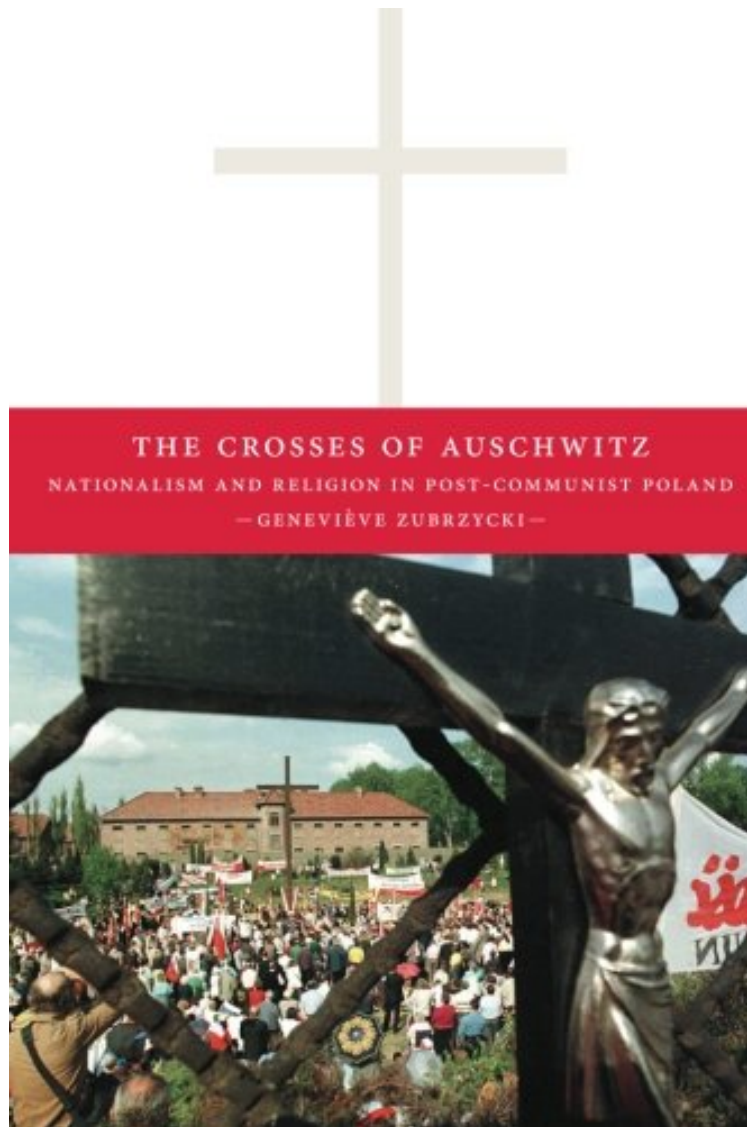


The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland

Genevive Zubrzycki

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Genevive Zubrzycki : The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland:

6 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Crosses at Auschwitz and Polish ethno-religious nationalism By TomWhen Carmelite nuns established a convent in 1984 in a building adjacent to Auschwitz that had formerly been

used to store Zyklon B gas during the Holocaust the international Jewish community was outraged. Jews argued that Auschwitz should have no connection to any particular religion. Relenting to world opinion, in 1989 the Roman Catholic hierarchy pressured the Polish Church to order the nuns to leave. They finally moved out in 1993 but left behind a large wooden cross in the middle of the former convent grounds that had been used at the 1979 Papal mass at Auschwitz II (Birkenau). The Jewish community insisted that the cross also be removed. Polish Catholic traditionalists not only refused to remove the "Papal" cross, but by 1999 they had erected three-hundred smaller crosses on the grounds. As tensions mounted, Kazimierz Switon, the leader of the "Defenders of the Pope's Cross," was arrested for threatening violence and the additional crosses were removed in the middle of the night by Polish police on May 28, 1999. However, the "Papal Cross" still remains. Genevieve Zubrzycki has written an extremely interesting survey of the Auschwitz cross controversy. However, this is not a chronological history of the events at Auschwitz in 1998 and 1999. Rather, Zubrzycki digs deep into Polish history to understand why these events took place. As a consequence of the partitioning of the country in the eighteenth-century, the Polish Catholic Church became the guardian of Polish language, customs, and heritage. Polish nationalism became entwined with the Church. The cross and the Black Madonna of Czestochowa became Polish national symbols. Beginning in the late nineteenth-century and during the interwar period, when Poland was once again independent, ethno-religious-nationalism (integralism) became popular whereby it was argued the only "true" Poles were Catholic and ethnically Polish. Polish clerics were enthusiastic sponsors of this ideology. Under communism the Church once again became the preserver of Polish nationalism. The Church was a prime player in the Solidarity movement. When Poland regained independence in 1989 and a civic state was established, Poles were confronted with the unfamiliar concept of the Church uncoupled from politics. During the communist era Poles had been told by the authorities that four million had perished at Oswiecim, with most of the victims being Polish citizens; the Soviets didn't differentiate between Jews and Gentiles. Consequently, Oswiecim became the national symbol of Polish martyrdom. After independence it was re-estimated that 1.5 million were actually murdered at Auschwitz; 1 million Jews and only 70,000 Polish Catholics. Many Poles bitterly contested this "Jewish usurpation" of their memorial. Traditionalist Poles fought the removal of the Carmelite convent and the crosses. Numerous manifestations of anti-Semitism marred both protests. The traditionalist view was that if you favored the removal of the crosses, you were not a "true" Pole. I enjoyed this book very much although the academic and professional jargon is often waist deep. As the cross controversy demonstrates, Polish society is deeply divided. There are definitely two Polands; the Poland of the liberal and centrist civic nationalists (in the tradition of Pilsudski) and the Poland of the far-right ethno-religious nationalists (in the tradition of Dmowski). But in the last decade we've seen the Polish traditionalists pushed increasingly to the margins of Polish society. However, within tradition-bound American Polonia, the chauvinist, integralist view is still extremely popular. Some excellent books which examine Jewish society in Poland and Polish Catholic anti-Semitism include: "Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present" by Joanna B. Michlic "Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland" by Jan T. Gross "The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland" by Antony Polonsky "Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz" by Jan Tomasz Gross "Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath" by Joshua D. Zimmerman "Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945" by Gunnar S. Paulsson "Shtetl" by Eva Hoffman "Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust" by Michael C. Steinlauf "Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust" by E. Thomas Wood "My Brother's Keeper: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust" by Antony Polonsky "Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War" by Emanuel Ringelblum "On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars" by Celia Stopnicka Heller "The Convent at Auschwitz" by Wladyslaw Bartoszewski "Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future" by Robert Cherry "The Hidden Pope: The Untold Story of a Lifelong Friendship That Is Changing the Relationship Between Catholics and Jews - The Personal Journey of John Paul II and Jerzy Kluger" by Darcy O'Brien "When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland" by Brian Porter "Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland" by Brian Porter "The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots" by Rafal Pankowski "Rome's Most Faithful Daughter: The Catholic Church and Independent Poland, 1914-1939" (Polish and Polish American Studies) by Neal Pease "Traitors True Poles: Narrating A Polish-American Identity, 1880-1939" (Polish and Polish American Studies) by Karen Majewski "The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933-1939" by Ronald E. Modras "The Jews in Poland" by Chimen Abramsky "Imaginary Neighbors: Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations after the Holocaust" by Dorota Glowacka "Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation" by Magda Teter "From Assimilation to Anti-Semitism: The Jewish Question in Poland, 1850-1914" by Theodore R. Weeks "Antisemitism And Its Opponents In Modern Poland" by Robert Blobaum "The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars" by Yisrael Gutman "Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War Two" by Israel Gutman "Economic Origins of Antisemitism: Poland and Its Jews in the Early Modern Period" by Hillel Levine "Forced Out: The Fate of Polish Jewry in Communist Poland" by Arthur J. Wolak "The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland" by Genevieve Zubrzycki "Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy" by John K. Roth "In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle: The Poles, the Holocaust and Beyond" by Leo Cooper "No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935-1939"

by Emanuel Melzer "The Politics of Hate: Anti-Semitism, History, and the Holocaust in Modern Europe" by John Weiss "Boycott! The Politics of Anti-Semitism in Poland, 1912-1914" by Robert Blobaum "In the Shadow of Hitler: Personalities of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe" by Rebecca Haynes 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Wonderfully researched and presented study. By D.K. A book worth reading if you are interested in the sacred / profane subject in Sociology. This book breaks down the Auschwitz Cross controversy into easily read research. 3 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Best Book I've Read in 5 Years By Interculturalist The author presents a well-researched, highly nuanced "reading" of events surrounding the "war of the crosses" at Auschwitz. Dr. Piotr Sztompka, Poland's leading sociologist, gave it a rave review. Is the author biased? Read it and decide for yourself!

In the summer and fall of 1998, ultranationalist Polish Catholics erected hundreds of crosses outside Auschwitz, setting off a fierce debate that pitted Catholics and Jews against one another. While this controversy had ramifications that extended well beyond Poland's borders, Genevieve Zubrzycki sees it as a particularly crucial moment in the development of post-Communist Poland's statehood and its changing relationship to Catholicism. In *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, Zubrzycki skillfully demonstrates how this episode crystallized latent social conflicts regarding the significance of Catholicism in defining Polishness and the role of anti-Semitism in the construction of a new Polish identity. Since the fall of Communism, the binding that has held Polish identity and Catholicism together has begun to erode, creating unease among ultranationalists. Within their construction of Polish identity also exists pride in the Polish people's long history of suffering. For the ultranationalists, then, the crosses at Auschwitz were not only symbols of their ethno-Catholic vision, but also an attempt to lay claim to what they perceived was a Jewish monopoly over martyrdom. This gripping account of the emotional and aesthetic aspects of the scene of the crosses at Auschwitz offers profound insights into what Polishness is today and what it may become.

The study of nationalism is one of those fields that tend to produce more heat than light. Having sweated through many of the debates myself, I found this study of Polish nationalism since the collapse of Communism as calming and refreshing as a cool beer on an August day. Genevieve Zubrzycki's writing is direct and unpretentious, her argument clear and convincing, and the material rich and original.--Philip S. Gorski, Yale University