

Divergent Holocaust Narratives concerning the Role of the non-Jewish Majority in Poland

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In Poland, the dominant official narrative on the national level conceptualizes the Holocaust as a sole confrontation between Germans and Jews, ascribing to non-Jewish Poles either the role of passive bystanders without any impact on the course of events or as heroic rescuers of Jews. However, accounts about neighbours' participation in the process of the mass murder of Jews orchestrated by Nazi Germany – such as classifying Jews as Jews thereby turning them into “stigma carriers” (Goffman) and watching how Jews were murdered or deported – have existed since the early post-Shoah period. They are found: in representations in literature (e.g. Henryk Grynberg's *Żydowska wojna*, 1965); in films (e.g. Andrzej Wajda's *Samson*, 1961); in testimonies produced and collected by the Central Jewish Historical Commission; in post-war trials held on the legal basis of the so-called August decree of 1944; in works written by survivor scholars (e.g. Szymon Datner, Nachman Blumental); and in debates among contributors to the Polish exile journal “Aneks” in the mid-1980s.

My paper seeks to address the question of why these representations that openly depict the behaviour of the non-Jewish majority were neither received by historians based inside and outside of Poland nor integrated into the historiographical works on the Shoah in German-occupied Poland. It was only thanks to various narrative shocks, first and foremost the shock evoked by Jan Gross' *Neighbors* (2000), that Holocaust scholars in general and Polish Holocaust scholars in particular (mainly those connected with the Polish Center for Holocaust Research in Warsaw) have taken up the subject and produced new empirical studies and micro histories. Referring to psychoanalysis, my paper argues that several defensive mechanisms, counter-narratives, and the emigration of survivor scholars have resulted in the non-integration of filmic, literary, and historiographical representations into the mainstream historiography of Poland under German occupation.