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CHAPTER 1

Contemporary Poland and “the Jews”

AN INTRODUCTION

What Poland is and “should be” has been at the center of public debates and political fights since the fall of state socialism. That battle is fiercer now than ever. Polish society has become even more divided with the rise of populism in recent years. One faction favors a traditional vision of Polish identity crystallized around Catholicism, conservative family values, and a national narrative emphasizing Polish martyrdom and heroism. Another promotes progressive values and secularism and questions key tenets of Polish national mythology. It’s a fight for the heart of Polish national identity.

In that contest over Poland and Polishness, history and memory occupy center stage, and no other aspect of Polish history has been more disputed than that of Polish-Jewish relations. In the past two decades, Poles have engaged in a divisive debate about the participation of ethnic Poles in violent crimes against Polish Jews before, during, and after the Second World War. That difficult process of soul-searching and reckoning with the past is described by the Right as anti-Polish defamation, which the current government, led by the far-Right populist Law and Justice Party, attempts to short-circuit, using every weapon in its arsenal.¹ At the same time, though, Poland’s small Jewish community is undergoing a significant renewal, and a substantial number of institutions, public figures, memory activists, and ordinary citizens are engaged in a multifaceted resurrection of Jewish culture.

How can we make sense of these seemingly contradictory phenomena; right-wing populism, antisemitism, and denial on the one hand, and a “Jewish turn” on the other? One might be tempted to see that Jewish turn

¹ Law and Justice is a far-Right, national-Catholic, Euroskeptical, populist party that has held the parliament and the presidency since 2015. For extracts of the party platform, in English, see <http://porterszucs.pl/2016/02/05/pis-in-their-own-words>.

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as simply a move to counter right-wing populism or antisemitism, but this rather stunted interpretation sidesteps the internal logic of each of the movements. I argue that both anti- and philosemitism—non-Jews’ support of, and even identification with, Jews—are part of a single struggle to define what constitutes Polishness. Polish philosemitism is a dynamic, unfolding movement that, in its most introspective form, challenges the narrow ethnocultural association of Polishness with Catholicism. It strives to articulate a civic and secular definition of national identity and to build a modern polity. *Resurrecting the Jew* shows why and how this project has arisen and examines its challenges and limitations.

Collective Memory and Culture Wars

On January 26, 2018, the Polish parliament voted to approve an amendment to its Institute of National Remembrance Act, which was originally ratified in 1999 to enable the investigation and prosecution of crimes against the Polish nation committed during the Second World War and the communist period.² The amendment added to the Institute’s mission “protecting the reputation of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Nation.” It threatened up to three years’ imprisonment for “anyone claiming publicly and against the facts” that “the Polish Nation or the Republic of Poland is responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes committed by the Third German Reich.”³

2 The full and official name of the institute is *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej–Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*. It is, however, commonly referred to as *IPN*. The official English translation is “Institute of National Remembrance—Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation.”

3 All translations from Polish are mine unless otherwise noted. The full text of the law is available at <https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/DU/rok/2018/pozycja/369>. Similar laws had previously been adopted specifically to target academic publications considered in right-wing milieus as “defamation” of the Polish nation. I detail these memory laws in appendix B. The timing of the vote was no accident. The government used the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed on January 27 to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on that day in 1945, as a platform to denounce the use of the term *Polish death camps* with reference to Nazi concentration camps in occupied Poland or in Polish land annexed to the Third Reich. Multiple Polish governments have also fought the use of that expression in foreign media, with considerable success—for example, after President Barack Obama referred to Nazi death camps as Polish camps at the ceremony awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the late Jan Karski. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=Rd-v24pAg7s. Most American newspapers and other major media outlets have updated their stylebooks to stop that phrase being used (<https://www.imediaethics.org/ap-updates-its-stylebook-on-concentration-camps-polish-foundations-petition-for-change-has-30000k-names>).

Numerous organizations and public figures in Poland immediately and forcefully denounced the amendment in official statements, public letters, and petitions.⁴ Widely panned in global media as the "Holocaust speech law," the bill was described by the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu as "distortion of the truth, the rewriting of history and the denial of the Holocaust."⁵ Law and Justice's propaganda machine mounted a vigorous response. In an astounding statement posted on the government's official YouTube channel, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki asserted that Poland was a victim of both the Second World War and now also of Holocaust denial, because "Holocaust denial is not only the denial of German crimes, but also [arises] when someone diminishes the responsibility of [the] real perpetrators and attributes that responsibility to their victims." The new amendment arose from Poland's determination to "fight against this lie," Morawiecki explained. In that discursive reframing, the law—and Poland—was serving to protect historical truth: "Today, as the world must once again fight against a new wave of antisemitism, the government of Poland states its position clearly: there is no room for hatred or the distortion of history."⁶ Despite the international outcry and domestic protests, ten days after the Polish parliament voted for the bill, President Andrzej Duda—from Law and Justice—signed it into law.⁷

The Holocaust speech law was but one episode in the Law and Justice Party's application of its "historical policy," which aims at shaping collective memory by either repressing or promoting specific interpretations

4 See, for example, the statements issued by the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews (<http://www.polin.pl/en/news/2018/01/29/statement-of-the-director-of-polin-museum-concerning-a-proposed>); by former ambassadors (<http://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/7,103085,22984827,list-polskich-ambasadorow-obecna-polityka-jaroslaw-kaczynskiego.html>); and by scholars, journalists, artists, and politicians (<https://oko.press/apel-stu-naukowcow-dziennikarzy-artystow-politykow-o-wycofanie-zmian-ustawie-o-ipn-tedy-droga-odzyskania-zbiorowej-godnosci>).

5 See <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-polish-pm-talk-agree-to-iron-out-row-over-holocaust-legislation>.

6 The official English-language speech can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9bS9z5OiWY&t=147s>. The following day, the video was transformed to include a dramatic soundtrack, colorful images of modern-day Poland and flyover shots of the Polish landscape, interlaced with archival footage of World War II showing German soldiers' boots on cobblestoned streets and in concentration camps. It concluded with the striking label "#GERMANDEATHCAMPS" superposed on a grim black-and-white shot of the infamous tower gate of Birkenau (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXcm7k3FpJc>).

7 Under international pressure, the government later softened the law, removing the threat of jail time. The announcement of that decision was made in a joint declaration by the Polish and Israeli prime ministers, Morawiecki and Netanyahu. That declaration was vigorously condemned by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel (https://www.yadvashem.org/press-release/05-july-2018-07-34.html?utm_source=social&utm_medium=tw).

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of the past.⁸ Targets of the policy include assessments of World War II, the communist period, and the postcommunist transition, as well as of more recent events, such as the 2010 plane crash in Smolensk, Ukraine, that killed the president of Poland Lech Kaczyński, his wife, the crew, and eighty-seven dignitaries—a tragedy presented and commemorated as an attack on the Polish state by Russia with the aid of Polish traitors. What these events have in common is a specific representation of Poland and Poles as martyrs, in line with tropes of national mythology developed in the nineteenth century, when the disappearance of Poland from the map of Europe was represented in literature as its crucifixion. The poetic metaphor of Poland as Christ among nations was enshrined and reproduced in the arts, popular culture, religious rituals, and commemorative practices. It was later solidified by the devastation caused by the Second World War and the imposition of communism in its aftermath (Zubrzycki 2006, 2010; Porter-Szúcs 2014).

The Holocaust speech law was deployed to stall an important process of national reckoning with the role of ethnic Poles in the Holocaust, initiated in the early 2000s. Polish indifference toward the genocide of Polish Jews had been discussed in the mid-1980s following the broadcasting on Polish television of Claude Lanzmann's 1985 documentary film *Shoah* and the 1987 publication of Jan Bloński's essay "Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto" in the prominent Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly). But it was the publication in 2000 of *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* by the Polish-born, US-based historian Jan Tomasz Gross that burst the dam and led to extended public debate and soul-searching about Polish violence against Jews during and after World War II. The short book described in painful detail how in the summer of 1941 ethnic Poles tormented and murdered their Jewish neighbors in

8 In Polish, *polityka historyczna* means both a broad "politics of history" and a more specific "historical policy." The expression derives from the German *Geschichtspolitik*. While *Geschichtspolitik* specifically describes Germans' reckoning with their Nazi past, the English expression "politics of memory" more generally concerns debates about the past, and how the past should be recorded, remembered, and disseminated or else silenced and forgotten. The politics of memory can involve *historical policies*, policies that distinguish between "true" and "correct" histories and "false/falsified" ones; specify how history should be narrated; or even legally regulate specific interpretations of the past (Noiriel 2012; Gensburger and Lefranc 2017; Belavusau and Gliszczyńska-Grabias 2017). Revisionist historical policies are especially salient following regime change; they range from place-name alterations and the removal of monuments to the literal rewriting of history in official documents and textbooks. For a discussion of that literature and a typology of reckonings with difficult pasts, see Zubrzycki and Woźny (2020). For analyses of the politics of memory and commemoration in postsocialist societies, see Bernhard and Kubik (2014).

the small town of Jedwabne in northeastern Poland.⁹ The newly founded Institute of National Remembrance opened an official investigation of the murders described by Gross, and on July 10, 2001, on the sixtieth anniversary of the pogrom, the government officially acknowledged Polish responsibility and erected a monument at the site where several hundred Jews were forcibly brought to a barn and burned alive.¹⁰ Although the monument's inscription fails to explicitly indicate that it was Poles and not Germans who committed the crime, the official apology by then-president Aleksander Kwaśniewski was unequivocal: "Here in Jedwabne," he declared, "citizens of the Republic of Poland died at the hands of other citizens of the Republic of Poland." He called it a "fratricide."¹¹

Neighbors' Narrative Shock

Neighbors created such a rupture that one could speak of Poland "before" and "after" its publication. Not only were Poles no longer cast as the main victims of the war; they were now perpetrators of some of its horror. By disrupting the narrative of martyrdom—for one cannot be both a sacrificial victim and a willing executioner—*Neighbors* provoked what I have

9 Pronounced Yed-WAB-neh. The book was first published in Polish under the title *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* in 2000. The English translation appeared in 2001. It was important to Gross for the book to appear in Polish first so that the interested public had a chance to discuss the issue (personal communication, January 13, 2020). The book's impact in Poland was immediate and far-reaching. In addition to public discussions and an official investigation, it prompted an important debate among historians in the form of lengthy editorials in the Polish press: see *Jedwabne: Spór historyków wokół książki Jana T. Grossa "Sąsiedzi"* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Frondy, 2002). Gross's own responses to the debates appeared in a collection of essays published in 2003.

10 The party in power then was the Alliance of the Democratic Left (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, or *SLD*). The findings of the investigation by the Institute of National Remembrance were published in two volumes (Machcewicz and Persak 2002a, 2002b) and included the partial exhumation of the mass grave. (The mass grave was opened so that investigators could see what it contained, but the bodies were left untouched to respect Jewish law, Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich told me [Warsaw, September 28, 2012].) The remains of up to three hundred Jewish victims were found, along with approximately one hundred German rifle bullets and cartridge cases. The remains of some forty other men and the head of a concrete statue of Lenin were found in a secondary mass grave (Stola 2003: 139–52, Persak 2011: 429). Those remains were most likely of the men forced to dismantle a statue of Lenin installed in the village square during the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland (1939–41) and executed as punishment for their alleged collaboration with the Soviets.

11 The monument's inscription reads "To the memory of the Jews from Jedwabne and environs; men, women, and children who shared dominion over this land, murdered, burned alive at this place on July 10, 1941." An English translation of President Kwaśniewski's speech can be found at <http://www.radzilow.com/jedwabne-ceremony.htm>.

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called *narrative shock* (2006, 2010, 2013b), a questioning of a key story of the nation, shaking its identity to its core.¹² It also engendered important scholarship demonstrating that crimes committed by ethnic Poles against Jews before, during, and after the war were much more widespread than the dominant Polish narrative had allowed.¹³

The shock was so great that many turned to denial and counteraccusations: “It was not Poles who killed the Jews, but the Germans,” “There were far fewer Jews murdered than Gross claimed,” or even “The Jews had it coming after all, since they collaborated with the Soviets.” Such opinions were frequently expressed in newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, academic panels, public roundtables, and church sermons. A countermemorial to Polish victims of the war, monumentalizing that perspective, was dedicated in Jedwabne’s main square in 2003.¹⁴ Almost predictably, in 2011, neofascist vandals defaced the Jedwabne memorial to the Jews who were murdered by spray-painting on stones surrounding the monument the statements “They were flammable” and “I do not apologize for Jedwabne.”¹⁵

Among groups on the Right, any attempt at discussing Poles’ participation in the Holocaust is perceived as defamation and a profanation of the Polish nation, which is held sacred.¹⁶ It is to counter what they call the “politics of shame,” and to protect the nation at home and its “good name” abroad, that the Law and Justice government, supported by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the right-wing Radio Maryja, conservative public

12 I coined the expression *narrative shock* in *The Crosses of Auschwitz* to refer to the shock to Poles’ historical consciousness and national identity created by the narrative reconfiguration of Auschwitz after the fall of state socialism, and the debate surrounding *Neighbors* in the early 2000s. I further developed the concept in subsequent publications (2010, 2013b). The phrase has since been adopted by many other scholars, though not always with proper attribution (Janicka and Żukowski 2021).

13 See, to cite only the most prominent texts on the topic, Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote żniwa: Rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów* (2011), translated as *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (2012); Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd: Polowanie na Żydów, 1942–1945* (2011), published in English in 2013 as *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*; Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, eds., *Dalej jest noc: Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (2018).

14 The monument was dedicated by the bishops of Łomża, Stanisław Stefanek and Tadeusz Zawistowski, on May 3, 2003, on the feast day of Our Lady of Częstochowa, Queen of Poland. May 3 is also a secular national holiday—the anniversary of the Constitution of May 3, 1791. For a detailed analysis of the countermemorial, see Zubrzycki (2013b).

15 <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,10209838,atak-neofaszystow-na-pomnik-w-jedwabnem.html?disableRedirects=true>.

16 For contributions on contested Jewish and Polish memories in the postwar and post-socialist periods, see Zimmerman (2003), Zubrzycki (2006, 2013b), Gebert (2008), Polonsky (2009), Forecki (2010).



FIGURE 1. Cartoon mocking the Right's ongoing campaign to promote Polish Righteous Among the Nations, which appeared on the leftist collective *Krytyka Polityczna's* website on March 31, 2018. The placard nailed on the cross reads "The King of Jews was to be crucified here, but Poles saved him" (Plawgo /Pyrka for krytykapolityczna.pl, reprinted with permission of Krytyka Polityczna.)

figures, and various nationalist organizations are engaged in a process of remythologization ranging from outright denial to the promotion of new narratives of Polish-Jewish relations.¹⁷ In recent years, for example, attention has been redirected toward Poles who rescued Jews and who are honored by Israel as Righteous Among the Nations. Their actions have been commemorated in numerous museums, monuments, murals, and movies (see chapter 4). The historian Jan Grabowski has nicknamed that rhetorical strategy the "Righteous Defense" (2016:19), a strategy that has been critiqued by many on the Left (figure 1). Public attention has also been redirected toward other Polish stories of Polish martyrdom.¹⁸

17 The Roman Catholic Church in Poland is a diverse and vibrant institution, but its hierarchy and the majority of the clergy are primarily constituted by what I call "traditional conservatives," for whom national identity is tightly intertwined with the Catholic faith. Radio Maryja is even more nationalist: founded in Toruń in 1991 by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the station is the voice of anticommunism, anti-EU sentiment, and antisemitism. In recent years it has added vociferous antirefugee, antifeminist, and anti-LGBT propaganda to its arsenal. Its charismatic leader has managed to create a quasi-social movement around the station's right-wing politics—the Family of Radio Maryja—consistently mobilizing followers devoted to the cause of protecting or restoring a "true Poland" (Krzemiński 2009, 2017; Sekerdej and Pasieka 2013: 61–65). In 2011 the Family of Radio Maryja was estimated to comprise a million members. While Radio Maryja is not the dominant face of Catholicism in Poland, it is the most vocal, and occupies public space with immense semiotic force.

18 The most significant are the cases of Katyń, where some twenty thousand Polish army officers, intellectuals, and civilian prisoners were murdered in 1940 by the Soviet NKVD (see

Poland's Jewish Turn

Denial and deflection constitute only half the story. With equal fervor and conviction, scholars and public intellectuals continue to unearth the participation of ethnic Poles in the Holocaust (e.g., Grabowski 2020). They refuse to allow the recognition of Polish Righteous to dilute or diminish the process of national soul-searching initiated with the publication of *Neighbors*. This activity is part of an important process of recovering and reclaiming Poland's Jewish past.

It is as part of this mnemonic awakening that various Jewish festivals have mushroomed in Poland since the mid-2000s. Today there are about forty such festivals held annually in more than a dozen Polish cities and towns. In addition, the interest in Jewish culture is now observable all year round in the renewed popularity of klezmer music; the proliferation of Judaica bookstores and Jewish-style restaurants; the inauguration of new museums, memorials, and memory spaces; the engagement of artists and public intellectuals with Poland's Jewish past and Polish-Jewish relations; and the emergence and development of Jewish and Holocaust studies programs in universities. The historian and Jewish studies scholar Marcin Wodziński (2021) found that between 2011 and 2021, approximately one hundred books and several hundred articles on Jewish topics were published *every year*, many written to be accessible to a broader public.¹⁹ A last indicator of the Jewish revival, for which there are no official statistics, is a modest but steady number of conversions to Judaism.²⁰

Philosemitism is not unique to Poland, of course.²¹ As Daniel Cohen (2017) notes in an essay on the phenomenon in postwar Europe, it has had

Etkind et al. 2012; Kosicki 2015); the massacre of Polish civilians by Ukrainian nationalists in Volhynia in 1943; the stories of the "doomed soldiers" (*żołnierze wyklęci*), anti-Soviet and anti-communist soldiers during and after the war who were later persecuted by the communist regime; and the 2010 plane crash in Smoleńsk (Zubrzycki 2013a; Golonka-Czajkowska 2018).

19 Those numbers are similar to those for the previous decade: Wodziński (2011) noted, for example, that between 2006 and 2009, 365 books on Jewish themes were published in Poland.

20 Interviews with Rabbis Michael Schudrich, Boaz Pash, Tyson Herberger, Itzak Horowitz, and Tanya Segal in 2012 and 2013; personal interviews with converts, March 2011, March 2013. Throughout this book, I name individuals when they spoke to me as representatives of institutions, but use pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of private individuals.

21 For a discussion of the history and theoretical underpinnings of the terms *antisemitism*, *anti-antisemitism*, and *philosemitism*, see Bauman (1998), Alteflix (2000), and Judaken (2008). On philosemitism in history, see Lassner and Trubowitz (2008) and Karp and Sutcliffe (2011); in postwar Germany, see Stern (1991); in post-1989 Germany, see Gilman and Remmler (1994); in postwar Poland, see Mushkat (1992). On philosephardism in Spain, see Rohr (2007) and McDonald (2021).

different significations at various times and places. In imperial Germany, philosemitism was primarily articulated as a "defense of Jews against the rising popularity of anti-Semitism." The term was in fact coined by self-acknowledged antisemites in Germany in the 1880s to denigrate those opposing antisemitism and defending Jews (Karp and Sutcliffe 2011:1). In England, on the other hand, admiration for Jews drew on early modern Christian polemic and Victorian morals, while in postrevolutionary France the positive image of the Jew became "a touchstone of French Republican universalism" (Cohen 2017).

Diana Pinto observes that in 1990s Europe, Jewish history and culture served as "spaces" in which individual societies could work through their national histories (1996; see also J. E. Young 1993). Ruth Ellen Gruber's (2002) pioneering work documents and analyzes these spaces, coining the expression "virtual Jewishness" to capture various Jewish cultural initiatives primarily enacted by and for non-Jews. Virtual Jewishness, she showed, transpired across multiple domains of public life, from the discovery and restoration of material heritage to the production and consumption of cultural goods. This raised difficult questions of authenticity and cultural appropriation, eliciting feelings and discourses ranging from confusion and discomfort to indignation for some Jewish observers.

In the German context, Bodemann refers to a new guild of "German experts on Jewish culture and religion . . . enacting Jewish culture" from biographical, historical, and museological perspectives as "professional almost-Jews" (1996:57). Such experts exist in Poland as well, and Henryk Halkowski, a native of Kraków's Jewish Quarter, community activist, and writer, cynically used the more direct expression "professional Jews" (*zawodowi Żydzi*) to describe a similar group of experts (2003:151–52).

Magdalena Waligórska (2013) prefers instead the term *Jewish stand-ins* in her ethnography of klezmer musicians in Kraków and Berlin in the early 2000s. She describes the klezmer scenes she studied as "contact zone[s] where Jews and non-Jews enter into conversation about the painful Polish Jewish or German Jewish past, exchange ideas, and work together, but also challenge each other, compete, and articulate their (sometimes conflicting) interests" (12). Inspired by Naomi Seidman's "(Jewish) politics of vicarious identity," Erica Lehrer adopts the term *vicarious Jewishness* in Poland to describe "Jewish-identifying Poles" involved in the revival of Kazimierz, Kraków's historic Jewish Quarter. Vicarious Jewishness in Poland, she argues, serves—among other purposes—as a cultural critique of Polish antisemitism (2013, esp. 188 *passim*).

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I adopt the term *philosemitism* to denote a wide spectrum of practices guided by a curiosity and desire to learn about Judaism, Jewishness, and Jewish history; to uncover and preserve the remnants of Jewish life; and to memorialize the death of millions of Jews (Polish and non-Polish) murdered on Polish soil. As with antisemitism, that process implies various degrees of objectification and instrumentalization of Jews (conscious or not). This is why the cultural critics Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski characterize philosemitism as violent (2021).

Even within a single society, however, philosemitism is far from uniform. To provide a nuanced, fine-grained, and comprehensive portrait of the phenomenon requires examination of a variety of empirical materials. Public discourses, performances, monumental productions, and artistic creations are certainly important, but they offer little purchase on the different meanings philosemitic practices have for those engaging in them. In this work, I therefore also investigate the motivations of individual Poles, of different generations, social horizons, and political leanings, for participating in the Jewish turn. I analyze how they imagine the Jew in their discourses and everyday practices, how they represent Poland's Jewish past, and how they imagine a future Poland. I pay attention to how they understand and explain the Jewish turn, and how they articulate the relationship between this phenomenon and their personal journeys and life goals. This approach allows for the identification of various "registers" of engagement with things Jewish, ranging from crude cultural appropriation to critical-introspective or political engagement (see chapter 5). Further, I investigate how Polish Jews themselves participate in the Jewish turn, how they feel about non-Jewish Poles' fascination with Jews and Jewish culture, and how the revival of Jewish communal life intersects with Polish philosemitism (see chapter 6). The ethnographic approach furnishes a more complete picture of Poland's Jewish turn and situates the phenomenon in the broader problematic of nationalism.

This discussion inevitably raises the question of how one defines Poles, Jews, Polishness, and Jewishness in opposition and in conjunction. Although I use the terms "Poles" and "Jews" in this book, I do not imply that these are homogeneous groups, nor that they are separate or mutually exclusive. Group identity is always constituted dialectically in relation to an "Other," and an individual's identity within a group is typically defined along a spectrum, with different markers coming into play such as gender, class, and sexual identity. "Poles" and "Jews" are therefore categories that make sense insofar as they are distinct from each other in a specific context. I use the term "Polish Jews" to denote Poles currently living in

Poland who identify as Jewish, as well as those who may have emigrated from Poland at any time during and after World War II. In the context of the Jewish turn more specifically, I use the terms “Jews” or “Jewish Poles,” and “non-Jewish Poles” to denote an individual or group of persons’ relationships to Judaism or Jewishness (ancestry, conversion, personal convictions). I use “Jewishness” to refer to Jewish cultural identity, and “Judaism” to refer more narrowly to the Jewish faith. In all instances I recognize that identities are complex, fluid, and contested.

Renewing Jewish Life in Poland

While philosemitism and Jewish revivals exist in other European societies, their intensity and territorial spread in Poland are remarkable. This phenomenon is sociologically puzzling precisely because it is enacted almost entirely by non-Jews. In postwar Germany, the carving out of Jewish space in the public sphere was initially performed by converts to Judaism, members of Jewish/Israeli and German associations, and a cadre of academics. The arrival of some eighty thousand Soviet Jews after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, injected new energy into German Jewish communal life (Bodemann 1996). In Hungary the process has been led by Hungarian Jews, and it is facilitated by their relatively high number in that country (between 75,000 and 100,000, representing 7–10 percent of Hungary’s population), their concentration in Budapest, and the extent of surviving material heritage in that country, including some twenty active synagogues in Budapest alone.²²

In contrast, little remains of Poland’s once large, vibrant, and diverse Jewish communities. Before World War II, Poland had the largest Jewish population in Europe (about 3.5 million), representing approximately 10 percent of its total population. Ninety percent of Polish Jewry was exterminated in the Holocaust, and many survivors chose to rebuild their lives elsewhere. Postwar pogroms, personal attacks and intimidation, and the loss of property—destroyed in the war or stolen by former neighbors—pushed others to leave (Aleksiun 2003; Gross 2006; Cichopek-Gajraj 2014).

22 <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/HU>. Sergio DellaPergola (2020) estimates Hungary’s core population of Jews, which “includes all persons who, when asked in a sociodemographic survey, identify themselves as Jews, or who are identified as Jews by a respondent in the same household, and do not profess another monotheistic religion” to be 47,300. On Hungary’s Jewish revival, see Gruber (2002), Kovács (2010), and Monterescu and Zorándy (2020).

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Antisemitic purges in 1968 forced the departure of approximately fifteen thousand more Polish Jews (Stola 2000, 2010; Plocker 2022). As a result, the number of Jews living in Poland today is estimated to be between 4,500 and 13,000 (the wide variation hinging on how Jewishness is determined: halacha [Jewish law], formal membership in Jewish organizations, meeting the criteria for Israel's Law of Return, or self-identification in the 2011 census).²³

Jewish leaders, however, estimate that between forty thousand and a hundred thousand Poles have some Jewish ancestry, representing significant potential for community and religious growth.²⁴ And the community has grown in both number and vitality since the fall of state socialism. Beginning in 1989, after the socialist narrative had effaced difficult topics of Polish history, it became possible (and even necessary) to examine and discuss the past. In filling that vacuum, many Poles discovered their Jewish ancestry. Others knew they were Jewish but had not felt they could speak about their identity freely. The opening of the Eastern Bloc enabled foreign institutional support and funding for the renewal of Jewish life. New Jewish schools were opened, associations were established, and magazines, cultural and community centers were founded. The development of Holocaust and Jewish-heritage tourism, along with the infrastructures to support that sector, facilitated the revitalization of Jewish spaces such as Kraków's Kazimierz district.²⁵ Most of what remained of Jewish communal property was also eventually returned to the official Jewish communities, or *Gminy*.²⁶

23 In the Polish census of 2011, approximately two thousand individuals indicated "Jewish" as their only ethnicity; an additional five thousand indicated it as their second ethnicity (with Polish as their primary one) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2015). (The census does not have a question on religious affiliation.)

24 Based on interviews with Rabbi Schudrich in 2012 and Jonathan Ornstein in 2021.

25 Like most of Kraków, Kazimierz was not destroyed during the war, but it remained in a pitiful state of disrepair until the 1990s. Its proximity to Auschwitz, only an hour away, facilitated the development of hotels and restaurants, as tourists visit the museum on day trips but return to the city for the night. Kazimierz has also benefited from a tourism boom following the popularity of the movie *Schindler's List*, released in 1993. Numerous agencies started offering *Schindler's List* tours, showing both historical sites and the locations where movie scenes were shot, blending history and fiction in a single narrative. In 2010 Oskar Schindler's former enamel factory was converted into the Museum on the Occupation of Kraków during the Second World War. On domestic and foreign tourism to Kazimierz, see Jochnowitz (1998), Kugelmass and Orla-Bukowska (2008), Gruber (2002), Lehrer (2013), Waligórska (2013); on urban development and gentrification more specifically, see Murzyn (2004, 2006).

26 *Gmina* (plural *Gminy*) has both administrative and religious significations in Polish. It may refer to a territorially based self-governing unit or to a specific denominational community. The *Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska*—the Jewish denominational community—combines

Aspirational Multiculturalism

As significant as the process of Jewish community and religious renewal is, the activities generally lumped under the term “Jewish revival” remain primarily driven by non-Jewish social actors. What motivates their efforts? One key motivation is to recover what has been lost and erased so as to recreate Poland’s multicultural past and thereby build and promote a plural, secular society in and against an ethnically and religiously homogeneous nation-state.

For most of its history Poland was indeed quite diverse, inhabited by a variety of ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. After World War II and the Holocaust, and with the postwar redrawing of Poland’s borders along with pogroms, state-sponsored ethnic cleansing, and antisemitic purges, this picture abruptly changed.²⁷ On the eve of the war, ethnic Poles constituted 65 percent of the Second Republic’s population; by the late 1940s they accounted for about 95 percent of the population of the new People’s Republic. The religious makeup of the population changed in a similar fashion (table 1).

Poland’s current ethnic and religious homogeneity is therefore the result of relatively recent and very violent historical events and political

both significations. Because the English translation of the term *Gmina*—community—does not capture the administrative aspect of the Polish original, I use the original *Gmina/Gminy* in Polish, capitalized, when referring to the official, legally recognized, administrative organizations that oversee religious life, communal property, and cemeteries, and the English “community” to refer to social, cultural, and informal Jewish groups. The February 20, 1997, law on the relations between the state and the Jewish denominations in the Republic of Poland specified the legal status of the *Gmina* and returned communal property—synagogues, cemeteries, and religious objects—to local *Gminy*. The issue of *private*-property restitution remained unsettled and hotly contested both in Poland and abroad. In 2021 Poland’s restitution law was amended to set a thirty-year time limit to appeal administrative decisions resulting in property seizure, de facto prohibiting the descendants of Jews whose property was seized during the Second World War and retained during the communist era from receiving restitution. That decision led to diplomatic tensions with Israel. For an insightful discussion of the issues impeding the restitution of so-called formerly Jewish private property and the context shaping that debate in Poland, see Stola (2008). For the full text of the law, “Ustawa z dnia 20 lutego 1997 r. o stosunku Państwa do gmin wyznaniowych żydowskich w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej,” see <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19970410251>. For a brief history, in English, of the restitution process and its legal underpinnings, consult the webpage of the *Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska w Polsce*, <https://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/en/heritage/restitution>.

27 As a result of the Second World War and the peace agreements, Poland ceded to the USSR 170,000 km² of its eastern territory, divided up between the Ukrainian and Belarussian Socialist Republics. In exchange, Poland received 100,000 km² of former German territory in the west, cutting off Germany from Silesia and Eastern Pomerania as well as a part of Brandenburg. German populations were deported; ethnic Poles in the east were “repatriated,” often relocated westward to the so-called recovered territories.

TABLE 1. *Ethnic and Religious Composition of the Second Republic of Poland and of the Popular Republic of Poland (percentage)*

	1931	1946
Ethnic Poles	65	96
Jews	10	4
Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Germans, Tatars, and others	25	
Catholics	65	95

Sources: Michowicz 1988, Tomaszewski 1993, Casanova 1994.

processes. Yet this state of affairs was naturalized in the postwar period by both the socialist state and the Catholic Church. These institutions built or boosted their legitimacy by steeping themselves in the potent infusion of Poland's new ethnonational and denominational homogeneity, waving away even the aroma of diversity. Combined, these processes further tightened the association between Polishness and Catholicism (Zubrzycki 2006; Porter-Szűcs 2012).

Although the diversity that characterized Poland for most of its history is unlikely to return, progressive nationalists see the recognition of this legacy as a platform from which to build a more open society. They seek to push Poland toward an internationally normative model of nationhood, one that values and encourages pluralism and multiculturalism. Reaffirming Jewishness through memory work, social activism, and cultural practices symbolically reclaims the plural society eradicated during World War II, the memory of which was materially erased and ideologically suppressed by the socialist regime.²⁸ In this view, Poland's Jewish past holds the key to an imagined cosmopolitan future.

²⁸ By "material erasure" I mean practices such as building over Jewish ruins and the conversion of synagogues into swimming pools, libraries, or cinemas, and of yeshivas into cultural centers. On the neighborhood built over the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, see Janicka (2011) and Chomałowska (2012). On the treatment of Jewish ruins more broadly in Poland and Germany, see Meng (2012, 2017). On Polish memory and amnesia with respect to Jews, see Irwin-Zarecka (1989), Kapralski (2001, 2015), Gitelman (2003), Steinlauf (1997), and Zubrzycki (2006, 2013b).

The historian Michael Meng has referred to this process as “redemptive cosmopolitanism,” which he defines as the “commemorative display of multiethnicity that celebrates the cathartic, redemptive transformation of Germans and Poles into tolerant democratic citizens” (2012:10). The problem with redemptive cosmopolitanism, Meng argues, is that it replaces a critical examination of the liberal democratic nation-state’s past and present failures (250). While I agree with Meng that a desire for cosmopolitanism is part of the motivation for Poland’s Jewish turn, my research shows that many Polish activists also seek a critical engagement with the past and that at the core of their initiatives is a political critique of the present.

Resurrecting the Jew therefore has three primary objectives.

The first is empirical: to explain the origins, meaning, and significance of Poland’s Jewish turn and of Polish philosemitism without reducing these to anti-antisemitism or a recent reaction to Poland’s rightward turn. I show instead why and how they are related to the specific structures of Polish national identity and of nationalism.

The second objective is theoretical: to shed light on the impact of national scripts and their logics on symbolic boundary-making and re-making, and to clarify competing models of the relationship between nationalism, symbolic exclusion, and cultural appropriation, three key issues of our times.

The book’s third objective is methodological: to propose a multifaceted approach to observing the making, unmaking, and redrawing of the symbolic boundaries of national identity via an analysis of discursive representations, material culture, and performative practices.

Symbolic Boundaries and the Logic of Ethnic Nationalism

“In order to focus on anything,” Eviatar Zerubavel pointedly observed, “we must perceive some discontinuity between that which we attend and that which we ignore. . . . It is boundaries . . . that allow us—visually as well as mentally—to grasp any entity at all” (1991:118–19). Most of the literature on symbolic boundaries in the social sciences concerns the creation, maintenance, and transgression of group boundaries.²⁹ In studies of ethnicity

29 In sociology, Émile Durkheim’s (1995 [1912]) work on the division of the world into the mutually constitutive and exclusive categories of the sacred and the profane is foundational for understanding symbolic boundaries and the role of the social in their making. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has shown how social class and cultural capital interact to reproduce social boundaries and enforce gatekeeping. Michèle Lamont (1992) expanded Bourdieu’s framework

and nationalism, the foundational work is that of Fredrik Barth (1969), who showed that ethnic identity is a feature of social organization and not a given of “culture,” as the Herderian view would have it. By shifting attention away from a substantive notion of identity and toward its social organization, Barth demonstrated that ethnic groups were constituted via difference in the process of creating boundaries. From this key insight an important literature crossing disciplines and empirical objects was born. One subset has focused on showing that those symbolic boundaries have concrete consequences. Richard Alba (2005), for example, has shown that the *types* of boundaries between ethnic groups in immigration countries—“blurred” or “bright”—affected prospects of assimilation of second-generation individuals into the receiving society. Falling on either side of the color line in the United States and elsewhere is also known to have significant effects on educational and health outcomes, life expectancy, residential and professional opportunities, among many others (see Wimmer 2008a). The international standing of polities is also affected by the proportion of their citizens classified as “colored,” hence political efforts to shift the criteria for “whiteness” to extend that category to more citizens (Loveman 2014).³⁰

It was, however, the flip side of boundary making that animated Brubaker and his colleagues (2006) in their study of ethnicity in Cluj, a large Romanian city with a significant Hungarian minority. Instead of taking for granted that ethnonationality matters and assuming that Romanians and Hungarians constitute discrete and tightly bounded groups, Brubaker and his team studied when, why, and how that assumption did and did not hold. They found that ethnicity mattered less than local nationalist politicians claimed, and they concluded that ethnic boundaries are generally much more porous than even scholars had surmised. It is precisely because group identity and boundedness can be tenuous constructions that nationalists insist on hardening and policing boundaries—symbolic or institutional—between groups.

to include moral judgments people make in drawing symbolic boundaries between themselves and others. Other scholars, like E. Zerubavel (1991), focus on cognitive processes of boundary making and investigate how social context shapes the criteria by which symbolic boundaries are set. For insightful reviews of the literature, see Lamont and Molnár (2002), Lamont and Bail (2005), and Lamont, Pendergrass, and Pachucki (2015). On different dimensions and strategies of ethnic boundary making, see Wimmer (2008a, b).

30 Loveman and Muniz (2007) showed that after the First World War, Puerto Rico started to include individuals of “mixed” background (previously considered “colored”) in the “white” category in its census, a process they call “boundary shifting.” This reclassification resulted in an official “whitening” of the island.

Andreas Wimmer (2008b) analyzed an impressive corpus of case studies to identify four strategies used by social actors to negotiate ethnic boundaries: contraction, inversion, repositioning, and blurring. He showed that the choice of boundary-maintaining strategies depends on the characteristics of the social fields in which social actors operate: the institutional order, the distribution of power, and networks of alliances. Wimmer’s “multilevel process theory” constitutes an important tool for understanding and explaining the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries. Yet the theory, along with the empirical literature it is based on, understandably focuses on boundaries *between* ethnic groups—in immigration countries, majority/minority polities, and multiethnic societies. *Resurrecting the Jew* investigates instead the process of ethnonational symbolic boundary making and redrawing within a single ethnonational group.

As we have seen, Poland is one of the world’s most homogeneous nation-states, with nearly 95 percent of its population ethnically Polish and 92 percent nominally Catholic. Almost 90 percent of Poles over the age of eighteen declare having religious faith. Forty-three percent participate in religious services at least once a week, and an additional 33 percent attend once or twice a month (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2021; Sadłoń 2021).³¹ And yet ethnoreligious criteria are routinely used to draw distinctions *among* Poles. The Catholic Church and the Right discredit their opponents by accusing them of being “Jews,” “Masons,” “secularists” (the latter two being code words for Jews), “bad Catholics,” and, increasingly, “terrorists-feminists” and the “LGBT lobby.”³² Given that Polishness

31 While the overall proportion of Poles attending church is very high (76 percent), it is in decline from what it was only a few years prior: in 2018, 87 percent of Poles participated in religious services, including 50 percent going to church at least once a week (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2018). The proportion of Poles participating in religious services today is also much lower than it was in the early 1990s, when 90 percent of Poles went to church (all frequency included, Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2021) and 87 percent declared having religious faith. Concomitantly, the percentage of Poles *not* attending any religious services has nearly tripled since 1992, from 9 percent to 24 percent in 2021. The most drastic changes, however, can be observed among young adults (18–24 years of age). In 1992, 93 percent of Poles in this age group declared having religious faith; in 2021, 71 percent did. Between 1992 and 2021, the percentage of young adults declaring themselves *atheists* more than quadrupled (from 6.7 to 28.6) as did the percentage of young adults not participating in religious services (from 8 to 36) (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2021). For discussions of secularization processes in Poland, see Borowik (2017), Marody and Mandes (2017), Grabowska (2018), Zubrzycki (2020), and Sadłoń (2021).

32 The quotation marks indicate the symbolic and discursive nature of the categories. It is representations of Jews and Jewishness—not real, existing Jewish persons—that are used to sharpen Polishness, even when actual Jewish individuals are referred to or verbally and symbolically abused. Graff (2008) argues that gays are the “new Jews” and notes the ideological

is tied to Catholicism, this discursive strategy seeks to symbolically strip these groups and individuals of their Polishness.

This form of symbolic exclusion points to an interesting paradox. As we know from a rich literature on nationalism (e.g., Brubaker 1992; Schnapper 1994; Yack 1996; Nielsen 1999; Zubrzycki 2001), ideological forms of exclusion are typical of places where the nation is understood in civic terms, and where national identity, at least ideally, is therefore determined by an individual's adherence to the principles of the social contract rather than by ethnicity, race, or religious persuasion. The American case is paradigmatic of ideologically defined national identity: because being "American" implies supporting a specific set of values and practices, it is possible for citizens to be considered "un-American" by virtue of courting the "wrong" political or religious beliefs (including atheism).³³ This was the case during the 1950s' Red Scare and McCarthyism, when those suspected of supporting communism were accused of being un-American and, in consequence, suffered discrimination and prosecution, and in certain cases were forced into exile. The trope of un-Americanness resurfaced after September 11, 2001, to characterize critics of the Bush administration, and more recently to delegitimize the Affordable Care Act (so-called Obamacare) or those embracing "socialism" or declaring themselves atheists (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006; Edgell et al. 2016).

Nations imagined in the ethnic mode emphasize instead common descent, language, and cultural traits such as religion, passed on to individuals through the blood. Inclusion in the national community is primarily determined by ethnic or racial origins; identity cannot be chosen, acquired, nor escaped. Exclusion on the basis of politics or ideological leanings therefore ill befits places where the nation is primarily understood in ethnic terms, such as Poland. And yet the Catholic Right routinely excludes ethnic Poles from the imagined boundaries of the nation because of their ideological leanings, political identities, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation.

alliance between minority groups toward which the political Right and the Catholic Church are not especially benevolent. This argument has also been made by the feminist scholar and public intellectual Magdalena Środa (2014), who analyzes the witch hunt against feminists and the Catholic Church's blaming of "gender ideology" for all sorts of social ills, from broken families to pedophile priests. Moreover, it is common for far-Right editorialists and activists to directly refer to feminist scholars and activists as Jews. On the use of Jewishness and homosexuality as tropes for symbolic exclusion from the national community, see also Mosse (1985), Bunzl (2004), and Bratcher (2020).

³³ The prefix *un*, unlike the more neutral *non*, implies active opposition to what is normatively considered "American."

How is it possible, given the dominant ethnic understanding of national identity, to exclude members of the prevalent ethnic group? How can the Catholic Right insist on the blood-based character of Polishness while at the same time symbolically excluding some ethnic Poles? How is the tension reconciled between these two modes of social closure—one based on blood and culture, the other on ideological orientations and political bonds?

Magical Antisemitism: Ethnicizing Ideological Otherness

In Poland, the tension between ethnic and civic modes of boundary-keeping is primarily solved by turning ideological divergence into ethnic divergence: individuals and groups who do not defend the prominent place of Catholicism and its symbols in the public sphere, but advocate instead for a civic and secular Poland, are discursively turned into "Jews" by the Right. That process makes ideologically based exclusion conform to the logic of ethnic nationalism.

This logic and the multiple cases of its application in the public sphere, in both verbal and nonverbal discourse, provide rich examples of a phenomenon analyzed long ago by Jean-Paul Sartre (1986 [1946]), who famously claimed that "if the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him." For Enzo Traverso (1997), one can be Jewish, and become Jewish, merely by virtue of the Other's gaze. The former political dissident and Solidarity activist Adam Michnik, now editor-in-chief of Poland's most important daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, refers to this reasoning as "magical antisemitism." He explains its workings as follows: "The logic of normal . . . antisemitism is the following: 'Adam Michnik is a Jew, therefore he is a hooligan, a thief, a traitor, a bandit etc.' Magical antisemitism however works this way: 'Adam Michnik is a thief, therefore he is most probably a Jew'" (1999:73).

Why single out Jews instead of Russians or Germans, also significant Others in the Polish social imagination? One key reason is that Jewishness is perceived as the polar opposite of the ethnoreligious category of the *Polak-katolik* (Krzemiński 1996, 2001). According to Kowalski and Tulli (2003:486–89), the invention of Jews in right-wing milieus is a response to their ideological creation of "imaginary Poles." Imaginary Poles embody the "true" qualities and values of Polishness—Catholicism, patriotism, traditionalism, and economic conservatism. But when actual Poles fail to live up to this model, right-leaning social actors can suffer from a cognitive dissonance that they resolve by spinning conspiracy theories of Jews infiltrating the nation. Furthermore, Jews are traditionally associated

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with capitalism, socialism, and cosmopolitanism. On the face of it, these three ideological forms might seem unlikely bedfellows, but all three are easily opposed to the traditional figures of the Polish Catholic peasant and nobleman-intellectual.

As Jewishness has become a symbol of a liberal, plural, and secular Poland, Poland is claimed by the Catholic Right to be ruled by “Jews”—symbolic Jews—who must be stopped. Poland is thus host to the perplexing phenomenon of antisemitism in a country with very few Jews.³⁴

Figure 2 captures key components of that type and form of antisemitism. Posted on a far-Right website, the photo collage is entitled “A Very Virtual Poland,” implying that the Poland represented here by (postcommunist Left) President Aleksander Kwaśniewski (1995–2005) is not the “real thing,” nor what it should be. It depicts Kwaśniewski with his mouth covered by a photograph of Joseph Stalin, thus implying that the president is a communist mouthpiece. Prominently displayed at the top right corner of the image is the insignia of the Soviet NKVD, the organization that preceded the KGB and that was responsible for murdering some twenty thousand Polish officers in the forests of Katyń during the Second World War. The cloth Star of David that Jews were forced to wear in Nazi-occupied Europe, at the top left corner, suggests that Kwaśniewski is not only associated with violent communism but also a Jew—replicating the long-standing trope of Judeo-communism.³⁵ The juxtaposition of the Star of David with the yellow stars of the European Union flag, which Poland joined in 2004 under Kwaśniewski’s leadership, visually alludes to a conspiracy theory often articulated in right-wing media, according to which the European Union is part of a communist/Zionist plot to take over Poland.³⁶

A second example of magical antisemitism transforms various political elites representing a wide range of views, from Left to Right, into Orthodox

34 For survey-based analyses of antisemitism in contemporary Poland, see Krzemiński (1996, 2001, 2015) and Bilewicz, Winiewski, and Radzik (2012). On antisemitism and opposition to it, see Blobaum (2005) and Michnik (ed., 2010). On folkloric and historical representations of Jews in Poland, see Cała (1995), Michlic (2006), and Tokarska-Bakir (2008).

35 In Poland, Judeo-communism—*żydokomuna*—is a pervasive antisemitic narrative claiming that Jews collaborated with the Soviet Union to impose communism in Poland. The term underlines the fusion of the categories of Jews/Jewishness and communism. On the narrative of Judeo-Bolshevism in Eastern Europe, see Gerrits (2008) and Hanebrink (2018). On its Polish variant, see Michlic (2006) and Śpiewak (2012).

36 Such conspiracy theories were expressed numerous times by my interviewees in the early 2000s. One man in his sixties, for example, explained to me that the Jews knew that their situation in the Middle East was untenable in the long term and were therefore trying to come back to Poland, the “real Promised Land.” As he saw it, the European Union was the structure through which they could accomplish that goal.



FIGURE 2. Antisemitic meme accusing President Aleksander Kwaśniewski of being a Jew and a communist, posted on the far-Right website "A Very Virtual Poland" (<http://bardzo-wirtualna-polska.abceblog.com>, accessed June 4, 2013).



FIGURE 3. Antisemitic meme turning Polish politicians into Orthodox Jews, posted on the far-Right website "A Very Virtual Poland" (<http://bardzo-wirtualna-polska.abceblog.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2013/08/zydzi-w-polsce.jpg>, accessed June 4, 2013).

Jews (figure 3). The image implies that Poland is ruled by Jews. The prominent figure smoking a cigar and unceremoniously holding the Polish flag is Jerzy Urban, a former press secretary under communist rule who in the 1990s founded the vulgar, satirical, anticlerical weekly *Nie* (No).³⁷ Behind him, making the victory sign with his fingers, is Adam Michnik. On the left side of the frame, above the flag, is Donald Tusk, then leader of the Center-Right party Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*), prime minister of Poland from 2007 to 2014, and more recently president of the European Council (2014–19). Other notable political figures in the collage include Aleksander Kwaśniewski; the late Andrzej Lepper, leader of the populist party Self-Defense (*Samoobrona*) from 1992 to 2011; and Leszek Balcerowicz,

³⁷ Urban is the only figure depicted without religious garb. This may be either because of his well-known animosity toward religion or because his Jewish origins are considered self-evident.

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former minister of finance (1997–2000), responsible for Poland’s so-called shock therapy during its transition to capitalism. Some of these figures have Jewish roots, but most do not. And that is the point: what matters is not whether they are Jewish by descent, but what Jewishness represents to the author of the cartoon.

These two arresting examples are emblematic of visual discourses common on far-Right social media but too extreme to be displayed on mainstream right-wing forums.³⁸ Magical antisemitism and discourses around *żydokomuna* are very much present in the public sphere, however, and commonplace in right-wing newspapers like *Nasz Dziennik* (Our Daily), *Gazeta Polska* (Polish Gazette), and the conservative Catholic weekly *Niedziela* (Sunday), as well as on the airwaves of Radio Maryja. In all these print and radio media, Poland’s most popular daily, the progressive *Gazeta Wyborcza*, is nicknamed “*Gazeta Koszerna*,” the kosher newspaper. In the same vein, the progressive, personalist Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, with which John Paul II was associated before his papacy and which has long worked toward building Polish- and Christian-Jewish dialogue, is nicknamed “*Żydownik Powszechny*” (Universal *Jewishy*) by people on the far Right.³⁹

The process of casting opponents as Jews is so prevalent that some progressive Catholic bishops are sometimes accused of being Jewish. Even John Paul II, canonized in 2014, is not immune to this magical antisemitism (see figure 4). A graffito defacing a mural dedicated to the memory of the late Polish pope accuses him of being an “actor and an impostor;” as well as a Jew, most likely because of his ecumenical preaching and rapprochement with Judaism and Jews, whom he commonly referred to as “our older brothers in faith.” A Star of David is spray-painted over the pope’s face, and the graffito includes a play on the vulgar “son of a bitch” insult, replacing the word “son” with “Jew” (“Jew of a bitch”—*z kurwy żyd*). The word Jew is sprayed over multiple times to achieve a bold effect. Though the graffito is not signed, the author left clues to its provenance. The symbol at the lower left is shorthand for the slogan “Poland Fighting” (*Polska walcząca*). It was used in the resistance against the Nazis during World War II and against communism in the postwar era, and is now used by the Right and far Right in their fight against the menace posed by so-called liberal issues.

38 While these images could be found on a popular far-Right website and are circulated on the web, it is impossible to identify their author or get in touch with the webmaster.

39 In a bold reversal, the weekly reclaimed the intended insult. For its sixty-fifth-anniversary issue in 2010, it printed *Żydownik Powszechny* on its masthead, commemorating its long-standing engagement with Polish-Jewish and Christian-Jewish relations.



FIGURE 4. Antisemitic graffiti defacing a mural to the memory of Pope John Paul II, in Kraków, summer 2013. It accuses the pope of being an actor, a fraud, and a Jew because of his ecumenism and explicit rapprochement with Judaism. “Z kurwy żyd” is literally “Jew of a bitch,” a play on the epithet “son of a bitch.” (Photo by Marcin Karkosza / Polska Press, reprinted with permission of *Gazeta Krakowska*.)

Similar discourses find expression in everyday life. During my fieldwork at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and the town of Oświęcim in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I was told on several occasions that the more liberal wings of the Catholic Church were led by Jews who had infiltrated the organization by “passing” as Poles/Catholics. A common theory is that many Jewish children who were hidden and saved by the Catholic Church during the Second World War later entered the priesthood for convenience and eventually rose in the church hierarchy. They are now ideally situated, the story goes, to destroy the institution from within. The fact that many Jewish children were in fact hidden in Catholic institutions, and that some of them later did become priests and nuns, lends plausibility and power to the conspiracy theory.⁴⁰

In the examples cited here, Jewishness is understood as an ethnic or racial category rather than a religious one. The trope of passing—converting

⁴⁰ See Paweł Pawlikowski’s Oscar-winning film *Ida*, about a novice nun about to take her vows who is told by a family member that she is Jewish. See also the documentary *Torn*, by Ronit Kertsner, about Father Romuald-Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel, a Roman Catholic priest who found out at age thirty-five that he had been given by his Jewish birth mother to a Polish Catholic family in Świącany (near Vilnius) before the liquidation of the town’s ghetto in 1943. Weksler-Waszkinel emigrated to Israel in 2008 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM4N2ecEaCo> and <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/biographies/4136-weksler-waszkinel-romuald-jakub>).

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and/or changing one's name to hide Jewish origins—is ever-present in the discourse of the far Right, as conversion cannot alter one's ethnicity or race. Revelations about the “real” names of public figures on traditional and social media platforms and the use of a modifier, such as “Polish-speaking” instead of the usual “Polish,” are therefore common discursive strategies meant to unmask “impostors.” Long before I started conducting research on antisemitism and philosemitism, someone's “real” identity would be “revealed” to me by others in confidence or casual conversations, not only with regard to public figures but also acquaintances and colleagues.

It is precisely this magical antisemitism that the street artist Peter Fuss critiqued in his project “Jesus Christ King of Poland.” As part of the project, in January 2007 Fuss installed a large billboard in a residential neighborhood of Koszalin in northwestern Poland (figure 5). It displayed fifty-six stylized photographs of Polish public figures with the caption “Jews, Get Out of This Catholic Country!” By including several prominent figures from the Catholic Right—such as the president of Poland, Lech Kaczyński—Fuss underlined the convoluted logic and hysteria that perme-



FIGURE 5. A police car investigates street artist Peter Fuss's billboard “Jews, Get Out of This Catholic Country” in Koszalin in January 2007. The billboard included prominent members of the Catholic Right as well as the former prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and the Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska, both associated with the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. (Photo by Peter Fuss, reprinted with permission of the artist.)

ates magical antisemitism. As part of the project, the artist observed and photographed reactions of passersby examining the billboard, as well as police cars slowing to investigate it. Those photographs became part of a multimedia exhibition in which Fuss blew up and framed transcripts of antisemitic discussions on popular web platforms and played recorded sound fragments from Radio Maryja.⁴¹ The billboard was deemed racist and antisemitic by the Koszalin police, and the exhibition was shut down for propagating hate speech. Fuss documented this process, too, and posted it on his website.

Magical Philosemitism and the Tragedy of Civic Nationalism

If magical antisemitism involves the ethnicization of deviation from a strict ethno-Catholic model of Polishness, the same strategy is at the source of magical *philosemitism*. Whereas ethnoreligious nationalists contend that "Jews" are contaminating the nation with their civic ideals and building a pernicious cosmopolitan world, proponents of a progressive, liberal, and secular vision of the polity argue that "Jews" must be resurrected and Jewishness promoted for the same reason. Philosemitism in contemporary Poland is therefore not anti-antisemitism but is connected to the inner logic of ethnic nationalism in that country. Precisely because Jewishness carries specific significations and symbolic capital that other minorities (such as Ukrainians, Silesians, or Vietnamese) do not possess, it is primarily through Jews and Jewishness that a vision of a modern multicultural and secular Poland is articulated and liberal nationalism promoted.⁴² In chapter 5 I explain in greater detail why that is the case.

In a context where national identity is primarily understood in ethnic terms, and where civic discourse of the nation can be perceived as a remnant of communist party-state rhetoric or as an import from the European

41 For photographs of the exhibition, screenshots, and radio segments used in the project, see <http://peterfuss.com/jesus-christ-king-of-poland>. The conservative weekly *Wprost* published a story on the project with the title "Police Searching for Author of Racist Billboard" (<https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/100441/policja-szuka-autora-rasistowskiego-billboardu.html>).

42 Broadly speaking, *Silesians* denotes the population inhabiting Silesia, a region that extends across the modern Polish, German, and Czech borders. Although few Silesians still speak the Silesian dialect (a mix of Polish and German), this regional identity is quite strong. In the 2011 census, the first to allow dual ethnonational identifications, 376,000 Polish residents declared "Silesian" as their only ethnic identity, 436,000 as their primary ethnicity, and 411,000 as their secondary one (https://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/Przynalezynosc_narodowo-etniczna_w_2011_NSP.pdf).

Union and neoliberal Polish elites, progressive, “civic” nationalists must work doubly hard at rendering their vision of the nation legitimate and authentically Polish. Public intellectuals have therefore tried to promote this vision by reconstructing a narrative that emphasizes the civic heritage of the nation in Poland. They do so by looking back to sixteenth-century religious tolerance, to the First Republic’s multiethnic and multiconfessional state, to the Democracy of Nobles’ elective monarchy, to the Constitution of May 3, 1791, to the nineteenth-century Polish legions fighting “for your freedom and ours,” to interwar liberal traditions, and to a certain extent to the 1970s Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR) and Solidarity’s peaceful resistance and civic activism in the 1980s.

Since the Right and far Right also use some of these historical themes, civic nationalists have few political stories and symbols at their disposal, and have therefore engaged in recreating Jewish culture as a visible counterweight to the ethnoreligious national community. Paradoxically, then, ethnicity remains the means through which they attempt to transcend ethnonationalism. That conundrum is at the basis of what I call the tragedy of Polish civic nationalism: to escape ethnic nationalism, civic nationalists must resort to deploying it. Part of that tragedy is that in order to achieve the goals of civic nationalism and multiculturalism, the Jew must remain irremediably Other. And whether real or symbolic, the category of the Jew remains malleable to those with power over it.

While Rogers Brubaker speaks of “ethnicity without groups” (2004) and Andreas Wimmer of “ethnicity without boundaries” (2008a) to highlight the fluidity of ethnic categories, in this book I analyze ethnic boundaries without ethnic groups, answering Lamont and Molnár’s call “for greater attention to the cultural production of boundaries, of difference and hybridity, and of cultural membership and group classifications” (2002:169).

Methods, Data, and Guide to the Book

To explain the contemporary enthusiasm for all things Jewish and to explore the ways it is related to symbolic boundary (re)making, this study adopts a multiscalar approach, considering macro, meso, and micro dimensions of philosemitism. I analyze Jewish-centered initiatives sponsored by state institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), bottom-up civic projects, and everyday individual practices. On the basis of archival and ethnographic research conducted in multiple Polish cities and towns, I interpret the different meanings that Jewishness has for the

diverse actors and organizations engaged in the Jewish turn: Jewish and non-Jewish, secular and religious.

In addition to its wide geographic reach, the study spans the last quarter century. It builds on previous fieldwork in Poland, during which I have observed and documented changing Polish-Jewish relations and the rising interest of non-Jewish Poles in Jewish culture. In the course of my research on the collective memory/nonmemory of the Holocaust in the 1990s and early 2000s, I conducted formal and ethnographic interviews with Poles (both Jewish and non-Jewish) interested in and dedicated to learning and teaching about Jews, Jewish culture, and Polish-Jewish relations. I participated in various commemorative events, such as the March of the Living at Auschwitz and the March of Memory in Kraków, and I have attended Kraków's annual Jewish Culture Festival on many occasions since 1990. These early encounters with the beginnings of the Jewish revival were significant because they served as a point of comparison when I returned to Poland in the summer of 2010 after a five-year hiatus.

I conducted thirty weeks of fieldwork over a period of ten years, from the summer of 2010 through the fall of 2019. Most of my fieldwork was in Kraków and Warsaw, where the Jewish turn is strongest, but I also conducted research in Lublin, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Łódź, Oświęcim, Chmielnik, and Szydłów. I was a frequent participant observer at the annual Kraków Jewish Culture Festival, which organizes workshops, courses, and tours focused on Poland's Jewish past and present. I was invited to numerous communal events in the Kraków and Warsaw Jewish communities, such as Shabbat dinners, anniversaries, weddings, bar mitzvahs, and religious holidays (Purim, Yom Kippur, Passover). I also attended the 2016 Polish Limmud, a three-day gathering of members of the Jewish community during which they learn from each other about Judaism, Jewish history and culture, and other issues relevant to their communal life in workshops, panels, and book readings. I participated in everyday work at Kraków's Jewish Community Centre (JCC), which opened in 2008, and I attended special events elsewhere for Catholics and Protestants who were eager to learn about Judaism and Jewish culture, such as a Christian enactment of a Passover seder. Lastly, I accompanied a group of Polish Jewish youth on a Birthright trip to Israel in July 2017, spending twelve days with them as they encountered that country, explored their Jewish heritage, and engaged in constant dialogue about their identities. I conducted follow-up interviews with a third of the participants in the months following the trip.

Besides participant observation, I conducted over one hundred open-ended interviews with key actors and representatives of institutions

involved in initiatives and activities related to Jewishness: rabbis, cultural entrepreneurs, communal leaders, museologists, artists, and public intellectuals, as well as participants in communal and cultural events. Over half of these formal interviews were with non-Jewish volunteers at Jewish institutions, non-Jewish members of an Israeli dance group, Christian evangelicals observing Jewish holidays, and non-Jewish Poles who are in the process of converting to Judaism or who recently discovered they have Jewish ancestry. Many of the last are recovering a Jewish identity by registering for classes on topics from Hebrew to kosher cooking, and seeking to implement their learning in their daily lives.

Finally, I collected materials documenting the emergence and transformation of various Jewish-centered initiatives and state-sponsored institutions like festivals, museums, and university programs; memorials and significant artistic creations and projects; and the opening of commercial enterprises such as restaurants, cafés, and bookshops, with special attention to coverage of these in the press. I also analyzed primary texts such as political speeches, inscriptions on monuments, and newspaper editorials; iconographic documents (photographs, graffiti, ads, pamphlets); audiovisual materials (films and amateur videos, radio broadcasts, music and soundtracks); and artifacts (mementos and souvenirs). Although spatial constraints preclude my referring to all these materials in the book, they inform my overall analysis. A detailed discussion of methodology, specific sources, and different types of data used for individual chapters appears in appendix A.

These multiple perspectives provide me with a view of both the production of the Jewish cultural revival in Poland and its consumption and re-creation by participants. My interpretation of the varied meanings of Jewishness is firmly grounded in empirical data. By getting close to the actors actually engaging in Jewish-centered practices, paying careful attention to the local contexts in which those practices and projects arise, and seeing how they are interpreted and appropriated by ordinary people reacting to them, I can paint a nuanced picture of the phenomenal interest in all things Jewish in contemporary Poland.

Resurrecting the Jew is divided into two main parts. The first focuses on Poland's great mnemonic awakening after the publication of Jan Gross's *Neighbors*, and the emergence of nostalgic discourses on Jewish absence. Chapter 2 studies the material evocation of Jewish absence through an analysis of mnemonic initiatives by artists, NGOs, and official institutions to find and mark Jewish traces and ruins in urban landscapes. Chapter 3 digs into nostalgic discourses about Jews and what these reveal about

Poles. Chapter 4 analyzes the most important cultural institution articulating the history of Polish Jews, the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Part Two shifts the focus to the active recovery of Jewishness and Judaism in the present. Chapter 5 analyzes the performance of Jewishness by non-Jews. It asks what cultural appropriation means in the Polish context before turning to the analysis of multicultural utopias embodied in the discovery, recovery, and performance of Jewish culture by non-Jewish Poles. Chapter 6 discusses the renewal of Jewish life proper, investigates how it intersects with the "Jewish turn," and asks what this all means for the community of Polish Jews. In the conclusion, I reflect on whether and to what extent the Jewish turn is a distinctively Polish phenomenon. I extend my findings to comparisons beyond Poland and articulate the theoretical contributions of the study to cultural sociology, the sociology of nationalism, and memory studies. By highlighting the role of cultural practices in the contest over national identity and its symbolic boundaries, *Resurrecting the Jew* disentangles the processes through which ethnonational, religious, and ideological identifications are bundled and mobilized.

The title of the book may be perplexing to some. The term *resurrection* is not one I have heard used in Poland to describe the Jewish revival. There, *rebirth* (*odrodzenie*) and *renaissance* (*renesans*) are used instead. I chose the metaphor of resurrection because it captures the story of the (unexpected, miraculous) passage from death to life, with a clear emphasis on life, which is central to the Polish narrative of Jewish history in Poland. I use that specific metaphor precisely to underline the Polish specificity of the phenomenon. I also use the metaphor in its present-participle form—*resurrecting* rather than *resurrection*—to emphasize the processual nature of the phenomenon and to stress that the revival of Jewish culture (and the renewal of Jewish life) in Poland involves human agency: it is a project enacted by specific people, most of whom are (nominally) Catholics but who are bringing Jewish culture back to life in order to transcend the religious definition of Polishness. The Jew in the title is not Jesus. It refers, rather, to an amorphous, ghostly Jew—a revenant—that Poles conjure to reinvent themselves.

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