Religion, Ethics, Politics,” articulates more explicitly this ethical commitment. The section starts with a piece by the Polish Catholic priest of Jewish origin, Romuald Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel, titled “A Breakthrough in the Teachings of the Church on Jews and Judaism.” The author examines the earlier complicity of the Catholic Church in forging the perception of Jews as strangers and enemies but also suggests that the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* No. 4, proclaimed by the Vatican in 1965, initiated a new era in the history of the Church. Underlining the bond between the Church and the Jewish religion, this has made possible to create bridges over the deep chasm produced by the Church’s erroneous teachings about the Jews. Jewish theologian Zev Garber’s “The Vision and Language of the Other: Jedwabne versus the Auschwitz Convent Controversy” makes a comparison between the controversy surrounding the disclosures about the Jedwabne massacre and the Auschwitz convent controversy (1984–93) in order to discuss the dynamics of (often unconscious) cultural and religious bias as the motivation for prejudice. Garber also analyzes how this bias leads to virulently polarizing language and alienation between neighboring cultures, sometimes despite the best intentions of the parties involved. In “Forgiving, Witnessing, and ‘Polish Shame,’” Dorota Glowacka explores the relation between repentance, forgiveness, and bearing witness in the context of the Jedwabne debate. Drawing on the ethical theories of Levinas and Derrida, but also on Jewish and Christian interpretations of both forgiveness and witnessing, she argues that the relation between those two concepts is a necessary one; moreover, as the aftermath of Jedwabne has revealed, thinking it is an intellectual’s responsibility today. Her essay is followed by Joanna Zylińska’s piece, “‘Who Is My Neighbor?’: Ethics under Duress,” in which she explores the structural ambivalence of the concept of neighborliness. Seen as both a moral concept designating the physical and emotional proximity of dwellers and a political concept used to tie a community together, neighborliness is in fact predicated on the preservation of boundaries and

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thus remains threatened by hostility, antagonism, and violence. Focusing on the “Jedwabne case” of neighborly violence, Zylińska discusses a (Levinas- and Derrida-inspired) ethics of alterity and hospitality that is put to the test if the “self” and “other” are found to be inhabiting the same geographic territory, if they share one national discourse. Ewa Plonowska Ziarek’s concluding chapter, “Melancholic Nationalism and the Pathologies of Commemorating the Holocaust in Poland,” looks at the survival of memory of the pogroms in northeastern Poland. Analyzing the issue of “Polish antisemitism” as a case of Freudian melancholia, she considers the possibility of mourning properly the lost Jewish neighbors and of thus providing an ethical response to past events and an ethical opening toward the future.

Significantly, the late Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, a courier of the underground Polish Home Army (AK) during WWII and director of the Polish service of Radio Free Europe from 1951 to 1976, resorts to the metaphor of closure—rather than opening—in his description of Polish-Jewish relations: “The six centuries of the presence of the Jews in Poland are today a closed book. To close the book with dignity, a mutual and straightforward accounting is necessary.”<sup>14</sup> And yet for some of us, the fact that an actual community of Polish and Jewish neighbors belongs in the past, and that this closure is inevitable and already real, is hard to accept. As Konstanty Gebert, editor of the Polish-Jewish monthly *Midrasz* and a prolific commentator on current sociopolitical events in Poland, has remarked, “I am sick and tired of people burying me, even with the best intentions in the world.”<sup>15</sup> Hence it is with the idea of an opening that we would like to provisionally close off this project. The editors of and contributors to this volume believe it is important to keep turning the pages in that “closed book,” to lean over them in reflection and sorrow but also with hope. Perhaps in this way we can add another chapter or at least an important appendix, open to what is yet to come.

## Notes

1. Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego*, 20, translation ours.
2. Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego*, 151.

3. Quote from Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, ix.
4. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.
5. While proposing an innovative approach to the problematic of Polish-Jewish relations, this book also follows in the footsteps of several noteworthy publications that have appeared in the last decade. The readers of this volume may be familiar with *My Brother's Keeper? Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (1990), edited by Antony Polonsky, which offers an overview of the first public discussion, in Poland and abroad, of Poles' responsibility for the fate of their Jewish neighbors during the Shoah. The discussion was prompted by Polish literary critic Jan-Błóński's groundbreaking essay "Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto" (1987), in which the author called on Poles to admit their guilt and confess to the dereliction of duties with respect to their Jewish compatriots. Carol Rittner and John R. Roth's volume *Memory Offended* (1991) provides excellent insight into the conflict between competing Jewish and Polish narratives of World War II, as it unfolded during the controversy surrounding the Carmelite convent in Oświęcim-Auschwitz. Michael Steinlauf's *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (1997) offers an insightful chronological account of Polish-Jewish relations with respect to the memory of the Holocaust, from the prewar years to 1995, the year that marked the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Important in Steinlauf's account is his call for a more nuanced sociological and psychological examination of these relations. Also worth mentioning is the 1998 special English-language publication of the Polish journal *Więź*, titled *Under One Heaven: Poles and Jews*. Because of its small circulation, this work is relatively unknown abroad; considering, however, that *Więź*, a Catholic monthly, has been a leading forum of progressive and conciliatory debate on Polish-Jewish relations, its significance cannot be underestimated.

More recently, Marek Jan Chodakiewicz's *After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflict in the Wake of WWII* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2002), although somewhat narrow in its exclusion of any theoretical models other than the focus on the historical minutiae, sheds light on the events of anti-Jewish violence in the years immediately after the war. An important overview of different aspects of Polish-Jewish relations is offered by the collection *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, edited by Joshua D. Zimmerman (Piscataway NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003). Even though it does engage some questions of identity, Jewish perceptions of Poland and Poles, and issues of post-Holocaust pedagogy, Zimmerman's book favors a more traditional historical approach when discussing these themes. Volumes such as "*Good News' after Auschwitz? Christian Faith Within a Post-Holocaust World*" (Macon GA: Mer-

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cer University Press, 2001), edited by Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, and *Jews and Christians in Conversation*, edited by E. Kessler, J. Pawlikowski, and J. Banki (Cambridge: Orchard Academic 2002), have engaged questions also relevant for this volume—about the implications of confronting the Shoah for both Christian and Jewish theology, the most pertinent of which has been Christianity’s need to re-examine its history of contempt for Judaism. Over the years, a number of important articles have also appeared in *POLIN: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, edited by Antony Polonsky. Its authors have commented, in a variety of contexts, on the issue of Polish-Jewish relations and have advanced our knowledge of historical facts that, for many reasons, have often been swept under the carpet or relegated to the margins of predominant historical narratives.

The most important publication to have appeared to date in the wake of the revelations about Jedwabne and the ensuing public debate in Poland and abroad is *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, by Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (2004). Polonsky and Michlic’s volume deals specifically with the Jedwabne massacre and the ensuing debates after its revelation, compiling mostly occasional texts and addresses that appeared in the media in Poland and abroad. The volume’s expressed goal is to enable non-Polish readers to understand the issues involved in the Jedwabne debate and to familiarize them with a variety of positions. All of the books mentioned provide a necessary historical and sociological context for comprehending the complex mechanisms of Polish-Jewish relations before, during, and after the war, and the reasons for the erasure of the Jewish memory from the postwar Polish public consciousness. An excellent Polish-language work, *My z Jedwabnego* (Us from Jedwabne) written by Anna Bikont, is worth mentioning here. Partly an ethnographic study of the shaping of anti-Jewish sentiment in the small towns of northeastern Poland before WWII and partly the author’s personal diary intermixing major developments in the “Jedwabne revelations” that took place after the publication of Gross’s book in Poland with personal conversations and anecdotes, Bikont’s volume is a beautifully illustrated testimony both to the past that is long gone and to the ethical spirit of an engaged inquiry into Polish-Jewish relations. The year 2006 saw the publication of Joanna Michlic’s study, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, and Jan Tomasz Gross’s *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*.

6. As Anna Bikont explains, in 1936 a number of significant changes took place in the treatment of the Jewish minority, which de facto turned Jews into second-class citizens: ritual killing of animals was banned, funding was withdrawn from public schools that taught Yiddish, and Saturday school attendance was made

- compulsory. The nationalist party Endecja became stronger and more aggressive at that time (*My z Jedwabnego*, 42).
7. This question has often been posed to the Poles by the morally shocked, distant Western observers.
  8. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 35.
  9. Knight, "The Holy Ground of Hospitality," 104.
  10. A promise of the transformation of both official and public discourse and of the integration of the Polish-Jewish past into the national narrative can be glimpsed in the widespread support for the construction of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The museum is now under construction at the site adjacent to the Warsaw Ghetto Monument in central Warsaw. The mandate of the museum is to present a history of one thousand years of Jews in Poland and to help keep the memory of Polish-Jewish history and culture alive.
  11. This phrase comes from *Daughters of Absence* by Mindy Weisel, a second-generation Holocaust artist, and she is in turn responding to Shoshana Felman's reference to the Shoah as "the event without a witness."
  12. In Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*, 133.
  13. One can mention here Alina Cała, *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo UW, 1987) and Bożena Umińska, *Postać z cieniem: Portrety Żydów w polskiej literaturze od końca XIX wieku do 1939 roku* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2001).
  14. Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, "A Need for Compensation," in *The Neighbors Respond*, 90.
  15. <http://isurvived.org/InTheNews/JewishMuseum-Poland.html>; accessed July 13, 2004.

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