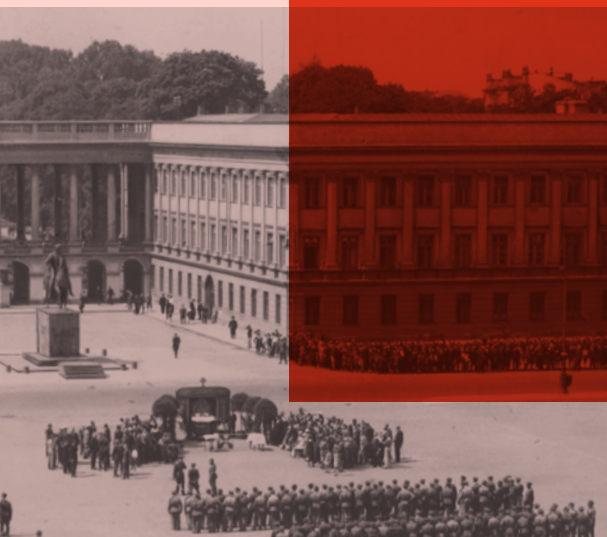


The Second World War

and its
Continuing
Relevance



 **Pilecki
Institute**



The Second World War and its Continuing Relevance

**Publication accompanying
the exhibition "The Volunteer.
Witold Pilecki and his mission
to infiltrate Auschwitz"**

Edited by Mateusz Fałkowski

Warszawa – Berlin 2019

Translation and Proofreading:

Beate Achilles, Joanna Adamczyk, Steffen Beilich, John Cornell, Sebastian Feller, Nora Gielke, Maciej Grabski, Małgorzata Hoc, Ian Stephenson, Herbert Ulrich, Stefan Widdess, Tina Wünschmann, Maciej Zakrzewski,

Cover Design:

pigalopus – Malwina Borowiec, Karolina Chodur

Graphic Design and Typesetting:

pigalopus – Malwina Borowiec, Karolina Chodur

Copyright © by Instytut Pileckiego, 2019

Instytut Pileckiego

Warszawa, ul. Foksal 17
Berlin, Pariser Platz 4a
www.instytutpileckiego.pl
www.pileckiinstitut.de

ISBN 978-83-66340-09-1

**The Pilecki Institute in Berlin
and perspectives on
the Second World War
005**

**The exhibition. Pilecki and his
mission to infiltrate Auschwitz
009**

**The war. Towards
a perfect death factory
022**

**Remembrance
and post-war justice
039**

The Pilecki Institute in Berlin and perspectives on the Second World War



Wojciech Kozłowski

Historian and Director
of the Pilecki Institute in Warsaw

Today, on September 16, 2019 the Pilecki Institute inaugurates its foreign branch in Berlin. It is a special moment for us and I am delighted to see that long months of hard work have come to fruition, and that from now on people from Berlin and the whole of Germany have a unique place at hand that will serve as an international meeting space for culture, scholarship and learning about 20th-century history, its memory, and its significance in the building of a better future in Europe, and in particular between Germany and Poland.

The timing for this opening is deliberate. Eighty years ago, in September 1939, the German invasion of Poland began the Second World War in Europe. This moment brought devastating consequences for the continent and in many places virtually obliterated the world as it had been previously known to our ancestors. The atrocities of the first hours of the conflict aimed cold-heartedly against civilians presaged the cruelty and barbarism of the unfolding war. Through the complete destruction of the Polish state and its plethora of institutions, down to their lowest ranks, and the introduction of unheard-of genocidal police terror, the occupiers attempted to quickly reduce Polish citizens to a slave workforce destined for brutal economic and physical exploitation with no regard for the dignity of human life.

The war changed Europe and its peoples. Restoring trust between former foes took decades and suffered a number of setbacks during the Cold War. War survivors continent-wide had to confront painful physical and psychological consequences, while atomized societies struggled to restore interpersonal bonds, to build a normal life, and to make sense of a shattered civilization and the destruction of cultural legacies. Tens of millions of lost lives were beyond recovery. Where to now, seemed the essential question to ask for a humankind burdened with an overwhelming legacy of hatred and destruction. This was not, however, one single puzzle. Every generation until today has in one way or another been called upon to deal with the matter, because this history is still with us in various manifestations. Testimonies and memories reach out to the future and exquisitely shape it by affecting the hearts and minds of contemporary generations, transforming the way we tend to think, to perceive, and to move forward. Resisting evil does not come automatically. Promoting democracy, freedom and mutual respect do not either. Securing peace and stability among peoples and nations is never effortless.

Looking back into the past begs the question how this will help to build tomorrow. By its projects, initiatives and programs the Pilecki Institute hopes to make a contribution here. As a research institution we are dedicated to high-quality scholarship open to international and interdisciplinary collaboration and are eager to bring our cutting-edge research closer to the German public. Through fellowships and archival projects we seek to inspire and intensify German-Polish scholarly communication that will benefit from solid source analysis and a meaningful exchange of ideas, approaches and perspectives. These are the prerequisites that lay the foundations for what we are very proud of: our educational and cultural projects. In them we believe we can bring the Polish experience of confronting two totalitarian regimes to a German audience in an attractive and captivating manner.

In Berlin we begin with an exhibition about Witold Pilecki's mission to infiltrate Auschwitz. I am thrilled that the Institute can bring here the story of this heroic rejection of the totalitarian contempt for any conceivable human values. The exhibition does not simply reveal facts; it encourages us to ask questions about ourselves and about the roots of our motivations to defy evil. This is not yet another account of horrors and atrocities in the most notorious German-Nazi concentration and death camp. Quite to the contrary, we learn about the ineffable power of the human spirit that allows trust and creates bonds, even in a society where there should be none, in a realm of fear, terror, and death. More than that, Pilecki's schemes, if heeded, could pose a lethal threat to such a "hell on earth".

The Pilecki Institute now has a presence in Berlin. I have no doubts that this is a fortunate opportunity to strengthen and expand a German-Polish dialogue across academia, education, history and culture. I am looking forward to the great potentials and possibilities that Berlin may offer and I have trust in what the future holds.

Wojciech Kozłowski,
Director of the Pilecki Institute



Magdalena Gawin

Historian and Deputy Minister of Culture and
National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

For decades, the story of Witold Pilecki's volunteer mission to Auschwitz remained unknown to the broader world. In 1948, the Communist authorities sentenced Witold Pilecki to death, and also consigned him to oblivion. For years, they effectively made it impossible for his story to be told to Poles or the global community. But since 1989, the memory of Pilecki is being slowly reinstated in his homeland. The exhibition which the Pilecki Institute in Berlin has organized in cooperation with an international group of historians and artists on the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War marks an attempt at making the figure of the Auschwitz volunteer better known to the international community.

In September 1940, Witold Pilecki was of his own free will deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he remained for two and a half years, building a resistance movement and regularly sending intelligence which was then relayed to London. Prisoner no. 4859 managed to escape from the camp. Immediately after the war, he found time to write down his reports once again. Gradually declassified archival documents tell us that the Allies were aware of the scale of the genocide taking place in Poland. They knew the locations of the concentration camps and the death camps, they knew of the mass arrests of the Polish intelligentsia, of the exterminations of the clergy, of the deportations and the Holocaust.

And they were well apprised of the gas chambers and the smoking crematoriums. "The camp was like a gigantic mill, one which processed the living into ash", wrote Pilecki, all the while trying to make the Allies react and destroy the main site of extermination.

Witold Pilecki and the values which drove his actions should become a part of the heritage of Europe and the entire free world. This story cannot be treated like an old book – closed shut and put away on a shelf. The tragic story of Pilecki's mission to Auschwitz and the reports sent to the leaders of the free world who were fighting the Third Reich – a story which ended in his being sentenced to oblivion by the Communist authorities – is a challenge for our present age. Do we stand up with sufficient strength for the civilians caught up in armed conflicts? Do we stand up as we should to aggressive wars and acts of aggression? And do we appropriately use the knowledge that we have at our disposal? In the wake of the war in the Balkans, of the Srebrenica tragedy, and of the aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, the answers do not seem at all obvious.

**Magdalena Gawin,
Deputy Minister of Culture
and National Heritage
of the Republic of Poland**

Introduction

Mateusz Fałkowski



Photo: Jakub Świątlik

Mateusz Fałkowski is a sociologist and deputy head of the Pilecki Institute Berlin

800

The exhibition "The Volunteer. Witold Pilecki and his mission to infiltrate Auschwitz" tells the story of Witold Pilecki, one which abounds in extraordinary situations such as his escape from Auschwitz through the use of a counterfeit key (featured as one of the exhibits). At the same time, it tells the tale of Poland's history during the Second World War, of the way in which the Polish Underground State operated, of the government in exile, of the round-ups, the messengers, the intelligence gathering. It helps us to understand the difficulty with which the contents of Pilecki's reports, including the facts relating to the functioning of the Auschwitz camp, entered the consciousness of political and military leaders. In the end, Pilecki's story sheds light on the cognitive struggle faced in understanding what the occupation of Poland was about and how the machinery for mass murder developed.

In their texts included in this volume, exhibition curators Jack Fairweather and Hanna Radziejowska tell us that Pilecki may well be a key to understanding the broad changes in the nature of warfare and extermination. His story, tangible and real, can be used to pose questions and look at the dilemmas which the leaders of the free world – Pilecki's contemporaries – faced. For Witold Pilecki bore witness to the development of the killing machine which the Auschwitz camp became, he reported the gassing first of Soviet prisoners-of-war and then of Jews, and he constantly observed and strove to understand "what are the perpetrators aiming for?" He sent these observations in – initially – oral reports to his superiors in the Polish Underground State, who then forwarded them to London. And Pilecki understood his role as a witness to history when he settled in Italy just after the war and wrote down his reports from Auschwitz shortly before his return to Poland and subsequent arrest, torture and death.

The murderous logic of the creators of Auschwitz and the latter stages of development of its killing technology witnessed by Pilecki are described in Jochen Böhrer's incisive text included in this volume. The author presents the process of continuous development of the killing technology from the very beginning of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 up until the creation of the Auschwitz camp. The variability of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp itself and its placement in the Third Reich's camp system is highlighted in an interview, included herein, with Nikolaus Wachsmann, one of the foremost experts on the issue. Both historians reveal the varying and hidden logics of the developing and continuously changing camp system. The concentration camps developed and became progressively more murderous and progressively more lethal over time. A witness to those latter stages, Pilecki sent his observations to the Polish government-in-exile in London and then to the Allies. Michael Fleming in his essay shows the great difficulty with which news was transferred from that center of extermination to the free world, how it was partly censored and just how difficult it was to be believed. He distinguishes a specific "information regime" within which news of the Holocaust was circulated. Political leaders and military personnel had the information, but their reactions were insufficient to say the least. We are presented with a clash of two rationales: Pilecki's, guided by his moral compass, calling for the destruction of Auschwitz, and that of the Allied leaders, guided by their own rationale of waging war and firmly focused on other military and political goals.

A further section of our publication is dedicated to the topic of the memory of the war. Fragments of statements made by prosecutor Fritz Bauer and Hannah Arendt present the problems of the settlement and trajectories of post-war justice. Fritz Bauer's words "Do not be just craftsmen, not just masters and servants, be humans! Humans! Humans!" resonate to this day. Data from Piotr Setkiewicz of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, showing that only a very small section of Auschwitz staff was ever sentenced, further strengthen the statements from the 1960s.

Yet light can be seen on that "Dark Continent", to use Mark Mazower's well-known phrase describing Europe's totalitarian 20th century. In the essay "Europe in the spirit of resistance", Wolfgang Templin postulates that Europe and Polish-German relations should be constructed by taking into account the values of those people who opposed totalitarian oppression. For Templin, Witold Pilecki's actions during and after the war figure among the greatest examples of courage and of a fight for justice and freedom that must not be forgotten when gauging present and future Polish-German relations and European cooperation.

The exhibition shows not only Pilecki and his Polish comrades, but also men like Otto Küsel, a German criminal prisoner and kapo in Auschwitz who on many occasions aided the conspirators, among others by stealing the plans of the gas chambers. Küsel and his courage, relatively unknown in Germany, should also be present in the memory of our national and political communities.

Arnd Bauerkämper presents a transparent look at the culture of memory in post-war Germany and the specific phases of discussion on the Second World War, including the crimes committed in occupied Poland. He touches on the role of historians and lawyers, both of whom are part of the broader memory

cultures. Finally, he describes the current context of those debates. From that starting point, one can go on to read the text by Paweł Ukielski which describes the German debate surrounding the commemoration of Polish victims in the German capital. Ukielski presents his arguments in support of such a memorial in Berlin, at the same time commenting on alternative proposals for commemoration, such as a memorial for all Slavic peoples or for all of the victims of the war in the East. Pilecki's story, one of the earliest attempts to recognize evil, to recognize what Auschwitz was, should also be included in this discussion of commemorations.

Which values come to mind when we see Pilecki's attempt to build a resistance cell in Auschwitz, to gain the trust of his fellow inmates, to foster solidarity? The aim of Germany's (and also the Soviets') occupation policies in Poland was to atomize its society, to render the people powerless. This can most clearly be seen in the concentration camp, where the prisoners, as Wachsmann describes, were stripped of their dignity. Therefore, we should remember in particular those who were able to break through that powerlessness – just as Pilecki did. His actions and the values which guided him – courage, aiding the weakest of his fellow prisoners, and solidarity – are not glaringly evident. They are not inherent qualities, but are formed situationally, we understand and discover them under specific circumstances. The situation of years of terror, dread and uncertainty throughout the Second World War may have been useful in displaying the process of creation of these values in an empirical manner, connecting individual units to certain values.¹

There is one more aspect to this specific situational rooting of norms and values. Anna Pawełczyńska, a former Auschwitz prisoner who went on to become a professor of sociology, wrote in her book *Values and Violence in Auschwitz* about a reinterpretation of moral norms and showed that any judgement of the morality of the camp prisoners is only justified when compared to the norms which were present under contemporary camp conditions and which were the most important under those terrible conditions. She wrote lyrically of the creation of values in conditions of utter darkness: "Every prisoner had loved ones. As a reaction to degenerate terror, a world of friendship was created to combat the world of hate. And in this sense, regardless of the behavior of prisoners incompatible with the norms of law-abiding societies, the concentration camp established a basic norm, the observance of which is universally essential. It created a new moral value: a sense of connection with the abused and one that requires the greatest of sacrifices".² Protecting the weakest became an act of resistance. The story of Witold Pilecki remained unknown for a very long time; the Communist authorities not only killed the man himself, but also strove to sentence him to oblivion. Thanks to the documents that have been preserved and the accounts that have been collected, such as the ones in this exhibition, we now know just how much we can take from this story of recognizing evil, and building human solidarity and a network of cooperation within the camp.

¹ H. Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, Frankfurt am Main 1999

² A. Pawełczyńska, *Wartości a przemoc. Zarys socjologicznej problematyki Oświęcimia*, Lublin 2004, p. 184

The exhibition. Pilecki and his mission to infiltrate Auschwitz



Discovering Pilecki

Jack Fairweather



Jack Fairweather is a journalist, curator, and author of *The Volunteer. One Man, an Underground Army and the Secret Mission to Destroy Auschwitz*

I only heard of Witold Pilecki's story by chance.

In 2011, I met a friend with whom I'd covered the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We were trying to make sense of what we'd witnessed. He had travelled to Auschwitz and learned about Pilecki's two-and-a-half-year mission to the camp. The idea of resisting the Nazis from the centre of their greatest crime felt shocking. I thought of the camp as the ultimate symbol of suffering and victimhood. Who would voluntarily expose themselves to such horror, I wondered? And what could such a man's story tell me about confronting evil today?

Then I discovered another remarkable fact about Pilecki: next to nothing had been written about him outside Poland. I managed to glean a little online. He had gone on to fight Poland's Communist regime at the end of the Second World War, been captured, executed, and all trace of his wartime record locked away in military archives until the collapse of the Soviet Union. It wasn't until 2012 that one of Pilecki's reports was finally translated into English. I remember eagerly reading the report upon publication only to find it deepening the mystery. Names were hidden to protect colleagues, events obscured or omitted. The report left unanswered the crucial questions: What happened to the intelligence he had risked his life in Auschwitz to gather? Why were his calls for action unheeded? How many lives might have been saved had the world listened?

This exhibition is based on the three years' research it took to answer these questions, which formed the basis of my book *The Volunteer*. The story you are about to discover is of the greatest historical importance. Pilecki arrived in Auschwitz at its beginning, when it served as a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners and the majority of its inmates were ethnic Poles. He thus witnessed the steps by which the Nazis conceived of and built their death factory for Europe's Jews. Pilecki was the first to alert the world to the camp's horrors through his smuggled reports and the first to try and stop them. Three years before Allied commanders publicly acknowledged the camp's existence Pilecki was urging them to bomb it.

The facts presented here establish Pilecki's role as a first witness to the Holocaust in Auschwitz. But the exhibition wouldn't be complete without explaining how he managed to carry out his mission. How do you survive in a death camp? How do you build an underground numbering over a thousand men without being detected? How do you smuggle out to London the Nazis' greatest secrets? I could hazard some answers here but I believe in that old maxim of writing that it's better to show, not tell. This exhibition gives visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves



Source: Pilecki family archive

in Pilecki's world, in the sights, sounds and objects that he experienced. My hope is that by doing so we can come closer to the man himself and his choices, and shed some light on our own time. As a reporter I've always been drawn to extremes – and I've found none greater than Pilecki's story of survival in Auschwitz. It describes the worst we can do to each other, and surprisingly, some of the best.

A note on our approach:

Pilecki's story offers a radically different perspective on Auschwitz. But it also presents a historical conundrum: namely that the main source for Pilecki's story is Pilecki himself. After his escape from Auschwitz in April 1943, Pilecki wrote three reports about his activities in the camp, along with a memoir of his early life and several smaller texts. Historians traditionally play down such testimony in favour of documentary evidence and it is true that a personal perspective, enormous suffering, and time can play on the human memory. But we believe it's a mistake to simply dismiss what historical actors noted down, be it during the action or in hindsight. Like other historical records, their accounts must be put into relation with other sources to test their accuracy.

For three years my research team and I counter-checked Pilecki's own story with thousands of pages of evidence from the testimonies of other witnesses and secret or official documents from the archives. Whenever gaps remained, it was our great privilege to be able to consult with Pilecki's children Andrzej and Zofia, his nephew Marek Ostrowski, and those who had known Pilecki or shared

his experiences. Many of the families of those connected to the story shared their memories and private papers. What we found was that in almost all cases, Pilecki's story, as told by himself, stood the test. Indeed, it's remarkable how much he got right, given the conditions in which he wrote on the run or in hiding. But should we really be surprised given his mission to speak truth in the face of evil?

"Nothing should be 'overdone'", he writes in the preface to one of his reports. "Even the smallest fib would profane the memory of those fine people who lost their lives there".

Our hope is that with this exhibition we can finally hear him.

Totalitarian non-memory, democratic memory

In conversation
with Hanna Radziejowska



Photo: Patrycja Mici

Hanna Radziejowska
is a curator and head
of the Pilecki Institute Berlin

Mateusz Fałkowski: Why Pilecki? And is this exhibition exclusively about Pilecki?

Hanna Radziejowska: First and foremost we are showing the world the unknown and hitherto untold story of Witold Pilecki's mission into Auschwitz, his death at the hands of the communist authorities, and the erasure of his legacy. We must remember that his is a story that we have not yet been able to tell even amongst ourselves in Poland. For me, this exhibition really speaks about the Polish experience of the war and thus connects the ideas of touching on many important aspects of the fate of Poland in the 20th century with those of Europe as a whole.

We try to pose the fundamental and classic question about the banality of evil and about how such terrible atrocities were made possible, who the people who committed them were, why the memory of Auschwitz, of Pilecki, and of the Polish experience of the war are absent from – or sometimes even rejected by – much of the social conscience, and why it is so difficult to discuss and understand them. These questions go hand in hand with the stories of Poland's fate during the Second World War and the history of Witold Pilecki, including his most important and little-known struggle to organize resistance in the Auschwitz camp, his efforts to tell the world of the atrocities being committed there, and his attempts to have the camp destroyed.

How would you develop these questions?

In its essence it is a discussion about the annihilation of the Polish state at the hands of the occupiers, particularly the *Intelligenzaktion* in which 50–60 thousand members of the Polish elite were murdered and which later developed into Auschwitz itself. We pose the question of why the occupation of Poland happened as it did. The Third Reich's attack on the Second Polish Republic did not unfold as it did in France, it was not carried out as it was in the Netherlands, but was immediately used as a means to exterminate the Polish intelligentsia along with the radical destruction of the Polish community and its culture. Today, when Europeans are talking about coming face to face with the colonial era and when there are discussions about post-colonialism, the question about the *Intelligenzaktion* is not only a question about the lack of awareness around the world or about how it could have happened. In my opinion it also touches upon the issue of today's non-memory in Germany and memory in Poland of certain events.



Source: Institute of National Remembrance

That question could also be answered without the figure of Witold Pilecki...

Witold Pilecki is key here. He is a figure who brings certain things into focus as if through a lens. He is a symbol of the generation which built Poland in the years 1918–1921. He was not a member of the generation which was twenty years old at the time of the Warsaw Uprising. He entered the war as an adult, he had a family and two children. Before the war broke out, he made innovative developments to his estate, fought the Bolsheviks, helped to shape the Second Republic, and was actively engaged in society. It is also significant that he was an officer. The vision of what the Polish army and its ethos were remains hidden from view to this day, having been distorted by communism. He was a soldier, but also studied art in Wilno (he never stopped painting and drawing). At the same time, he categorized himself in such a way that it would have to be said that he was, to use the modern term, a "statesman". Pilecki very much wanted to build the Polish state and indeed continued to build it right up until the moment when the war broke out. He then tried to find his place in the new situation, first by carrying out military tasks and then by striving to develop a resistance movement.

This man's story allows us to examine the fate of the Polish underground, how it was formed, what its activities and the decisions of its authoritative bodies were, as well as the political situation at the time, the mass atrocities committed by the occupier and the efforts that were undertaken – not only by Pilecki himself, but also by his colleagues in the structures of the underground state and the government in exile – to report on the Third Reich's crimes in Auschwitz and bring about the bombardment of the camp. It is not

only the battle of Poland's underground state with the occupiers that we can see in his story, but also the game of freedom and democracy with world leaders led by the resistance movement and the government in exile.

And of course, Poland's post-war history is also reflected in Pilecki's life story. His death at the hands of the communists was a very significant twist of fate for many soldiers, leaders and politicians from the underground state and the government in exile. Władysław Bartoszewski, Kazimierz Piechowski (the hero of one of the most famous escapes from Auschwitz) and many others were interned in communist prisons for several years after the war, sometimes for longer than the war itself had actually lasted. In 1947, Pilecki was labeled an "enemy of the people" and all memory of him was erased throughout the following decade. Here is an example of how effective that was. In 2003, when the first edition of Norman Davies' book *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* was brought out, Davies received a photograph from the Polish Press Agency which purportedly showed Ludwig Fischer at a war crimes trial. In actual fact it showed Witold Pilecki. That means that the communist authorities and their censor went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that Pilecki's image was associated with the greatest of the war criminals.

What happened to the memory of Pilecki after 1989?

I think that is the most fascinating aspect. We have been observing a very slow reclamation of Pilecki over the last few years thanks to the efforts of his family and the actions of various people engaged in restoring an idea of social justice and

memory. Witold Pilecki could be a wonderful piece of evidence for foreign researchers of how it is not true that Poland has overstated its “martyrological” and “heroic” history over the years, that we have it organized and taken under consideration, and that we understand the mechanisms which shape our common memory of those events.

Pilecki's reports were first published in Polish in as late as 2000. Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* came out in the same year and began the longstanding dispute which continues to this day about the participation of some Poles in the pogroms against Jews in 1941. Pilecki's reports, despite their great scientific value, have never been thoroughly researched and discussed internationally. Reports in English were first published only in 2012. Why were some stories – such as Pilecki's – not so thoroughly researched and discussed?

It is really only in Jack Fairweather's book that Witold Pilecki's actions have been analysed in a broader context. As a result, we see that there is indeed a link between the oral reports he sent from Auschwitz and the actions of the government in exile, the underground state, and even the Ładoś Group – Polish diplomats in Bern, Switzerland who forged Latin American passports with the aim of saving Jewish lives. Of course, access to the various accounts and documents referred to in Fairweather's book was made possible by the earlier work of Prof. Wiesław Wysocki, Dr. Jacek Pawłowicz, Dr. Adam Cyra and others. We must also reconcile honestly with the fact that Fairweather's book by no means ends this research, but instead opens up new areas. This longstanding deficit in research is one of the unfortunate consequences of 45 years of communism in Poland.

So first we must discover Pilecki. What was he an example of?

He volunteered to be interned at Auschwitz and that is really the starting point of this story; it was an act of courage and one of his own free will. The question of Pilecki's legacy touches on the universal question of how we recognize evil. The story of the Auschwitz volunteer is the story of recognizing and giving a name to the “crime without a name”, as the Polish-Jewish lawyer Rafał Lemkin described genocide. He gave a name to something that was – and still is – unimaginable. When we read Pilecki's reports, we are forced to reflect upon how we ourselves would be able to act or react in the face of evil. The popular saying “a lesson learned from history” also describes the ability to recognize the mechanisms of good and evil, to think about one's own comportment in the face of a difficult historical legacy. Pilecki, a volunteer who acted of his own free will, is significant not only in an individual dimension, but also in a socio-political one.

The question about how we react to and oppose evil and what our priorities are will always be an important one. Perhaps we have become accustomed to the inconsiderate conviction that nothing could have been done: “that's how it was, nobody managed to bomb those tracks, nobody managed to save those Hungarian Jews”. At a certain point, however, when we start to read and understand the story, ask questions, imagine what the Holocaust was like and what the atrocities committed by the Third Reich were, and when we finally say “never again Auschwitz”, then the thought starts to emerge that “maybe it all could have happened differently?” Then we are imbued with an awareness and feeling of responsibility for our own



actions and decisions. José Ortega y Gasset said that history was in opposition to prophecy in the sense that there is a precise and clear link between that which was and which could have been and that which will be in the future.

I think that an exhibition about Pilecki in the heart of Berlin forces consideration on the question of why it is important to remember. If we try to claim that his story was not an important one after all, or that “Poles can remember, the rest of the world doesn’t need to know”, then really we are admitting the victory of the totalitarian regimes which committed those atrocities in the 20th century. I don’t really think that is how we want to build order in a democratic Europe.

What kind of significance does Pilecki have for someone from the Netherlands, Belgium or Germany?

His story has a universal, a European dimension. Pilecki represents European values – freedom, concern for human rights – and is therefore a European hero. Non-memory is an innate characteristic of totalitarian states. If we are building a democratic Europe, then it must be based on the ability to remember, it should be based on memory. John Paul II once said: “to love means to remember”.

Here is a German example. James Simon, a German collector of Jewish origin who donated his collections to the city’s most important museums, was commemorated in Berlin a few months ago. In the Nazi era, Simon was rejected and forgotten and he died in destitution in 1932. For decades he left a big hole in the history of Berlin. This year, an architecturally beautiful gallery named after James Simon was opened at the Pergamon Museum,

where there is an exhibition about him. The scope of the project and the associated events gave him the justice – at least in part – of a worthy restoration of his memory.

The story of Pilecki and Auschwitz is also the story of the common trauma and culture of memory in Poland’s communist era.

Those who stood on the side of democracy, freedom, truth and honesty during and after the war were destroyed through the years. And not only them, but also their families. The people who survived the Stalinist prisons could not find work and their children could not study. It was not only a fight against the individuals, but also against the memory of them, a fight that the communist authorities practically never gave up on. Both those directly sentenced as well as their families and friends were affected by that injustice. The rules were turned “upside-down”, the social behavior of society as a whole ruled in opposition to truth and honesty. The trauma this caused is therefore a social experience and working with it requires the restoration of the proper rules, that is, calling wrong wrong and good good. In order to accept the suffering and integrate it into life which goes on, we must first make sure that the story has been told and discuss it so that something can be learned from it in order to ensure that such a terrible thing can never happen again.

Let’s go back to the values that Pilecki represented for a moment. What were those values?

What is striking in Pilecki’s story are his agency, his ability to act, and his feeling of responsibility for others. He takes the decision to act the moment he and his colleagues realize what is happening at Auschwitz. Pilecki says that “the first thing that must be done is to defend the weakest, we have to do something to change this situation”. That is the mindset of free people for whom the values of a democratic society are a benchmark.

Another thing that is exceptional in Witold Pilecki is the way in which he organized cooperation between the inmates. A very large part of them came from the Polish intelligentsia, and so there were very often representatives of very disparate political entities that were often at loggerheads with each other. Pilecki noted bitterly in his report that it was only Auschwitz that could make pre-war political opponents want to come together to counteract a threat and form a community. Does that mean that everybody suddenly declared the same opinions regarding Poland and its politics? Of course not. A community does not require its members all to have identical opinions, but to be able to respect each other’s differences. That respect and ability to cooperate for the common good is in my opinion the essence of pro-state and democratic reasoning. What’s more, we observe



Source: Pilecki family archive



that mechanism operating in an extreme situation. Auschwitz was a construction of unconditional evil in and of itself, and therefore Pilecki's mentality is even more worthy of admiration. Those people never lost their ability to think and to act.

Is there anything in Pilecki's post-war story that you deem to be worthy of highlighting?

Yes, his bearing with regards to the prisons and torture present in Stalinist-era Poland. The communist authorities sentenced him to three separate death sentences. Pilecki sent Thomas à Kempis's book *The Imitation of Christ* to his mother Maria just before his execution. That was his final act. At first I was under the impression that he wanted to use that book to save his family from hate and despair, but then someone pointed out to me that he had wanted to put his own story in that deepest of contexts and at the same time save his loved ones from the feeling of calamity. It might sound odd, but I think that Pilecki's behavior in his final hours ties into Maria Dąbrowska and Jan Kott's discussion from 1945 about the bearing of the heroes in Joseph Conrad's stories. The debate as to whether we make choices in accordance with our own personal values, even if those choices result in disaster, touched on the relevance of the Warsaw Uprising and continues to this day. In its essence it is a very universal debate which concerns every one of us.

You have previously created other exhibitions, including ones in Warsaw about the Wola massacre.

I organized the first-ever exhibition about the Wola massacre at the Wola museum in 2014, on the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. The massacre was a crime committed during the first days of the uprising that resulted in some 40–50 thousand civilian residents of Warsaw falling victim to units under the command of Heinz Reinefarth. I have family whose loved ones were killed then, and I experienced the memory of the Wola massacre in

both a superficial and in a deep way. On the one hand, my entire family knew how those people had died and we went to the Wola Cemetery to take part in the commemorations every time the anniversary of the Uprising came around. On the other hand, it was a part of history that I had never learned anything more about. I was always afraid of it. I accepted and understood that it had happened, but I tried not to get too close to it.

When I was managing the Wola museum, I came to the realization that working with the residents of the district and often working on very innovative artistic projects would not allow me to ignore the history. You cannot seriously enter into that space and skip over that experience at the same time, because that space is constantly marked with it. It was astonishing to discover that some of the places where the mass murders took place or where the bodies were burned still stand empty and disordered. It suddenly came to me that this untold and unexamined history has an imperceptible influence on all of us all the time – on our subconscious, on the architectural development of the district, on the whole city.

This leads us once more to the questions about trauma in the Polish-German context. Perhaps – just as in Warsaw's Wola district – history that has not been fully understood and worked out causes emptiness and chaos in international relations as well.

With Wola, we asked why the trauma is so strong. One of the theories – except for the obvious conclusion that the history is unknown and unexamined – was that the trauma is linked to the feeling of a lack of justice. Heinz Reinefarth, the commander of the German units in Wola, lived in West Germany after the war and was elected mayor on the island of Sylt on three separate occasions. He never saw any consequences for his actions. And he was not the only one, for neither did his officers, the men who committed those atrocities. I realized that that problem has today

become a part of the Polish-German memory, or rather “non-memory”, and might be a result of the untended knowledge of the massacre and the lack of justice having been meted out.

Justice can only be done today by telling the story and revealing the truth. The 2014 exhibition about the Wola massacre was based on archival documents, especially on eyewitness accounts and on the Polish and German post-war trials, as well as on the opinions of lawyers as to why Reinefarth did not appear before a judge. We invited the Sylt island authorities to its opening and we created a Polish-German cooperative project between Wola and Sylt. Survivors of the Wola massacre and their families attended special meetings with the Sylt authorities. Everybody cried. Very many people came to me afterwards and said that it had been a watershed experience for them as it was the first time that somebody from Germany had come to face the history, share it with them, join them in mourning, and show them sympathy.

Is this also an occasion to engage the audience and encourage them to co-create an exhibition? Are there any chances for interaction?

The exhibition is a public space, a place where dialogue can and should happen. When you build a house of stories, as Walter Benjamin described museums in the *Arcades Project*, then you have a chance to build a community in which people with opposing opinions and different views on certain events – like Poles and Germans – can talk about that history.



**Visualizations of the exhibition
“The Volunteer. Witold Pilecki
and his mission to infiltrate Auschwitz” (2019)**
Designers Barbara and Jarosław Kłaput,
Kłaput Project.



**“[The prisoner
functionaries’] first
question: What is your
civilian job? – priest, judge,
lawyer meant being beaten
to death. (...) So, they were
going out of their way
to kill the professional
classes. Perhaps there was
a method to this insanity
and this was some terrible
way of murdering Poles
beginning with the
intelligentsia”.**

Pilecki, 1945 Report

Source: Pilecki family archive



**“What – was there still
a world outside where
people lived normal lives?
Here there were houses,
gardens, flowers. Happy
voices. Games. Yet right next
door – hell, murder and the
destruction of everything
human, everything good...
There, this same SS man was
a murderer, a torturer;
here, he pretended to be
human. So where did the
truth lie? There... or here?”**

Pilecki, 1945 Report

Source: Pilecki family archive

Source: Pilecki family archive



“We beg the Polish government, for the love of God, to bomb the camp and end our torment. Should we die in the attack, it would be a relief given the conditions. This is the urgent and well-considered request sent on behalf of my comrades by the witness of their torment”.

Dembiński Report

‘I tried to live my life in such a fashion,’ he told the courtroom, ‘so that in my last hour, I would rather be happy than fearful. I find happiness in knowing that the fight was worth it’.

Pilecki, 1945 Report

Source: Pilecki family archive



“Can we from the 20th century look our ancestors in the eye and... laughably... prove that we have attained a higher cultural plane? For these days an armed group destroys not some enemy army, the ‘cloak’ of the past having been cast aside, but whole defenceless nations and societies using the latest technical inventions. Civilization’s progress – yes! Cultural progress??? – don’t make me laugh. We have strayed, my friends, we have strayed dreadfully. What’s worse is that there are no words to describe it... I would like to say that we have become animals... but no, we are a whole level of hell worse than animals!”

Pilecki, 1945 Report

Source: Pilecki family archive



The war. Towards a perfect death factory

Source: Polish Underground Movement Study Trust



Photo: Jan Prosiński

Jochen Böhler is a temporary chair holder for Eastern European History at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, and author of *Der Überfall. Deutschlands Krieg gegen Polen*



Can we comprehend mass murder?

German extermination techniques
from the invasion of Poland
to Auschwitz and the abysses
of ideology¹

Jochen Böhler

Collective experience: mass shootings of Poles and Jews in late 1939

The guy was probably sweating. In the light of a table lamp in the Berlin Gestapo Headquarters, the newly founded Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Liebl sat opposite his interrogators on a grey December afternoon in 1939 to report about the recent deployment of one of the Einsatzgruppen within his ranks in occupied Poland. These police units were death squads which had entered the country on the heels of the Wehrmacht soldiers in early September and would subsequently commit mass murder amongst the elites of Polish society. The operation had been nicknamed 'Intelligenzaktion', and its aim was to eliminate those Polish civilians who in the eyes of the Third Reich's leadership had the capacity to form the core of a potential resistance movement. The vast majority of the people killed, an estimated number of at least 50,000 people by the end of that year, had not been put on trial. As a matter of fact, systematic legal trials would have slowed down the killing process to such a degree as to render it impossible. Therefore, in the summer of 1939, the commanders of the Einsatzgruppen were called to an informal meeting in the private apartment of Reinhardt Heydrich, head of the German security service (Sicherheitsdienst, SD), in Berlin, where they were told that their target was the Polish intelligentsia, and that besides mass arrests, executions were to be applied as needed. No written order was given.

When the Einsatzgruppen entered Poland, they began the killing process slowly by shooting some people, seemingly accidentally, on their journey east during the first days of the invasion. They had been told that killing was part of their job description, but to what extent? In their first reports to the RSHA, they gave very small figures, explaining every casualty as resulting from the use of arms by the delinquent, or from attempted escape. But such insecurities vanished during the advance. Every week, the Einsatzgruppen commanders would report personally to the RSHA, where they consulted with



Heydrich and received new instructions from him. Soon they learned that it was not a smaller but a larger death toll that their superiors were expecting. Some Einsatzgruppen would soon broaden the circle of suspects by summarily including Polish Jews – whether part of the upper echelons of society or not – as victims of their massacres. Besides the notorious Einsatzgruppe von Woyrsch, the Einsatzgruppe I left a bloody trace throughout the Jewish communities in Southeastern Poland in the latter half of September, on its way to the demarcation line marking Soviet occupied territory. One of the commanders of its subunits was SS-Sturmbannführer Alfred Hasselberg, and one of his subordinates was Fritz Liebl.

In December 1939, Fritz Liebl was ordered to report to Berlin from Lublin (where his unit had settled) and be interrogated by German prosecutors. He was probably wondering what those guys wanted from him. He had never seen a written order on the killing actions. Arresting and killing political enemies as a police practice had started in the Third Reich years before the outbreak of the war, but not on such a massive scale. Would he be made personally responsible for having taken part in the massacres of thousands of Poles and Jews during and after the Polish Campaign? In Lublin, Liebl was worried about the illegal character of the shootings in an occupied country, asking two officers of his unit if he and his comrades would have to continue them on Reich territory after their return.

After some minutes of interrogation, Liebl was able to relax: executions without death sentences in Poland were not the issue here. Rumors of maltreatment of subordinates by Commander Hasselberg, who clearly had developed fantasies of omnipotence, had reached the RSHA, and Gestapo chief Reinhardt Heydrich was eager to find out why Hasselberg – who had been chosen for the job because of his impeccable National Socialist worldview and excellent leadership skills – had so obviously lost his mind on the field.

Nevertheless, Liebl's interrogation took another turn. Like most of his comrades, he was reluctant to denounce his superior. Much more, he was excited about finally having the opportunity to talk with someone on the outside about his experiences with mass killing. On their way east, the Einsatzgruppen had formed a closed community in enemy territory, driving their motorized units along dusty Polish country roads, stepping up the killing along the way, from single cases of murder to genocide. Liebl was eager to share his thoughts on that with people who had not been there. A psychologist would easily interpret this urge as a way to gain reassurance that his behavior in Poland was still in accordance with the values and ideologies of the German people's community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). In other words, although he had taken part in extremely violent actions, he needed to know that he was still 'normal' – at least in the eyes of his compatriots. Significantly, the fate of the Poles

Source: Polish Underground Movement Study Trust



and Jews he had assisted in killing did not bother him at all. Rather it was the way in which those people had been killed. Liebl, having become an expert in massacre, was disgusted by the unprofessionalism the German units had displayed in action:

“[SS-investigator] Mylius: Criminal Detective [Kriminalkommissar] Herzberger reports that when he asked you one day why you looked depressed, you told him you had just spoken with two comrades about what would happen once you were back at home, and whether you would then be able to shed your criminal habits. What did you mean by the term ‘criminal habits’?

Liebl: By the term ‘criminal habits’ I meant partly the shootings, but partly also other unwarranted brutality. Based on my actions in Einsatzkommando Hasselberg, I have come to the conclusion that a human life has absolutely no value there. In the beginning, several shootings were undertaken without obtaining a verdict from the military courts [Standortgerichte]. Later, the persons in question were brought before the military court, which sentenced them to death. Personally, however, I was especially disgusted by the way these executions were carried out. All those sentenced to death were executed by being shot in the back of the neck with a pistol. The condemned had to step up to the edge of a pit that had been dug beforehand, and then they were killed with a shot to the back of the neck.

Mylius: Did it happen that those sentenced were not dead yet after the first shot?

Liebl: Yes. In these cases, further shots were fired. The members of the execution squad were just not trained for these tasks. In my opinion it would have been quite possible to hand the people [to be shot] over either to the Wehrmacht or to the Schutzpolizei for the carrying out [of] the death sentence. I think these people [the members of the execution squad] should at least have been shown how to perform executions, so that they would not just fire haphazardly into the back of the neck without causing, as already mentioned, immediate death. I attended one execution where I shot one of the condemned men myself. At first I stood by and, after the shots had been fired and the condemned men had fallen into the pit, I noticed that one person had not been hit at all, but had fallen – apparently out of fear – into the pit. I then killed that person from above, specifically with a shot to the back of the head”.²

Liebl's statement is a historical source of almost invaluable significance: it is a firsthand report from the earliest National Socialist sites of mass murder, and it expresses the uneasiness of a murderer complaining about the psychological side effects the gruesome shootings had on him and his comrades. In his account, the victims figured as pure numbers, a workload that had to be dealt with as effectively and effortlessly as possible.



Source: Polish Underground Movement Study Trust





One cannot grasp this cynical line of thinking without understanding the National Socialist ideology. The racial imaginings of Hitler and his followers roamed in a realm of good and evil, of purity and filth, of holy mission and diabolic seduction, of kin and enemy. This strict division of the world was mingled with the Darwinist theory of 'survival of the fittest'. As Hitler had made absolutely clear in his two major outlines of Nazi dogma – *Mein Kampf* (1925/26) and the so-called *Second Book* (1928) which was unpublished in his lifetime – in his eyes, there were two imperative consequences for the German *Volksgemeinschaft*. It had to become racially pure and spatially free, a program which had to be implemented through the 'Germanization' of the nation – by identifying and removing the 'enemies within' – on the one hand, and the submission of 'outer enemies' on the other. In occupied Eastern Europe, a territory designated for German colonization – or, in Nazi terminology, 'living space' (*Lebensraum*) – and in the meantime populated by several millions of 'racial enemies' –

Jews and Slavs – who posed a threat to the 'purity' of the nation, these two currents converged during the very first days of the war, thus turning Nazi occupation policy into a deadly torrent. In the eyes of men like Liebl, the mass shootings of potential Polish resistance fighters and alleged Jewish conspirators were not horrendous crimes but a necessity. Hasselberg's adjutant, Alois Fischotter, in an odd attempt to say something favorable about his boss, stated bluntly: "In conclusion, I consider it my duty to mention that Dr. Hasselberg had not only negative but also many positive qualities. The area around Lublin, for instance, was up to its neck in Jewish scum, and a strong hand was needed to finish them off, and Hasselberg did finish them off".³

Therefore, the question was not *if* or *why* these people were to be eliminated, but *how*.



Technical progress: euthanasia and the gas vans

But the idea to use more 'advanced' methods for mass killing was not developed in the field, it was developed at home. In their obsession to purge the German *Volksgemeinschaft* from 'unhealthy elements', the Nazi leadership launched a program to grant a 'mercy death' to incurably mentally ill people. The idea was rooted in the eugenic discussions that had evolved in Europe since the turn of the century, and had been further propelled by the mass killing of healthy young men on the battlefields of the First World War. In the summer of 1939, around the same time the killing of the Polish intelligentsia was being discussed, Hitler and his entourage decided on the destruction of all 'life unworthy of life' in Germany. The link between this radicalization at the home front and the war was underlined by a written decree on euthanasia which Hitler signed in October, but which was antedated to 1 September 1939. Naturally, mass killings by shooting in sanatoriums within the Reich borders were out of the question. Therefore, the Forensic Institute of the security police in Berlin (*Kriminaltechnisches Institut* – KTI)

started experimenting with carbon monoxide, which was first inducted into the compartment of a truck which functioned as a kind of mobile gas chamber. The victims were loaded into the truck and, after it started moving, suffocated with carbon monoxide, which at the beginning was provided by gas bottles affixed to the truck, and later directly from the truck's exhaust pipe, brought into the car interior through metal tubes. At the same time, the KTI equipped clinics where the euthanasia program was to be implemented with gas chambers that looked like showers. In October 1939, Fort VII in Posen, a fortress turned into a concentration camp by the Nazis, witnessed two trial gassings of inmates. Soon after a preliminary geographical division in killing techniques could be observed: gas chambers were to be used within the territory of the Old Reich, and gas vans in the occupied territories.

The transition from mass shootings to the use of gas vans can be illustrated best in these territories annexed to the Reich, where

Polenisch Spricht, unser Feind!



the euthanasia program was implemented with massacres of the mentally ill in the greater Danzig area in late 1939. The first gas van then was used in occupied Poland for killing thousands of hospital inmates in the Warthegau in the first half of 1940. Probably for concealment purposes, it bore the cynical inscription "Kaiser's Kaffee Geschäft". It is also significant that many former members of the Einsatzgruppen deployed in Poland in 1939 were to be found within the ranks of the staff that managed the gas vans. Nevertheless, mass shootings were not simply replaced by the new, more sophisticated technique: they continued until the end of the war. It was more the particular occasion which determined the selection of the method. Police executions would by and large still be implemented through mass shooting, such as the total liquidation of the Jewish community of Ostrów Mazowiecka in November 1939, or the killing of several thousands of alleged Polish resistance fighters and criminals in the course of the 'Extraordinary Pacification Operation'

(*Außerordentlich Befriedungsaktion* in the General Government in 1940. When the Einsatzgruppen killed not tens, but hundreds of thousands of Jews and non-Jews in the back of the German operational area during the German attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, they did it exactly the same way they had done it in Poland in 1939. But the gas vans were still in use, and they were brought to the operational area as well. There is clear evidence that all Einsatzgruppen squads also operated with gas vans. But when in late 1941 the decision to eliminate all Jews within the German sphere of control was made, it was still unclear how it should be implemented. The gas vans had been a decisive step towards the rationalization of murder, but the numbers lagged far behind German expectations. Three gas vans operating for six months had managed to kill scarcely 100,000 people.⁴



The ‘Final Solution’: extermination camps

So, the last step in perfecting murder led from rationalization to industrialization. Again, it was the linkage between the euthanasia program in the Reich and the mass killing in the occupied territories which opened new doors. The mobile gas vans had been a means to operate freely in the newly conquered territories and to move forward with the front. But the extermination of the European Jews was to take place in occupied Poland, far from the fighting, where bigger killing facilities would soon replace the single gas vans with their rather limited capacity. Again, it was in the ‘Warthegau’ that the killing process was pioneered. There, in the summer of 1941, there were already plans to use “some sort of quick-working agent to finish off those Jews who are unfit to work”.⁵ In October 1941, the “Sonderkommando Lange” – the same unit that under the command of SS-Obersturmbannführer Herbert Lange had implemented euthanasia in gas vans in the Warthegau – was stationed in Kulmhof (Chełmno nad Nerem). Here, they operated the first German extermination camp, where in the course of three years up to 150,000 people were killed. The gas vans used in the process did not leave the camp yard, thus constituting provisional stationary gas chambers. But the ongoing deportation of millions of Jews from all over occupied Europe to Poland required more facilities like Kulmhof.

This was the birth of the extermination camps that were equipped with built-in gas chambers: Auschwitz, Bełżec, Sobibór, Majdanek, and Treblinka. Their history is widely known. It is still worth noting that the majority of the personnel running the gas chambers in occupied Poland came from the euthanasia program, which had been stopped in the Reich in late 1941 (due to the unrest the killings had caused within the German population), the very moment when the extermination of the European Jews was begun.⁶ But the extermination camps did not put an end to the mass shootings: after the Jewish uprisings in Sobibor and the Warsaw Ghetto, when the Germans decided to liquidate all inmates of the remaining labor camps for Jews in the Lublin area – a massacre they baptized “Operation Harvest Festival” (*Aktion Erntefest*) – they gunned down more than 42,000 people in trenches at the killing sites of the Majdanek, Poniatowa and Trawniki camps.⁷

Understanding German ‘Decency’?

The perfecting of mass murder from killing in trenches to killing in gas chambers is relatively easy to follow. Through the intersection of two mass killing programs – the murder of civilians in the occupied territories in the East and the murder of the mentally ill in the Reich – experiences and experts were exchanged and new techniques were developed and propelled to hitherto-unknown dimensions according to the plan to exterminate all European Jews.⁸ But can we understand *why*?

It is obvious that both the disturbing effects the mass shootings had on policemen and their numbers, which lagged far behind expectations, led the German leadership to think about alternatives. Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler himself had inspected mass shootings in August 1941 in Ukraine and ordered his subordinates to look for more effective and humane methods – more humane for the perpetrators, that is. Former German police officers who after the war had to answer for their actions were eager to convince their interrogators how psychologically and physically exhausting their ‘work’ at the killing sites had been for them.

On the other hand, this was ‘work’ that for the National Socialist mindset was absolutely necessary. According to this logic, the men conducting genocide were not mass murderers, but martyrs for a better cause. “Most of you here”, Himmler said, addressing an audience of 92 SS officers in Posen in 1943, “know what it means when 100 corpses lie next to each other, when there are 500 or when there are 1,000. To have endured this

and at the same time to have remained a decent person – with exceptions due to human weaknesses – has made us tough, and is a glorious chapter that has not and will not be spoken of”.

The clue to this perverted notion of German ‘decency’ lies in the aforementioned National Socialist ideology, which divided the world into us and them. “One basic principle”, Himmler had stated in the same speech, “must be the absolute rule for SS men: We must be honest, decent, loyal and comradely to members of our own blood and to nobody else. [...] What other nations can offer in the way of good blood of our type, we will take, if necessary, by kidnapping their children and raising them here with us. Whether nations live in prosperity or starve to death interests me only in so far as we need them as slaves for our culture; otherwise, it is of no interest to me”.⁹ This radical attitude had infiltrated all layers of the persecution apparatus, from top to bottom, and from the very beginning of the war. When SS-Obersturmbannführer Hasselberg abused a dog in Lublin in December 1939, leaving him outside all night, thus freezing him halfway to death, his subordinates – who themselves had killed thousands of Poles and Jews during the previous weeks – were convinced: Hasselberg was an evil man.

However we try to rationalize the Nazi genocide, we will probably never overcome these incomprehensible abysses and paradoxes of the inhuman Nazi ideology and worldview.

¹ First published in: Andrzej Nowakowski (ed.), *Auschwitz: Poza horyzontem zdarzeń – Beyond the Horizon of Events* (Kraków, 2015), p. 59–68. We thank the Universitas Publishing House for permission to reprint the text.

² Jürgen Matthäus, Jochen Böhrer, and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (eds.), *War, Pacification, and Mass Murder, 1939. The Einsatzgruppen in Poland* (Lanham, 2014); Fritz Liebl's interrogation protocol pp. 140–141.

³ Klaus-Michael Mallmann, Jochen Böhrer, and Jürgen Matthäus, *Einsatzgruppen in Polen. Darstellung und Dokumentation* (Darmstadt, 2008), p. 78.

⁴ Mathias Beer, “Gaswagen. Von der ‘Euthanasie’ zum Genozid”, in: Günter Morsch and Astrid Ley, *Neue Studien zu Nationalsozialistischen Massentötungen durch Giftgas. Historische Bedeutung, technische Entwicklung, revisionistische Leugnung* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 153–164.

⁵ Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi. Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford, 2010), p. 183.

⁶ Patricia Heberer, “Von der Aktion ‘T4’ zum Massenmord an den europäischen Juden”, in: Morsch/Ley, *Studien*, pp. 165–175. On Kulmhof see also Patrick Montague, *Chełmno and the Holocaust. The History of Hitler's First Death Camp* (Chapel Hill, 2012).

⁷ Jochen Böhrer, “Totentanz. Die Ermittlungen zur ‘Aktion Erntefest’”, in: Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Andrej Angrick (eds.), *Die Gestapo nach 1945. Karrieren, Konflikte, Konstruktionen* (Darmstadt, 2009), pp. 235–254; Stefan Klemp, ‘Aktion Erntefest’. *Mit Musik in den Tod: Rekonstruktion eines Massenmords* (Münster, 2013).

⁸ With the mass killing of the mentally ill in the occupied territories and of Red Army soldiers within the Reich, these two processes also overlapped geographically.

⁹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Trial* (Nuremberg, 1948), vol. XXIX, pp. 145, 122–123.

The camp system was changing all the time

An interview
with Prof. Nikolaus Wachsmann



Photo: Jan Prosiński

Nikolaus Wachsmann is a historian, Professor of Modern European History at the Birkbeck University of London, and author of *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*

Mateusz Falkowski: Professor Wachsmann, what were the concentration camps in the Third Reich? Why were they created?

Prof. Nikolaus Wachsmann: The concentration camps were set up in 1933, within weeks of Hitler coming to power, initially as places to destroy, to deter any political opposition within Nazi Germany against the new regime. The vast majority of prisoners early on were German political prisoners, largely German communists. The focus of the camps later changed. By the late 1930s the majority of inmates were German and Austrian social outsiders, those persecuted for their non-normative lifestyles: beggars, prostitutes, homeless people, and also small-time petty criminals. During the war, the function of the camps changed once more, bringing terror, slave labour and mass murder to much of Europe. The camp system spread with the Nazi occupation forces, and by the later stages of the war, the vast majority of inmates were foreign prisoners from different parts of Nazi-controlled Europe.

How big was this camp system?

Prisoner numbers grew dramatically during the war, as did the camp system as a whole. When war broke out in 1939 there were six main concentration camps. By 1944 there were over 20, as well as many hundreds of attached satellite camps dotted across

Nazi-controlled Europe. And this camp system no longer held about 20,000 prisoners as it did in 1939, but over 700,000 by early 1945. And this despite the fact that huge numbers of prisoners had died in the camps since the war started.

We often talk about Auschwitz as a signifier for the entire camp system. What was Auschwitz in relation to the whole system?

The SS camp system was huge. More than two dozen main camps were set up in the course of the Third Reich, and over 1,100 attached satellite camps, spread across Nazi-controlled Europe. These camps didn't all operate at the same time, as some were closed down and others opened up. This had a lot to do with the shifting priorities and functions of the camp system. Now Auschwitz was very much a part of this SS camp system and it was closely connected to other concentration camps. When Auschwitz was established in 1940, the core of its SS staff came from other concentration camps: they were veterans of camps like Sachsenhausen and Dachau. In the following years, prisoners came in transports from other camps to Auschwitz, and then also went from Auschwitz to other camps. Likewise, material and goods arrived from other camps and also went the other way, right up to the end of the war.

So Auschwitz was part of this wider network of SS concentration camps. But at the same time it was also exceptional, standing apart from the other camps. It was exceptional because it was, for most of its operation, by far the largest camp in terms of prisoner numbers and staff. And it was also by far the most lethal concentration camp of them all. And that is because Auschwitz was the only concentration camp to play a major role in the Holocaust, from 1942 onwards right up to the end of the camp's existence. In all, almost one million Jews were murdered in Auschwitz. So that very much sets Auschwitz apart from other concentration camps. Here, too, there was mass death by slave labour, execution, starvation, illness, human experiments. But only Auschwitz also operated as a major Holocaust death camp.

What did the world of the camp prisoners look like?

Sometimes when we see photos of prisoners in the camps – who were dehumanized by the SS, with their shaved heads, their regulation uniforms – we might think that all prisoners were alike. But actually, the prisoner population was incredibly diverse. The SS itself introduced categories for differentiating between prisoner groups, identified by triangles or other markings on their uniforms. There was the red triangle for political prisoners. There was the black triangle for so-called asocials, the green triangle for so-called criminals. There were also categories for Jehovah's Witnesses, for homosexual prisoners, and others. So the SS tried to differentiate between prisoner groups, and so did the prisoners themselves. We might like to think of the prisoner population as being united in suffering, but there were

huge differences and also tensions between prisoners, on account of their nationality, their background, their political or religious beliefs, and all of this was exacerbated in the camps by the daily struggle for survival, for a piece of bread, for a better post, for better clothing.

Were any acts of resistance or opposition possible in the camps, that is, in such a very repressive environment? What did these look like?

When we talk about resistance, about defiance, about self-assertion in the camps, we first have to talk about all the barriers to this. And there were many, almost insurmountable obstacles. When prisoners arrived in the camps, they were often already sick and starved. They had been beaten and tortured in other sites of Nazi terror, in prisons, jails, ghettos, in other concentration camps. So when they arrived, bewildered and confused, sometimes after days on transport, they were in no position to organize resistance. They were unarmed, hungry, ill, weak. And the SS inside the camps tried to make organized resistance impossible. It tried to control pretty much all the movements of prisoners, who were forced into destructive labor for hours and hours upon end. There was mass disease, starvation, illness and death. And finally, there were the divisions within the prisoner community, which made it hard for all prisoners to come together even if they could have.

So with all of these obstacles and barriers in mind, it is striking just how much defiance there actually was. Probably most common was solidarity within smaller groups, where individual inmates came together on the basis of political or religious belief or because they worked together or because they knew each other from their hometowns, and they tried to share food and moral sustenance. They talked together, they kept each other's spirits up, they tried to help each other when they fell ill, or sing patriotic songs and pray together. All of this was about defying the SS, to hold on to some sense of their pre-camp identity. Then we have some more organized resistance, where prisoners used contacts and insights into how the camp operated to gather information about SS crimes, about SS staff committing these crimes, and smuggled this information outside. There were a number of Polish political prisoners in Auschwitz, for example, who did exactly this. They gathered information and fed it to the Polish underground resistance outside, with the aim of publicizing the horrors of Auschwitz abroad. And in some cases, this really did happen during the war. Finally, the rarest form or resistance was for prisoners to stand up directly to the SS in some way. It was the rarest because prisoners knew that open defiance would be brutally punished. Some prisoners tried to escape, for example, including several hundred from Auschwitz. But the stakes were enormously high, because prisoners knew that they would be tortured and probably killed if they were caught, and that their fellow prisoners might suffer terribly, too.

What about Pilecki? Did his escape matter?

His escape was very significant because it allowed him to write a report about what he had seen, the crimes he'd witnessed and heard about in Auschwitz, which was then sent to the Home Army. And this is one of the earliest, detailed reports by any prisoner we have about Auschwitz.

Was the camp system pre-designed, or are we dealing with a long learning process?

One of the misconceptions about the concentration camps is that the Nazis had a blueprint to put into practice when they came to power. That they knew exactly what they were going to do. And nothing could be further from the truth.

There was lots of improvisation and change. A site like Auschwitz was never the same from one day to the next. Again and again, the function, operation and conditions of the camps changed. As they changed, they became progressively more murderous, more lethal. Before the war, it was still much more likely for prisoners to survive and be released again. The reverse was true during the war, when death became the hallmark of the camp system.

I would like to ask about your experience as a teacher. What are student reactions? Is Auschwitz difficult to explain, to understand?

Many people think they already know and understand Auschwitz. But there are many myths about Auschwitz. Perhaps the most pervasive one is that Auschwitz is seen as standing for the camp system as a whole, as well as for the Holocaust. In other words, that Auschwitz, the Holocaust and the camp system are essentially the same. But they are not. For a start, there is more to the Holocaust than Auschwitz. To be clear: Auschwitz was the deadliest camp, and in no other site under Nazi control were more Jews murdered than in Auschwitz. Nonetheless, the majority of Jews were murdered elsewhere, in death camps like Treblinka, in ghettos, in forests and fields across eastern Europe. At the same time, there was more to Auschwitz than the Holocaust. People often believe that Auschwitz was set up specifically for the extermination of Jews, and don't realize that the camp had been established not in 1942, when the Holocaust hit Auschwitz, but in 1940, to destroy the Polish political opposition and resistance in newly-occupied Poland. And Polish political prisoners were still dragged there in 1943 and 1944, as were political prisoners from other parts of Europe. So Auschwitz is more than the Holocaust, though the Holocaust was an absolutely central part of its function from 1942. Finally, there was also more to the concentration camp system than Auschwitz. Though Auschwitz was the most lethal and the biggest camp of them all, it was not by any means the first – the Nazi camp system was not invented in Auschwitz, but in places like Dachau, several years earlier.

The challenge of distributing information of the Holocaust during the Second World War

Michael Fleming



Michael Fleming is the vice-director of the Institute of European Culture at the Polish University Abroad (PUNO), London, and author of *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust*

Throughout the Second World War, the Polish Underground State sent information about conditions in occupied Poland to the Polish Government in Exile, based first in France and, from 1940, in London. This information was sent by courier and later by radio, and included reports on Germany's evolving policy against Jews. News also reached the West via eyewitnesses. Szmul Zygielbojm of the General Jewish Workers' Union (the Bund) informed audiences in Belgium in early 1940, following his flight from Poland, of the deteriorating situation of Jews in Poland, and in Warsaw specifically.

For the Allies, news of German actions against Jews was not a central part of the war narrative. In Britain, even before the war started, the Ministry of Information outlined a policy which recommended that no propaganda, outside Palestine, should be directed towards (or about) Jews specifically. The view that Jews should simply be addressed (and described) as nationals of the states of which they were citizens was widespread, and was defended by Polish Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski in his role as chairman of the Inter-Allied Conference on War Crimes in May 1942. This view made it more difficult to highlight the specificity of German actions against Jews, including after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941.

News of German atrocities against Jews had to pass through the hands of a series of information gatekeepers if it was to reach the general public. These gatekeepers included the Polish Underground State, the Polish Government in Exile, and British newspaper editors and journalists sensitive to the views of the British Foreign Office

and Ministry of Information. On 12 November 1941, a memorandum approved by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Home Secretary Herbert Morrison and Minister of Information Brendan Bracken stated that the 'news department of the Foreign Office [which had an office in the Ministry of Information] advises the press on the accuracy of its material and on the advisability of publishing it'. The press was responsive for a number of reasons, including the fact that, during the war, much information was derived from government sources, and that government adverts were an important source of revenue. The view that reporting on the fighting and on winning the war was the most important task was dominant. In addition, there was a concern that reporting atrocities might damage morale and that reporting atrocities against Jews might stimulate antisemitism. Consequently, news of atrocities and news of atrocities against Jews were liable to be marginalised.

When news about the German atrocities against Jews was reported in the British press, it was usually confined to the inside pages where it could be, and often was, ignored. The same is true of the press in the United States. During the course of the war, there were three occasions when Germany's systematic murder of Europe's Jews was more widely reported (but again, on the inside pages of newspapers) – in June/July 1942, in November/December 1942 and in June/July 1944.

Reporting the Holocaust

Following the receipt of a report from the Bund in May 1942 which described the gassing of Jews at Chełmno and pointed out that 700,000 Polish Jews had been murdered, Prime Minister Sikorski, broadcasting on the BBC to Poland, noted that Germany sought to kill all Jews. Szmul Zygielbojm worked hard to ensure that an appropriate response was forthcoming. On 25 June 1942, "The Daily Telegraph" reported the news and this was followed by a flurry of articles in the regional press. On 9 July 1942, Winston Churchill's good friend Brendan Bracken, the British Minister of Information, hosted a conference in London at which he highlighted the news received from Poland and promised punishment for the perpetrators. News of Chełmno and the gassing was also broadcast on the BBC. In July 1942, the main English language organ of the Polish Government in Exile, "The Polish Fortnightly Review", published news of Chełmno, Bełżec and Sobibór.

However, over the summer of 1942 news of the Holocaust was increasingly marginalised as the British Foreign Office sought to regain control of the wartime narrative and downplayed the information that had arrived through advice given to those making representations and through the Weekly Political Intelligence Summary that was distributed to around 500 members of the British governing class. The Foreign Office's strategic scepticism regarding news of atrocities against Jews was related to its concerns about



Britain's interests in the Middle East, the war effort, domestic antisemitism, national morale, and its desire to determine policy without being forced to respond to public pressure.

At around the same time, in August 1942, that the Foreign Office was advising Labour MP Sydney Silverman not to act in response to receipt of the Riegner Telegram (which reported that Germany sought to exterminate the Jews at one blow), news that over 100,000 Warsaw Jews had been killed, sent by radio by the head of the military wing of the Polish Underground, Stefan Rowecki, and received by Polish intelligence in London, was not circulated. However, the news had been received by the Polish legation in Bern. It reached Jewish representatives in New York, and was ultimately passed by the Polish ambassador to the United States to his British counterpart. The news ultimately reached the British Foreign Office in early September 1942.

News of the Holocaust was marginalised in the press until late November 1942 when new reports sent by the Polish Underground were reported on in British and American newspapers. Intense lobbying by the Jewish representatives on the Polish National Council (Szmul Zygielbojm and Ignacy Schwarzbart) and British Jewish representatives played an important role in ensuring that the Allies responded. On 10 December 1942, the Polish Government issued a note to allies outlining the German policy of extermination, and on 17 December 1942, the British Foreign Secretary stood in the House of Commons and condemned Germany's 'cold-blooded policy of extermination'. This United Nations Declaration officially recognised and condemned the systematic murder of Jews in Europe. It promised punishment for the perpetrators.

Following the UN Declaration, the Foreign Office again sought to regain control of the wartime narrative and continued to express the view that nothing substantial could be done until the war was won. Perpetrators would face justice after the war. The efforts of civil society, including the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, founded in March 1943, were unable to change this policy. The Polish Government continued to pass on information about Germany's systematic murder of Europe's Jews, including about Auschwitz, but generally through back channels. There were two notable exceptions to this low-key transfer of information. First, prior to the parliamentary debate on refugees that took place on 19 May 1943, the Polish Government, following representations by Ignacy Schwarzbart, distributed a detailed report on the death camp of Treblinka (which also mentioned Oświęcim (Auschwitz) as a similar sort of camp) to British members of parliament. Second, on 21 March 1944, the Polish Government issued a press release which reported that over 500,000

Jews had been killed at Oświęcim. This press release was reported on in the United States, where it provided context for President Roosevelt's 24 March speech condemning 'the wholesale systematic murder of the Jews of Europe', and in Australia. The main information in the Polish press release was not reported by the British national press.

The third occasion when Germany's mass killing of Jews attracted media and political attention followed the distribution of the Vrba-Wetzler report in June and July 1944. Slovak Jews Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler had escaped Auschwitz and provided details of the killing and operation of the camp. This information reached Switzerland where it was widely reported in the Swiss press, and a summary was forwarded on to Britain in mid-June 1944. However, that Auschwitz was a centre where Jews were being murdered on a mass scale had been known to the Foreign Office in Britain through both Polish and other sources for over a year (the first report of trainloads of Jews being slaughtered at the camp reached the Foreign Office on 7 January 1943 and originated with a Jewish woman who had arrived in Palestine in November 1942).

Ambassador Ładoś,
Source: Polish Embassy in Switzerland



The impact of the information regime

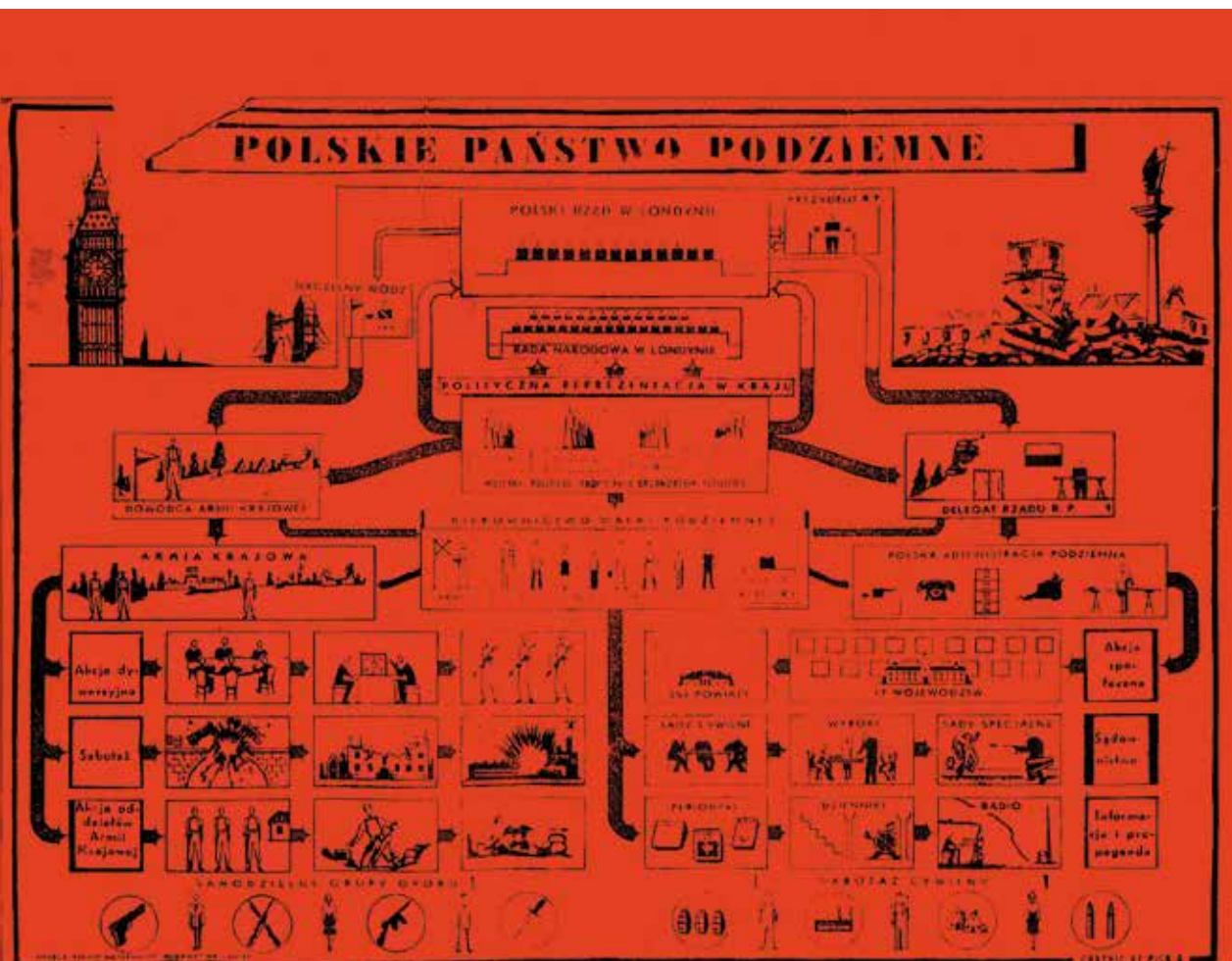
In the British context, the efforts of those governments whose Jewish citizens were being murdered by Germany to highlight the atrocities were especially important. In late November/December 1942 the Polish Government played a key role in ensuring that the UN Declaration of 17 December was issued, but at other times, as a result of negative synergies between the policy of the British Foreign Office and the views of those on the Right in the Polish Government and Polish National Council (the quasi-parliament of the Government in Exile), much news was marginalised.

Despite a great deal of information being received by the Polish Government in Exile during 1943 and the first half of 1944 about the mass-killing of Jews at Auschwitz, the Polish Government did not aggressively promulgate it or challenge the British press's practice of ignoring this important news. However, the information received from the Underground State was passed on and was collected with a view towards post-war trials. On 2 June 1944 (before the arrival of the Vrba/Wetzler report), the Polish War Crimes Office sent a charge sheet to the United Nations War Crimes Commission detailing crimes at Auschwitz and other camps. Among those

included on the charge sheet was Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Höss.

Following the chain of information from source to distribution reveals that news of German actions against Jews was rarely a central concern of the Polish Underground State, the Polish Government in Exile, the British Foreign Office, or the British and American press. There were some delays in the transmission of information (the Polish Underground had news of Chelmno in March 1942, but did not send it to London until May 1942). There were failures to formally, appropriately and publicly imprint government authority on the news (the main exception being the 17 December 1942 UN Declaration). Repeatedly, the press simply ignored important news that was passed on – including about Auschwitz. In these circumstances, the news that did reach the public domain, predominantly buried on the inside pages of newspapers, was often misinterpreted by members of the general public. The practices of the information regime, rather than the nature of the news itself, helped turn much intelligence into 'rumour'.

The marginalisation of news of the Holocaust in both Britain and the US, despite the availability of information, often from a trusted ally (Poland), reflects the limits of Western humanitarian concern in the context of total war and the priority given to winning the war in as short a time as possible. The inability of governments in exile in Britain, both before and after December 1942, to speak sufficiently robustly and frequently



Remembrance and post-war justice



Credits: PAP/DPA

Fritz Bauer – born 16 July 1903 in Stuttgart, died 1 July 1968 in Frankfurt am Main; German lawyer. As the chief public prosecutor for the state of Hesse from 1956 to 1968, he played an important role in the capture of Adolf Eichmann, was a key initiator of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963 – 1966) and one of the driving forces in shaping the public debate about Germany's Nazi crimes.

The Attorney General of the State of Hesse, Dr. Fritz Bauer, commenting on the Eichmann process

Germany is today proud of its Wirtschaftswunder or “economic miracle”. It is proud to be the home of Goethe and Beethoven, but Germany is also the land of Hitler, Eichmann and their many accomplices and followers. However, just as the day consists of day and night, the history of every people has its upsides and downsides. I believe that the young generation in Germany is willing to learn the whole story, the whole truth, which is, unfortunately, sometimes hard to cope with for their parents. In Germany, we strive for this truth in the courtrooms and in the schools. A Central Office prepares the criminal proceedings, even against culprits who are still in hiding. I know that we are sometimes accused from abroad of having wasted precious time. That may be so, but I believe that it is not too late, when today, after having gained some distance of time, we are investigating seriously the facts and the reasons leading to the moral catastrophe of the period between 1933 and 1945 in Germany. And if we Germans really go to court, not only about Eichmann and his ilk, but about ourselves and our history, the national

history and the history of our own private lives, I think there is a lot to learn. In ancient times, Germans would by no means blindly obey their rulers. In the legal books of the Middle Ages, we still read the robust statement that everyone in German lands should resist his emperor and king if he do injustice. Later, many, too many, resigned themselves to the principle of “orders are orders”. We Germans, I believe, must relearn that, as the Bible says, we must obey God rather than man. I also believe that, in our German history, we have often had a false idea of strength and greatness. Too often we have confused strength with force, with power, with severity and sometimes with brutality. While, as I believe, true strength means sufferance and tolerance, above all: sufferance and tolerance of everything that carries a human face. To live and let live has nothing to do with weakness or with humanitarian sentimentalism. A great German poet once asked his fellow beings and fellow citizens in Germany to take the following to heart: “I see craftsmen, but no humans. I see thinkers, but no humans. I see judges, but no humans. Masters and servants, but no humans”. With this poet, the victims of the dreadful years of 1933 to 1945 exclaim: “Do not be just craftsmen, not just masters and servants, be humans! Humans! Humans!”

The Attorney General for the State of Hesse, Dr. Fritz Bauer, commenting on the Eichmann process [in:] Eichmann and the Third Reich, dir. Erwin Leiser, Switzerland/West Germany, 1961



Credits: APImages/EastNews

Hannah Arendt – born 14 October 1906 in Linden, died 4 December 1975 in New York City; Jewish German-American political theorist, philosopher and professor. One of the most important political thinkers of the 20th century. Among her most famous works are *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Hannah Arendt in a TV interview with Thilo Koch, January 1964

What we all cannot cope with in terms of the past is not the number of victims, but the shabbiness of these mass murderers without guilt and the thoughtless inferiority of their so-called ideals. 'They abused our idealism' – so you often hear former Nazis say these days, who believed themselves to be something better [...] In my experience, Germans who have never committed even the smallest of wrongful deeds express how guilty they feel with the strongest conviction, while you only need to meet a single former Nazi to be confronted with the clearest conscience in the world – even when he isn't lying right to your face and when the clear conscience isn't serving as a camouflage. In the first years after the war, I explained these sweeping confessions of guilt to myself using the great statement of Jaspers immediately after Germany's collapse: 'It is our fault that we are alive.' In the meantime however, and especially in the face of the really astonishing nonchalance with which people in Germany, until the incarceration of Eichmann, had apparently seemed to have accepted that 'the murderers are amongst us', without putting them to trial or dealing with them, and even facilitating the continuation

of their careers without problem in many cases – of course without killing and murdering – as if nothing or nearly nothing had happened, well, now that all these things have come to light in the recent years, I have had misgivings about the pleas of guilt by the innocents. Their statements often served to cover for the guilty ones. When everyone calls out "We are guilty", you can no longer discover the crimes that were actually perpetrated. Then whether someone participated in the massacre of hundreds of thousands or whether he only remained silent and lived in secrecy becomes a matter of an insignificant difference in degree. This, I mean, is unbearable. And in my opinion, the most recent talk about 'Eichmann is within us' is part of the same unbearable category – as if everyone, just because he is a human being, unavoidably has an 'Eichmann' within him. Or the latest objections to the Nazi criminal trials, which were already being pressed during the Eichmann trial, that this would only lead to finding scapegoats at whose expense the German people would, collectively, feel innocent again. Politically, the German people must in any case assume responsibility for the crimes committed in their name and by members of the nation, and today likely only a very small minority still has doubts about this. Yet this has nothing to do with the personal feelings on an individual level. In political terms, it seems to me that the German people will be justified in declaring this terrible past to have been overcome once they have condemned the murderers, who still live amongst them unchallenged, and after they have removed all the true criminals from public positions, though not from private and business life. If that does not come to pass, the past will remain unresolved despite all the statements and declarations – or one will have to wait, until we have all died.

Hannah Arendt in a TV interview with Thilo Koch, January 1964 [in:] Arendt, Hannah. *Ich will verstehen: Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk* / Hannah Arendt. Orig. version ed. Munich [i.a.]: Piper, 1996



Warszawa 1943–1945,
Source: Polish Underground Movement Study Trust

Anti-totalitarian resistance in Poland and Germany as a pillar of reconciliation and bridge to the future

Wolfgang Templin



Wolfgang Templin is a publicist
and member of the political opposition
in the former GDR

Europe

in the spirit

of resistance

20th-century Europe was shaped importantly by the emergence and later success of liberal democracies. These, however, were faced with the totalitarian systems of National Socialism and Communism that also dominated the century, both of which originated in Europe and aimed at world domination. Their sinister development and the record of their crimes has led historians to speak of this century as the century of the camps, of extremes. Triggered, enabled and propelled by the horrors of the First World War, left-wing internationalist Communist systems were based on the ideology of class struggle. Their right-wing antipodes, culminating in German National Socialism, claimed racial struggle as their decisive impulse. The murderous logic of both systems led to wars of conquest, wars of annihilation, concentration camps, the Gulag, and the singular extermination practices of the Holocaust.

Many historians argue that the concept of totalitarianism cannot be applied to two such fundamentally different political systems, since this would result in an inadmissible equation threatening to level the differences between them and calling into question the singularity of the Holocaust. According to this approach, the theory of totalitarianism is strictly a right-wing political weapon. Richard Löwenthal, the eminent German Social Democratic politician and intellectual, may serve as a counterexample here, among others. He had started out as a young Communist himself and was influenced by his own bitter experiences with Soviet-style Bolshevism and National Socialism. To trivialise one of the two systems, or to underestimate the singularity of the Holocaust's industrial mass extermination was clearly not his intention. He compared the differences and similarities of National Socialism and Bolshevism/Communism, and their destructive dynamics, which he described as totalitarian revolutions – revolutions of a deadly totalitarian energy that the democracies of the West misjudged for too long, backed away from and sought to come to an arrangement with to the last. Löwenthal vehemently

opposed later historical revisionist attempts, for example by Ernst Nolte, to explain Hitler's atrocities as a consequence of Stalin's misdeeds. Hitler's hatred of Jews and Slavs, the Nazis' maniacal conquest of the world, and their exterminatory frenzy had their own roots that stemmed from the ups and downs of German history. The singularity of the Holocaust was thus without question.

After 1989, Jürgen Habermas spoke of the opportunity and constitutive importance of an anti-totalitarian consensus of all democracies. Early discussions concerning the two totalitarian systems were addressed by a volume published by Suhrkamp in 2000: *Die Europäische Idee. Aus dem Geist des Widerstandes* [The European idea. In the spirit of resistance]. It included manifestos, memoranda and concepts going back to the first decades of the 20th century, bearing witness to the resistance against the Nazi and Communist threats and serving as inspirations to the founding fathers of the future European Union. Besides the cry of "Never again war" for a future order of European peace, the rights of liberty and the values of democracy and social balance formed the basis for a new beginning. Unlike the failed post-war order of 1918 and confronted with a historically unique German burden of war guilt and criminal acts, it was about a path that would lead the free part of Germany back into the circle of civilised nations and make the Federal Republic a partner in the European democratic reorganisation. Compensation and reconciliation set a goal for which true remembrance and the recognition and admission of one's own guilt were a prerequisite.

When it comes to acknowledging the importance of anti-totalitarian resistance in Europe, with its different traditions and protagonists, Poland and Germany have a special role to play. Germany, in the shape of the Weimar Republic, had failed to develop a stable parliamentary democracy and to build a balanced, partnership-based relationship with its newly formed Polish neighbour. Poland was considered a *saisonstaat* [seasonal state], and this "disgrace of Versailles" was to be erased and former German greatness restored. This was a shared consensus that was resisted only by a few democratic, conciliatory forces in Germany. There were warning calls from politicians and journalists who saw a deadly threat to the fragile German democracy in the coincident rise of the radical Communist left and of the Nazis. They were not dazzled by Hitler's appeals to peace and moderation, or by his cajolery of parts of the bourgeois camp. *Mein Kampf* provided the textbook for a conquest of power, and made obvious his fanatical anti-Semitism and anti-Slavic sentiments. Until 1933, however, the bourgeois camp and many Social Democrats underestimated the danger associated

with Nazism, while the German Communists contributed to the demise of the Weimar Republic.

After the seizure of power by the Nazis, all other political forces were pushed aside or eliminated. The underground resistance inside the country and from abroad had very different features and embodied sometimes opposing positions. Disappointed and disillusioned former Nazis, resistance from within the apparatus, and parts of the national conservative elites who despised the former corporal and his closest followers formed one side here. Internal plans for a coup, later assassination attempts, and cooperation with Western powers characterised a high-risk form of resistance that was not, however, undertaken by democrats. On the other hand, there was the self-sacrificing struggle of the German Communists. These, however, almost exclusively sided with Moscow, that is, with the other totalitarian power in Europe. The resistance and espionage network of the Rote Kapelle ["Red Orchestra"] had included aristocratic, bourgeois forces, and Social Democrats – but also communists who, due to their close ties to Moscow, require a very differentiated form of appraisal. The long-prepared collaboration of the Nazis under Hitler with the Soviet Union under Stalin, culminating in the Hitler-Stalin Pact, to which Poland was the first to fall victim, could not effectively be countered by the German resistance. Information about it and warnings of it that reached the western side were without effect until after the Munich Agreement of 1938. A policy of appeasement remained the only helpless response. It took a character like Winston Churchill to deprive Hitler of the opportunity to conquer the whole of Europe in the summer of 1940.

The Second Polish Republic, likewise built on shaky ground, was confronted with

the totalitarian threats of the inter-war period in an entirely different way. Under the influence of Moscow, Polish Communists dreamed of a Soviet Poland, while a militant anti-Semitic right wished for a fascist *führer* state based on the Italian model or flirted with the idea of joining up with Hitler. The historical reality thwarted all such designs. Poland was invaded and occupied by its overpowering allied neighbours. The Polish population was classified by the Germans as a slave race and its elites were to be wiped out. Auschwitz, later an extermination camp for Jews from all over Europe, was initially filled with members of the Polish intelligentsia and the Polish resistance.

Here, such diverse and yet closely related biographies of resistance as those of Władysław Bartoszewski and Witold Pilecki begin. They document the intensity and breadth of Polish anti-totalitarian resistance that existed from the first moment of the German invasion and of the almost simultaneous Soviet invasion.

With regard to casualties, in relation to its total population and the degree of the country's destruction, Poland was to bear the greatest brunt of the Second World War. Poland was the country with the strongest resistance against the German and Soviet occupiers. Civil resistance led to the formation of the Polish Underground State, military resistance by the Home Army – which had hundreds of thousands of fighters – and a functioning legitimate state in exile. It was virtually impossible for the Germans to install even the semblance of a Polish Quisling system.

The Polish resistance ranged from forces who saw themselves in the tradition of the Polish Republic and its founder, Józef Piłsudski, to republican-conservative forces and, finally, right-wing nationalist groups who did not care about the fate of Polish Jews, did not consider the national minorities fully fledged Poles and in fact even persecuted them. At the same time, there was civilian and military resistance from the Communist side, which kept the knowledge of Stalin's crimes against the Polish people repressed and wished to see the victorious Soviet Union as a liberator. Survivors of this resistance belonged to the leadership of the Polish People's Republic after 1945.

Władysław Bartoszewski and Witold Pilecki went through the hell of Auschwitz early on, surviving and continuing to fight in the resistance. Pilecki paid with his life for his fight against the Communists in the People's Republic; Bartoszewski went to prison once again for several years. He then took the opportunity to convey the experiences of his early struggle to the democratic opposition within the People's Republic. For him, the tradition of decades



Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Helmut Kohl,
Krzyżowa, 12.11.1989
Credits: Tomasz Kosiorowski/FOTONOVA



Willy Brandt, Warszawa, 07.12.1970
Credits: AP Images/EastNews

of resistance was linked to the values of freedom, decency and justice. As early as 1989, these ideals led him to seek the path of rapprochement and reconciliation with groups who stood for the same values in West Germany and within the democratic opposition in East Germany. After 1989, he became one of the decisive bridge-builders for rapprochement and partnership with Germany. He was very aware of the importance of this for the common European project.

The fact that a Polish research, documentation and education centre is being created in the heart of the German capital and given the name of one of his companions, Witold Pilecki, is both a stroke of good fortune and an opportunity. Partnership will prove itself in difficult times.

A German debate on Polish victims*



Paweł Ukielski



Paweł Ukielski is a political scientist and deputy director of the Warsaw Rising Museum



Source: Warsaw Rising Museum

In fall 2017, at the initiative of German architect and urbanist Florian Mausbach, several public figures in Germany signed a petition to erect in Berlin a monument commemorating the Polish victims of German atrocities perpetrated during the Second World War. In Germany, the plan encouraged a wide debate, which, I believe, has largely gone unnoticed in Poland. It is worth taking a closer look at this discussion because, aside from influencing Polish-German relations, it speaks volumes about the current attitude of Germans toward the past and about their historical awareness.

The past still plays a major role in contemporary Polish-German relations. This is barely surprising, given the intensity and tragic nature of the contacts between our two nations. Undoubtedly, the most emotional issue is still that of the Second World War, which bore witness to Germany's aggression and subsequent genocidal policies, resulting in the deaths of around 6 million Polish citizens. Although we are now allies within the structures of NATO and close partners in the European Union (especially economically), and although the process of reconciliation has advanced, many Poles are still no strangers to the feeling that we have not quite turned over a new leaf with respect to historical matters.

It is not advisable to combine historical issues and current politics too readily, despite the fact that some believe otherwise. Claims that this subject is only raised by the Law and Justice party as part of their domestic policy are as appealing as they are simplistic: this interpretation gives no

real insight into why the Polish-German history of the 20th century is still a current issue in Polish society. Recall the previous fierce controversy surrounding Erica Steinbach, the Federation of Expellees, and its planned exhibition: this all took place at a time when the relations between Warsaw and Berlin were exemplary, Poland had just become an EU member a few years after joining NATO, and there was no right-leaning government in place in our country.

Therefore, it is barely surprising that the discussions about reparations, or, more globally, about compensation for the losses and injuries suffered by Poland during World War Two, also stir emotions. A deep popular conviction that our country received the smallest compensation from among all the states which suffered during the War is reflected in hard numbers (which are presented e.g. by Prof. Stanisław Żerko). What is more, Poles are not sympathetic to Germany's expectation that Poland should accept that the western territories which they were awarded after the War at Germany's expense were part of the compensation for the losses suffered. The Poles treat these lands – as was the intention of the powers which set the new Polish borders in Potsdam – as compensation for the territories lost in the east to the Soviet Union.

The issue of commemorating the Polish victims of the Third Reich in the public space of Berlin is not new. A strong proponent of this idea was Władysław Bartoszewski, at that time prime minister Donald Tusk's representative for international dialog, and a former prisoner of Auschwitz, member of Żegota, Warsaw Uprising soldier, victim of communist persecutions, and, already in sovereign Poland, a minister of foreign affairs. In demanding the erection of a monument, he often did not mince his words and emphasized the magnitude of German atrocities in Poland, the fact that the war began with the Reich's invasion of Poland, as well as the hatred on the part of the German occupiers, which was at first directed at the Poles. A few years later, this discussion was revived by Krzysztof Szczerski, a Special Minister at the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland.

Florian Mausbach's call thus struck a chord and met with a widespread public response in Germany. There were many voices in favor of erecting such a monument, while some leveled criticism at the idea. Of particular interest among the latter group are those that do not reject the idea itself but suggest that the proposed monument should not focus solely on the Polish victims of German crimes but instead commemorate a larger group which the Poles would be part of.

The critical voices do not usually deny that crimes were perpetrated against the Poles, and they were utterly bestial crimes at that. Instead, fears are expressed that this may set off a chain reaction of similar claims put forth by other nations affected by the German atrocities. A partisan argument is also sometimes raised: namely, that no such undertaking should be realized while Law and Justice are the ruling party in Poland, since they could use this fact as a testimony to how successful their policy is.

Much more interesting is the discussion about broadening the scope of the project and creating a supranational monument devoted to a group of victims of the murderous Nazi policy larger than just Poles. Such proposals are underpinned by fears that a "Polish monument" could lead to the "nationalization of memory", and these fears are duly justified in a Germany burdened with the experience of the Second World War and of the gruesome crimes perpetrated in the name of the national-socialist ideology. Consequently, two scenarios are suggested: that the monument commemorate either the Slavs or the victims of German crimes in the East.

A basic argument in favor of a monument memorializing the Slavs is the fact that, under the Nazi ideology, they were treated as "subhuman", which was used to justify their extermination. However, this is only theoretical, and it would be difficult to argue that it actually corresponded to the reality of the Second World War because the treatment of particular Slavic nations varied significantly. The occupation of Poland was very different than that of the territories of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, while some Slavic nations, such as Slovaks, Croats, or Bulgarians, were allies of the Third Reich. Moreover, for almost two years of the war Germany was in alliance with the Soviet Union, i.e. a state dominated by Slavic peoples. Therefore, it would be problematic to posit a common denominator in the fates of all Slavs during the Second World War, and any attempts to do so are rather far-fetched.

It needs to be remembered that the crimes perpetrated by the Third Reich functionaries in the occupied territories affected all Poles and were deliberate. In crude terms, the Poles were dying because they were Poles. What is more, nobody made a secret of it: the Germans would repeatedly assert that the Poles were subhuman and were clearly lagging behind in terms of civilizational development. Thus, a supranational commemoration of all Slavs would be erroneous and unjustified if they were to be memorialized as the victims of an insane ideology and of the totalitarian criminal scheme, under which their nationality was reason enough to take their lives. Abandoning this clear distinction in the name of which these people were dying could be

construed as an attempt to once again deprive them of their identities.

There is yet another dimension to the idea of erecting a common monument for "all the Slavs". This may have escaped the attention of the majority of the German public, and many intellectuals supporting this solution may have missed it too. From the Polish perspective, the notion of Slavdom as a separate political or meta-political entity is inextricably connected with Russian imperial ambitions and geopolitical concepts. Thus, it is barely surprising that Russia's pan-Slavic theoretical constructs from the 19th century, when Poland was partitioned, never garnered much support from the Poles. Quite the opposite: they were seen as extremely dangerous for Polish national interests, a fact which, interestingly, was a contentious issue dividing the Poles and the Czechs in the second half of the 19th century. Also, it is not a coincidence that Russian propaganda frequently referred to the Poles as "traitors to Slavdom".

It needs to be added that the people of present-day Poland do not really identify with Slavdom. To be sure, the Poles do realize that they are Slavs, but any deeper identification with this group is virtually non-existent. The Poles have little sense of belonging to a larger group of Slavs, so "squeezing" them into a model commemorating all Slavic victims of the war would be a hard sell to them.

Similar problems surround the other, similar approach, i.e. the proposal to raise a monument commemorating all the victims of German operations in the East. In short, this would include the Poles and the nations of the Soviet Union. Hence, it may be concluded that this is narrowing the scope further than in the scenario involving all the Slavs. Another merit of this plan is that it would evade the trap of neglecting the different fates of the nations it concerns. Still, this approach is also seriously flawed, which, in my opinion, rules it out.

Crucially, narrowing the scope in this way would be an even stronger indication of commemorating the Poles together with citizens of the Soviet Union. There is no denying that heavy losses were suffered by both Soviet civilians and the Red Army soldiers, but it needs to be remembered that Poland was the first victim of the Second World War, having been attacked by Germany, whom the Soviet Union joined on 17 September 1939. Up until the German aggression against the USSR in June 1941, Stalin, just like Hitler, had been implementing the policy of exterminating and displacing Polish nationals, a policy which was most tellingly embodied by the Katyn Massacre.

Also, such an approach could be construed as another, this time symbolic "Sovietization"

of the victims of German operations in the East. Poles are, without a doubt, very sensitive about any such steps, but I believe that this may apply in equal measure to other nations which at that time were part of the Soviet Union, especially Ukraine. This problem has been recently pointed out during one of the debates in the Berlin Topography of Terror by Julia Obertries, who remarked that in light of the Donbas conflict it is difficult to commemorate all the victims together. Additionally, it could potentially create an impression that the nations whose victims are to be memorialized are being to some degree disrespected, because under this approach they are not treated subjectively, being instead given the label of "everything that happened in the East".

Commemoration is a very delicate subject, especially when it concerns two nations sharing such a difficult past. I am convinced that if the project concerning the monument of Polish victims in Berlin is to succeed, it is necessary to properly understand all the circumstances and to clearly state that any of the postulated forms of increased inclusiveness may do more harm than good.

Even if the plan of erecting a monument in memory of the Polish victims of the war is approved (which seems likely because of the wide support for such a project), it will not automatically solve all the relevant problems. The path leading from approval to implementation is always long, and often bumpy. The questions arising along the way with regard to the Berlin monument concern its location, form, inscription, and educational functions.

The originators presented their own idea of where the monument should be erected, suggesting the Askanischer Platz, which they believe to be a worthy, symbolic place at a convenient location. One argument in favor of installing the monument there is its close proximity to the Documentation Center of the "Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation" foundation (this institution documents the 20th-century expulsions, causing serious controversy in Poland). This way, the monument would be a reminder of the German crimes against the Poles during the Second World War, also toning down the accusations that the Germans are using the Center to relativize blame and paint themselves as victims of the war. However, this location may pose a risk, and its merits may become a burden if the disproportion between the monument and the Center were to be too glaring, or if the monument were not to be given proper exposure. Then, accusations could be leveled that a false symmetry is being promoted, that the Polish victims are seen as less important than the German victims, or that the project is merely a fig leaf covering the narrative according to which the expulsions are the gravest crime of the 20th century.

Of huge importance would be setting up an informational/education center operating in conjunction with the monument, as in the case of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (I am referring to the idea, not the scale of its implementation). Voices supporting such a solution can be heard in Germany, where some of those involved in the debate even go so far as



Source: Warsaw Rising Museum



Source: Warsaw Rising Museum



Source: Warsaw Rising Museum

to claim that education and the popularization of knowledge are much more important than a symbolic commemoration of the Polish victims of the war.

Consequently, when the proposal has been approved, it seems advisable to run extensive consultations with Polish institutions and experts, which would help avoid any misunderstandings. It stands to reason that similar problems may surround the inscription to be installed at the monument and the monument's form. Although we are neighbors (or maybe because of that), our nations are characterized by very different memories and historical sensitivity. This fact has already caused previous misunderstandings, which did not result from ill will but precisely from miscommunication, and it would be a shame if, for similar reasons, steps taken to improve mutual relations had counterproductive effects.

* This text was first published in Polish on 1.03.2019 under the title "Przyszłość pomnika ofiar wojny w Berlinie" in "Rzeczpospolita". We thank "Rzeczpospolita" for permission to translate and republish the article.

Historians are always part of broader cultures of remembrance

A conversation
with Prof Arnd Bauerkämper



photo: Bernd Wannenmacher

Arnd Bauerkämper is a historian
and Professor of Modern History
at the Free University of Berlin

Mateusz Fatkowski: Professor Bauerkämper, when thinking of the Second World War as a historical phenomenon, as an event, why should we concern ourselves with it at all? Aren't there more important things, perhaps?

Arnd Bauerkämper: There are always more important things in life. But the Second World War is quite important. First of all, because it has a radiating effect on current politics. You cannot understand certain political controversies if you do not know the Second World War. Second, we are actually still living in families with memories of the Second World War. It is true that the people directly affected, the persons who were directly involved, have mostly already died. But of course they passed on and shared their memories with the next generation. And these memories continue. In Europe, this results in different perspectives between states, between regions and individual groups and people.

You need to know these different perspectives, for example in other nation states, in order to be able to achieve an understanding about the memories of the Second World War, about the significance of the Second World War. Understanding does not necessarily mean consensus, but to engage, and to engage productively. That can also lead to conflict, but on a foundation that is marked by empathy and understanding. That also involves empathising with others, and taking on their perspective. Yet that also means that you need to know the other's experiences, based on which the different memories were derived in the first place. Many conflicts in memory can be traced back to different experiences in the Second World War itself and to the different ways in which it affected people. And this repeatedly leads to misunderstandings, even to political misunderstandings. Only once we are familiar with the different perspectives, the different experiences in the Second World War and the events can we engage with these productively.

Do historians have an influence on these controversies and debates?

Of course historians are a part of this debate and also part of these memories. This is easy to comprehend if you look at the discussion about the Second World War in the Federal Republic of Germany that first phase in the fifties, when Germans saw and remembered themselves very, very strongly as victims, with keywords such as forced displacement, bomb attack victims. A lot of historians went along with this as well. Historians are therefore always part of these broader cultures of remembrance.

At the same time, however, they can also correct legends and myths, and some of them have done just that. In the sixties, historians, alongside

lawyers such as Fritz Bauer, played a leading role in a critical remembrance of the role the Germans played in the Second World War.

A further example is Italy since the eighties. Italian historians have uncovered, described and analysed the massacres and atrocities committed by Italian troops in the Balkans. In doing so, they have corrected the concept and also the myth of *Resistenza*. The Italian remembrance, the memory of most Italians, including the official memory of politicians, was very strongly related to the Italians' resistance, especially against the German occupiers from 1943 and against Italian fascism. Historians, on the other hand, have argued since the eighties that this is not the whole story. Italians also became perpetrators. Italians participated in fascism. They committed crimes in the Balkans.

My bottom line is: Historians should also always consider to what extent they are part of a culture of remembrance, and how they carry it with themselves, but then in a second step, once they have reflected on it, they should also work against the grain and consider: What can I do to correct the picture? What can I do to prevent myths and legends from forming?

Would you mind naming some examples in which historians have corrected legends in Germany? What phases did this discussion have? What was corrected, what was not?

Of course there were different phases. In the fifties, the phase was one in which the military events of the Second World War were very much in the foreground, in which even former generals still shaped the picture. 'Lost wars'; It was Hitler, so to speak, who basically ruined the Second World War, not the generals; the German Wehrmacht were said to have fought honourably. This was all eventually examined for the first time in the sixties. Above all, perspectives were changed and for the first time it became clear that Germans had become perpetrators.

This myth of an innocent Wehrmacht was dispelled in the eighties and nineties.

That brings us to an important point. Historians have repeatedly, even in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, called for critical remembrance and contributed to it. Yet they were not the only ones, and at times not the crucial actors. Lawyers were also very important. I mentioned Fritz Bauer, who initiated and conducted the Auschwitz trial from 1963-1965. That was surely just as important as the new historiography, which had just started to take off. The legal and historical perspectives worked together. One shouldn't forget that the Institute of Contemporary History provided important expertise for the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, for example. Close interaction, a close collaboration, cooperation between lawyers and historians was required here.

Was that not limited? Fritz Bauer was disappointed in the end after all. Heinz Reinefarth, for example, who was responsible for the Wola Massacre in Warsaw in 1944, even became mayor of Sylt

- w moim przekonaniu pojście najwłaściwie-
szem jednak jest porozumienie tego
w rykach Pana Generała.
- Może ktoś w donoszone tym
się również zainteresuje.
Przez tego nie bracie jako sensa-
cyjny temat (myślenie) - gdyż
śś to przeżycia na najwyższym
szczeblu - szczytu szczytów Polaków
Jest tu powołanie mój nie
było - gdyż wszystkie opisane
wkrótce ciasto niepodobne
Niema tu "stawa za wiele"
Właściwie to raczej spójnowa
to by - wspomnienia o świątecznych
postaciach - które tam zginęły
Tomasz z Osinskiego =
= rtm. Witold
Ten który się panu dzielił
meldować u Pana Generała
19-X-1945.

Nie mam napisanej nobliwie swoje fakty, jak tego chce moi koledzy -
Mówiono: "Im więcej pan się będzie trzymał swych faktów, podajcie
je bez komentarzy - tym będzie to wartościowsze."
Spróbuję więc...lecz człowiek przecie nie był z drzewa - już nie
mówię z kamienia - /choćby wydawało się, że i kamień nieraz smiałby
się spojzić/.

Czasami wigo, wrzód podawanych faktów bęże, jednak wstawił mi, w
wyróżnieniu to co się oszło.

Nie wiem, czy konieczność ma to obniżyć wartość napisanego.

Nie było się z kamienia - oszeto mu sandorofizem - miało się
jeszcze ciągle bijące, oszeta w gardle, serce, kołosać się gdzieś...
chyba w głowie - myśli - oszeta i Zapalem i z trudem...

O nich - wstawiając od oszeta do oszeta sąp parę, -sądę, że dopiero
się, odda obras przedziwy.

STREŻENIE POLSKI PODKOPANE
W. KUCZYŃSKI

Dnia 19 września 1940 roku - II-ga Zapanka w Warszawie.
Jeszcze było kilku ludzi, którzy widzieli, jak o godzinie 6-ej
rano, pośrodkiem nas i na rogu Al. Wojaka i Felickiego stanęli w "pił-
ki" ustawieni w szereg - ss-mannów z Zapanką nębianą.

Potem nałożono nas na Fl. Włocława do aut ciężarowych i zawiezio-
no do Komar Szewlecherów.

Po spisaniu danych personalnych, w zorganizowanym tam przewodzie
nie biurze i odebraniu ostrych przedmiotów, pod groźbą zastrzalenia, je-
śli się potem u kogo będąc byłaby najmniejsza, wprowadzono nas na ujeżdża-
nie, gdzie ponastawiliśmy przes 19-ty i 20 września.

W ciągu tych paru dni niektórzy już zapomnieli się z polka garowa
spadając na ich głowy. Niektórzy się to jednak w ramach zmniejszającej
wielkości do przajęcia, dla kilku przajętych od tego rodzaju swo-
sobie utrzymywanie i dla przajętych przajętych.

A tym czasie niektórzy rodzinę wykupowały swych najbliższych, pła-
cąc ogromne sumy ss-mannom.

A nocą spalimy wszyscy pokuten na ziemi.
Ujeżdżaliśmy obwieszili ogromny reflektor, otworzyli przy wejściu.
Po czterech stronach umieszczono byli ss-mannowie z bronią maszyno-
wą.

Było nas tysiąc osiemset kilkadziesiąt.

Nie oświadczyliśmy najwięcej domowemu biernemu nasz Polaków. Wszy-
cy zapani nasiliłi już jakby psychik. Tłum - która wtedy wyrzuciła
się w tym, że cały tłum nasz upodobał się do stada wierzonych baranów.

Każde miało być protawoburzy uważy, serce do oszeta to nas.

Współtowarzyszy nasz - Szpakowskiemu blaskowi, nie, że był do
oszeta Powstańca w Warszawie /proponowali wspólnie okucie w noc: ponowa-
nie tłum, napad na posterunki, przy tym mialem przechodzące do ułaski
"sawadzi" o reflektor i zniszczyć.

Leś ja w innym celu znalazłem się w tym środowisku.

Było by to pojście na rzecz znaczenie mniejsze...

On - wogóle umiał to za pomocą z dziedzin fantazji.

21-ej rano wędrowni nas do aut ciężarowych i w towarzysztwie os-
kurtujących notoryczki z bronią maszynową, odwieziono nas do dworca zachod-
ni i nałożono do wagonów towarzyszy.

W wagonach tych przedtym widocznie musieli mieć wapno, gdyż cała
podłoga była nim wysypana.

Wagoni samkietu, wieszono dzień cały. Pił ani jeź nie dali. Wresz-
cie jeź nie chciał. Niechliwy, wydany dnia poprzedniego, chleb - któ-
regodny jeszcze wtedy ani jeź nie mógł nie umieli. Obiecało się nam
tylko bardzo pił. Wapno, pod wypływ wstrząsów rozdusiło się w pił. Wca-
niło się w powietrze, drżąc do oszeta i gardła. Pił nie dali.

Przez sześćdziesiąt dekad, którzy zabite były okna, widzieliśmy, że w
nasz nasz dzień na Csepelohow.

Około 10-ej wieczór /godzin 22-ga/pociąg się zatrzymał w jakimś
niejaku i dalej już nie ruszył. Wyjechał z przajętych, otwierając
wagon, jadąc do pob.

To miejsce we wspomnieniach moich nawiązywał momentem - w którym
ktoś z nas wszystkim, że było dotychczas na ziemi i zapamiętał pol-

co było chyba gdzieś tam...

Nie jest to silnie nie na jakichś dawne słowa, określenia. Pra-
cownicy - uważam, że na każde słowo ładnie brzmienie a nieistotne, wyszali
się nie potrzebując.

Tak było.

W głowie nasze uderzył nie tylko kolby ss-mannów, -sawadzi
wskazywały na przajętych oświadczeń.

Brutalnie kopnięto we wszystkich nasze pojścia dotychczasowe, do
których myśli się na ziemi przajętych do jakiegoś porządku rzeczy -
prawa.

Wszystko wzięło w rękę.

Uważano uderzyć nobliwie radykalnie. Zapankę nas psychicznie
jakąśś wybieg.

Każde i jęgot głosem silił się stopniowo. Wreszcie gwałtownie
otwarto drzwi naszego wagonu. Obieczy nas reflektory skierowane we wst-
rzenie.

"Herraus! Herraus! Herraus!" - pędziły wrzaski i kolby ss-mannów na ra-
miona, plecy, głowy kolegów. Należało szybko znaleźć się na zewnętrz-
nym i wyjątkowo nie dostali kolby, stojąc w "piłki" - w bro-
dek kolumny.

Wiekna zgrała ss-mannów biła, kopała i robiła niesamowity wrzask:
"zu fimer!"

Na stojących na aktryjch piłkach, ruszali się przy, oszeta przez
bojówki.

Obieczyli reflektorem, pochani, bici, kopani, oszeta pamięci, raptownie
znaleźli się w warunkach, w jakich wstąpił by ktoś z nas był kiedyś
wielki. Należeli byli oszeta w tym stopniu, że naprężyli tworzyli głę-
bię.

Pędzono nas przed siebie, ku większej ilości skupionych biłach.

W drodze kolumny z nami biec do skłupa w bok od drogi i za-
mknąć w ślad za nim pędzono cieżę z p-m. Zabito, wyjeżdżając z szeregu
10-ciu przajętych kolegów i zastrzelono w naramu z pistoletów, na stru-
k "odpowiedzialności solidarności" na "wielkość", którą naszałowali sa-
mi ss-mannowie.

Wszystkich jedenasta obięto na rzemieniach uwiązanych do jed-
nej naci. Wreszcie kolumny przajętych przy i oszeta nie na nich.

Wszystko to robiono pod akompaniament blachy i kpin.

Obieczyli się do bramy, umieszczono w ogrodzeniu z drutów, na
które: "Wielki napis: 'Arbeit macht frei'".

Pędzieli dopóki naszałowali się go, dobrze rozmieć.

Na ogrodzeniu, rzędnym ustawione były mrowne butelki, wśród któ-
rych widniał płag rozciąły.

Wchodząc wśród szpalera ss-mannów, przed sobą bramy, doznaliśmy
przez krótki okres oszeta wielkiego spokoju. Odpędzono przy, kolumny nasz
wyrzwał piłki. Natąj liczone nas skrupulatnie - na kolumny dolizające
okładając trupy.

Wysoki, wtedy jeszcze pojedynczy płot z drutu kolczastego, brama
poza ss-mannów naszałi się z nimowi, kiedy cyfryne aforyzmy obiekty:
"Niedobro - pędzi o odrocie, a wychodził bydlęcia cały..." "Wielkich nieco
trudniejszy zrodził się dzień we mnie i przajęty...na co to tutaj się
prajęty..."

Na drutach, na wielkim placu, inny uderzył nas widok. Wiele fa-
ntastyzmem, połączonym po nas, se wszystkich stron biłte reflektory.
Widoczni byli jacyś ludzie - z wyglądu - niby ludzie, lecz jako z za-
chowania raczej do zwierząt dzikich podobni, bezwzględnie obrach tu
zwierzęta - niema w języku naszym jeszcze na takie stworzy określenia,
z dzikich zwierząt w przy, jakie się widzieli na filmach z film-
z, orderni nakolatorowych watach /tak mi się wtedy w nędzajym biłte
wydawało/, a dręgni w rękę, ruszający płot z drutu kolczastego, po pojed-
nych kolegów naszych, bijąc po głowach, kopiąc leżącego już na ziemi w
ziemi, w inne oszeta cieżę, watach tużami na kłitę pierzawę,
brzech - zając biłte z niesamowitym jakimś chichotem.

"Ichteż naszałi nas w szafie dla obłąkanych..." "Przajęty
mnie wyłi, - co podłobił - rozumowałem jeszcze kategoriezi z nami."

Ludzie z Zapanki - a wigo nawet w pojściu nieśmów nie obiecyli, wina
ładną wobec III-ej Rzeczy.

W głowie ogniem szafieci mi słowa Janka W., wyrzuczone do mnie
po pierwszej Zapance /sierpień w Warszawie: "O widnie, nie akorystałeś
z takiej dobrej okazji - ludźmi zapanu na ulicy przecie nie narodzi-
ładnej sprawy politycznej - w ten sposób najbezpieczniej można się do
obozu dostać."

Jakże widnie han, tam w Warszawie podobałiśmy do sprawy Po-

after the war. Was there a movement by historians and jurists in the German debate to continue the work of Fritz Bauer and others?

There are different answers to that question, of course. In jurisprudential terms, such procedures are about assigning individual responsibility. It takes clear evidence, clear proof to do that. Thus it is about the individual person, about the responsibility of the accused individual. That is an important but also a limited perspective. If one cannot successfully prove such a responsibility in a reliable, legal way, then disappointment is naturally the result.

However, there is a second point, which is that the law and thus the criminal code does not exist in a vacuum, but in a societal field. In the sixties, the social environment was still shaped by a widespread will to forget, to suppress and to not ascribe responsibility in concrete terms. Because there was still a minority of the population in the Federal Republic that included people that had participated in National Socialism or at the least had tolerated the NS regime. And naturally they also felt a bit responsible, at least subcutaneously, and had no interest in individuals, especially if they were not just the already demonised SS leaders, but also the functionaries, i.e. the functional elites, being condemned, because then they would have

had to ask themselves: 'What did I actually do under National Socialism?'. That was an uncomfortable question for that generation.

And perhaps it is no coincidence that a truly critical examination of National Socialism only began in the eighties, despite the initial beginnings twenty years earlier, and that these crucial beginnings really took hold because a new generation that had nothing to lose began to take on decisive leadership positions. That is quite evident when looking at the history of companies. These were ordered from the eighties onwards, starting with Volkswagen, and early on at Mercedes Benz, and then at Allianz. By now there have been quite a lot, so I don't need to list any names. I also think this has something to do with the fact that in the management teams of these companies, in the boardrooms, there are people who were no longer directly involved in National Socialism and who had either participated, conformed, did not resist or even supported National Socialism. In my opinion, this has to do with the change of generations.

And when it comes to the role of historians, who also wrote these company histories in the eighties, you also have to emphasise the role of journalists. As a rule, historians were not alone in effecting disruptions in the cultures

of remembrance when it came to dealing with the Second World War and National Socialism. The journalists are also an important professional group. When the television film *Holocaust* was broadcast in Germany in four episodes in 1979, historians were dismayed because they wondered why a television film created such an emotional debate, had such a broad impact, while scientific books had not achieved that. So this shows: As historians, we can trigger disruptions, but at times our impact is limited, or we can effect something in cooperation with other groups.

Parallel to the television film *Holocaust* there was the Historians' Dispute. What consequences have the debates of the seventies and eighties had for the perception of the Second World War today?

I believe the consequence was that when in 1989–1991 the deep upheaval took place and the newer history of Eastern Europe became more accessible to West German and West European historians, also because archives were made accessible, people were sort of prepared to compare dictatorships. Without equating the two dictatorships – the National Socialist and the Stalinist one – people had learned that comparisons did not have to be taboo if they are understood not as equating, but as working out similarities and contrasts.

You might call them totalitarian or modern dictatorships, but the attempt to compare dictatorships is easier in hindsight after the collapse of the state-socialist regimes, because you basically also know the outcomes much more easily and much more precisely. You have access to the legacies of those who were involved, so, more concretely, to the archives. It is also possible to talk more freely to people, to ask them what was associated with difficulties in the time of state socialism. We can relate the experiences in the Stalinist and state socialist dictatorships up to 1989/90 – in the Soviet Union until 1991 – to the National Socialist dictatorship and the experiences, the different actors, different groups who worked in and under National Socialism. So I think we learned a lot for the comparison of dictatorships, as sterile as the Historians' Dispute may have been. At the same time, the scientific result was only very limited, for the interpretation that National Socialism was primarily, so to speak, a consequence of the Stalinist dictatorship, is misleading. The roots of National Socialism were much less about Stalinism than anti-Semitism, for example, and the specifically German problems after the First World War. That one can and should compare the two dictatorships with regard to similarities and differences, I believe, is a realisation that one could probably also have had without the Historians' Dispute, but which perhaps was prepared after all by the engagement

in the eighties.

There may also be niches, dimensions or approaches in research on the Second World War that have not been sufficiently taken into account or that researchers do not like to pursue. In your opinion, what are such blind spots in the historiography of the Second World War?

Some blind spots refer to individual events that did not fit into the prevalent cultures of remembrance. The German massacres in Italy have long been neglected. These days, in Germany there is a discussion on the crimes committed by German Wehrmacht units, especially Waffen-SS and SS units in 1944 in Northern Italy. In August, for example, President Steinmeier paid tribute to the victims in the village of Fivizzano. Only very few historians are aware of the fact that a massacre was committed in this town. In short: There are still new things to discover.

But some new discoveries refer less to individual events, to individual spots, but also – if you like – to taboos that have been cultivated for a long time. And that brings us to the cultures of remembrance one again. There is a realisation, for example, that Italian residents of these villages often reacted with little enthusiasm to the partisan attacks because they rightfully feared the reprisals by the Germans. However, this behaviour of the villagers does not fit into the *Resistenza* narrative, it is rather opposed to it. If you look at the various other regions of occupied Europe, it is likely that you will find similar differentiations that contradict this narrative of resistance which has long prevailed in many European countries, such as Norway and France.

Another taboo area, touched upon by new discoveries, new sources, is to also talk about the assaults of Allied occupation troops in West Germany. Here the Western Allies – in contrast to the Soviet Union – were long regarded as friends. People rather kept silent about crimes committed by western allied troops – French, British, American soldiers – for example during the invasion of Germany. The extent was much less than the crimes committed by the Soviet army during the invasion of the future occupation zone, i.e. East Germany. But they did occur. A book was published on this just a few years ago. For a long time, these findings did not fit in with a dominant, West German culture of remembrance which glorified the relationship with the western allies, the new alliance partners. A further example is the reaction to the bombing runs by the Allies in Italy and in Europe's western states that had been occupied by Germany in 1944.

These nuances and differentiations that run counter to the dominant cultures of remembrance

are not well known yet. So the historians themselves, as they were caught up in this dominant culture of remembrance, did not apply the magnifying glass properly, so to speak. This leads back to my remarks about the role of historians in society. Sometimes they themselves are also biased in dominant interpretations, in dominant cultures of memory, and they often do not break out of this corset.

What were and are the dominant interpretations in this field of research?

Roughly speaking and at least in many Western countries, the trend was from political and military history in the fifties and sixties to social history in the seventies, thus also to the reactions of the population – the German population and the population in occupied areas of Europe – and then to everyday history, including oral history, i.e. interviews, to more recent cultural history.

Since the nineties, military history has been strongly pursued as cultural history in Germany, but also in other states, if I interpret this correctly. For example, the experiences, the world interpretations, the myths of the affected parties were examined in concrete terms. How did people in the Second World War interpret violence in concrete terms? How did they interpret gender relations? How did they try to make the occupying power their own, to deal with it? The level of perception and interpretation has moved quite strongly into the foreground in the context of this cultural-historical turn – the key word since the nineties. And we are still in this phase, which also marks the beginning of more recent historical research into memory.

What has changed in this context in research on the occupation of Poland? What is the current picture or state of research?

You certainly cannot speak of only *one* picture. However, in the past twenty years there has clearly been the realisation that Poland became the first object of Nazi exploitation and extermination along with the associated political measures. More specifically, this includes the discovery that the *Einsatzgruppen* squads did not begin only during the attack on the Soviet Union – this had been known since the eighties – but, as Jochen Böhrer in particular has pointed out, already in Poland. The realisation, then, was that Poland was, if you will, the early experimental field for the National Socialist policy of annihilation, repression and racist new order. 'New order', of course, in the National Socialist sense; this also included settlement and expulsion. Seeing Poland as a very early object of National Socialist occupation in all the aspects I just outlined – that is a new perspective.

In the seventies, there were initial signs of this following the German-Polish Treaty of 1970 and the spectacular *Kniefall* (genuflexion) of Brandt in the former Warsaw Ghetto. The realisation that many Poles – most Poles – became victims to the German will to extermination early on has, I believe, only really come out since the nineties, despite the previous approaches.

And a second realisation is added to this: that Poland was a victim of two dictatorships. The realisation that 1945 was not only a liberation for Poland, which it was, but also, in a way, the beginning of a new occupation a little later, the beginning of a new dictatorship. I believe that this is a new development and, at least in Germany, has only really become clear to the public after the upheaval of 1989–1991. This also includes the establishment of 23 August as a day of remembrance within the European framework 10 years ago – the day of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and of the resulting consequences: The German occupation and then also the Soviet occupation, albeit the latter as a consequence of the Second World War caused by Germany.

And there is a third realisation as well. This one is more difficult for Poles, namely the recognition that some of their ancestors were also perpetrators. And as a German, it is a difficult balancing act to accompany this research process. We would be well advised, and I say this not only from a German perspective, to not forget the framework of these discussions, namely that the Germans bore the primary responsibility for the occupation policy. In this context, however, they also won over Poles, and they tried to fuel and exploit anti-Semitism in Poland. To use anti-Semitism, which existed in parts of Polish society, for the German occupation policy in order to also divide the Poles. And in the process, Poles also became perpetrators, but within the context of the overriding German occupation.

You mentioned new insights since the end of the Cold War. What is the state of knowledge and perception of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in Germany?

There are still relatively few public discussions, such as this year's event in the Topography of Terror. Overall, the number of events is still quite small. This indicates that there continues to be a problem related to August 23rd in the German culture of remembrance. First of all, the fact that in the Cold War, anti-communism in the 'old' Federal Republic of Germany served to shift the blame onto Stalin, i.e. to ascribe to him, along with Hitler, responsibility for the division of Poland and not just Germany, still continues to have an effect.

These days, I think Germany's difficult position between the immediate neighbours to the east and Russia plays a role. On the one hand, despite the annexation of Crimea, despite the conflicts in Eastern Ukraine, the federal government aims to keep the communication channels open to the Russian leadership. The federal government especially keeps the contact going on medium and lower levels. So: culture, education, dialog and different – also political – formats. On the other hand, the federal government is committed to its immediate eastern neighbours as an ally. That includes Poland and the Baltic states. There are Bundeswehr units in the Baltic States and in Poland. The federal government is between these different sides and tries to mediate, and August 23rd is a difficult thing to remember.

Russian policies also do not make things easier. Since the nineties, the approach has changed from a relatively critical assessment of the Hitler-Stalin Pact to one that is rather whitewashed. The official interpretation in Russia amounts to the assertion that this pact was necessary to keep the Soviet Union out of the Second World War in 1939, as a political necessity, which is ultimately apologetic and rightly met with strong contradictions, especially from Poland and the Baltic states. Germany is increasingly torn between these conflicts of interpretation. If the Russian side had stuck to a more critical interpretation, it would have been easier for German politics.

You have mentioned several times that there are certain cultures of remembrance. In summary, what has changed in Germany in regards to Poland in the last decades?

The German culture of remembrance has changed with regard to Poland, in that Poland has joined the Soviet Union as the main victims. I spoke of early experimental fields – i.e. Poland as an additional victim of German occupational policies and the pact with Stalin. All in all, I think that the importance of the German occupation policy in Poland has gained in significance in people's minds. I also believe that it has been emphasised more clearly than it was twenty or thirty years ago.

But this is a tendency that needs to be differentiated immediately. When speaking of German memories and remembrance, you can see that there is no German memory, but there are cultures of memory, which in turn are divided into groups. In Germany, there is still an apologetic memory – and one must certainly admit this – where people claim 'we do not have to apologise for anything' and 'the Poles took our territory'. That is making things far too easy. And then as historians, we do have to say: It's not that simple. And we cannot take new findings about Polish perpetrators, or the crimes of individual Polish

groups as proof that Germans were essentially innocent. This type of calculation and off-setting of the past is not productive.

Witold Pilecki, like many other protagonists of the Polish resistance, is largely unknown in Germany. Do you think that his story can be relevant to German cultures of remembrance?

A deeper study of Witold Pilecki's experiences and life is important because it conveys insights into the engagement with different dictatorships. Poland and Germany (with the GDR) basically share this heritage and memories of it, albeit in different forms. In any case, the German occupation was an additional factor for Poland. Witold Pilecki thus connects the two countries in two respects and is therefore also relevant to the Federal Republic of Germany's culture of remembrance.

Mr Bauerkämper, thank you very much for the interview.

THE PILECKI INSTITUTE IN BERLIN

In September 2019, the Pilecki Institute will begin work in Berlin in order to develop international cooperation and broaden fields of research and study on the experiences of the 20th century and on the significance of the European values of democracy and freedom in modern history. The goal of the Institute is also to deepen the understanding of Poland's 20th century history. Scholarship and research programs are currently being conducted in order to achieve these goals and will continue, as will various work on the interlinking facets of history, art and culture. Our aim is to portray the social, historical and cultural transformations in 20th century Europe with a particular focus on the processes which took place in our region, and to present the norms and values connected with the experiences of the 20th century. The development of long-term cooperation with German cultural institutions and the academic world is of paramount importance to us. The exhibition "The Volunteer. Witold Pilecki and his Mission in Auschwitz" will inaugurate the Pilecki Institute's work in Berlin.

The Pilecki Institute in Berlin
Pariser Platz 4a, 10117 Berlin
www.pileckiinstitut.de

Hanna Radziejowska
h.radziejowska@instytutpileckiego.pl
head of the Pilecki Institute Berlin

Mateusz Fałkowski
m.falkowski@instytutpileckiego.pl
deputy head of the Pilecki Institute Berlin

Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk
m.jedrzejczyk@instytutpileckiego.pl
arts and science, "Exercising Modernity"

Jakub Świetlik
j.swietlik@instytutpileckiego.pl
administration and production

Natalia Latecka
n.latecka@instytutpileckiego.pl
archival programs

Karolina Głowińska
k.glowinska@instytutpileckiego.pl
educational programs

Anna Bobczuk
a.bobczuk@instytutpileckiego.pl
production and archival programs

Patryk Szostak
p.szostak@instytutpileckiego.pl
press officer

Klaudia Pytlowska
k.pytlowska@instytutpileckiego.pl
office

Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our special thanks for assisting in the organization of the exhibition to Katarzyna Chiżyńska, Lena Dąbkowska-Cichocka and the whole team of the Pilecki Institute in Berlin and Warsaw.

Barbara and Jarosław Kłaput and their team have given the exhibition its present splendid form.

Weronika Dorociak, Monika Maniewska, Grzegorz Nogal, Piotr Prawucki, Bartłomiej Zygmunt and the invaluable Paulina Wiśniewska displayed great involvement in conducting preliminary surveys of materials for the exhibition. Eric Bednarski, Dorota Przyłubska and Miłosz Hermanowicz prepared the audiovisual materials. Jack Fairweather sent in texts, Jochen Böhler and Piotr Setkiewicz carried out consultations concerning the materials and the form of the exhibition, while Stefan Widdess and other wonderful translators rendered successive parts from English into German. Joanna Adamczyk, Steffen Beilich, John Cornell, Nora Gielke, Maciej Grabski, Małgorzata Hoc, Ian Stephenson, Herbert Ulrich, Stefan Widdess, Tina Wünschmann, and Maciej Zakrzewski translated and proofread this publication.

Our special thanks go out to Dr. Piotr Cywiński, the Director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and Deputy Director Dr. Andrzej Kacorz, as well as to Elżbieta Cajzer, Magdalena Emilewicz-Pióro and Szymon Kowalski.

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Director Robert Kostro and employees of the Polish History Museum, and also to Director Dr. Jacek Pawłowicz for providing kind support and advice.

This exhibition is based on the book *Volunteer* by Jack Fairweather.

The research for the *Volunteer* was conducted over the past three years by the team of: Marta Goljan, Katarzyna Chiżyńska, Ingrid Pufahl, Luiza Walczuk, Hannah Wadle and Irina Radu.

Many thanks to the staff who assisted us at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the Central Archives of Modern Records, the Central Military Archives, the Institute of National Remembrance, the Ossolineum, the Chronicles of Terror Archives at the Pilecki Institute, the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust, the National Archives in Kew, the Wiener Library, the National Archives in Washington, DC, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the FDR Presidential Library,

the Hoover Institution, the Yad Vashem Archives, the Central Zionist Archives, the German Federal Archives in Koblenz and Berlin, the Swiss Federal Archives, the Archivum Helveto-Polonicum Foundation, and the International Committee of the Red Cross Archives.

Jack Fairweather would also like to express deep gratitude to the Pilecki family for their support: Andrzej Pilecki, Zofia Pilecka-Optułowicz, Marek Ostrowski, David McQuaid, Dorota Optułowicz-McQuaid, Beata Pilecka-Różycka, Elżbieta Ostrowska, Tomasz Ostrowski, Edward Radwański, Lidia Parwa, Stanisław Tumielewicz and Krzysztof Kosior. He is also indebted to those who shared their memories of Pilecki or the experiences they shared with him: Kazimierz Piechowski, Bohdan Walasek, Jerzy Zakrzewski, Jerzy Bogusz, Janusz Walendzik, Mieczysław Gatuszka, Zofia Zużalek, Jacek and Ryszard Stupka, Józefa Handzlik, Anna Czernicka, Stefan Hahn, Mieczysław Mastalerz, Kazimierz Albin and Zofia Posmysz. The following contributed family memories and private papers: Maria and Szymon Świątorzecki, Marek and Barbara Popiel, Yaninka Salski, Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, Daniel Piechowski, Jan Tereszczenko, Piotr Woyna-Orlewicz, Ewa Biały, Adam Wojtasiak, Zofia Wiśniewska, Maria Serafińska-Domańska, Stanisław Domański, Jan Dembinski, Jan Jekietek, Krystyna Kłęczar, Wiesław Kłęczar, Kazimierz Kłęczar, Andrzej Molin, the Stupka family, the Kożusznik family, Krystyna Rybak, Robert Płotnicki, Jacek Dubois, Bożena Sławińska, Henryk Bleja, the Harat family, Beata Ciesielska-Mrozewicz, Felicjan Świerczyna, Piotr Wielopolski, the Mikusz family, Krzysztof Nahlik, Jan Chciuk-Celt, Stefan Pągowski, Tadeusz M. Płużański, Marta Orłowska, Wanda Janta, Ryszard Stagenalski and Stanisław Mróz.

Jack Fairweather was assisted in recreating Pilecki's escape route by Bogdan Wasztyl, Mirosław Krzyszkowski, Zbigniew Klima and Marcin Dziubek of Stowarzyszenie Auschwitz Memento, Piotr Grzegorzek on the banks of the Soła, Bolesław Opaliński in Alwernia, Zbigniew Kumala in the Niepołomice Forest, Stanisław Kobiela in Bochnia. Special thanks to Ales Hitrun and Piotr Kubel for showing Pilecki's home in Krupa, Łukasz Politański, the battle scene in Wolbórz, Jacek Szczepański and Jacek Iwaszkiewicz, the family holiday home in Legionowo, and George Dernowski and Maria Radożycka Paoletti, the glorious beach of Porto San Giorgio.

