

Title: *Representations of Poles' attitudes and actions towards Jews during the Holocaust in the narratives of "historical policy" of the Law and Justice party versus the opinions of contemporary Poles.*

## Summary

This dissertation pursues three interrelated research objectives using multi or mixed methods.

Objective 1: to characterize the representation of Poles' attitudes and actions towards Jews during the Holocaust contained in the narratives of the "historical policy" of the Law and Justice party (PiS), based on the thematic analysis of:

- a) PiS's election programs of 2014 and 2019;
- b) interviews with members of Polish and Israeli symbolic and political elites on the conflict surrounding the January 26, 2018 amendment to the IPN Law, its infamous Article. 55a;
- c) The 2017 Core Curriculum, the section Learning Objectives – General Requirements for Teaching History in Elementary School Grades 8;
- d) History textbooks for grade 8 approved by the Ministry of Education for school use and used in the 2019/2020 school year.

The study of the election programs, core curriculum and textbooks was carried out as part of the research project *Auschwitz in the social memory of Poles 75 years on: In the context of changes of the memory of the Holocaust and World War II and the politics of memory in Poland, Europe and the world*, funded by a grant from the National Science Center, Poland, No. 2018/29/B/HS6/02133, led by Prof. Marek Kucia, carried out in 2019-2023. The author of the dissertation participated in the implementation of that project as a PhD stipend holder. Interviews on the conflict around the amendment of the IPN law were conducted by the author as part of her own research project.

Objective 2: to assess whether and to what extent the representations promoted by the Law and Justice Party are present in the social consciousness of modern Poles and whether and to what extent they are recognized by them, based on an analysis of the results of research among the following populations:

- a) 7th and 8th grade students – quantitative research,
- b) 8th grade students – qualitative research,

- c) history teachers in the 8th grades – qualitative research,
- d) the general public – quantitative and qualitative research.

The above research was carried out as part of the research project *Auschwitz in the social memory of Poles after 75 years*.

Objective 3: to answer the question whether the representations promoted by the Law and Justice Party are a new creation or merely an accentuation and intensification, by means of the instruments of “historical policy,” of the symbols and topoi concerning the attitudes and actions of Poles toward Jews during the Holocaust shared in Polish society.

The dissertation consists of five chapters. The first introduces the subject matter, formulates the research questions, defines the key concepts and the theoretical base. The second contains a review of the literature and previous research on the attitudes and actions of Poles toward Jews during the Holocaust. The third chapter first characterizes the Law and Justice Party’s “historical policy” regarding Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, describing the representations of Poles’ attitudes and actions toward Jews during the Holocaust promoted by the Law and Justice Party in its election programs, amendments to the IPN law and the core curriculum. The chapter then presents an analysis of school textbooks for teaching history in grade 8 of elementary school, answering the question whether the representations of Poles’ attitudes and actions toward Jews promoted by the Law and Justice Party are reflected in these textbooks. The fourth chapter contains analyses of the results of qualitative and quantitative research among the selected collectivities and Polish general public. Based on these analyses, conclusions are drawn about the presence of the PiS “historical policy” narrative about the attitudes and actions of Poles toward Jews during the Holocaust in the consciousness of contemporary Polish society. The fifth chapter contains a summary, conclusions and suggestions for further research.

The main findings of the dissertation are as follows:

1. The narratives of the Law and Justice party’s “historical policy” regarding the attitudes and actions of Poles toward Jews center around the representation of “the heroism of Poles saving Jews from the Holocaust,” inscribed in the Core Curriculum; this representation consists of such elements as:
  - highlighting the massive help provided by Poles to Jews, including the representation of Poles as heroes who helped save Jews despite the death penalty for doing so;
  - highlighting the status of Poles as innocent victims of the war;
  - exposing the role of the Germans as the perpetrators of the Holocaust and the only ones responsible for it.
2. The presence of two main distinct representations of Poles’ attitudes and actions toward the Holocaust of the Jews was noted in all populations studied. The first, widely shared, is the Law and Justice Party-promoted representation of the “heroism of Poles saving Jews from the Holocaust,” which is based on heroic-martyrdom narratives about Poles’ attitudes and actions toward Jews. In contrast, the second representation, shared by minorities, is characterized by a critical narrative about the attitudes and actions of Poles toward Jews during the Holocaust, which does not glorify the heroism of Poles saving Jews.

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3. The representation promoted by PiS about the “heroism of Poles saving Jews from the Holocaust” is based on socially shared, pre-existing topoi and symbols about Polish-Jewish relations during World War II. The Law and Justice party did not create that representation but only highlighted and intensified it through the instruments of “historical politics,” making it the most important, especially by enshrining this representation in the current core curriculum.