
Reply to Krzysztof Persak

Miroslaw Tryczyk

Abstract: This is a reply to the review of author's book *Miasta śmierci. Sąsiedzkie pogromy Żydów* [Cities of death. Jewish pogroms by neighbors] penned by Dr Krzysztof Persak in *Zagłada Żydów* (2016).

Keywords: holocaust; pogroms of Jews 1941 in Podlasie; the book *Miasta śmierci. Sąsiedzkie pogromy Żydów* by M. Tryczyk; Krzysztof Persak.

The latest issue of *Zagłada Żydów* features a review of my book *Miasta śmierci. Sąsiedzkie pogromy Żydów* [Cities of death. Jewish pogroms by neighbors] penned by Dr Krzysztof Persak (Persak, 2016, pp. 357–374). The reviewer claims that when writing about the pogroms of 1941, I intended to author an academic dissertation in the shape of a historical monograph. He goes on to say that I failed to accomplish this task and suffered a spectacular defeat. My book is “an empty shell,” whereas I am a collator of “haphazardly selected quotes,” an impostor who steals intellectual property, and a dilettante who draws erroneous and precipitant conclusions from sources I incompetently interpret.¹

The problem is that in making all these charges against me, Krzysztof Persak has evidenced his own inability to analyze sources, in this particular case the source being my book. It was never my ambition to produce a work that would formally conform to the standards of a historical monograph. My intention was to write a book to be read by readers outside the narrow circle of Polish-based scholars dealing with the Holocaust.

That was the reason that led me to reject the academic apparatus of history and not approach *Cities of death* as my postdoctoral dissertation. It was never supposed to be a huge, dry volume never touched by anybody outside academia. I simply selected my own readers and, surprisingly, was also selected by them. The first edition of the book sold out.

Natalia Aleksion (Aleksion, 2016) was first to criticize me for the same reason. She criticized my methodology and I rushed to agree with her and explained my rationale (Tryczyk, 2016). Apparently, Mr. Persak is not familiar with my response, so I will reiterate it here: the methodological strategy applied in *Cities of death* is the outcome of a conscious decision by the author, who intended to write a text that would be comprehensible by every reader.

¹ “This article is not a review of *Cities of death*. It is more of an attempt to deconstruct something I will name an empty shell of a book, for the lack of a better name [...] that pretends to be a serious, documented academic monograph, while it actually is an inept collage of quotations from haphazardly selected sources. [...] This study defies the fundamental methodological standards, has little to do with reliable research and proposes theses that do not stand up to academic critique” (Persak, 2016, pp. 357–374).

The elites' perspective

What is significantly more grave than my or Persak's erroneous understanding of sources is the catastrophic situation in the Polish publishing market and in public debate in Poland. The highest esteem is enjoyed by historians dealing with the Holocaust who write oversized books that abound in methodological intricacies – and that nobody reads. In doing so, these historians fail to fulfill the basic task of scholars, which involves conducting research alongside educating about the wave of pogroms in 1941. As a consequence, an abyss emerges between what the “narrow circles” of academic experts know about the pogroms in Poland and what ideas about this tragic aspect of the modern history of Poland are fed to “the mass” society. Instead of referring to the difficult studies about the pogroms, readers immerse themselves in the easily readable books by negationists (Mocarski, 2016), antisemites, or more or less overt advocates of national chauvinism.²

We are living in a country which continues not to tell the truth about its past and the memories, suffering and traumas of towns affected by the pogroms are doled out by the narrative produced after 2001 by remote elites.

It is these elites that have imposed what and how we should talk about the past and what we are actually permitted to feel: be it pride or shame. For years, we have been denied subjectivity, which was recently expressed strongly by Dr hab. Piotr Laskowski from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw (ISNS UW) in his interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Laskowski, 2016). We, the people from the Podlasie region, have known the awkward truth, but we have neither been heard nor understood. In the film *Sąsiedzi* [Neighbors] by Agnieszka Arnold, people from Jedwabne confessed to the acts their parents and grandparents had committed, but the elites skillfully erased this motif,

“creating a tale of dark, murderous folk, without emphasizing the role of the elites of pre-war Poland: the priests, nationalist journalists and increasingly right-wing state actors, who all organized the powerful antisemitic propaganda in the 1930s. The people who told the truth have heard that we have nothing to do with them. Few people will now have the courage to talk of such crimes in Poland” (Laskowski, 2016).

Pushing the true perpetrators to the background, the elites who set the tone of the Jedwabne debate assumed the role of false defenders of a falsely defined folk that, to a large extent, was actually disenfranchised gentry.³ In doing so, the elites were clearly defending themselves, their own social fantasies and genealogy. People from Jedwabne, Szczuczyn, Radziłów, Goniądz and other towns did not need them as defenders. They only wanted to be heard.

2 One of the examples may be a once famous book by R. Zieliński, *Jak pokochałem Adolfa Hitlera* (Zieliński, 2006).

3 Agnieszka Ramotowska (town of Łomża): “Since the beginning of 1940, military underground troops started emerging in Łomża and the surrounding villages and gentry hamlets. [...] Underground activities encompassed also the area of Jedwabne (Kolno county) and developed in the localities inhabited by small-scale gentry with great patriotic traditions. Today, there are no people of such grand profile there – the behavior of the people there was extraordinary back then” (Strzembosz, 1991, p. 6).

I decided to discard such practices in *Cities of death*. I gave voice to the witnesses and participants of crimes that had been committed in their towns, trying to minimize my own commentary. In this way I tried to subjectivize those who had been forced to remain silent and upon whom a specific position, narratives and emotions had been imposed.

For Krzysztof Persak, this is the fundamental accusation when he states that my own text does not exceed 35% of the book's content (Persak, 2016, p. 370). This even being so, what is he actually accusing me of? There are different writing styles. I did what I did not because I fear to speak on my own behalf, but in order to let those speak who are usually excluded from the dialogue in the Polish public space.

I would be highly interested in what Krzysztof Persak would say to my grandfather, a proud nationalist from a small village in the Podlasie region before the war. Who was also a Catholic, an anticommunist partisan, a fervent antisemite, perhaps a killer of Jews and a more or less overt supporter of the German Nazis that always transpired in his stories as defenders against the Jewish and Bolshevik plague. I wonder which intellectual construct created after 2001 Krzysztof Persak would refer to, and where he would place my grandfather. What would he and his now former colleagues from the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) have me delete from my grandparent's profile to maintain narrative cohesion?

My peers in Jedwabne, Radziłów, Szczuczyn and Bzury also have such relatives. That is what they were like, and that is how they should be presented today. If I am ashamed of my grandfather, I am not going to lie about the reasons for it.

I would be interested to learn what Dr Persak and his colleagues from the Institute of National Remembrance offered to the young people in the regions of Łomża and Białystok in terms of anti-pogrom education over the last fifteen years. How did they reach them with their research results? How did they show them the criminal side of Polish nationalism, Catholic totalitarianism and national chauvinism?

Over the period in question, the Institute of National Remembrance suspended or discontinued all major investigations of the pogroms in Podlasie in 1941. The case of the pogrom in Radziłów was discontinued in 2010, that of the murder of twenty-two Jewish women in a forest near the village of Bzura – in 2014, and the case of the pogrom in Wąsosz – in 2016. I haven't heard about Krzysztof Persak protesting against these discontinuations as zealously as against my book.

I do not understand why the Polish state after 1989 was unable to explain the deaths of these women, Polish citizens who were defiled, murdered and trampled in mud near the village of Bzura in Podlasie, or to find the place where they were buried.

I do not expect Dr Persak to understand my emotions but I find it particularly painful to be accused of (self-)promotion, (Persak, 2016, p. 360) which allegedly follows from the fact that I decided to reveal the past of my relative (Kącki, 2015). Only a person who

never took such a risk can believe that something like that may be a path to a social career. What would the manifestation of my popularity be? The Star of David hanging on a gallows scrawled near my house?

Genocide as modernization

Dr Persak disagrees with my thesis that a nationalist and antisemitic underground organization emerged around Jedwabne in the fall of 1939. As if these things were mutually exclusive, he stresses that partisan troops in the neighborhood of Jedwabne in late 1939 had connections with the Association for Armed Struggle (ZWZ), which he probably imagines is a guarantee that it could not have been nationalistic or anti-Semitic (Persak, 2016, p. 372). The problem is, however, that the emergence of anticommunist partisan troops in Jedwabne, Radziłów and the whole county of Grajewo – which were inspired by Rev. Marian Szumowski, a pre-war activist of the National Party (SN) who opposed the “dominance of the Jewish population” from Jedwabne and by Rev. Stanisław Cudnik from the village of Burzyn, who shared the same political outlook; the troops that were later co-created by Aleksander Burski who collaborated with both priests – was described by Professor Tomasz Strzembosz as early as in 1991. He reiterated his claims in numerous articles and, finally, in the book published in 2004 (Strzembosz, 2004), where he stressed the local, national-democratic character of these partisan troops. I wonder why Dr Persak is undermining the findings of Professor Strzembosz.

Additionally, the Institute of National Remembrance conducted investigation no. S/25/03/Zk, concerning the “physical and moral mistreatment of Jan Kiełczewski” (a member of this organization) by NKVD officers in Brześć in 1940. The investigation conducted by prosecutor Jerzy Kamiński was discontinued in December 2005, and I am surprised that Krzysztof Persak is not aware of its outcomes. It features numerous witness accounts and archival materials about this anticommunist organization from the neighborhood of Jedwabne and the “partisan republic” it established upon the Biebrza River.

My estimates of the number of partisans as of the day of the pogrom, that is June 10, 1941, were extremely cautious. The NKVD documentation quoted by Tomasz Strzembosz mentions ca. 250 of Burski’s militants who were arrested after the defeat of their base in Kobielno in 1940, owing to a list of the underground organization’s members which was found there.

I estimated that the maximum number of members of this partisan organization before the arrests was ca. 500,⁴ although much larger numbers of up to 4,000 are mentioned in witness testimonies.

⁴ I have made this estimate on the basis of NKVD materials included in the above-mentioned investigation of the Institute of National Remembrance no. Bi S/25/03/Zk; see, for instance, p. 180: “Jan Mocarski, son of Stanisław, inhabitant of the village of Makowskie, Jedwabne region, who undertook armed struggle against the Soviet authorities, was registered at entry no. 405, alias ‘Strzała,’ in the main records of the liquidated counter-revolutionary staff of this insurgent organization.” On this basis, I concluded that Burski’s organization must have registered at least 405 members, even though it would be also unjustified to assume that this was the last member registered. The estimated number of 500 is, of course, only a hypothesis.

Therefore, I made an assumption that ca. 200 active members of Burski's organization could have been operating in the neighborhood of Jedwabne after June 22, 1941.⁵ Whereas they lacked their commander, who had fled to the German side of the border in 1940, they had some military training, weapons and lower rank command. This is evidenced by not so much the "murder of an NKVD officer from Jedwabne" (Persak, 2016, p. 373) that Krzysztof Persak writes about, but by an execution carried out by the members of this organization of the Deputy Head of the Regional NKVD Directorate from Jedwabne, which confirmed indirectly that they were still powerful and well-organized.

It is hard to believe that the systematic absolution of people involved in anticommunist, nationalist partisan operations and in the wave of pogroms in 1941 was a matter of coincidence. It made it possible to replicate the convenient narration about "peasants" (Engelking, 2011) or "scum that is part of every society," about "the temptation and impunity"⁶ of "human nature,"⁷ while ignoring the actual people who prepared and supported this wave.

Andrzej Leder, in his exquisite book (Leder, 2014), is among those who present the pogroms of 1941 as another stage of the revolutionary modernization processes that occurred in Polish rural areas in relation to their progressing industrialization. They are right of course. Yet this stage of modernization occurred in specific political and religious context, which must not be neglected only because it is more convenient to do so. Isn't it ironic that, so far, no Polish historian has tried to present the genocide in Volhynia in a similar vein? It too might interestingly be seen as the inevitable outcome of the modernization of Ukrainian villages related to industrialization processes, revolutionary changes in the structure of property, not to mention the influence of "evil human nature."

In the case of the Ukrainian massacres, however, everything was clear right from the start: here, we are dealing with premeditated ethnic cleansing executed by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), with a genocide which the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) had planned since the mid-1930s, as evidenced by its press publications, organizational pamphlets, periodicals published by associated organizations (frequently with very small print runs and small range) as well as the sermons of Uniate priests, speeches of local leaders and addresses of individual OUN activists, for instance Mykhaylo Kolodzins'kyi.⁸

Why is the narrative of the pogroms in Podlasie constructed in Poland after 2001 so utterly different?

5 Dr Persak is questioning these findings, cf. Persak (2016, p. 373).

6 Cf. the speech delivered by Prof. Barbara Engelking on December 10, 2016 during the Forum of Modern History Researchers (Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne Zarząd Główny, 2016).

7 I am referring to the speech delivered by Prof. Andrzej Nowak on December 10, 2016 during the Forum of Modern History Researchers (Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne Zarząd Główny, 2016).

8 This is the description offered by Motyka (2016), among others.

Another thing Krzysztof Persak criticizes me for is the unfair blurring of borders between the National Radical Camp (ONR) and the National Party (SN). I reject this accusation. In the Łomża region and in Podlasie, both these right-wing factions were equally antisemitic and the press articles they published dehumanized Jews in similar ways. Dr Persak writes: “Tryczyk can see the influence of the ONR-Falanga even where it was absent.” He seems not to understand the importance of the antisemitic riots in Radziłów in 1933, preceded by similar riots in Grajewo, and their role in setting the ground for the later pogroms. In late May 1936, the trial started of the brothers Bolesław and Czesław Drozdowski, farmers from the village of Ignacewo (30 km away from Radziłów), related to a bombing they had organized during another trial against them, in which they were being prosecuted for posting the appeals: “Long live the revolution and the ONR! SLAUGHTER THE JEWS!”⁹ In a testimony given in 2001 to Radosław Ignatiew, the prosecutor from the Institute of National Remembrance, Jan S. from Radziłów said¹⁰ that he remembered antisemitic events organized by the members of the ONR in Radziłów before the war, and that his father was an ONR supporter. Let us also consider the following excerpt from a situational report prepared for the Polish Government in London for the period from August 15, 1941 to November 15, 1941:

“[t]here were [...] instances, especially in the Białystok region and in Belarus, where some young people with fascist attitudes, and also large numbers of former members of independence organizations, went into the German service, forming militia troops.”¹¹

Jewish women and children

Antisemitic violence translated not only into the murders of Jews in the villages of Podlasie after the German occupation started in late 1941. It was manifested also in the attitudes of the local populations to those closed up in the ghettos. There are numerous testimonies evidencing that Jews were used as a slave labor force on Polish farms. This was the case in Szczuczyn, the Zofiówka estate near the village of Bzury, Lipnik and Goniądz to name but these. This topic was raised by Konstancy O., an inhabitant of the village of Lipnik, municipality of Szczuczyn:¹²

“[w]hen I came back to the village from the field, I learned that four people cycled from Szczuczyn to Lipnik to fetch Jews and I learned that these four had already murdered one Jew in the village. Farmer Aleksander C. also kept four Jewish men and two women to work at his farm. He took them from the Szczuczyn ghetto.”

9 APB z. UWB, sygn. 94, records of the investigation S1/00/Zn, OKŚZpNP, IPB, Białystok, vol. XI; see also: Machcewicz & Persak, 2002; Milewski, 2000.

10 IPN Bi S 15/01/Zn, records of the investigation concerning murders committed in Radziłów on July 7, 1941 of 800 persons of Jewish nationality, some of whom were shot and some were burnt in a barn undertaken under art., 1 item 1 of a Decree of August 31, 1941, leading prosecutor M. Redos-Ciszewska, pp. 338–342, quoted after: Tryczyk, 2015, pp. 173–174.

11 AAN, microfilm 2225/1, sygn. 202/II – 6 Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, Departament Spraw Wewnętrznych, Sprawozdanie sytuacyjne 1941–1942 [6th Government Delegation for Poland, Department of Internal Affairs, Situational Report 1941–1942].

12 Case files IPN Bi IV S. 289/50.

This is backed up by Aleksander D., who said:

“Wincenty R. would lend out Jews [from the Szczuczyn ghetto – M. T.] to dig ditches in Niećków, and he even gave Jewish women to an inhabitant of Szczuczyn, Janina Dudowa to work in her farm.”¹³

The Jews from the Szczuczyn ghetto slaved away in the fields of Janina Dudowa.¹⁴ These were the fields I examined for six months, working together with the Rabbinic Commission at the Chief Rabbi of Poland within the research project conducted by the Jewish Historical Institute. I looked for the bodies of eighty Jewish women murdered by the people from Szczuczyn in 1941. How do we know there were eighty of them? Because this was what one of the few survivors, a Jewish girl from Szczuczyn, Chaja Sojka-Golding wrote in a letter to a friend in June 1945:

“Tuesday, some village farm owners requested girls to work in the fields cutting the harvest, to work in the gardens and so forth. The chief of police along with five or six gentile lads chose the girls. They chose more than 80 women (Gutki [Gutka – Ed.] Rozentel was amongst those, chosen) [...]. They departed and never returned. They had been killed, some by scythes right in the rye fields, others by hoes, and others in the gardens.”¹⁵

Exceptionally tragic was the fate of the Jewish women who were raped by men from Radziłów, Goniądz, Szczuczyn, in the neighborhood of the village of Skaje and Bzury and elsewhere. Rape is one of the most brutal ways to subjugate another person and objectify them.

Subjugation of the victims, their dehumanization and contempt for them were reflected also in the language used by the perpetrators to talk about them. They were not people, they were “it”: “they stacked it on my cart,” “those things,” “we took it to the ditch.” Alternatively, vulgar language was used. “Those whores, they got it” says Stanisław Z.,¹⁶ one of the perpetrators of the murder of Jewish girls from Szczuczyn near Bzury. I have to admit I was petrified when 75 years later, another inhabitant of Szczuczyn, Lucjan D., born in 1927, perhaps a participant in the events, referred to these Jewish girls in a similar way when I interviewed him with Marcin Kącki. “D. smiles, he talks about a Jewish woman who owned a bakery in Szczuczyn and had ‘seven whores.’ That is daughters. I read out the list of murderers from the testimonies. D. remembers all the names” (Kącki, 2016).

Krzysztof Persak does not agree with my assessment of the perpetrators’ behavior. He calls them projections (Persak, 2016, p. 366). Let the readers decide who is right here.

13 Testimony of Aleksander D. of October 20, 1947, S8/12/Zn, OKŚZpNP, IPN Białystok, pp. 189–190.

14 Testimony of Franciszek B. from the village of Skaje, of April 27, 1948. Investigation records S8/12/Zn, OKŚZpNP, IPN Białystok, pp. 187–188.

15 Księga Pamięci Sztetla Szczuczyn – Zagłada Kahału w Szczuczynie [The Szczuczyn Shtetl Yizkor Book – The Destruction of the Shtetsin (Szczuczyn) Kehilah], Tel Aviv, 1954, English version available from (JewishGen, n.d.). The letter of Chaja Sojka-Golding to Yeshiah Skubielski is dated July 22, 1945.

16 Records of the trial of Stanisław Z. of February 28, 1951, IPN Bi K 29/50.

When I was reading the records of the pogrom trials conducted after the war, I could not stop thinking about one thing. I could not understand why people went to so much trouble. You could simply rob and kill somebody. But these people made an effort to saw somebody's head off (Radziłów), hammer nails in it, break the limbs, cut the tongue out (Goniądz) or torture a woman for many hours before raping her.

I believe that the murders of the summer of 1941 were not primarily fuelled by larceny, since valuables were found in the ashes of the barn in Jedwabne. The girls near Bzury were murdered, although they possessed nothing except their clothes. Were they killed so as to conceal that one of them had been raped? But why kill as many as twenty-two persons? Wouldn't it have been simpler to lead away and rape that one only?

What about Jewish children: were they rich? Or maybe they collaborated with the Soviets? Even the Serbs in Srebrenica spared boys under 15, which did not prevent the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the Hague Tribunal from reaching the unanimous conclusion that "ethnic cleansing" had taken place there.

In Jedwabne, all the Jews were burned. All, meaning that they were not divided into "guilty" ones and others. This means that the only common denominator of the victims in Jedwabne, children in Szczuczyn and girls near Bzury was their ethnic origin. The remaining motivations are secondary. It is difficult for this conclusion to reach not only collective consciousness but even that of experts on the subject.

Freudian errors

Another error of mine is, in Dr Persak's opinion, including Major Jan Tabortowski alias "Bruzda" in the National Armed Forces (NSZ) (Persak, 2016, p. 372). I never wrote anything like that, though. Major Jan Tabortowski alias "Bruzda," a professional officer of the Polish Army, Home Army, Citizens' Home Army and later a member of Freedom and Independence (WiN) was never a formal member of the NSZ. However, when he hid in the Biebrza forests after 1950 and attacked local stores and state-owned farms to "requisition" resources, it is actually difficult to determine what organization he represented.

I mentioned Tabortowski when writing about the murders of Mordechaj and Icchak Dorogoj in early 1945; they were killed by the same men who four years earlier killed Dora Dorogoj at the age of 18 in the summer of 1941. On March 28, 1945, one month after the event, Major Tabortowski signed an order to liquidate both Dorogoj brothers as "Soviet snitches." I published a copy of this order in my book (Tryczyk, 2015, p. 237). I wrote under the picture of "Bruzda" that he was a "legend" of NSZ and not its member. That I was right is confirmed by the internet.

Dr Persak accuses me of shocking readers with cruelties, which is supposedly confirmed by the drastic photographs of the pogrom in Lviv in 1941 that I published (Persak, 2016, p. 367). While they are not geographically related to the events I describe, they are

related to them in terms of emotions and facts. Replying to the text by Natalia Aleksion, I explained that I used these pictures to stress the victims' helplessness in the face of the surrounding crowd that can be seen in the background. The sight of the perpetrators who have surrounded the woman and indifferently watch her tragedy fills you with terror as you come to realize what they have done. What we see in this picture is not a German soldier's boots, but a woman's elegant evening slippers, a man's patent leather shoes and the skinny legs of a youngster (Tryczyk, 2016).

Joining the criticism of Natalia Aleksion, Dr Persak suggests that I exclusively blame Poles for the murders committed in Podlasie in 1941 (Aleksion, 2016). What is more, he puts words into my mouth that I have never uttered: about the biological, congenital propensity for antisemitic aggression displayed by some families in Łomża (Persak, 2016, p. 371). At the same time, he accuses me of insufficient knowledge about family ties among the old small-scale gentry and the consequent similarity of names. This topic is too delicate and I will not allow myself to discuss it in public, but it is Dr. Persak who does not have access to the local knowledge on which I based my findings. I sustain my thesis that the families of K., D., and G. were more prone to violence than was the case with anyone in that area. This did not result from a biological, congenital propensity (as understood by Krzysztof Persak), but from the traumas that had pestered them for generations. I have indicated it in my book as a hypothesis that demands further research. Dr Persak is discrediting himself rather than myself in assuming that a thesis like that could be founded on biology. There are many ways in which traumas are transmitted from generation to generation that this historian has clearly never come across.

As concerns the German participation in the bloody events in Podlasie in 1941, I state clearly in my book that after the collapse of the structures of the Polish state due to the war and occupation-related terror, Polish citizens carried out some pogroms in the towns of Podlasie alongside German death squads. Krzysztof Persak denounces me for using a German report which stated that "the Polish population killed a whole barn of Jews right after the Russians retreated and before the German troops reached" Wąsosz. He cannot understand why I included this report in my book (Persak, 2016, p. 367). The reason was to demonstrate that the Germans were not aware of the details of the pogrom in Wąsosz. What is most significant in the above-quoted report is that the Germans were absent when the crime was committed.

Peer criticism

Footnote no. 94 to the review by Dr Persak features his thanks to Barbara Engelking for giving him access to her editorial review of my book, and his regret over the state of Polish public debate in which standards are distorted for the purpose of attracting attention. I am not a member of the Center for Holocaust Research, which is probably the reason why for nearly six months I was denied access to the review penned by

Dr Persak, thereby making it impossible for me to reply to his review in the same issue of the yearbook published by the Center. Are these the desirable standards of public debate postulated by Dr Persak?

In the foreword to the first edition of *Cities of death* I stress the fact that the book is based on materials collected by the prosecutors of the investigation department of the Institute of National Remembrance. It was not my intention to use the critical edition of materials published in *Wokół Jedwabnego*, edited by Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, but to refer directly to the original court records. In general, they were in a very poor condition, which was especially the case of paper records, folders, investigation and court materials. Reviewing such an enormous number of records, I encountered obvious difficulties in making out individual words and phrases, which resulted not only from the poor quality of the original court records, but also from such trivial circumstances as the handwriting style of the recorder. Krzysztof Persak reveals six cases of omissions or changed word orders in the witness accounts I quote; all this on the 802 pages of the original version of my text (the published version is 498 pages long) and in over 200 accounts of victims, witnesses and perpetrators (sometimes of quite an extensive size of over a dozen pages). I do admit that this is not a satisfactory result. Every omission is a mistake. I do not agree that they diminish the value of my book, though.

Krzysztof Persak takes a shocking attitude to the debate over my book, and he divides the reviewers into a critical group of “true historians,” where he lists a right-wing journalist of the *DoRzeczy* magazine Piotr Zychowicz, Prof. Natalia Aleksion, Prof. Barbara Engelking, Prof. Andrzej Żbikowski and Dr Marcin Urynowicz, and another group encompassing everybody else, presumably the “worse sort” of humanists. The latter features the authors of the preface to my book, sociologists Prof. Zygmunt Bauman and Prof. Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, the psychologist Prof. Michał Bilewicz, Prof. Adam Chmielewski, literary scholar Prof. Ola Hnatiuk, historian and diplomat Dr Maciej Kozłowski, theologian Rev. Wacław Oszejca, Prof. Piotr Rozwadowski (a historian, but clearly not a “true one”), and cultural anthropologist Prof. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir.

It is really hard to comment on that.

The problem of the anonymization and ownership of photos

The conclusion of Dr Persak’s review speaks for itself:

“[e]verything I have described here is evidence of not only the total methodological illiteracy of Mirosław Tryczyk; I assess his practices to be intentional abuse” (Persak, 2016, p. 368).

Writing the above, Krzysztof Persak has two main things in mind. One concerns the anonymization of the perpetrators of the pogroms of 1941 in terms of their names and any

data allowing them to be identified. I made the decision to anonymize them in order to protect their descendants from being stigmatized. When writing my book, I made the rather obvious moral assumption that children are not accountable for the deeds of their parents.

Persak, however, blames me for making such a decision, and accuses me of some unspecified evil intentions which impede the critical perusal of my book (Persak, 2016, p. 364). I know that my solution may be subject to criticism, but I was driven by the following line of reasoning: I wanted my book to be read also, or even particularly, in those places where the pogroms occurred; I wanted my book to reach the young people living there, who usually do not know the difficult past of their localities and, at the same time, I did not want my book to become an excuse for neighbors to settle mutual accounts. I did not want my book to unnecessarily increase suffering, but to show the truth, thereby helping to get rid of this suffering, to domesticate it and enclose it in the symbolic space as sites of memory, historical monuments, plaques, lessons at schools, sermons in churches and so on. This was the primary goal of my work.

Krzysztof Persak is aware of the arguments that speak in favor of such a solution, because I have talked about them on numerous occasions, including my reply to the review of Natalia Aleksiuń that he quotes. I am sorry to see that they did not convince my critic.

I am even sorrier about the accusation of having committed hidden plagiarism which Persak makes with respect to the work of J. J. Milewski (Persak, 2016, p. 369). I find this accusation surprising, since on page 47 of my book *Cities of death* (that is the title page of the chapter “Jedwabne”) I clearly wrote that

“[t]he interpretation of events was developed on the basis of the accounts of Polish and Jewish witnesses accessible in the court records and investigation materials of the Institute of National Remembrance, mainly the materials from the investigation S1/00/Zn, concerning the burning of persons of Jewish nationality in Jedwabne on July 10, 1941, conducted by Radosław Ignatiew, works by Jan Jerzy Milewski: *Polacy – Żydzi w Jedwabnem i okolicy do 22 czerwca 1941 roku* and *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Ostrołęckiem i Łomżyńskiem w latach trzydziestych i w czasie II wojny światowej*, other publications and materials of those times” (Tryczyk, 2015, p. 47).

A similar comment is made also in the title page of the chapter “Radziłów” on p. 167. The text features appropriate footnotes. If my text displays any deficiencies in this area, I am extremely sorry. This is the result of the enormous work I undertook and the Editor’s requirement to nearly halve the text. Any shortcomings resulting from those circumstances are not caused by my ill will or the intention to conceal anything. I will make every effort to cure them in the next edition.

I would like to thank the author of the review for indicating the owners of copyrights to the photos on pages 70 and 189 (Tryczyk, 2015). Neither I nor the Editor was able to identify them. This information is highly valuable to us, the more so as we did our best to fulfill all obligations in this respect. I believe that Mr Jose Gutstein will find no obstacles to permit our use of one more picture in further editions of *Cities of death*,

since he has permitted the publication of all other pictures taken by his ancestor, Zalman Kaplan, a photographer from Szczuczyn, murdered in the pogrom of July 14, 1941. All these pictures bear the markings as required by their legitimate owner. I am unable to understand why me and my Editor's attempts at reaching the owners of the pictures are called by Dr Persak "pure pharisaism" (Persak, 2016, p. 368).

Translated by Katarzyna Matschi

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Odpowiedź Krzysztofowi Persakowi

Abstrakt: Odpowiedź na recenzję książki autora, *Miasta śmierci. Sąsiedzkie pogromy Żydów*, pióra dr Krzysztofa Persaka, zamieszczoną w czasopiśmie „Zagłada Żydów” (2016).

Wyrażenia kluczowe: Zagłada; pogromy Żydów w 1941 na Podlasiu; książka M. Tryczyka *Miasta śmierci. Sąsiedzkie pogromy Żydów*; Krzysztof Persak.



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