

Anti-Polonism in the Ideology of National Socialism

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Abstract

Hanna Arendt in her *opus magnum* observed that National Socialism divided nations into ones that were to be exterminated forthwith, such as the Jews, those that could expect to be annihilated in the foreseeable future, such as the Poles, Russians and Ukrainians, and ones for which no “final solution” was planned (the French and the Belgians). However, the extermination of the Polish civilian populace began as early as 1939. First, the Wehrmacht committed war crimes against Polish prisoners of war and civilians – the alleged partisans, while later *Einsatzgruppen* units started killing “radical Poles”; finally, members of the organization *Volksdeutscher Selbstschutz* murdered tens of thousands of Polish citizens. It was not a total genocide, as in the case of the Jews, but the first partial genocide committed during World War II – a method of pacification of a community combined with declassing and an alteration of its identity.

The nature, methods and goals (both short- and long-term) of the German occupation in the East (including Poland) were determined by National Socialist ideology. Racism, Social Darwinism, anti-Semitism and German Nationalism were at its core, but anti-Slavism and anti-Polonism also formed a part. Without the latter, neither the partial genocide committed against the Polish nation, nor the planned total genocide would have been possible.

[...] how are we to explain to the world that six million Poles and Jews – defenseless women, children and the elderly, laborers and scholars, were captured, imprisoned, robbed, bound and ultimately killed. (Hirszfeld, 2011, p. 530)

During the Second World War, anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism – fundamental components of Hitler’s world view – became inseparably linked with anti-Polonism [...] Hitler made a dogma out of the annihilation of the Poles. (Borejsza, 1998, pp. 95–96)

Hannah Arendt (2008) in her *opus magnum* observed that National Socialism divided nations into ones that were to be exterminated forthwith, such as the Jews, those that could expect to be annihilated in the foreseeable future, such as the Poles, Russians and Ukrainians, and ones for which no “final solution” was planned (the French and the Belgians) (p. 622). Towards the end of the War, Kazimierz Wyka wrote in a similar vein, stating that the West never really experienced the true nature of Germanism. “Its true nature was known only to the Slavs, and in particular to us, the Poles. [...] It is a bitter but most fortunately not belated triumph of the Slavs that during this conflict the true countenance of Germanism, hitherto turned solely to the East, was finally seen by all of Europe” (as cited in Michnik, 2010, p. 377). The extermination of Poles as a nation commenced already in 1939. First, the Wehrmacht committed war crimes against Polish POWs and civilians, treating the latter as alleged partisans (Böhler, 2009, 2011; Datner, 1967; *Z największą*, 2004), while later *Einsatzgruppen* units started killing “anti-German elements” (Böhler, Mallmann & Malthus, 2009); the policy was ably supported by the *Volksdeutscher Selbstschutz* – a paramilitary organization grouping ethnic Germans – which independently murdered tens of thousands of citizens of the Second Polish Republic (Jansen & Weckbecker, 1992; Mazanowska & Ceran, 2016).

Contemporary researchers more often use the functionalist interpretation than the intentionalist in order to explain the Holocaust and the history of expansion of the III Reich.¹ This should not, however, mean that

1 The functionalists include among others Hans Mommsen, Raul Hilberg, Christopher Browning, Götz Aly, Martin Broszat and Zygmunt Bauman. Prominent amongst the intentionalists are Eberhard Jäckel, Wolfgang Wippermann, Richard Breitman, Lucy S. Dawidowicz, and Karl Dietrich Bracher (see Bartrop & Jacobs, 2011).

the study of Nationalist-Socialist ideology is to be abandoned, or that its role in the history of the Second World War overlooked. The character, methods and objectives (both short- and long-term) of the German occupation in the East were decided by National Socialist ideology. At its heart was racism, social Darwinism, anti-Semitism and German nationalism. It was further augmented by anti-Slavism and, more specifically, anti-Polonism. Without this element, the mass crimes committed against the Polish nation would never have been possible.

In 1988 a Polish researcher of totalitarian systems, Jerzy Wojciech Borejsza, published a booklet entitled *Antyslawizm Adolfa Hitlera* (see Borejsza, 2006). He was the first to turn attention to the fact that the anti-Semitism prominent in the Führer's world view – which became the world view of many Germans – was accompanied by anti-Slavism, of which anti-Polonism formed a part. Without this key ingredient we would be unable to understand the concept of *Lebensraum*. The majority of historians analyze the Polonophobia of the III Reich in the context of Polish-German stereotypes formed over the centuries (Szarota, 1996), or of National-Socialist propaganda (Król, 2006). Only Borejsza saw that it contained an integral ideological element, however he was unable to promote his view in world literature. The French philosopher and lawyer Jean-Louis Vullierme (2016) mentions 19 ideological atoms comprising the toxic molecule of Nazism. Nevertheless – as he himself admits – this is not an exhaustive catalog, for it contains neither anti-Slavism nor anti-Polonism (p. 17).² There is one significant exception, however. The British historian Michael Burleigh (2010) in his excellent *Trzecia Rzesza. Nowa historia* noted – citing Borejsza's conclusions – that from 1939 Hitler had been guided by deep Prussian anti-Polonism (p. 467). None of the serious researchers negates the ideological bases of the Holocaust or the Nazi's anti-Bolshevism (anti-Communism). Ideology played a similar role in the extermination of Poles. It is worth returning to these deliberations when analyzing anti-Polonism, not only in the minds of the Nazi elite (Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, Frank), but also in the hearts and minds of ordinary Germans.

The Nazis did not create anti-Polonism, but rather fostered the anti-Polish sentiment latent in German society, using it as an ideological justification for their plan to exterminate the Polish nation. Already from the end of the 16th century the following proverb had been popular in Germany: "The Alps divide us from the Italians, rivers from the French, the sea from the English, while only hatred divides us from the Poles" (Król, 2006, p. 31). Its Polish equivalent stated that Germans shall never be brothers to Poles. The stereotype of Poland as *polonia confusione regitur* (Poland is governed by

² The author mentions industrial anti-Semitism and anti-Slavism, however he does not develop the topic (Vullierme, 2016, p. 73).

anarchy) and of German civilization as the “bearer of culture” (*Kulturträger*) emerged in the 18th century, soon becoming an element of the dichotomous division into the “civilized” West and the barbarian (Asiatic) East. A century later, it was supplemented with racial theories. Bismarck himself presented the Polish-German borderland as an area of struggle between the Germanic and Slavic races (Mazower, 2011, p. 35). From the 19th century the term “Pole” was used in German to denote a barbarian, a nasty, stupid and despicable person who was at the same time cruel, dirty and savage. It was then, too, that the concept of *Drang nach Osten* – which National Socialism developed into the theory of *Lebensraum* – gained popularity. In his *Niemiecka historia dziewiętnastego wieku* the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke questioned the very sense of the existence of Poles, calling them “born slaves” (Król, 2006, p. 41). These perceptions and stereotypes were brought together, developed and utilized by the III Reich to nearly complete dehumanize Poles as such.

Although Hitler did not devote much time or space to Poland and Poles in his writings and statements from before the Second World War, it is worth citing a fragment from *Das Zweite Buch*:

The nation state cannot in any circumstances annex the Poles with the intention of eventually making Germans of them. To the contrary, it must take a decision to separate these racially foreign elements in order to prevent the continuous and repeated spoilage of the blood of its own nation, or otherwise it must simply bring about their removal, and transfer the lands and territories thus vacated to its own citizens (as cited in Młynarczyk, 2012, p. 101).

Remove and separate – that is displace and slaughter.

Many historians fail to note anti-Polonism in National-Socialist ideology due to the fact that in the years 1933–1938 German anti-Polish propaganda was put on hold. Following Hitler’s rise to power Polish-German relations improved, among others because the Führer viewed the Second Polish Republic as a potential satellite that would help him conquer the Soviet Union. But this was only a tactical alliance (see Kornat, 2007, 2012; Wojciechowski, 1980; Żerko, 1998). In October 1939, during a discussion with Wilhelm Keitel, Hitler declared that “My formerly pro-Polish policy did not go hand in hand with the sentiment of the German nation” (Burleigh, 2010, p. 467). Tactical aspects finally had to make way for ideology. It is worth noting that in his frequently cited speech to Wehrmacht commanders, delivered at Obersalzberg on 22 August 1939 and devoted to the topic of the objectives of the war with Poland, the Führer also referenced the superiority of the Germanic race over Poles. “A long period of peace did not do us any good. We must therefore be prepared for anything. We must keep a manly bearing. Not machines fight against machines, but men. And our men are qualitatively superior. Spiritual factors are decisive. Our foe has the weaker manpower” (Frank, 1970, p. 98).

Nazi propaganda equated the word *Slave* (Slav) with the term *Sklave* (slave) (Borejsza, 2006, p. 158). In order to ensure the achievement of their own ideological war goals, the creators of National Socialism had to convince German soldiers that the fight against the Slavs (Poles among them), which included the murder, eviction and deportation to concentration camps of children, women and the elderly, was not being conducted against human beings. This was something more than just propaganda at the service of war. Anti-Polonism infested the hearts and minds not only of regular soldiers, of members of the *Einsatzgruppen*, or of the *Volksdeutsche* who had been citizens of the Second Polish Republic before the War. On 14 September 1939 the American NBC correspondent in Germany, William L. Shirer, wrote down the following conversation that he had had with his German maid:

Why are the French at war with us? – the maid inquired.

And why are you at war with the Poles? – I responded.

Hmm... – she muttered, with a nondescript expression on her face. – But the French are humans – she finally declared.

Maybe the Poles are too – I said, refusing to back down.

Hmm... – again, she did not know how to respond.

(Shirer, 2007, p. 162)

During the war years, Polonophobia became a fundamental component of the world view of Hitler and many Germans. Anti-Polonism excluded the possibility of cooperation between Germans and Poles, between the occupier and the occupied. Having rejected the offer of a joint German-Polish attack on the Soviet Union, Poles as a nation were classified amongst the “objective enemies” of the III Reich. This hatred towards Poles and the desire to conquer living space in the East were among the reasons why Hitler decided to risk unleashing a world war. Towards the end of the conflict, despite Hans Frank’s suggestions, the III Reich did not make a concerted effort to recruit Poles or other Slavs to fight against the Soviets.

Franciszek Ryszka (1985), a Polish historian specializing in the III Reich, constructed a political-historical scientific model which explained the essence of functioning of the “state in a state of permanent emergency”. One of its four pillars was the concept of the objective enemy, which has been described by H. Arendt. The objective enemy constitutes a threat through the very fact of his existence, and is endowed with inalienable and irremovable (“irremediable”) traits. The objective enemies of the Nazis, who based their actions on racial hierarchy, were not states but peoples. Arendt and Franz Neumann stated that only the Jews could have been an enemy of the III Reich. Ryszka (1975) disagrees with this approach. “Hatred starts with the Jew – the psychosis of hostility commences with the Jew and imparts hatred, as Alan Bullock correctly observed. But anti-Semitism does not exhaust the concept of totalitarianism as far as the subject of hatred is concerned” (p. 129). According to the Polish

researcher, in 1939 the entire Polish nation became an objective enemy of the III Reich by the very fact of belonging to a species that was considered hostile in its entirety. The war that broke out in 1939 was total, and therefore the enemy had to be “total”, too. “The enemy could not be incapacitated otherwise than through physical extermination” (p. 121). “Hostility had to find expression in the feelings of each and every German, accompanying him in the entirety of relations with the species considered as antagonistic” (p. 131).

Hitler denied Slavic nations any right to have their own states. In his opinion they were incapable of creating such a complex form of social organization. Furthermore, he refused to acknowledge that this species as a whole had any state-building abilities.

It was the Germanic-Nordic race that engendered the concept of statehood, which it then proceeded to implement by forcing the individual to adjust to the whole [...] Whereas Slavic nations are not intended to lead independent lives. They know this, and so we should cease persuading them that the situation is any different (Rauschnig, 1994, pp. 60–61).

Obviously, Hitler’s racial policy with respect to the Slavs varied (the Slovaks had their own state, while the Czechs in the Protectorate had their own officials and president), however it was the Poles and the Russians who were earmarked for extermination in first order. The Führer was convinced that “the Slavs were a born mass of slaves who obediently follow their master, inquiring only who that master is” (Borejsza, 2006, p. 148).

In 1939, the Germans approached Poland with a logic that followed directly from ideological anti-Polonism. “The issue of Poland and the treatment of the population of this former state territory is at once racial-political and national-political in nature” (Wetzels & Hecht, 1998, p. 139). As Timothy Snyder (2015) observed, according to the Nazis:

Poland does not exist, never did exist, and could not exist as a sovereign polity. Soldiers who had been taken prisoner were allowed to be shot, for in reality the Polish Army could never have existed. After the military campaign had drawn to a close, there was no passage to “occupation”, for in line with Nazi logic there had never been a subject whose territory could be occupied. [...] The Germans treated Poland in the same way as European states, in their most destructive incarnations, had approached the colonies – as a strip of land inhabited by indeterminate beings incapable of self-government (p. 149).

Together with the international factor – playing the Polish card in relations with France and Great Britain, so that the “sitting war” could be continued in the West (Ceran, 2016b, pp. 19–24) – this explains Hitler’s refusal to create

any form of Polish statehood and his treatment of the General Government not as an occupied territory, but one that had been “destroyed” (*debellatio*) as the result of a “final conquest” (Klaffkowski, 1946, pp. 85–86). As we know, the German occupation of Poland was not a homogeneous experience, and this was determined to a large extent by ideology. The western Polish territories (“ethnically” German) were incorporated into the Reich, for that was where Poles with German blood lived, and they could be safely recovered for the German nation. Central Poland was turned into the General Government. In German documents and the speakings of Hitler or Hans Frank, this area was known as a “creation of the German Reich”, a peripheral country of the Reich (*Nebenland*), a reservation (*Restgebiet*), a reservation of Polishness (*Polenreservation, Reservestaates*), a rump state (*Reststaat*), “the abode of the Polish nation” (*Heimstätte des polnischen Volkes*), or as a “shelter” for Poles and Jews, a “gigantic labor camp”, or – finally – as a “colony” (see Winstone, 2015).

The *Intelligenzaktion* – the operation carried out in 1939 with the objective of murdering the Polish elite and the leadership class – consisted in destroying the “masters” of the Polish nation in order for Germans to assume their role. “The Poles should have only one master, and he should be German [...] thus, all representatives of the Polish intelligentsia must be killed” (Borejsza, 2006, p. 116), declared the Führer. According to Nazi ideology, the Polish intelligentsia simply could not exist. The Polish state had been built not by the Slavs, but by the Germans, who later underwent Polonization due to the mixing of blood. Using such argumentation, the totalitarian system attempted to turn its own fictitious world into tangible reality. If, as the ideology maintained, the Polish intelligentsia did not exist (for all Poles were primitive subhumans – devoid of culture and creativity), the extermination of its pseudo-representatives served two purposes: one pragmatic – the destruction of *potential* elites *potentially* capable of state-building – and the other ideological. By twisting logic to the breaking point, the Nazis endowed their philosophical imaginings with a degree of verisimilitude. As Arendt (2008) noted: “the majority of the Polish intelligentsia was liquidated not because it was considered hostile [to the III Reich], but in direct consequence of the theory that Poles had no intellect” (p. 492). The application of all available means, including terror, to bring the real world in line with the ideological (logical, cohesive and organized) is a common trait of totalitarian systems. Melita Maschmann, an office worker at the Union of German Girls in Reichsgau Wartheland, recalled: “The fact that you would not come across Poles from the upper classes led me to the false conclusion that the Polish nation was made up solely of proletarians, peasants and beggars. It is no wonder, I said to myself, that during the course of its history Poland has had to endure long periods of foreign rule. Clearly, it was unable to create a stable and permanent leadership class” (as cited in Burleigh, 2010, pp. 468–469).

According to National-Socialist ideology, Poles – being a nation of inferior culture or indeed one without any culture (*Volk ohne Kultur*) – had complexes about the German nation and its superior culture, and these drove them to violence. “As regards the spiritual aspect, the Pole can be considered as completely uncreative, both in cultural and national-political terms [...] this is associated with the lack of a sense of order and an inability to comprehend the creations of a higher culture, and how this culture should be maintained and nurtured” (Wetzel & Hecht, 1948, p. 139). Poland was excluded from the European cultural family of nations, while Polishness as such was identified with barbarity. Towards the end of 1939, Kazimierz Wyka wrote thus:

A simple German soldier, whether he be an unshapely but good-natured Bavarian, an Austrian speaking with a drawl more typical of Lwów, or a no-nonsense, disciplined Prussian – each of them when asked why he came to Poland replies: “to bring order, cleanliness and culture”. Their calling is to rule in others’ stead (Wyka, 2010, p. 27).

As we know, following the occupation of Poland the Germans proceeded to pillage and plunder Polish works of culture.

In January 1940, Ludwik Landau (1962) noted the following in his *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji*: “A person who had talked to an employee of the National Museum told me what the Germans had looted: all of the collections of the foreign art department (or so that person said), of the Egyptology department, and also of the ethnographic department, however leaving the Polish department untouched, «for Polish art represents nothing of value» (p. 169).

In the opinion of German ideologues, all Poles had an innate gene of cruelty, which functioned as an inseparable component of Polish culture. The deaths of approximately 4,500 *Volksdeutsche*s in the first months of the War were to confirm this as fact. German propaganda presented the event as an act of Polish barbarity – a genocide that consumed the lives of some 60,000 victims (see Pospieszalski, 1959, pp. 21–22), brought about by the national traits of Poles. The war with Poland was perceived by the Nazis as an ideological crusade and a continuation of the erstwhile German civilizational mission in the East. The technical and military superiority of the Wehrmacht in the Polish Campaign of 1939 – an undisputed fact – was also presented as an indication of the racial superiority of the Germans over Poles (Snyder, 2015, p. 148).

The Nazi’s anti-Polonism was closely connected with anti-Semitism. In the autumn of 1939, Hitler viewed Poland in terms of the country’s Jewish citizens. Between 3 and 26 September, the Führer toured the areas which were still the scene of military operations. Using a variety of means of transport – a special train, an aircraft and a motor car – he visited Gdańsk

Pomerania, Silesia, Galicia, the Kielce region, and the Łódź region, inspecting the larger Polish cities and provinces. He saw everything that he had wanted to see. But it was the small Jewish townships that became lodged in his memory.

It would appear that his anger at the Poles, his hatred of this nation which had “unleashed the Second World War” and his belief that it was impossible to reach an understanding with the inept Polish ruling class, with the gentry and the clergy, were then augmented by the conviction that it was pointless to maintain any sort of satellite Polish state, for it would always be undermined by the millions of Jews living there (Borejsza, 1988, pp. 85–86).

On 10 October Goebbels (2013) noted in his diaries:

Poland has been taken care of. Practically no one mentions the possibility of the former Polish state being reestablished. [...] The Führer’s opinion of the Poles is devastating. More animal than men, completely numb and amorphous. Add to this their gentry, which is at least – truth be told – a mix of the lower classes and the Aryan master class. The filth in which the Poles exist is unimaginable. They are totally unable to reason or think (p. 26).

Four days later, he added: “And the Poles respect only force. They are so stupid as to be incapable of accepting any arguments. Indeed, Asia starts in Poland. The culture of this nation is beneath all criticism” (p. 27). As Tomasz Szarota (1996) noted, the animalization of the image of the typical Pole is of key importance for understanding the crimes committed by the Germans in Poland; “the stereotype of the Jew – a parasitic insect – did not at all differ from that of the Pole, which was conventionalized to a similar degree” (p. 192). Just like anti-Semitism, anti-Polonism had its origins in the deep dislike and hatred of a nation that was considered as retarded (Osmańczyk, 1982, pp. 64–65). The Jewish nation was purportedly backward due to the fact that it did not have its own state; as regards the Polish nation, National-Socialist propaganda rejected its right to have one.

The genocidal policy followed by the occupier in Poland would not have been possible if a breakthrough had not been achieved in the psyche of the *Übermenschen*. Struggle entails at least some sort of partnership and a modicum of respect for one’s opponent. But “vermin” must be eliminated without any questions or doubts (Szarota, 1996, p. 193). An enemy is to be fought, while vermin must be eradicated. After Poland had been occupied, German journalists received the following guidelines.

It must become plainly obvious to everyone in Germany, right down to the last cow herder, that Polishness amounts to subhumanity. [...] We must continue our efforts until each and every

citizen of Germany shall have it encoded in his subconsciousness that all Poles – laborers and intellectuals alike – are to be treated as vermin (as cited in Wolff-Powęska, 2010, p. 289).

On 6 October 1939, Hitler declared that Europe should be grateful to the USSR and the III Reich for partitioning the Polish state – the source of European wars and crises – and turning its territory into a foundation of European security. Hitler demanded that London and Paris approve German conquests in the East (in his opinion, the aggression against Poland was the final correction of the unjust Versailles Treaty) and give him free rein in determining the future of the Polish lands, further stating that he did not intend to attack the West. The invasion of Poland was justified by the Poles' purportedly bestial treatment of *Volksdeutsche*s, which act was to be an inescapable consequence of the immutable Polish national character and the Poles' penchant for cruelty and barbarity (Domarus, 1973, pp. 1378–1393). In the 19th century, the II Reich had justified the destruction of the Polish state on similar grounds. Then, the Partitions of the Polish Republic and the persecution of Poles were presented not as crimes, but as a German act of kindness and magnanimity that benefited all of Europe (Borwicz, 1947, p. 7).

In 1939 Otto Reche, a “racial expert” and Director of the Institute of Race and Ethnology in Leipzig, voiced the opinion that:

the Polish population is a most unfortunate mix of elements of the Eastern Baltic and Ostian Proto-Slavic races (related to the Scandinavian Lapps), with clearly visible local Mongolian admixes. In any case, it is necessary to avoid any intermingling of this [...] Slavic populace with the Germans, which goal may be achieved solely by removing the Poles (Król, 2006, p. 345).

According to the Nazi version of history, the Polish state had been established thanks to the self-awareness of its gentry, that is the descendants of the Eastern Germanic and Norman tribes. They created a master race (*Herrenvolk*). Over the next few centuries there occurred the “intermingling of blood”, which resulted in the Polonization of the original German population and the regular influx of German blood to the Polish nation. Purportedly, German Catholics were the most numerous group to succumb to Polonization. But in Pomerania and Greater Poland there survived an “Eastern German” people, different from the “Eastern Baltic” race, which was to dominate in ethnic Poland. What is more, the former “continued to let its blood”, sharing this treasure with the more deprived areas of the Polish Republic (Wetzel & Hecht, 1948, p. 137).

The crowning “achievement” of this mobilization of hatred by Hitlerite propaganda (which was busying itself with the spiritual preparation of German society for the conquest of Poland) was a leaflet circulated by the

Vereinigung zum Schulze Oberschlesiens publishing house. It was entitled *A prayer to the German God*.

Paralyze, O Lord, the arms and legs of Poles;
 Turn them into cripples, dazzle their eyes with blindness,
 Punish both men and women with stupidity and deafness.
 Ordain it so that the Poles shall turn into dust in droves,
 Destroyed along with their women and children, sold
 into slavery,
 May our foot crush the fields that they have sowed!
 Grant us the blissful pleasure of murdering both children
 and adults,
 Allow us to plunge our sword into their body,
 And cause the Polish country to disappear in a sea of blood
 and charred ruins.
 The German heart cannot be softened,
 May not peace but war reign between the two states,
 And when I am called to fight the fight of life and death,
 I shall repeat in my dying gasp: O Lord, turn Poland into a desert.
 (Wyka, 2010, p. 70; cf. Samselski, 1997, p. 12)

The world view of the leader became that of the majority of the nation. “The Nazi dictator not only continued to cheat the nation and deceive it insidiously, he also represented it to a very considerable extent – decidedly greater than many would like to acknowledge” (Jochmann, 2007, p. 5). Kempner, an eye-witness to the birth of the III Reich who interviewed scores of accused during the Nuremberg Trials, imagined what he would have done if he had been forced to become Hitler’s lawyer. “Mr Hitler, I shall conduct your defense [...] I will demonstrate how everyone cheered you with such devotion that you yourself would have found it impossible to believe. I shall demonstrate this and further state that if all those people cheered you so, then this means that the existing situation was approved of by millions, and that you yourself could have well become convinced that you were in fact doing something good” (as cited in Borejsza, 2011, p. 152).

The anti-Polonism of Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels soon became the anti-Polonism of the thousands who implemented their policies in occupied Poland. While speaking in Bydgoszcz on 14 October 1939, Ludolf von Alvensleben, a former adjutant to Himmler and leader of the *Volksdeutscher Selbstschutz Westpreussen* organization, which was responsible for the deaths of approximately 30,000 Poles from Gdańsk Pomerania, referred to the clash between “Germanic-Nordic man” and the “Slavic subhuman”. Two days later in Toruń, he added thus: “Let us never forget how grateful we should be to our German Army for having reconquered this ancient German land. And let us never forget the injustices that we have suffered in this German land. Such acts could have been committed only by those who belong to an

inferior race” (Skorzyński, 1958, p. 51). Paul Ziehlke, a resident of Tuchola and the son of a Pole and a German woman, was convinced that “the Poles must be eradicated, and also that a purge must be carried out of all opponents of the National Socialist regime. We can set ourselves the Russian Cheka as an example” (Ceran, 2014, p. 38). Franz Noetzel, a miller from Kowalewo Pomorskie who took part in the extermination of local residents from the very beginning of the occupation, volunteered to help quell the Warsaw Uprising. Having returned from Warsaw in 1944, he purportedly said that he had just shot 200 “Polish dogs”, and that if every German had done so in 1939 there would have been no Uprising (p. 92). Willi Ehlert, the commandant of a displaced persons’ camp in Toruń in which at least 515 people – including 317 children – perished, had the following to say to Wanda Klimek, a Polish woman who was caring for six children at the facility: “You are a good mother. I think I have already said that if you were not a Pole, I would set you as an example to German mothers. But you are a Pole. And this is the essence of your problem” (Ceran, 2011, p. 96). ss-Standartenführer Wilhelm Richardt, the commandant of the *Selbstschutz Westpreussen* camp in Karolewo in the district of Śępólno Krajeńskie, where the Germans murdered at least 1,781 people, declared that “it will be an honor for any Pole to have his carcass used to fertilize German soil” (Mazanowska, 2017). Examples of similar statements are numerous. Does this mean, however, that anti-Polonism was predominant in the hearts and minds of all Germans in 1939 and later?

There were instances of a completely different treatment of Poles, of help being provided and lives saved – or at least of not taking part in their extermination. Elizabeth Rahn from Wejherowo took a Polish woman with two small children (they had been evicted from their home) under her roof (Turnau, 1986, p. 16). A German, whose surname remains unknown, threw a Pole by the surname Tylicki from a truck that was taking a larger group of people to their execution in Klamry near Chełmno, shouting after him that he would continue to thank him for this until the end of his days (Ceran, 2016a, p. 153). Willi Schlesinger – a member of the *Selbstschutz Westpreussen* from Łopatki – refused to shoot a pregnant Polish woman, one Maria Lewandowska, who was his neighbor, declaring that she was not a bad Pole and had never killed anyone (Ceran, 2014, p. 61). Decent or “good” Germans were definitely more numerous than the Ten Men of the Bible, however when taken in relation to German society as a whole, they were very few indeed.

During the Second World War, the Germans coined an offensive paraphrase of the first sentence of the Polish national anthem: “So Lang hat Esel Ohren ist Polen nich verloren” (“Poland shall not perish as long as the donkey’s ears are long”) (Ryszka, 1975, p. 135). Verbal anti-Polonism translated tangibly into the conditions of life faced by Polish citizens. Józef Warota was arrested on 8 March 1940 while walking along a street in Toruń because he had said “Noch ist Polen nicht verloren” (“Poland has not perished yet”). He was deported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. His family

received letters until the end of 1944; he never returned home (Ceran, 2011, p. 26). We should keep in mind that one hundred years previously, following the November Insurrection and during the Spring of Nations, thousands of Germans sang the song that later became the Polish national anthem, thereby expressing their support, admiration and respect for the Polish independence movement. The words “Noch ist Polen nicht verloren” were synonymous with a conviction that not all was lost, that there was still hope (Król, 2006, p. 39). This clearly shows that Poles and Germans were by no means condemned to eternal hostility. History and stereotypes could have been used to create not anti-Polonism, but polonophily. However this did not come about. By and large, positive stereotypes of Poland were atypical of German society – the negative were far more common. Thus, with a flagrant disregard for historical truth, Polish-German relations were reduced to a tool for substantiating the extermination of Poles as a nation.

Each theoretical model – just like every “-ism” – serves only to reduce historical reality. No historical process can be fully explained by a single cause – every monocausal explanation is illusory. It is therefore logical that while anti-Polonism helps us better understand the policy followed by the III Reich against Poland and the Polish nation, it does not clarify and did not determine all of its aspects. But although Poles were treated as a collective objective enemy, at the same time thousands of them who lived on lands incorporated into the Reich (mainly by gauleiter Albert Forster in Pomerania) were entered in the German National List (Jastrzębski & Sziling, 1979, pp. 160–199; Schenk, 2002, pp. 300–323). Hitler and Himmler opposed the mass Germanization of Poles on ideological grounds. Not infrequently, however, political practice had the upper hand over ideology. This would seem to form part of a broader debate concerning the potentially superior role of ideology in Nazi policy. The ideological factor was not always decisive, however it cannot be ignored or underestimated. Individuals act according to specific systems of beliefs, understood as conceptions of the past and the future, while their actions are determined by the values which they espouse. Anti-Slavism, as Borejsza (2006) wrote, “turned out to be an ideology that was not only propagated, but also translated into an act of genocide committed against millions of Russian POWs, Russian civilians, Poles, and also Ukrainians and Byelorussians” (p. 10).

Many authors notice the overriding importance of ideological priorities in the extermination not only of Jews, but also Poles and other Slavs, however they do not use the terms “anti-Polonism” or “anti-Slavism”. In his synthetic history of Europe in the first half of the 20th century, Ian Kershaw (2016) wrote thus:

This hell on earth created by man, which claimed so many victims – not only armed soldiers, but also civilians – was in first order the creation of a diabolical ideology which, as it turned out, played a most prominent role in determining who was to

live and who was to die. The terror and mass killings of the civilian population perpetrated in Poland and on the Eastern Front during the Second World War serve as irrefutable proof of this fact. The most important example of ideological priorities was the Holocaust of the Jews, who were one of the first groups of victims of the extreme violence which rapidly transitioned into genocide on a mass scale (p. 438).

It is worth reminding ourselves – again and again – that according to current estimates some 5.6 million citizens of the Second Polish Republic perished during the Second World War, including 3 million Jews, with civilians comprising 95% of the total number of victims (approximately 5.3 million).³

Just as the history of the Holocaust would be incomplete without taking into consideration the genocide of other nations, so too an analysis of Nazi ideology that does not mention anti-Polonism will not allow us to understand the realities of the German occupation of Poland. Hans-Christian Harten (1996), a German researcher of National Socialist policy in Poland, stressed that it was determined first and foremost by ideological and racial factors, with economics playing a less important role. Basically, it can be described using three German terms: *de-personalisierung*, *de-humanisierung* and *de-kulturation*. All this had as its objective making the occupied lands “free” of Poles (*polenfrei*) in order to create the *Germanischen Reich Deutscher Nation* (pp. 8–11 ff.).

The Nazi ideology did not lead Hitler to attack Poland in 1939 exactly, but it did determine the nature and primary goals of German occupation policy in Poland. Hitler did not intend to replicate the errors of 19th century Prussian policy, when the elimination of the Polish state had not destroyed the nation. Neither did he believe in the possibility of the permanent Germanization of Poles. Thus, his goal was not only to destroy the Polish state through yet another partition, but also the comprehensive extermination of Poles and Polish society. He approached the occupation – just like the war – from a biological-racial standpoint. Peter Longerich (2014), Himmler’s biographer, has no doubt that “the war against Poland was conducted by the Nazi leadership with the objective of bringing about the ultimate destruction of one of the races” (p. 526).

In the longer term – similarly to the Jewish Holocaust, which was implemented gradually – the Polish nation, which according to the Nazis belonged to the *Untermenschenvolk des Ostens*, was also to undergo complete biological annihilation. The next step after the *Judeacide* was to be the *Slavesicide*, which included a *Polencide*. The author of the *Ridiculous*

3 Data inscribed on the wall chart entitled “Victims of the War” at the permanent exhibition of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk.

million Slavs... whom Hitler intended to absorb or remove called the Poles and Russians the “Jews of tomorrow”, and this was by no means a literary embellishment (Borejsza, 2006, p. 163). Ludwik Hirsztfeld (2011), a Polish Jew, subsequently nominated for a Nobel Prize in medicine, wrote in memoirs written between June and August 1943 in Miłosna near Warsaw thus: “I think, however, that if the War goes on, the same fate awaits Poles, for in the gradation of the Führer’s hatred the Polish nation ranks just behind the Jews. And those of Hitler’s declarations that are dictated by hate are now being brought to fruition” (p. 389). He later added: “The Germans, by creating the concept of racism and racial isolation, have extended their contempt to Poles to the same extent as to the Jews. The only difference concerns the actual tempo of annihilation” (p. 524).

Speaking in December 1939 in Łódź, the Head of the German Labor Front, Robert Ley, stated thus: “We need this land and we shall retain it. Such a decision may seem harsh, but life is always harsh [...] In 50 years’ time this will be a flourishing German territory, completely free of Poles and Jews. [...] We Germans believe in a higher law and in a superior race. And we have come to Poland with this law” (Landau, 1962, p. 143).

During a speech given on 15 March 1940 in Poznań, Himmler made the following declaration: “All skilled workers of Polish origin should be put to work in our armaments industry. Later, all Poles will disappear from this world. [...] For this reason it is necessary for the great German nation to see its main task as bringing about the extermination of all Poles” (as cited in *Zagłada*, 2009, p. 6). In May 1940 Himmler (1948) wrote a document entitled *Kilka myśli w sprawie traktowania obcoplemiennych na Wschodzie*. The creator of the SS declared that the final objective of German policy in the East should be the division of the former Polish Republic into the largest possible number of parts and fragments.

Over a few years – as I see it, within 4 to 5 years – the concept of, for example, the Kashubians must become unknown, for by then there shall be no Kashubian nation [...]. I trust also that because of the possibility of bringing about the mass exodus of all Jews to Africa or some other colony, I shall witness the complete extinction of the term “Jew”. Further, it must be possible – albeit in a somewhat longer term – to ensure the total disappearance from our national territory of the terms “Ukrainians”, “(Polish) Highlanders” and “Lemkos”. What I have said with respect to these specific ethnic groups applies on a proportionately larger scale to the Poles (p. 123; cf. Podgóreczny, 1977, pp. 384–385).

During the Second World War, the Germans murdered the same number of Polish Jews as non-Jewish Polish citizens. It therefore comes as no surprise that historians (not only Polish) consider that in the general

narrative of the Second World War, which is dominated by the Holocaust, this issue should be strongly emphasized. Not only the Jews, but also Poles – as seen by their tormentors in the death pits and concentration camps – ceased to be considered as human beings. The dehumanization of Poles was implemented from the very beginning of the War, and this approach played an important role in facilitating the mass extermination of other nations, too. Using the terminology introduced by Martin Pollack⁴, the contamination of the landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe did not concern solely the extermination of the Jewish nation, but also the mass murders committed on non-Jews, and among them Poles. Let us just add that this does not have to lead to a negation of the Holocaust as a development altogether exceptional, or to scientific rivalry concerning the number of victims.

Furthermore, German crimes committed against the Polish nation during the Second World War should be described using one common term. The majority of historians and prosecutors from the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation are in no doubt that this was genocide (see Czerwiński, 2016, pp. 70–95). While agreeing with them, it is however worth noting that the term in question makes all of the crimes equal, so to speak, and therefore renders it difficult to comprehend their specificity. The definition of genocide set forward in the UN Convention is so broad that it allows the majority of mass crimes to be classified as such, thereby blurring the fundamental differences between them. More and more frequently, comparative studies do not lead to a better understanding of individual historical processes, but rather to their uniformization. Many various types of genocide were committed in the course of history.⁵ They had a sufficient number of common features to be jointly classed as genocide, however there were also fundamental dissimilarities between them. Genocide researchers have at their disposal a more precise terminology. I am of the opinion that the crimes committed by the Germans against the Polish nation during the Second World War did in fact constitute genocide, albeit partial genocide, that is – referencing the definition elaborated by Robert Melson (an American researcher born in Warsaw in 1937) – consisting in the “pacification of a community connected with its declassing and the alteration of its identity” (Nijakowski, 2013, p. 77). In my view, the usage of this term is appropriate for three reasons. Firstly, it enables a proper presentation of both

4 The “contaminated landscapes” are “landscapes that have been locations of mass murders, however committed out of sight, far from potential onlookers and frequently in the closest secrecy. Where the perpetrators, having carried out a massacre, made every effort to obliterate their traces. Uncomfortable witnesses were eliminated, the pits into which the dead were thrown were filled in, leveled and – in many instances – carefully planted with shrubs and trees, so as to make the mass graves disappear” (see Pollack, 2014).

5 Genocide studies differentiate between complete genocide, partial genocide, quasi-genocide, eliticide, and politicide. Additionally, topical literature defines various other forms of mass violence: massacres, lynchings, pogroms (see Nijakowski, 2013).

the intentions and actions undertaken by the perpetrators with respect to the Polish nation. Secondly, it does not equate the German crimes committed against Poles with the Holocaust (complete genocide). Finally, it allows us to observe the longer-term goal of the German occupation in Poland – complete genocide, which however was not implemented, but only planned. For Hitler did actually intend to murder the “ridiculous hundred million Slavs”, including each and every Pole. The German historian Martin Broszat observed that the long-term goal of Nazi policy with respect to Poland was the “national-biological decomposition of Polishness” (*volkisch-biologische Dekomposition des Polentums*). It was not carried out in full solely due to the requirements and limitations imposed on the ideology by the situation on the fronts (Broszat, 1965, pp. 27–28). The term “partial genocide” refers to the extermination not only of Poles, but also of other nations of Central and Eastern Europe, first and foremost the Ukrainians and Russians.

Hitler – a genius organizer of mass hatred, as Borejsza terms him – did not create a complicated and cohesive theory of anti-Polonism, for he did not need one. Indeed, he declared that the masses are like wild animals – they listen only to their instinct and are driven by feelings and resentments, not by sophisticated reasoning. These masses are incapable of comprehending and remembering advanced theories, and must be fed the simplest slogans (Rauschnig, 1994, p. 227). Equating Poles with barbarians constituted the essence of his anti-Polonism. While this concept was definitely palatable to the broad masses, what about the German intelligentsia? It would be difficult to imagine that the German cultural elites, which encountered Polish artists, doctors, lawyers and scholars at German and Austrian universities in the interwar period, could unquestioningly believe that not a single Pole had any intellect.

Polish recollective literature contains an unequivocal indictment of the German intelligentsia, focused in particular on people of science. Its author was a scholar of world renown, who co-discovered the inheritance of ABO blood types – the previously mentioned Professor Ludwik Hirszfeld. He began his scientific career at the universities of Würzburg, Heidelberg and Zürich, and personally knew a large part of the German medical milieu. In his opinion, instead of becoming “the gardeners of human souls”, the majority of German scientists turned into “arsonists of the world” and soldiers not of science and truth, but of the state and its falsehoods. It was they who mobilized not the bodies, but the souls of the German nation, and provided the Hitlerite regime with means to extend its rule. Instead of pure, objective science, they pursued “German science”, which consisted of “German mathematics”, “German physics”, “German sociology”, etc. It is worth citing a longer fragment of the Polish scientist’s reflections:

I see blood on the hands of the German scholars. On the hands of those who wrote about racial hygiene, the Nordic soul, living space, and the mission in the East – a notion clearly designed to

at once anticipate and substantiate plunder. And on the hands of the larger group still, who knew that all this was nonsense, but remained silent and failed to greet their colleagues, in disgrace with the authorities, upon meeting them in the street. For there are times in the life of a nation when you cannot be silent – unless you want to become an accessory. And I think that if a murderer comes up and tries to kill my friends and loved ones, justifying his plan with the observation that their eyes are insufficiently blue or their skulls too short, then am I to engage in a discussion and point out that their skulls are longer than would appear at first glance [...] or simply to say that you are not allowed to commit murder? Is it worth writing books or debating whether some twenty or fifty percent of Poles and Jews are indeed Nordics, or is it better to state – never, and make sure that everyone ten generations further on understands that even non-Nordics cannot be murdered? [...] Ingrained in the mind of each and every Pole are images of people being captured like mad dogs, deported and killed, terrifying visions of defenseless millions being herded to places of mass execution. And all these acts were made possible by the belief – based on a trust in science – that one race was more valuable than any other (Hirszfeld, 2011, pp. 535–536).

Over the centuries the German intelligentsia – which in 1939 shared the conviction that Poles were racially and culturally inferior – created a number of anti-Polish stereotypes. But this did not have to mean that it agreed to and supported genocide. As Szarota observed years ago, the question remains open as to the degree to which the forced emigration of a part of the anti-Nazi elites from the III Reich before the outbreak of War made it easier to control those of the intelligentsia who stayed behind, as well as the broad masses of German society. Some 3,120 professors and university lecturers left Nazi Germany, among them Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Karl Jaspers, Max Horkheimer, Karl Mannheim and Thomas Mann. Nearly every second economist and sociologist departed the III Reich (47%). At all German universities the position of vice-chancellor was replaced with the office of “University Führer”, who was appointed by the minister (Turowicz, 1970, p. 24). Other opponents of Hitler and Nazism, intimidated and terrorized by the system, retreated into an internal emigration. Friedrich Kellner’s (2015) “diary of opposition” of a citizen (not a subject) of the III Reich is an excellent example of this development. A large part of the German scientific milieu actively and of its own volition involved itself in creating a scholarly basis for Nazi ideology, of which anti-Polonism formed a part. It is sufficient to mention the sweeping “East European studies” (*Osteuropaforschung*), which were intended to prove the thesis – accepted in advance – of the Germanness of the territories of this part of Europe (see Burleigh, 2002).

German sociology and philosophy in particular (but also history) started to shine with the light of depraved knowledge. Anti-Polonism as an idea was created at German universities and scientific institutes. The Nazis despised the intelligentsia as a social group, however they supported and encouraged research (pseudoscientific) that would help create a scientific basis for their theories. In 1941 Hans Frank (1970), a Doctor of the Legal Sciences, gave a speech at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin. In it, he justified the aggression against Poland as follows: “Germans have entered this land by force not for this or that reason brought into being by the global political situation, but to return to a territory that belonged to them from the very beginning. And so it is not we who are the foreign nation there, but the Poles” (p. 402).

German science to a large extent supported Nazism and helped create its ideological foundations, among others by justifying the extermination of the “subhumans”, including Poles (see Madajczyk, 1999, pp. 221–290). “The destruction of the Polish state was effected using both ink and brute force” (Snyder, 2015, p. 150). Let us once again cite Hirszfeld (2011):

Their elite? What do we care about an elite that has had its moral spine removed. For a great many years to come this nation of poets and philosophers shall live on in the European memory as one of murderers, plunderers and thieves. Those who saw what acts the Germans committed in Poland shall abhor the very thought of scholars justifying military victory as the guarantor of progress, as a means of providing fresh living space for superior human beings (p. 542).

His view was shared by Kellner (2015), who provided an even more critical assessment of his own countrymen, calling them headless, a nation of slaves and lackeys deprived of all rights. On 9 October 1939, he wrote thus: “All our poets, bards of freedom, lived in vain. In years gone by the idealistically inclined youth fought for freedom, whereas now they allow themselves to be used by a cheat and a rat catcher for the defense of a hideous tyranny. Such a nation is not worthy to exist” (p. 35).

In the event of the final triumph of the III Reich, the partial genocide of 1939 (mainly eliticide) could have been transformed into a complete genocide, i.e. the biological extermination of Poles as a national group. Poland was presented as a nation devoid of culture (*Volk ohne Kultur*), as a part of barbarian Asia and incapable of possessing its own state, whereas Poles were viewed as savages, and indeed potential murderers. Hitler was convinced that any violence that does not originate from a strong spiritual basis would be wavering and unreliable. And for him, anti-Polonism formed an important element of this metaphysical foundation.

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