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## AN INCLUSIVE MODEL OF MEMORY WORK IN POLAND: BRIDGE TO POLAND AS A CASE STUDY

### ABSTRACT

The memory of World War II in Poland is sometimes plagued by an us/them mentality or a competition of suffering. This paper will attempt to answer several questions: how are non-Jews contributing to Holocaust memorialization in Poland today? How can recognizing this contribution serve to heal rifts and change deep-seated stereotypes? We will present a case study, based on participant observation, of Bridge To Poland, which emphasizes memory work conducted by non-Jewish Poles. Bridge To Poland's latest project in conjunction with the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre, *The Neshoma Project: Conversations with Poles Rescuing Jewish Memory*, highlights those whom Tec calls "Rescuers of Memory". Exposing people to their work, Tec believes, results in breaking down negative stereotypes about non-Jewish Poles and building bridges between people.

**Keywords:** memory work, Holocaust, Polish-Jewish relations, postmemory

**Słowa kluczowe:** praca z pamięcią, Holocaust, stosunki polsko-żydowskie, postpamięć

## INTRODUCTION

After World War II (WWII), Jewish memory was to a large extent absent in Poland. But after the fall of communism, memory work on a wider scale became possible. Today, in Poland, there are people engaged in many different aspects of memory work, and that work has had a positive impact on selected participants of Bridge to Poland trips. After laying the groundwork about post-war amnesia regarding Jewish memory in Poland, we focus on the subjects of Bridge To Poland's *The Neshoma Project*,<sup>1</sup> whom Tec calls "Rescuers of Memory." We will show that exposure to their work – primarily through Bridge To Poland trips – has the potential to create curiosity and empathy, and thus contribute to bridge building between trip participants and the Polish people they meet.

## THE ERASURE OF JEWISH MEMORY IN POLAND

In order to understand the impact of the "Rescuers of Memory" in Poland, it is first necessary to lay out the extent of the destruction of Polish Jewry and the forces that contributed to the erasure of Jewish memory after the war. Before WWII, the Jewish population of Poland was approximately 3.3 million, or ten percent of the total population. Ninety percent of the pre-war Jewish community was murdered during the Holocaust: *In some cases, such as in Warsaw, almost every last fragment of the Jewish past – its streets, shops, prayer houses – vanished from the urban landscape.*<sup>2</sup> This devastating loss, coupled with the post-war migration of a majority of Polish Jewish survivors and the so-called "Zionist purge" of 1968, left Poland practically bereft of the rich, pre-war Jewish community that used to thrive there. The result was that remembrance of the Jews who used to walk Poland's city streets and inhabit its *shtetls* was left largely to non-Jewish Poles. Many Jewish families were entirely wiped out, leaving no descendants to commemorate family members.

Jewish remembrance in post-war Poland was hampered for several reasons. After the war, the emphasis in Central-Eastern Europe was on the each country's "own" victims of Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism. Polish identity is often said to carry a sense of unique suffering among nations, which developed from having undergone conquest, invasions, lack of a nation-state for more than a century, rebellions, wars, occupations,

<sup>1</sup> *Neshoma* means "soul" in Yiddish and is also used to denote a good person. *The Neshoma Project* (a joint effort of Leora Tec, Bridge To Poland, and the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre) is so named as a tribute to the "Rescuers of Memory" as well as to the souls of the Polish Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust. The goal of the project is to collect and preserve conversations with Polish "Rescuers of Memory" in an online video archive. L. Tec, Ośrodek Brama Grodzka-Teatr NN, *The Neshoma Project. Conversations with Poles Rescuing Jewish Memory*, [online] <https://neshomaproject.org/>, 20 IV 2021.

<sup>2</sup> M. Meng, *Shattered Spaces. Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*, Cambridge, MA–London 2011, p. 5.

and communism.<sup>3</sup> Jews were usually excluded from the prevailing definition of Polish identity in an ethnic sense. To Poles, *the Holocaust was not “their” suffering, and it opened the darker, less heroic parts of Polish history.*<sup>4</sup>

Antisemitic ideology as well as shameful actions during the war (looting, denouncing, and even murdering) contributed to creating indifference and forgetting on the part of non-Jewish Poles. Furthermore, secondary antisemitism – accusing Jews of exploiting feelings of guilt among other nations – blames Jews for their fate. Non-Jewish Poles’ focus on their own victimization is motivated by a belief that their suffering has not been and will not be recognized enough. Antisemitism rooted in a competition of suffering may suppress feelings of guilt among some non-Jewish Poles towards Jewish Poles: *Belief in the morality of one’s victimised nation and competitive victimhood produce a distorted image of history and constitute a threat to positive intergroup relations.*<sup>5</sup>

Censorship was put in place in Poland after the end of WWII by the communist regime and began to be loosened only after 1980. *After the anti-Zionist campaign of the late 1960s, a profound and nearly universal silence descended on the ‘Jewish question’.*<sup>6</sup> And though *[the] 1980s were characterized by a gradual opening up to Jewish topics, as the outcome of a general slackening of censorship after 1980,*<sup>7</sup> until 1989, Poland was under communist rule, and Jewish history and culture were to a large extent taboo. This meant that Holocaust remembrance on a large scale would not begin until the 1990s. The dearth of survivors of the Holocaust, along with ignorance of Jewish topics and the aforementioned taboos resulted in a lack of initiatives aimed at preserving Jewish memory.

## THE LANDSCAPE OF MEMORY WORK IN POLAND TODAY

Sadly, even today, there exist both Jews and non-Jews caught up in the us/them dichotomy. On the Polish, non-Jewish side (we are aware that the very use of the word “side” perpetuates this problem!) one can observe expressions of frustration that Jewish suffering receives an excess of attention, while the suffering of “Poles” has been ignored.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> S. Krajewski, *Nasza żydowskość*, Kraków–Budapeszt 2010; J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *Islands of Memory. The Landscape of the (Non)Memory of the Holocaust in Polish Education from 1989 to 2015*, Kraków 2020.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 258.

<sup>5</sup> O. Bartov, *Conclusion*, [in:] *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, eds. J.-P. Himka, J.B. Michlic, Lincoln, NE–London 2013, p. 668.

<sup>6</sup> M.C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead. Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, Syracuse 1997, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, M. Ruta, *From Jewish Culture to Culture about Jews*, [in:] *Jewish Presence in Absence. The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1945–2010*, eds. F. Tych, M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, trans. G. Dąbkowski, J. Taylor-Kucia, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 830–831.

<sup>8</sup> *[In spite of the intellectual debates about Jewish memory in Poland] Poland’s Jewish past in general and the Holocaust in particular have not become part of the country’s ‘living memory’. If anything, recent surveys suggest that understanding of the unique qualities of the Jewish past has decreased over the past decade.* Quoted from: S. Kapralski, *Amnesia, Nostalgia, and Reconstruction. Shifting Modes of Memory in*

On the Jewish side, the prevailing “us/them” categorization is based on the idea that there is no loss that can be compared to what the Jews suffered. And the fact that some Jews were denounced and even murdered in some cases by their Polish neighbors creates a traumatic postmemory<sup>9</sup> of Poland.

And yet, there are many Polish people today engaged in the work of Jewish remembrance, who embrace the idea that the history of the Jews of Poland is an integral part of the history of Poland. The “Rescuers of Memory” see Jewish history as *their* history and, when confronted with empty space or absence where Jews used to belong, feel an overwhelming urge to fill those spaces with Jewish memory. Doing so necessitates a rejection of the “us/them” mentality. The fall of communism broadened the space for this work.

In contrast thus to the suppression of memory described above, today, Holocaust remembrance in Poland takes many forms and is undertaken by various people who do not see bright-line ethnic and/or religious divisions among people: scholars, teachers, guides, grassroots activists, and artists. The Jews of Poland are remembered through monuments, museum exhibitions, theatrical works, academic articles and books, conferences, workshops, commemorative events, cemeteries, synagogues, and storytelling. Many Poles today are involved in the rescue of Jewish memory in these different ways.

## WHO ARE THE “RESCUERS OF MEMORY”?

Perhaps the most straightforward manifestation of memory work is through education in schools. The Holocaust is part of Polish history and yet, apart from initiatives of individual teachers and NGO educators, young Poles are often not engaged in active learning on the topic and do not take part in discussions about the impact of the Shoah on contemporary Polish life. The extent to which a student in Poland receives education about the Holocaust largely depends on grassroots action, often initiated by local civil society organizations or individual teachers, local activists, and/or historians of a region. Empirical studies<sup>10</sup> have confirmed that a positive impact of education about the Holocaust on attitudes in Poland did not depend on the amount of teaching in schools, but rather relied on the engagement of very well-trained educators, both from schools and NGOs, who taught students in creative ways.

Several of those interviewed for *The Neshoma Project* are teachers passing Jewish remembrance on to their students. Educating about Jewish topics is not a path devoid

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*Poland's Jewish Spaces*, [in:] *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, eds. E. Lehrer, M. Meng, Bloomington–Indianapolis 2015, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> The term *postmemory*, introduced by Marianne Hirsch, relates to the experience of those who were born after the traumatic events which former generations witnessed, and is close to the processes causing distortions of memories and further deformations of identity. See: M. Hirsch, *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge, MA–London 1997.

<sup>10</sup> J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *Me Us Them. Ethnic Prejudices and Alternative Methods of Education. The Case of Poland*, Kraków 2003; J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *Islands of Memory. The Landscape of the (Non) Memory of the Holocaust in Polish Education from 1989 to 2015*, Kraków 2020.

of obstacles, but it can be fruitful and result in student engagement. Marek Kołcon – a teacher in Zamość who is passionate about teaching his students about the Jewish history of their city – admits that students do not always start off deeply engaged in Jewish memory: *I guess young people nowadays are not interested in [...] any history. It doesn't matter if it is Polish or Jewish. They lived in the place where the ghetto used to be in Zamość and they had no idea about that. And this discovery was fascinating for them.*<sup>11</sup> Mariusz Sokołowski, now a school principal in Białystok, formerly a teacher in Wasilków, notes, when asked if anyone has ever objected to his teaching about Jewish topics: *In the course of the first or second year of my teaching, whenever I started to talk about the Jewish history of Wasilków, students would say things like: "You're going to speak about those Jews again [...]" But many of them showed signs of interest, openness – they were inquisitive, maybe because so far they had only associated the word "Jew" with stereotypes.*<sup>12</sup>

Increasing the extent to which Poles of all ages are exposed to portraits of Jews as fellow human beings will hopefully increase empathy and lead to continued remembrance of the lost Jewish culture of Poland. Both Katarzyna Winiarska from Białowieża and Mariusz Sokołowski have involved children in remembrance by having them take on the roles of Jews from their towns in theatrical productions. Sokołowski states: *[...] empathy, respect, tolerance, and open-mindedness—these are the key words for me, the foundation for my way of thinking about the role of education in human life.* The above aims of education were found among many Polish teachers, as confirmed by empirical studies.<sup>13</sup> Winiarska states: *[...] they [the students taking part in a play] know; they have somehow internalized specific [Jewish] names and surnames.*<sup>14</sup>

There are many ways in which, apart from education, Jewish memory is being preserved today in Poland. Those who are drawn to become "Rescuers of Memory" share several defining characteristics. Many have grown up with an ignorance of or a disconnection from the history of Jewish people in Poland. Often it was an encounter with Jewish absence that led them to shift their understanding of the past. It changed their perspective from a distant or unknown history of Poland to a concrete understanding, vital and personal, a calling that they could not ignore.

Many of those remembering the Jews in Poland today grew up during communism, unaware of the history of the Jews in Poland. Professor Stanisław Obirek grew up in Narol – ten minutes from the death camp Bełżec – and yet he knew nothing about what had befallen the Jews there. He says: *I was born close to Bełżec and I grew up in the shadow of this death camp [...] [I was a teenager when] I discovered [...] that Polish Jews, I mean, a half million Polish Jews [...] were killed exactly close to my village or my town.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Marek Kołcon, interview within the framework of *The Neshoma Project* on January 21, 2020. All interviews cited in the text were conducted as part of the same project.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mariusz Sokołowski on April 26, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> J. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *Me Us Them...*

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Katarzyna Winiarska on April 27, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Stanisław Obirek on January 26, 2019.

One of the earliest to engage with Jewish remembrance was Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, founder and director of the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre in Lublin. Today, Lublin has a Jewish population of forty or fifty, compared to the pre-war Jewish population of that city: 43,000 out of 120,000. In order to properly commemorate the Jewish community, non-Jews would of necessity need to be engaged in this work. In the 1990s, Tomasz Pietrasiewicz was poised to establish a theatre company in the building surrounding *Brama Grodzka* – once the passageway between the Christian and Jewish parts of the city. When he learned that the “other side of the Gate” used to be home to the majority of Lublin’s Jews and now consisted mainly of empty space, he felt he had to act to bring back the memory of these people: *I felt there was something deeply not right about this situation, that an adult man living in this city doesn’t know anything about the Jews.*<sup>16</sup> Life is impossible to restore, but memory can be brought back in a variety of ways. Indeed, Pietrasiewicz refers to the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre as an “archive of memory” or “an ark of memory.” The Centre collects photos and documents, and in the late 1990s, their activists began interviewing inhabitants of Lublin who remembered the war and the pre-war years.

Tomasz’s definition of story is a broad one and includes fragments of story and parts of photographs. Embracing the importance of fragments is essential, as stories from the Holocaust period often do not come to us as complete narratives. The iconic example of Pietrasiewicz’s appreciation of fragments is the story of the boy from the town of Kamionka in the Lublin region. When Tomasz was in elementary school in the 1960s, his teacher told the class that during the war in Kamionka, she had seen a small Jewish boy being dragged to his death and that within five minutes the boy’s hair turned white. Tomasz remembered this story as an adult, but he realized that he was the only one left alive to bear witness to this little boy’s life. Tomasz had a choice: he could forget about the little boy or he could honor his memory by telling his story. Tomasz Pietrasiewicz chose to remember and added another metaphor to several that define the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre: An orphanage of stories.

The core mission of the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre is the remembrance of Lublin’s Jews. Today, the institution employs sixty non-Jewish, Polish workers. They accomplish their mission through a variety of activities, many of which have an artistic character. For example: *43,000 Folders* is a project conceived of by Pietrasiewicz to honor the memory of the 43,000 individual Jews who inhabited Lublin before WWII, as well as Lublin’s pre-war Jewish community as a whole. His idea was that there should be a physical place for each of the people who lived in pre-war Lublin. After all, many of these people have no one left to remember them. Each of the 43,000 folders contains as much information as is available about an individual. In some cases, it is only a name or a photo. In other cases, such as that of someone who survived, there may be a lot of information. Half of the folders are empty, yet they are there, holding space for the loss.

Dariusz Popiela – an Olympic kayaker on the Polish national team—uses what he refers to as his “modest sporting career” to forward his own brand of remembrance.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Tomasz Pietrasiewicz on March 17, 2019.

When Popiela discovered that the population of his own city – Nowy Sącz – had been one-third Jewish before the war, and that there were no plaques or monuments to commemorate this fact, he was propelled to action. *I don't know why, but I had to act*, he says.<sup>17</sup> And so, he created the NGO, *People, Not Numbers* (*Ludzie, nie liczby*) and through this organization, with the help of his family, friends, and the inhabitants of Grybów, Krościenko, and Czarny Dunajec, has restored the Jewish cemeteries in those towns and to the extent possible, named those who are buried there so that they do not remain anonymous.

The devastation of the Polish Jewish community during WWII, coupled with the emigration and expulsion of the Jews after the war, has led by necessity to Jewish remembrance falling to non-Jewish Poles. With 1200 Jewish cemeteries and countless mass gravesites and abandoned synagogues, not to mention the memory of individual people, the work of Jewish remembrance in Poland is vast. For many social activists, encountering the absence of Jewish memory in their communities or in Poland as a whole, was the catalyst that spurred them to action. Bridge To Poland's mission is to highlight their work.

## FACILITATING BRIDGE BUILDING: BRIDGE TO POLAND

I, Leora Tec,<sup>18</sup> am the American daughter of a Holocaust survivor and Holocaust scholar from Lublin, Nechama Tec. My mother's memoir, *Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood*<sup>19</sup> tells how she took on the non-Jewish identity of a Catholic girl, Krysia Bloch, during the war and was rescued by non-Jewish Poles. When her book was published in Polish, I was invited to accompany my parents on the book tour. It was my first visit to Poland, the place where my family had made their home for generations; the place where over 100 members of our family had been murdered during WWII. In Lublin, we were given a tour of the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre by the Centre's director Tomasz Pietrasiewicz and a very brief tour of Jewish Lublin by Witold Dąbrowski. Actor, storyteller, and deputy director of the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre, Witold has a passion for Jewish remembrance and is a captivating storyteller. I was left with a sense of awe and curiosity to learn more. The meeting with Brama Grodzka and with Tomasz and Witold changed my life. Several years later, I established an organization called Bridge To Poland through which I create trips to Poland that tell the story of Jewish Poland with an emphasis on non-Jewish Poles doing the work of remembrance.

The Bridge To Poland philosophy is rooted in the idea that you cannot tell the story of Jewish Poland without telling the non-Jewish story as well. It is important to provide participants with a complete picture of what Poles endured as a nation under the

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dariusz Popiela on February 14, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> One of the authors of this paper.

<sup>19</sup> N. Tec, *Dry Tears. The Story of a Lost Childhood*, New York 1984. The book was published in Polish as: N. Tec, *Suche łzy*, tłum. K. Mantorska, M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, Warszawa 2005.



German occupation as well as under the Soviets and resist the temptation to engage in a competition of suffering. Of course, shedding light on Polish experiences during the War and after also includes the dark parts of history. Bridge To Poland does not shy away from hard truths about *szmalcowniki*, Polish murder of Jews and antisemitism. In my work over the last fifteen years, I have met many people with Polish Jewish heritage who have an entrenched, negative view of Poles. I have heard countless times variations of such comments as, “Why would any Jew in their right mind want to be involved with Poland?”<sup>20</sup> or “The Poles made their country almost Judenrein. Let them live with it.”<sup>21</sup>

Meeting those who are engaged in memory work can be a catalyst for shifting ingrained stereotypes. Of course, people with the most entrenched views would not come on a Bridge To Poland trip. Those who sign up, knowing the emphasis on non-Jewish “Rescuers of Memory”, must at least be somewhat open to the idea of non-Jews remembering their Jewish neighbors. Below are few examples of shifts in perception that have occurred after participation in a Bridge To Poland trip.

Judy was a 2017 trip participant. Her mother had left Poland for the United States in 1929 at the age of sixteen. Though Judy’s mother did not live through the Holocaust in Poland, Judy’s childhood was full of stories of Polish antisemitism and fear of non-Jewish Poles. It was not until she was in her sixties, after her mother was no longer alive, that she decided to visit Poland to explore for herself. Judy’s mother’s stories of antisemitism in Poland had made the place seem uninviting, a closed door. Now, when she hears about Poland on the news Judy thinks of the specific people that she met on the Bridge To Poland trip – Witold Dąbrowski, Tomasz Cebulski, and others – as opposed to the nameless, faceless Poles that her mother had described in a disparaging way. Judy later told me in an on-camera interview: *Meeting all the people that were memorializing Jewish life in Poland was a superb experience. They were so warm and welcoming and my impressions were really positive, after having heard not such great things about Poles from my mother. My opinion was really changed by this trip.*

Randy, a Catholic college student who participated in a trip in 2014, was so fascinated and moved by what he had learned, and the people he had met, that he changed his college minor to Jewish Studies, in an effort to continue that connection and learning.<sup>22</sup> Susie, a trip participant with roots in Łomża, wrote that her biggest takeaway from the trip was: [...] *if you begin to douse EVERYTHING in humanity, in understanding, in empathy, I think it’s hard not to walk away with greater compassion all around.*<sup>23</sup> It is not only the trip participants who see the benefits of Bridge To Poland trips, but also Poles who meet with them like Grzegorz Jędrejko, a former worker in the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre, who said: *Thanks to her trips, people realize that Poland is not only*

<sup>20</sup> Facebook, accessed January 23, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Facebook, accessed October 24, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> L. Tec, *Bridge Building in the Polish Jewish Landscape*, [in:] *Jews in Dialogue. Jewish responses to the challenges of multicultural contemporaneity*, eds. M. Dziaczkowska, A.V. Messina, Leiden–Boston 2020, pp. 182–203.

<sup>23</sup> Email communication with the author.



a cemetery, but actually there are people living on this cemetery who also lost their identity because they lost their neighbors.<sup>24</sup>

When I first created Bridge To Poland, I thought that I was telling a story only about Poland and the Jews. But student groups in particular taught me otherwise; this is a human story. After visiting the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre and being immersed in the memory work being carried out there on a daily basis, students commented to me that they wanted to work on issues that had to do with divisions between people, like black-white relations in the United States and the Syrian refugee crisis. Exposure to memory work done with devotion by people who at least on the surface are not part of the group they are commemorating, can have a powerful impact on those who witness it.

### THOSE WHO COMMEMORATE: *THE NESHOMA PROJECT*

The goal of Bridge To Poland's *The Neshoma Project*<sup>25</sup> is to immortalize the work of Polish "Rescuers of Memory" in an online video library to give future generations access to the wisdom of the memory workers that came before them and to educate descendants of victims about the efforts to remember those who perished. The current generation of these activists has several advantages over their colleagues in the future.

First of all, they have the benefit of having had contact with Holocaust survivors. Many speak of being guided in their work by the perspective they gained from the survivors whom they know personally. Of course, as Elie Weisel said, no one can truly know what a Holocaust survivor has gone through,<sup>26</sup> but knowing a survivor firsthand at least provides an opportunity to gain insight into his or her experiences and their repercussions. The reverence with which the "Rescuers of Memory" talk about their relationships with survivors is evidence of the empathy that they bring to their work.

Tomasz Pietrasiewicz emphasizes the importance of his relationship with Symcha Nornberg, the first survivor with whom he developed a deep friendship. Symcha had vowed never to return to Poland but after becoming friends with Tomasz he changed his mind.<sup>27</sup> Katarzyna Winiarska, who speaks of the Jews of Białowieża as if she had personally known them, says that her friendship with a survivor is of paramount importance: [...] *the most important experience for me was [...] when I found David Waldshan, a survivor, who now lives in the States. [...] I thought that I was merely picking up some*

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Grzegorz Jędrak on June 10, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> In cooperation with the Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre Centre.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-9/analysis-reflection>, *Facing History and Ourselves, The Holocaust and Human Behavior Curriculum*, quoting E. Wiesel [et al.], *Dimensions of the Holocaust. Lectures at Northwestern University*, annotated by E. Lefkowitz, 2nd ed., Evanston, IL 1990, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Tomasz Pietrasiewicz on March 17, 2019.

*scraps and that's all.*<sup>28</sup> For the “Rescuers of Memory”, the connection with survivors facilitates a much closer “touching” of the history that they are working to preserve.

Secondly, the “Rescuers of Memory” grew up entirely or partially under communism when Jewish topics were to a great extent taboo. For several activists, the existence of this taboo, was one of the determinants of their work. Tomasz Cebulski, guide, genealogist, and author of the book *Auschwitz after Auschwitz*,<sup>29</sup> is a good example of the above motivation. He reported that when he returned from working at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw as a teenager where he had discovered that Janusz Korczak was Jewish, the adults in his life were uncomfortable with his questions about Polish Jews. He credits this reticence to discussing Jewish issues as one of the factors that propelled him to devote his career to Jewish memory in Poland.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION: RESISTANCE TO DEHUMANIZATION

During the war, the Germans attempted to annihilate European Jewry and remove all traces of the Jews and their culture. Some resisted the mass crime by saving lives and others by saving testimonies (Ringelblum Archive). After the war, remembrance was hampered by censorship, antisemitism, a competition of suffering and a lack of Jews. After 1989, commemorating Jewish heritage in Poland was possible on a larger scale. And yet, nowadays, some Poles are still reluctant to commemorating the Jews. Despite this, rescue of Jewish memory is being accomplished in many different ways by many different people all over Poland. Americans who come on Bridge To Poland trips encounter NGOs and activists whose work and passions challenge any pre-conceived negative stereotypes about Poles held by trip participants.

The work of remembrance carried out by the individuals cited herein enhances the lesson of shared humanity and has given Bridge To Poland trip participants hope for the future. Perhaps the idea of hope in a place that many describe as a cemetery is ironic, but that is the truth. It could be described as finding hope among the ashes. Still, no one wants their country, the place where they grew up and raised or plan to raise children, to be described as a cemetery by outsiders. The land of Poland contains both: ashes and tears for both Jews and non-Jews, but also memory, and traces of a rich, vibrant culture. The “Rescuers of Memory” who are – with devotion and commitment – bringing back the memory of the Jews who once lived in Poland, offer hope for future generations.

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<sup>29</sup> T. Cebulski, *Auschwitz po Auschwitz. Polityczne i międzynarodowe aspekty funkcjonowania Państwowe-go Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau 1980–2010*, Kraków 2016.

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