

## **DIFFICULT TOPICS IN TEACHING ABOUT POLISH - JEWISH RELATIONS DURING THE OCCUPATION AND IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD.**

**Grzegorz Siwor**

Polish-Jewish relations in the years of World War II and just after its end is a topic that is extremely important but difficult to undertake in a Polish school. Seemingly, teachers of History, Polish, Knowledge About the Society, Religion, Ethics, Knowledge About Culture have many opportunities to address the topic of the Holocaust in their lessons, but in practice, we often have to deal with the escape of teachers and pupils from the essence of this issue. This escape consists either of a casual "reworking" of the material and brushing it off with a few clichés and phrases, or more or less conscious defense against knowledge that could in any way violate the national-religious mythology and the identity *status quo*. In other words, in the school practice it is more convenient to avoid the Jewish topic.

On the one hand, my workshops could be an impulse to rethink difficult issues anew, on the other, they should provide participants with specific didactic materials and proposals for their use in lessons.

We worked using a variety of cultural texts and source materials:

1. We talked about the fluidity of the role of the executioner, witness, and victim on the basis of the movie *Przy torze kolejowym* directed by Andrzej Brzozowski connecting it with a fragment of Zofia Nałkowska's *Medallions*, on the basis of which he was filmed.
2. We spoke about Poles' crimes committed on their Jewish neighbors in hiding on the example of Pawel Łoziński's documentary *Miejsce urodzenia* (1992).

3. We juxtaposed the paintings of Jonasz Stern with the biography of the Holocaust's survivor and the story of Kornel Filipowicz, *Krajobraz, który przeżył śmierć*, and also a photographic record of Marina Abramović's performance *Balkan Baroque*.
4. Władysław Strzemiński's cycle *Moim przyjaciołom Żydom* was used as a pretext to analyze the role of the genocide witness.
5. A comic book by Art Spiegelman *Maus* was juxtaposed with Wilhelm Sasnal's paintings based on them and a mural created in the place of the burnt synagogue in Bielsko-Biała.
6. We analyzed the poems written by Zuzanna Ginczanka *Non omnis moriar*, Władysław Szlengel *Rzeczy*, Henryk Grynberg *Retoryczne pytanie*, Julian Kornhauze *Wiersz o zabiciu doktora Kahene*, Adam Zagajewski *Jedwabne* - raising the subject of robbing of the so-called post-Jewish property, blackmailing, pogroms committed by the Polish population during and after the war.
7. In this context, we also discussed press articles: Marcina Kącki *Powiększenie*; Ryszard Kotarbiński *Zuzanna Ginczanka: śmierć poetki. Historia okupacyjna*.
8. We reviewed and commented on the photographic documentation of the robbery during the liquidation of the Szydlowiec ghetto and lynching of a resident helping Jews in Grybów.

The starting point of the classes was a discussion on the list of issues created by the participants, which release emotions and disputes while working with young people. Once again, it was confirmed that the subject of the Holocaust, genocide, mass crimes, and persecutions of the civilian population raised during the lessons provokes extremely strong and complex psychological reactions in young people the foundation of which is **fear**. This fear in its deepest layer is **existential**, after all it is about death, crimes, human remains, but also about the dehumanization of victims and the attempt to strip them of their dignity. Another important emotional element seems to be the **trauma** transmitted from generation to generation and the type of **post-memory** connected with the Nazi occupation, still clearly present in the consciousness of

Polish society - nowadays, psychologists work with the third and even fourth generations of the victims, witnesses, and participants of war events.

Discussing the subject of pogroms, murders on the Jewish population, blackmailing, looting, robbery of property is related to the sense of **national identity** of young people and the deconstruction of many myths and imaginations present in the general consciousness, the myth of Poland as the Christ of Nations and innocent sacrifice is still alive. It is extremely difficult for students to identify with the negative or criminal attitudes of Poles, they tend to **rationalize, displace, or negate** them. It is understandable that young people want to imitate heroes, get inspiration from heroic attitudes, so it remains an open question, how to get them to accept the existence of a variety of human behaviors, including evil. A similar difficulty is connected with indicating the responsibility of the Church, or, more broadly, Christianity, for centuries of teaching anti-Judaism and creating the blood. legends.

Workshop participants also raised the subject of the stereotypical image of Jews in Polish society, the fear associated with the restitution of “post-Jewish property”, and political manipulations around the past.