AFTERMATH

(Pokłosie)

Written and Directed by Władysław Pasikowski

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LOGLINE

A peaceful and idyllic village in the Polish countryside harbors a dark secret: the collective murder of their Jewish neighbors during World War II.

When two brothers unearth the secret, they must come to terms with the legacy of their family, their hometown, and the narrative of their nation's history.

SYNOPSIS

Franek and Jozek Kalina, sons of a poor farmer, are brothers from a small village in central Poland. Franek immigrated to the United States in the 80's, and cut all ties with his family. Only when Jozek's wife arrives in the US, without explanation, does Franek finally return to his homeland.

Franek discovers that Jozek has been ostracized from the community, and constantly receives various threats. As Franek and Jozek struggle to rebuild their relationship, they are drawn into a gothic tale of intrigue. The two brothers eventually uncover a dark secret that forces them to confront the history of their family and their hometown.

Upon its release in Poland, *Aftermath* received acclaim and also generated intense controversy. Polish nationals have accused the film of being anti-Polish propaganda as well as a distortion of a sensitive piece of Polish history, leading the film to be banned in some Polish cinemas.

THE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The film is about the meaning of tradition and history. It tells the story of two brothers: one "good" one "bad" according to their father.

The setting is a village with its traditional values and harsh moral code. One of the brothers leaves the family farm, the other stays on to look after it. In a time of crisis they are forced to question everything they believed in, to revise the history and legacy of their family, and consequently of the entire village, the country and the nation.

The peaceful and quiet Polish village where the brothers grew up, a prime example of the idyllic beauty of the Polish countryside, turns out to harbor a dark and terrible secret: the collective murder of its Jewish inhabitants by their Polish neighbors during World War II.

It no longer matters which of the sons was seen as "bad" and which one as "good" but which one can make the right judgments about their father, their family, neighbors, nation, country, and history. This dark chapter of our history is one of the few remaining stories never to have been shown on film.

This film will try and tell that story through the lives of ordinary people who have nothing to do with politics, by showing their fundamental decency and uprightness, their baseness and lies. We are always given a choice in life. This film is about making that choice.

The film begins with an idyllic vista of a pristine country landscape nestled among forests, russet fields of wheat, speckled with white yarrow and crimson poppies, and culminates in fire, destruction and darkness, like the most haunting of nightmares.

Władysław Pasikowski

Andrzej Wajda on *Aftermath:*

"Andrzej Wajda called *Aftermath* "the last film of the Polish Film School" for its sharing of that movement's ambition to open a social dialogue about Polish identity, to ask questions "about who we are". Commenting on the issues raised by the film, including the organized murder of Jews by Poles, past anti-Semitism in Poland, and its persistence today, Wajda added, "some say it's best to forget about this, but artists, Polish cinema, we're here to remind people." Yet, provoking such a reckoning is what historian and consultant to the film Barbara Engelking says was the project's aim: "This is a film about us, a film about what we do with our memory."

- Excerpted from Thomas Anessi's article "Moving Ahead into the Past: Historical Contexts in Recent Polish Cinema," published in **IMAGES: The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication** (Volume XI, No. 20)

AFTERMATH CREDITS

Directed by:	Władysław Pasikowski
Written by:	Władysław Pasikowski
Director of Photography:	Paweł Edelman
Music:	Jan Duszyński
Production Design:	Allan Starski
Sound:	Jan Schermer, Bartek Putkiewicz, Jan Freda
Editing:	Jarosław Kamiński
Costume Design:	Małgorzata Braszka
Make-up:	Liliana Gałązka
Production Manager:	Leszek Pieszko
Producers:	Dariusz Jabłoński, Violetta Kamińska, Izabela Wójcik
Co-producers:	Frans van Gestel, Arnold Heslenfeld, Artem Vasiliev, Katarina Vanzurova, Patrik Pašš
Produced by:	Apple Film Production
Coproduction:	Topkapi Films, Metra Films, Attack Film, Trigon Production, Telewizja Polska, Canal+
Supported by:	Polish Film Institute, Eurimages, The Netherlands Film Fund, Cinema Fund Russian Federation, Slovak Audiovisual Fund

Poland, Netherlands, Russia, Slovakia, 2012
color, 107’

WŁADYSŁAW PASIKOWSKI
Director/Writer

He is one of Poland's most acclaimed and popular directors, and the recipient of many prizes at film festivals.

His debut film, *Kroll*, a thriller about desertion, won Best Debut and the Special Jury Prize at the Polish Film Festival. His crime thrillers, *Pigs* (1992) and *Pigs 2* (1994), based on the political shifts of 1989, were hits in Polish cinemas, and earned Pasikowski the Best Directing Award at the Polish Film Festival. He also received a Golden Duck Award for Best Film from the readers of *Film*, the oldest film magazine in Poland.

Pasikowski is also the director of two seasons of the crime TV series *The Cop* (2004-08), hailed by critics as "the best Polish crime series ever."

Pasikowski is also the co-writer of *Katyn* (2007), Andrzej Wajda's Oscar nominated film, which won numerous awards and became one of the most acclaimed Polish films of the decade.

DARIUSZ JABŁOŃSKI
Producer

Dariuz Jabłoński is the president of Apple Film Productions, and one of the leading independent film producers in Poland. A graduate of the Film Directing Academy in Lodz, he has worked as a director, producer, cinematographer, and first assistant director.

During his career, he has collaborated with Krzysztof Kieslowski (*Decalogue*) and Filip Bajon (*White Visting Card, Magnate*). He produced and directed *The Visit of and Elderly Lady*, the first Polish independent film, as well as *Photographer*, which received many international film awards.

Jabłoński founded Apple Film Productions in 1990. Since then, the company has produced more than 20 documentaries, 15 feature films, and numerous tele-plays. Jabłoński is also the founder of the Polish Film Awards and the Polish Film Academy, and is a member of the European Film Academy.

PAWEŁ EDELMAN
Cinematographer

Academy Award nominee Paweł Edelman majored in Film Studies at the Cultural Studies Department of the University of Lodz, and studied Cinematography at the Film School in Lodz, from which he graduated in 1988. He has worked with various directors, and made multiple films with Władysław Pasikowski and Andrzej Wajda.

Having gained recognition beyond Poland – mainly due to his collaboration with Roman Polanski – he is one of the top-rated Polish cinematographers currently working.

Paweł Edelman has received the Cesar Award and the Eagle Polish Film Award for Best Cinematography for *The Pianist*. His work on *The Pianist* also earned him nominations for the Academy Award for Best Cinematography, the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) Awars, and the British Academy of Film and Televsiion Arts (BAFTA) Award.

In 2004, he received a second ASC nomination, for his cinematography in the film *Ray*. A year later, he received the Hollywood Cinematographer of the Year Award.

Edelman has also served as the cinematographer for *The Ghost Writer* (dir. Roman Polanski), *Sweet Rush* (dir. Andrzej Wajda), *The New Tenants* (dir. Joachim Back), *Katyn* (dir. Andrzej Wajda), and *Oliver Twist* (dir. Roman Polanski).

ALLAN STARSKI
Production Designer

Allan graduated with a degree in architecture from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He has collaborated with Oscar and Palme d'Or-winning director Andrzej Wajda on projects like *Man of Marble, Man of Iron, The Maids of Wilko*, and *Pan Tadeusz*.

In 1993, he won an Academy Awards (shared with Ewa Braun) for Best Art Direction/Set Decoration for Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.

He has also worked with Agnieszka Holland (*Europa Europa* and *Washington Square*) and Jerzy Stuhr (*Love Stories*). Starski worked with Roman Polanski on *The Pianist* (winning a Cesar Award) and *Oliver Twist*, as well as on *Hannibal Rising* by Peter Webber, and *Snow Princess* by Mark Roemmich.

MACIEJ STUHR

leading actor - Józek

IRENEUSZ CZOP

leading actor - Franek

JERZY RADZIWIŁOWICZ

Vicar

ZUZANA FIALOVA

Justyna

ANDRZEJ MASTALERZ

Priest

ZBIGNIEW ZAMACHOWSKI

Sergeant Nowak

DANUTA SZAFLARSKA

Madwoman

ROBERT ROGALSKI

Headman

MARIA GARBOWSKA

Palka

WOJCIECH ZIELIŃSKI

Antek

AFTERMATH

AWARDS

Audience Award Winner – Best Drama
East Bay International Jewish Film Festival 2014

Audience Award Winner – Best Film
Seattle Jewish Film Festival 2014

Yad Vashem Chairman's Award
Jerusalem Film Festival 2013
Jury Statement: "*Aftermath* is a gripping journey into the heart of the Holocaust's darkness, a film that manages both to reckon with the most painful of historical events and to bring them eerily to life in the present tense."

Polish Film Academy – Eagle Awards 2013
Best Actor - Maciej Stuhr
Best Production Design – Allan Starski

Jan Karski Eagle Award 2013
For the first time in the history of the Award – it is presented to the film and its authors "for the courage to say NO to anti-Semitism".

Journalist's Award
Gdynia Film Festival 2012
Poland's premiere film event, the Gdynia Film Festival is a showcase of the very best of Polish cinema and its most influential filmmakers.

Los Angeles Times

Review: Brothers face Poland's dark history in 'Aftermath'

Two Polish brothers dig into a town's dark Holocaust chapter in gripping 'Aftermath.'

Critic's Pick! One of the Best Films of the Year!

By Kenneth Turan, Los Angeles Times Film Critic
November 14, 2013

"Aftermath" is a bombshell disguised as a thriller. Its devastating story involves Jews and the Holocaust, yet not a single Jewish character appears on-screen. Instead there are only Poles, grappling to different degrees with a history that is as difficult as it is complex.

If the celebrated William Faulkner quote "The past is never dead, it's not even past" is true anywhere, it's in Poland, where this film was made and caused a national sensation. The narratives of competing victimization between Poles and the international Jewish community over who suffered most during World War II remain unresolved even decades after the fact, and it is into this maelstrom that "Aftermath" has inserted itself. Not as a polemic but rather as an especially effective film noir.

It was the excellent notion of writer-director Wladyslaw Pasikowski to use the true story of what happened in the Polish town of Jedwabne, an incident revealed in historian Jan Gross' equally controversial 2000 book "Neighbors," as the inspiration for a fictional drama. If you don't know what happened in Jedwabne, don't look it up, for one of the pleasures of this brooding, disturbing film is how adroitly and carefully it reveals its secrets.

"Aftermath" opens with the return to Poland after a 20-year absence of Franek Kalina (Ireneusz Czop). He's not happy being back, but as it turns out Franek isn't happy about much of anything. A dour, contentious individual, he's been living in Chicago all this time, but instead of delivering encomiums about the land of the free, he tells the airport taxi driver, "They sure don't let a Pole make an honest buck over there."

The "they" turns out to refer to the Jews, and Franek, in addition to everything else, is a reflexive anti-Semite, casually referring to Jews as "Yids" and grumbling about how difficult they make his economic life.

Franek has returned to an unnamed rural town to visit his brother, Jozek (Maciej Stuhr, the son of Polish star Jerzy Stuhr), because Jozek's wife and children have abruptly moved to

Chicago and refused to tell anyone why they have abandoned Jozek and their homeland. Franek has shown up to find out what scared them off.

Jozek, however, is not the forthcoming type. As surly as his brother, he has angry gripes of his own, like the way Franek abandoned their parents to immigrate to the U.S. and didn't even return for their funerals. Though he won't say why, Jozek is also noticeably on edge: He keeps an ax near for protection and is not surprised when a rock gets thrown through his window late at night.

It doesn't take long, however, for Franek to find out what seems to be behind this. His brother has made it his mission to collect the town's Jewish gravestones. They were uprooted when the Nazis destroyed the Jewish cemetery during the war and, as was not uncommon across Eastern Europe, repurposed as paving stones around town.

This work has made Jozek persona non grata in his town, but even he cannot explain to his brother why he is doing it. "They were human beings," is the best he can do. "There is no one left to look after them."

In a less complex work, this discovery might be the film's dramatic climax, but in "Aftermath" it is just the beginning of the story. Gradually, and much against their will, the brothers find out more and more about their town's history, revealing secret after unthinkable secret.

One of the most effective of "Aftermath's" notions is to make the investigators not the classic righteous Gentiles of so many Holocaust movies but angry, dissatisfied, antisocial, even borderline anti-Semitic individuals drawn into a quest for the truth almost against their will.

Strongly acted by Stuhr, Czop and a capable supporting cast, "Aftermath" succeeds, as films like this rarely do, on both the plot level (Pasikowski's earlier thriller, "Psy," was a major hit in Poland) and in its ability to be sensitive to the issues involved. Though its sensibility is different, "Aftermath" shares with "12 Years a Slave" a willingness to be unblinking in the face of great evil.

That this film could be made in Poland with a Polish cast and crew has turned "Aftermath" into a significant milestone in that country's ongoing process of wrestling with its demons. It's almost as if the truth has a will of its own, refusing to stay buried. What Jozek told his brother about the tombstones — "there is no one left to look after them" — connects to the awful truth behind this film as well.

www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-aftermath-20131115,0,3420570.story

The New York Times

The Past Can Hold a Horrible Power

‘Aftermath’ explores culpability in the murder of Polish Jews

By J. Hoberman
Sunday, October 27th, 2013

Maciej Stuhr in a scene from “Aftermath,” a Polish thriller written and directed by Wladyslaw Pasikowski.

A man returns to his hometown after 20 years abroad. Something is clearly amiss. Neighbors are unaccountably hostile. The family farm is seemingly under siege. His estranged brother greets him with an ax in hand for a reunion rendered all the more tense by a rock crashing through the window.

“Aftermath,” a Polish thriller written and directed by Wladyslaw Pasikowski, has affinities with American “guilty town” westerns like “Bad Day at Black Rock” and “High Plains Drifter.” In this case, however, the buried secret concerns the wartime fate of the local Jews who, contrary to official history, were not deported by the Nazi occupiers but massacred in a single day by their Gentile neighbors.

Released in Poland in 2012, “Aftermath,” opening in the United States on Nov. 1, has reignited the controversy that surrounded the publication, in 2000, of

"Neighbors" by the historian Jan T. Gross, a searing account of the covered-up slaughter in Jedwabne, a once half-Jewish village in northeastern Poland where hundreds of Jews, including children, were murdered in a savage pogrom in 1941. Poles, accustomed to seeing themselves as victims during World War II, were confronted with an incident in which their countrymen had been victimizers. Nationalists were incensed. Others found this revelation evidence of a nation coming to terms with its difficult past. Mr. Pasikowski saw the subject as material for a movie. "The film isn't an adaptation of the book, which is documented and factual, but the film did grow out of it, since it was the source of my knowledge and shame," he said in an e-mail.

Largely unknown outside Poland, Mr. Pasikowski enjoyed a huge popular hit in the early '90s with his hard-boiled "Psy," the first movie to depict corruption and lawlessness, and the survival of former security forces, in post-communist Poland – and one that occasioned a quick sequel. Still, Mr. Pasikowski said, it took his determined producer, Dariusz Jablonski, seven years to persuade the state film fund to back "Aftermath," adding that he himself had long since given up hope and "expected I'd have to shoot it on a cellphone."

"Aftermath," which is set around 2001, at the time of the Jedwabne debate (to which the film never explicitly refers) in the same impoverished region of northeast Poland, drew not only on "Neighbors" but also the 1996 documentary "Shtetl," made by Marian Marzynski. (Like Mr. Gross, he is a Polish-born Jew who left Poland during the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968.) "Shtetl" concerned a once predominately Jewish town and features as a central character the young local historian who had taken it on himself to create an ad hoc cemetery out of the Jewish tombstones used to pave roads and shore up buildings.

A similar obsession to rescue the remnants of Jewish life drives Mr. Pasikowski's protagonist, Jozef Kalina (Maciej Stuhr), and he is subject to even more intense hostility. Jozef is ostracized by his neighbors. His wife, unable to withstand the pressure, has left for Chicago. His older brother, Franciszek (Ireneusz Czop), who departed Poland on the eve of the 1981 declaration of martial law, returns to investigate and find himself unwillingly drawn into his brother's mission, excavating the past with increasingly violent and ultimately devastating results.

"Aftermath" was praised by Poland's culture minister, Bogdan Zdrojewski, as well as by the nation's greatest filmmaker, Andrzej Wajda, for whom Mr. Pasikowski helped write the expose of another wartime massacre, "Katyn." "I am very happy that such a film has been made in Poland," Mr. Wajda was quoted as saying in a British journal, The Jewish Chronicle.

The Polish film historian Malgorzata Pakier organized a special screening at Warsaw's new Jewish Museum and said by e-mail that although initially skeptical that a popular movie could be made about the Jedwabne massacre, she was surprised by "Aftermath" and by "the sensitivity with which it dealt with the issue."

"Aftermath" has no flashbacks to 1941, but given the movie's unblinking representation of the brutality directed at the Kalina brothers, it is not surprising that it provoked a storm of criticism. The right-wing newspaper Gazeta Polska characterized the film as "mendacious and harmful for Poles." The movie was attacked by nationalist politicians, banned in some towns and excoriated on the Internet. "A wave of primitive anti-Semitism rose up in the Polish media," Mr. Pasikowski said. It was anti-Semitism without Jews.

The reaction is "another stage of the process that has been going on for years," explained Stanislaw Krajewski of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, who added by e-mail that Jews were the object of the debate but not its subject.

"Aftermath" is very much a Polish story. For most of it, Jozef and Franciszek are nearly as much at odds with each other as they are with their neighbors. Neither man is especially sympathetic to Jews, and Franciszek, who is the more determined of the two, is casually anti-Semitic, complaining that in Chicago, Jews had "cornered" the construction business: "They sure don't let a Pole make an honest buck over there."

What's striking is that in their attempt to investigate the past, the brothers are demonized and called Jewish slurs. This identification carried over to the film's lead actor, Mr. Stuhr. The son of the actor Jerzy Stuhr (known for his roles in Krzysztof Kieslowski films), he said via e-mail that he gave many interviews for the movie and consequently became a frontman in the controversy who, Mr. Pasikowski said, suffered "the worst abuse."

Like his character, the actor was accused of being Jewish and, in some cases, blamed for the virulent attacks that his role inspired. A cover article in Poland's largest weekly, Wprost, framed his image in a Jewish star with the headline "Maciej Stuhr – Lynched and Asking for It." The article called Mr. Stuhr (who won the Polish Film Academy's 2012 Eagle award for best actor) "a walking symbol of simplifying and manipulating history for the sake of commercial success" and sneered that rather than a peasant, he looked like "an intellectual out of Kafka."

"Aftermath" succeeds in bringing the past into the present. The director calls it a "warning of how easy it is to cross the line between" using a slur "and regarding your neighbor as subhuman, then condemning him to death in a burning barn."

Predicated on the unraveling of the social fabric, "Aftermath" is a thriller that's meant to stun. As Mr. Pasikowski reported, "A lot of the film's screenings ended in utter silence."

THE Hollywood REPORTER

'Aftermath' Dares to Unearth Terrible Secrets of Poland's Lost Jews

October 28th, 2013
by Seth Abramovitch

The most controversial film in the country's history lands stateside on Nov. 1.

On July 10, 1941, half the residents of Jedwabne, a Polish village 85 miles northeast of Warsaw, murdered the other half. The mob, led by the mayor, were Catholics; their 1,600 victims were Jewish, slaughtered over several nightmarish hours with bats, knives, rifles and other improvised weapons. Those who survived the massacre were then rounded up in a barn donated by a local farmer, which was then set ablaze. A plaque erected at the site blamed Nazis for the massacre, but, in fact, Nazis had only authorized it. Locals walked by the plaque for half a century, knowing the truth, but saying nothing.

Jedwabne's terrible secrets were at last laid bare in Neighbors, an explosive account of the massacre by Princeton University historian Jan T. Gross. That 2001 book shattered carefully held myths, promulgated by Communist leaders, that Poles were only victims of World War 2, not perpetrators. (Poles -- who unlike many European countries never officially collaborated with the Nazis -- lost close to 6 million citizens to the Nazis, or about 17 percent of the population. Just over half of those were Jewish.) Now, 12 years later, comes Aftermath -- premiering stateside Nov. 1, it's a film inspired by Jedwabne that has forced the country to once again face certain unthinkable aspects of its past. Since its October 2012 premiere at the Warsaw Film Festival, the movie has been a lightning rod. Major news outlets have dismissed it as being anti-Polish propaganda, its non-Jewish star Maciej Stuhr has been the target of vicious anti-Semitic attacks, and its producer says he has been blacklisted by the country's national film council.

That producer, Dariusz Jablonski, was first approached with the script in 2004 by Wladyslaw Pasikowsi, an established director of action movies. Pasikowsi's script takes place entirely in present-day Poland, and follows two brothers as they uncover what befell the Jews living in their small town, where anti-Jewish attitudes persist. Pasikowski, who is not Jewish, wrote the script after reading Neighbors, which left him feeling helpless, angry and like an unwitting accomplice to an institutionalized cover-up.

"But a book is nothing compared to the power of a feature film," says Jablonski, who was instantly gripped by the power and efficiency of Pasikowsi's storytelling. His first step was to bring the project to the Polish Film Institute, an office founded in 2005 and dedicated to nurturing films that celebrate Polish culture. The fund found the taboo project "anti-Polish," not because the claims made in it were deemed untrue, but because it chose to overlook acts of Polish heroism and compassion shown towards Jews during the war. In other words, Aftermath was not a Polish Schindler's List. The PFI also objected to the image of the present-day village, inhabited by anti-Jewish thugs and locals who conspired to keep the truth literally buried. "They said this wasn't the truth about Poland, but

unfortunately, I didn't agree," Jablonski says. "I know these kind of villages, I know these kind of people."

Undaunted, the team spent the next seven years getting the script in the hands of anyone -- politicians, actors, producers, investors -- who might help them get it made. While opposition among nationalists mounted, the project found vocal support, too, most visibly within the centrist press. The groundswell eventually led the Polish Film Institute to reverse its decision. Jablonski then scoured Europe, and secured backers in Russia, Slovakia and the Netherlands, each of which contributed ten percent of production costs. With the full budget finally in place, the call went out to an A-list production team of Polish nationals who had expressed interest over the years -- including production designer Allan Starksi, an Oscar-winner for Schindler's List, and cinematographer Pawel Edelman, who shot The Ghostwriter and The Pianist for Roman Polanski.

Stuhr, the son of famed Polish actor Jerze Stuhr, was best known for his comedic work prior to Aftermath. He'd been a fan of the project since first reading the script in 2004, and when filming began seven years later, he was the perfect age to play younger brother Jozef, who sets the plot in motion by retrieving Jewish gravestones used by villagers as paving stones and erecting a makeshift cemetery on his father's land.

While he never seriously feared for his safety, Stuhr says the nationwide controversy that swirled around the film's premiere was a trying time for him. "They were calling for me to get a one-way ticket out of Poland immediately," Stuhr recalls. "The right-wing journalists were ruthless about me." Jablonski read the climate as far more threatening: "I realized then that he was in physical danger. So many web pages with our pictures, saying, 'These people need to be hanged.'" He says he was particularly disturbed by an issue of Wprost, a mainstream news magazine, which provocatively splayed Stuhr's photo on its cover along with anti-Semitic graffiti and the headline, "Lynched at his own request." Inside, an editorial entitled, "Stuhr, you Jew!," detailed the wave of racist backlash that met the actor. While it didn't endorse the anti-Semitic sentiments, the piece ultimately sided against the star: "He has become a symbol of simplicity and manipulating history for commercial gain," wrote its author, Magdalena Rigamonti.

"What was written inside the magazine was worse [than the cover], a load of lies," Stuhr says. "The reviewer wrote that it was the end of my career." Stuhr, whose work in Aftermath earned him the Polish Film Award for best actor, says Rigamonti's prediction hasn't yet come to pass: "I'm still very busy with work. The Polish film community has given me a lot of support, and I think I've scored plenty of points here."

Jablonski, on the other hand, says he still feels the effects of the backlash, particularly from the Polish Film Institute, which he says is seeking a full repayment of their funds. PFI counters that Jablonski violated the terms of their agreement by attaching foreign producers without their approval, and has prohibited him from applying for further funding for the next three years. Both parties are in the process of settling their differences in court.

http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/aftermath-dares-unearth-terrible-secrets-651230

THE HUFFINGTON POST
THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

Aftermath Film Powerfully Evokes Polish Anti-Semitism

January 16th, 2014
By Abe Foxman
National Director of the Anti-Defamation League

After Germany itself, no country has been more scrutinized for its behavior during the Holocaust than Poland. This is understandable considering the fact that 3 million Jews lived in Poland and the fact that the largest death camps were in Poland.

Sometimes, however, this scrutiny takes awkward turns. From time to time one hears references to the "Polish" camps, and it is necessary to set the record straight: These were German camps located in occupied Poland.

At other times one hears comments such as the Poles learn their anti-Semitism from their mother's milk or the Poles were even worse than the Germans. These are most unfortunate comments because while Polish anti-Semitism was real and virulent, there is an implication of something historic and inherent about Poland that does not square with the record.

The question that must be posed is: If Poland was always an anti-Semitic country, why were 3 million Jews living there on the eve of World War II? The answer is that for many centuries, Poland was a more welcoming place for Jews than countries in Western Europe.

Jewish communities were given a degree of autonomy and stability in Poland that did not exist elsewhere in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. Anti-Semitism existed, of course, but Jewish life could flourish. It was only later, with the dissolution of the Polish Empire and, particularly, in the 20th century with the emergence of reactionary political forces, that Polish anti-Semitism took a turn for the worse.

In sum, the history of Poland and the Jews is a lot more complicated than some would have it.

Still, the power of anti-Semitism in modern Poland is real and never has it so brilliantly been portrayed as in the Polish film Aftermath, which recently came to the United States.

It is a story of two Polish brothers, one now living in America who goes back home. He sees that his brother is being abused by his neighbors. He learns that it was a result of his brother's digging up tombstones of Jews that were used to pave a local road and setting them up in the field behind his house.

Whatever his attitude toward Jews, he explained that "they were human beings. There is no one left to look after them." People began to call him "Jew lover" and other even less pretty epithets.

This, however, is only the beginning of the tale. As it evolves the story of those dead Jews becomes more and more gruesome and relates back to events that took place during World War II.

The film is one of the most riveting Holocaust-related films I have seen for several reasons.

First, it is not in your face. The story and the revelations slowly emerge and are all the more powerful when they do.

Second, anti-Semitism is shown not to be a simple phenomenon, but one with many layers. Both of the brothers themselves make anti-Semitic references and yet each is very different from their hate-filled neighbors. For the brother living in Poland, even if he carried with him common stereotypes about Jews, using tombstones to pave a road was too disrespectful. So he took a stand.

And for the brother coming from America, concern about issues of property in the town led him to pursue with vigor and integrity the true story of what happened to the Jews of the town and the role of prominent members of the community in those events.

Third, through the telling of a story it shows the importance of recovering the truth of the past in order to repair the present and the future.

While this is a fictional account, it is based on the horrific events that took place in Jedwabne in 1941 when the Germans invaded. Jan Gross has written an important book on the subject.

Much like when Gross's book came out, so too when Aftermath appeared on Polish theaters, there was much controversy. The filmmaker was accused in some circles of defaming the Polish people. Others, however, commended him for speaking truth about terrible acts committed by respectable Poles.

Aftermath is a must-see film. In a sophisticated way, it does a better job of communicating the power and destructiveness anti-Semitism than almost any other film.

And it is a story about heroes, about people who do the right thing even if they are less than perfect people themselves.

Poland's history toward the Jews was, indeed, complicated. But the power of anti-Semitism in that country in the 20th century was profound. Coming to grips with it is an imperative of our times.

Abraham H. Foxman, a Holocaust survivor from Poland, is National Director of the Anti-Defamation League.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/abraham-h-foxman/aftermath-film-powerfully_b_4611435.html

THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

How a Polish thriller challenges Holocaust history

By Andrew Apostolou – Op-Ed
March 2, 2014, 11:00 pm

The Polish film "Pokłosie" ("Aftermath"), currently on release in the U.S., contributes to the popular understanding of the Holocaust and Polish history in an unusual way. Neither the Holocaust nor any event in Polish history occur during the story, which is set entirely in Poland during the last decade. Instead, director Wladyslaw Pasikowski and producer Dariusz Jablonski explore the relationship between Poles and the Jewish past of their country through the tensions around family and community.

What "Aftermath" does is to put Polish Christians back into the history of the Holocaust. Generally nations try to write themselves into history. They exaggerate their accomplishments, backdate their origins, and assert their importance to the rest of the world. The exception is the Holocaust. The nations of continental Europe, whether they were German allies or under German occupation, have sought to write themselves out of the genocide of European Jews. Most of these countries have portrayed the Holocaust as having involved the Germans and the Jews, an event with no local context. We are asked to believe that the local populations, such as the Polish Christians, were helpless bystanders.

Using an apparently simple plot, "Aftermath" sets out to undermine this history without local context. Franek Kalina returns to his native village for the first time in 20 years after his brother Jozek's marriage has collapsed. There is no warmth between the brothers. A Pole in the Chicago construction business, Franek was away when his parents died, a source of regret for him and bitterness from Jozek who he left behind to deal with the consequences. What has happened is that Jozek, quite by chance, has discovered some Jewish tombstones that he then saved by placing them in his wheat field as a makeshift memorial. The village has turned on Jozek, fearful of what his disturbing of the past will do.

The dramatic tensions within the film are all metaphors for the larger problems in Polish history. The relationship between Franek and Jozek is about brotherhood and mutual obligation—precisely what was at issue with the fate of the Jews during the Second World War. Franek is mystified by Jozek's desire to save the grave stones of Jews who died a century ago and "are not our people"—while Jozek rejects Franek as a member of the family. Similarly, Jozek, by reconstituting a Jewish cemetery, is treated as an outsider by the village community, which echoes the marginalization of the Jews.

For all the accusations by some Polish media and politicians that the film is anti-Polish, both brothers are almost stereotypical Polish heroes. They obstinately confront superior odds to do what they believe to be right—which brings to mind the Polish pilots during the Battle of Britain and the doomed Warsaw Uprising of 1944. The film contains no sophisticated discussions or weighing of options. Franek and Jozek turn out to be, in different ways, men of principle. The directness of the film, exemplified by Ireneusz Czop and Maciej Stuhr's impressive portrayals of Franek and Jozek, has displeased some critics. The New York Times described "Aftermath" as "lurid."

Yet it is the simplicity of the film that is its greatest strength and that makes it such an intelligent exploration of the issues. "Aftermath" is gripping because it uses the well-worn suspense genre to expose the protagonists' ignorance about their village and its history. Most audiences have a rough understanding of what Franek and Jozek are likely to discover. We know, but they are sincerely ignorant. Unlike the middle class characters in Michael Verhoeven's "The Nasty Girl" (1990), who cover up the Nazi past of their German town, almost all of the farmers in Franek and Jozek's village know nothing of the past. Again, the film is a metaphor for the historical cluelessness of so many Europeans when it comes to the Holocaust in their countries. As one elderly woman disingenuously tells Franek, the Germans came and the Jews were gone—the central myth of Holocaust history.

As the plot accelerates, the characters discover that the destruction of the Jews in this anonymous Polish village was not so simple. The villagers were not as detached from events as the post-war generations believed. Franek and Jozek turn out to be different men to those portrayed in the opening scenes. Franek is not the cynical, mildly anti-Semitic expatriate and Jozek not the simple apparently conscience-stricken farmer who believes Jews, as human beings, deserve to have their graves treated with respect.

Although inspired by Jan Gross' pioneering historical work "Neighbors" (2000), which examined a pogrom of Jews in Jedwabne in eastern Poland in July 1941, "Aftermath" is about no particular Polish village. Indeed, the village in "Aftermath" is never named, because the issues raised in "Aftermath" could be set in dozens of different villages or towns in Poland or other European countries. Released in the U.S. as "Aftermath," the original Polish title "Pokłosie" also translates as "Consequences." The Jews are gone, but the consequences of their murder remain, and by accepting that there were consequences, "Aftermath" rejects one of the most enduring taboos of Polish and European history.

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http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/how-a-polish-thriller-challenges-holocaust-history/

Breaking National Taboos

An Interview with Władysław Pasikowski and Dariusz Jabłonski

by Leonard Quart

Left to right, Władysław Pasikowski & Dariusz Jabłonski

Before WWII, Jews comprised ten percent of the population of Poland. By the end of the war, of the 3.3 million Jews who lived in Poland before the war, only 300,000 survived. They were the primary victims of the Holocaust (which also included Gypsies and homosexuals) and all six German death camps were located in Nazi-occupied Poland. There were Poles who collaborated with the Germans, but other Poles risked their lives to save Jews. Still, anti-Semitism in various forms has played a powerful role in Polish life through much of the twentieth century.

*A number of Polish films have dealt with the Holocaust. Polish Jews directed some of the earliest films on the subject, including Aleksander Ford (*Border Street, *1949) and Andrzej Munk (*The Passenger, *1963). The early films also included Wanda Jubowska's* The Last Stage *(1948) set in the women's concentration camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau, which powerfully evokes the horrors of the camps, but which also can look, at moments, like crude socialist realism. In fact, all the early Polish directors who made films about the Holocaust were constricted by Communist Party censorship. For in Marxist-Leninist historiographical discourse, there was no "Holocaust" as a discrete event. The communists wanted to marginalize Jewish victimization and instead to emphasize how Polish citizens (two million Poles were killed) and other "nationalities" were also victimized during the war (the Jews being just one "nationality" among others). The communists were even more reluctant about suggesting that the role of Poles in the Holocaust was at times a more ambiguous and darker one than the films projected. While the largest numbers of trees for the Righteous Among Nations at Yad Vashem are for Poles, in many instances Poles betrayed or murdered their Jewish neighbors, and far too often remained silent as they watched the destruction of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis.*

The director and producer of *Aftermath* explore the national controversy ignited by their film that exposes Polish atrocities committed against neighboring Jews during World War II.

Still, Poland's greatest director, Andrzej Wajda, demonstrated from his first films on sympathy for the Jews, and made the difficult nature of Jewish-Polish relations a central subject of a number of his works. In Samson *(1961) he broke from the anti-Semitism that played a prime role in Polish society and emphasized the special quality of Jewish victimization. Although Wajda never neglected to convey the immense suffering of the Poles during the war (e.g.,* Kanal, *1957), and did not fail to portray a number of Poles as compassionate toward and even committed to Jews, his films made us aware that there were anti-Semitic Poles who behaved odiously toward the Jews. In* Samson, *a "Jew catcher" gets paid by the Gestapo for delivering Jews hiding among the Poles; in* Korczak *(1990), an aristocratic radio station director fires Dr. Korczak because he's a Jew; and, finally, a drunken Polish policeman in* The Condemnation of Franciszek Klos *(2000) assists the Nazis in liquidating the Jews in a rural area.*

Wajda, however, never made a film portraying Poland's Gentiles committing murderous crimes against their Jewish neighbors. The Poles were never the villains in his films—the Nazis were. This explosive issue has been explored in documentary films such as Marcel Lozinski's Witnesses *(1987), about the 1946 Kielce pogrom; Pawel (Marcel's son) Lozinski's* Birthplace *(1992) about Henryk Grynberg, a Polish-Jewish writer living in the United States who returns to Poland in search of his father's grave and a moral reckoning with his father's murderer; and Agnieszka Arnold's* Neighbors *(2001), which explores the massacre of Jews in Jedwabne in 1941, a film which was seen by two million people on Polish TV.*

Aftermath *is the first Polish fictional film to depict Poles committing violent acts against their Jewish neighbors during WWII. The film was directed by Władysław Pasikowski, whose previous films include* Kroll *(1991), a thriller dealing with desertion, and two other thrillers,* Pigs *(1992) and* Pigs 2 *(1994), based on the political shifts of 1989, which were box-office hits in Polish cinemas, and earned Pasikowski the Best Directing award at the Polish Film Festival. But* Aftermath *is his groundbreaker—a trenchant film that has clearly touched a raw nerve and aroused intense controversy in Poland.*

Aftermath *focuses on the attempt made by first one, and, ultimately, two brothers—Jozek (Maciej Stuhr) and Franciszek Kalina (Ireneusz Czop)—to break the conspiracy of silence they discover among the residents of their rural village about the massacre of their Jewish neighbors during WWII. The two brothers are not political liberals or secular saints, but rather an ordinary worker and a farmer.*

The film begins with an unhappy, chain-smoking Franciszek, warily returning to his rural home—set in a pristine country landscape of dense forests and golden fields of wheat—after twenty years away in Chicago where he worked in asbestos removal. Here his gruff, conscience-stricken brother Jozek farms the family's fields. He quickly discovers that Jozek's fellow villagers hate him for quixotically and relentlessly memorializing the Jewish dead by wresting Jewish tombstones from courtyards and roads where they served as paving stones (a common practice in Poland, where good stone was hard to come by), and creating a cemetery for them in his fields.

Aftermath *is nothing if not realistic. It uses backwater Polish villages that look untouched by the twenty-first century and a cast that is convincingly rural. Pasikowski never tries to magically turn the inarticulate Jozek into someone who can explain why he is so committed to providing justice for the Jewish dead. For Józek is willing to suffer beatings, broken windows, a murdered dog, anti-Semitic graffiti painted on his barn door, and a fire destroying his wheat fields and searing the gravestones, without ever halting the creation of his Jewish cemetery.*

The returned Franciszek, a man who indulges in the casual anti-Semitism that plays a role in everyday Polish talk, and speaks of "Yids" and how the Jews run things in Chicago, is initially hostile to his brother's obsession. But it's he who gets to the heart of the mystery of what happened to the village's Jewish neighbors. It feels imperative to ask why Franciszek, an outsider in the world of the village, makes the momentous choice he does. But the film stays rooted to his actions and does not delve into his motivation. The sullen villagers either stonewall or are openly hostile, even seeing the Kalina brothers as "Yids" because of their sympathies, but Franciszek's determination pays off and the mystery of the massacre is ultimately unraveled.

The Kalina brothers Franek (Ireneusz Czop, left) and Józek (Maciej Stuhr) discover a historical conspiracy of silence about the appropriation of Jewish-owned land during WWII in *Aftermath*.

What the brothers find out is more than they really want to know. Their own father is centrally implicated in the massacre, and the house and land they inhabit, just like that of many of their neighbors, were once owned by Jewish farmers. Nobody who is part of the village, including Józek and Franciszek, is free of some guilt for what occurred. It's not the Nazis who killed the village's Jews, which is the commonly held belief (or self-protective lie), but the Polish villagers themselves, motivated by envy, greed for the Jewish farmers' land, and classic anti-Semitism.

There are few Poles in the film not tainted by anti-Semitism, including the local police and one of the priests (though another older priest is committed to doing what is right). The older villagers and many of their progeny have collaborated to hide the truth of what happened to the Jews during the war, and few exhibit even a tinge of guilt.

Aftermath *is tightly conceived as a taut, accessible thriller—powerfully grounded in historical and social concerns—with the protagonists pursuing their investigation in the face of external threats and violence. There is nothing virtuosic about the film stylistically, though the mysteriousness of the dark woods surrounding the farm is well used to build tension. Pasikowski's focus is clearly neither on the Kalina brothers' psyches nor on exploring the nature of their uneasy and volatile personal relationship. What's central to the film is its courageous illumination of a dark moment in Polish history, and preserving the memory of Jewish suffering at the hands of the Poles. The massacre is loosely based on the historical facts of a pogrom that took place in Jedwabne in northeastern Poland in July 1941 when several hundred Jews were beaten and burnt to death in a barn by their Polish neighbors.*

Aftermath *avoids any touch of sentimentality or facile moral redemption. The Kalina brothers' efforts to bring to light the horrors of the past do not suddenly transform the villagers into people who are concerned about what happened to the Jews. In fact, the final scene sees a Jewish youth group and some Orthodox Jewish men praying at Jozek's cemetery. They are pointedly isolated from the film's action and have no idea of the anguished drama that has taken place to create the cemetery. They also make no link to the villagers, who are left seemingly unmoved by what has been revealed by the brothers. The villagers seem equally untouched by the positive changes that are taking place in Polish attitudes toward the Jews, even a sometimes self-conscious Philo-Semitism, that co-exists with a persistent strain of anti-Semitism in contemporary Poland. Still, as Israel's ambassador to Poland, Zvi Rav-Ner, told Reuters, "The debate has begun and the film is a very positive sign. It is good that we can talk about painful issues now."*

We spoke with both the director and producer of Aftermath *in September, just prior to the film's national theatrical release. I am grateful for the assistance of Professor Erica Lehrer, the Canada Research Chair in Post-Conflict Memory, Ethnography, and Museology at Concordia University in Montreal.*—**Leonard Quart**

Cineaste: *What prevented Polish filmmakers from dealing directly with the plight of Jews during the Holocaust after World War II?*

Władysław Pasikowski: The answer is simple—communism. Since you've had less contact with communism than we have in Eastern Europe, you might be unaware that, in spite of the sweeping slogans about communists of Jewish descent, communism was in fact anti-Semitic. But some attempts were made to address the issue in those days; take Leonard Buczkowski's *Forbidden Songs*, or Andrzej Wajda's *Samson*. Best of all was Paweł Łozinski's excellent, Oscar-worthy documentary, *Birthplace*. When Poland regained its sovereignty and became a democratic country, this kind of film did appear sporadically, but still... The straight answer to your question would probably be that conscience, or perhaps shame, prevented us Poles from making films about Poles of Jewish origin.

Cineaste: *Given that in films centered on the Holocaust and Jewish victimization, like Wajda's* Samson, *the prime villains remained the Nazis and not the Poles, what prevented even Wajda from going further in exploring the relations of Poles to Jews?*

Pasikowski: Historical truth and what's called "matter of course." The Nazis, Hitlerites, or Germans if you will, were responsible for the Holocaust. After the war, the primary obligation for artists, including filmmakers, was to document that fact whenever WWII was mentioned. The truth had to be repeated as many millions of

Józek (Maciej Stuhr) in the remains of his cemetery of exhumed Jewish gravestones after his fields have been burned in *Aftermath*.

Józek and Franek confront a neighbor who angrily denies their allegations of how farmland was seized during the war in *Aftermath*.

times as there were Holocaust victims, until that terrible, basic truth got into the heads of even those most immune to knowledge, even the biggest simpletons living somewhere in the antipodes of Europe. The Germans slaughtered nearly the entire several-million-strong European Jewish diaspora—almost exterminating a nation in the name of an inhuman false ideology. It took fifty years of imprinting the simple truth into everyone's minds, and I think Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Steven Spielberg's Holocaust archive were needed before filmmakers could ask: "But what were the French, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Poles doing while the *Einsatzgruppen* were going berserk around Europe?" Andrzej Wajda's film was made when it was still too early for such questions.

Cineaste: *In what ways does your film differ from the Holocaust films that preceded it?*

Pasikowski: My film's closest predecessor is Jan Kadar's *The Shop on Main Street*, a Slovak film from the Sixties about an anti-Jewish pogrom in a small town, but no German characters are featured. My film is different because it doesn't employ an art-house/festival style intended for New York film buffs. It looks and proceeds like any other mainstream film production, and it isn't even in black and white.

"I was surprised that the presentation of historical facts could be seen as' lies.' The dark face of anti-Semitism made its appearance."—Dariusz Jabłonski

Cineaste: *As the film's producer, can you tell me how the film was funded, and how difficult it was to finally get financing?*

Dariusz Jabłonski: Most of the funding came from the Polish Film Institute and private Polish funds, and from three other countries—Holland, Russia, and Slovakia. But it was a difficult process. At first, in 2006, the Polish Film Institute rejected subsidizing the film—it was seen as too controversial—but clearly changed its mind.

Cineaste: *Did the controversial nature of the script move you to become involved?*

Jabłonski: I felt the script was telling the truth to one's own nation, rather than being a portrait of Poland as anti-Semitic. I wanted every aspect of Polish history depicted. It's a topic we have been avoiding, and I felt we had a moral duty to make this film. I also felt that this well-known director, who had made commercially successful thrillers with social connotations in the Nineties, had a very original, powerful approach to the subject.

Cineaste: *Getting back to the substance of the film, was reading Jan Gross's* Neighbors *the main inspiration for making the film?*

Pasikowski: Professor Gross's book was like a pang of conscience because, even though I considered myself knowledgeable about Polish history, until I'd read *Neighbors* I had no idea about what went on in Jedwabne and other towns in the areas the Red Army abandoned after June 1941. Secondly, the intellectual shame I felt for what we Poles had done to our own neighbors moved me to make the film.

Cineaste: *Do you consider* Aftermath *a thriller?*

Pasikowski: *Aftermath* is a thriller as per the dictionary definition of the term: an exciting story that usually involves some kind of investigation. All those elements are present in my film.

Cineaste: *Your film neither reconstructs the past nor has any Jewish characters. Was your intent to force us to imagine the horrors of 1941 by avoiding the literal piling on of atrocities?*

Pasikowski: I wanted to tell a modern-day story about how we are still influenced by the past. On that premise, I would have had to show wartime in flashbacks, but I think they're a questionable move, stylistically, as well as very suspicious, ideologically. You mustn't forget that we filmmakers are always trying to persuade the audience that the picture on the screen is something real, and I'm also trying to get them to believe they are alongside the hero, looking into a small village on the Eastern border of Poland. In that context, flashbacks can't provide the same kind of "presence." If someone tells you they've been to Chicago, do you imagine them in Chicago streets out of a Sixties movie? No. All you have at your disposal are the words and the voice. That's real, so I vowed to confine myself to eyewitness accounts. But to show those accounts on film would have given their words the status of objective truth. But I don't know who's telling the truth, and who's lying. We approach film like we do history; it's a confrontation.

Cineaste: *Does the film suggest that the worst cases of anti-Semitism were to be found in rural villages among the peasants?*

Pasikowski: I'm always cautious not to classify people by ethnic, social, or gender traits. The only acceptable categories are good and evil, wisdom and stupidity. The film is set in a small rural village because I needed my characters to have basic features like devotion to traditions, land, and family. But in reality, the majority of the anti-Jewish pogroms in WWII occurred in small towns, not out in the countryside.

Cineaste: *Is the film signifying that the Catholic Church was implicated in past and present anti-Semitism? And why crucify the central figure?*

Pasikowski: There isn't just one church, and we shouldn't extend accusations against individual members to cover the whole institution. There are probably just as many anti-Semitic priests as anti-Semitic laymen, and at least as many as among followers of Islam. But it was Pope John Paul II who said the church was guilty of the sin of anti-Semitism, and who am I to argue with him? Why did the villagers crucify the central figure? There's no simple answer to that. A friend of mine, whom I invited to write the music, said he thought of that music as a passion, because the film is a passion play. Well, you can't have a passion play without a crucifixion. That's the interpretation I prefer.

Local policeman Nowak (Zbigniew Zamachowski) tries to thwart the Kalina brothers in their troubling investigations in *Aftermath*.

Cineaste: *Have there been recent instances where ordinary Poles, like the brothers in the film, behaved heroically in their commitment to preserving the Jewish past?*

Pasikowski: The film is largely based on facts, although they weren't actually interconnected. A few decades ago, a boy was crucified for some mundane reasons, and then, in a totally different place and time, another man decided to collect Jewish *matsevah* [*gravestones*] and put them up in his field. I just took poetic license and linked the two cases. After the release of Gross's book, several Polish authors and scientists published significant articles, and a monument to the Jews was finally erected in Jedwabne, in the presence of the then president of Poland.

Cineaste: *What can the film medium bring especially to the subject of Polish anti-Semitism?*

Pasikowski: By its very nature, film is a more popular medium than books, especially nonfiction, so it is sure to reach a considerably wider audience, and perhaps some of them will be inclined to search for more accurate historical records to discover their own past, even its disgraceful side.

Cineaste: *Why did you choose a star like Maciej Stuhr to play Józek?*

Pasikowski: He's a superb actor, one of the best we have at the moment, and he's also very popular. I decided to cast Ireneusz Czop in the leading role, as Franciszek. Since he was less famous at the time, I needed one bright star, and Maciej shines brighter than them all.

Cineaste: *Did locals resent it when you shot the film on location?*

Pasikowski: We had all kinds of meetings with local residents. Some of them showed us real *matsevahs* in the walls of buildings that are still standing. Those people were glad we were telling the truth about that period, whereas others declined to let us use locations when they found out what the script was about, but they were definitely in the minority.

Cineaste: *What about the film's reception in Poland? Did you expect the film to be attacked with such vehemence by right-wing nationalists?*

Jabłonski: I knew it wouldn't be easy because we were dealing with a subject that was still very much a taboo. But I was surprised that the presentation of historical facts could be seen as "lies." The dark face of anti-Semitism made its appearance. The film received a great deal of coverage in the papers, and, soon after the film's release, Polish patriots and ethnonationalists accused the film of being part of a Jewish conspiracy to tarnish Poland's reputation. The one person who evoked the most rage was Maciej Stuhr, the beloved actor who played Józek. Soon after the film came out, he began receiving online death threats and attacks dismissing him as "as a Jew and not a Pole anymore."

Cineaste: *What explains the negative reception the film received from a number of ordinary Poles?*

Jabłonski: The Poles suffered great losses on both the Eastern and Western fronts. It was a dark period of our history where a whole generation was lost. As a result, Poles see themselves as victims of the war, not oppressors. It makes it hard for them to acknowledge the film's historical truth.

Cineaste: *What was the critics' reaction to the film?*

Jabłonski: The film powerfully affected the critics. They were so moved by the film's perspective and action that they couldn't detach themselves and make aesthetic judgments about the film's strengths and weaknesses. Many newspapers rallied behind the film. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, one of Poland's most widely read newspapers, embraced the work as "outstanding."

Cineaste: *How did Polish audiences in the theaters respond?*

Jabłonski: When I saw it with an audience, they sat in stunned silence as the final credits rolled. In addition, though it attracted decent audiences in the theaters, it had twenty times more sales on DVD than a normal Polish film. Given the heated controversy the film aroused, many Poles were wary of attending the film in theaters. Thousands of people wrote positive comments on the film's Website, which moved me to tears. In addition, the film had a concrete practical effect. People decided to stand up some of the Jewish gravestones that had been used as paving stones. The film woke up the conscience of people.

Cineaste: *I'm curious about the film's effect on other Polish filmmakers. Are other Polish directors planning to direct films dealing with the behavior of Poles toward the Jews during the war? For example, what about a film depicting the Home Army's complex relationship with Jewish victims and Resistance fighters?*

Pasikowski: I'm not aware of any, except Ryszard Bugajski, who has been planning a film about the Kielce pogrom for a long time. But that's a great idea for a film you have about the Home Army. We ought to make a film like that, or else people in Europe will have to learn everything from the ZDF miniseries *Generation War* [aka *Our Mothers, Our Fathers*]. Perhaps I could make that film?

Cineaste: *What are the levels of anti-Semitism in Poland today?*

Pasikowski: They're exactly the same as in France or the United States, but in no way does that exonerate us. ■

Aftermath is distributed in the United States by Menemsha Films, www.menemshafilms.com.

Tablet
A NEW READ ON JEWISH LIFE

Film

In the Polish *Aftermath*

In a public debate over a controversial new Holocaust film, Poland faces up to a complicated past

By Denise Grollmus
April 17, 2013 12:00 AM

On a snowy Sunday in March, dozens of parka-clad Poles trickled in between the pews of Warsaw's Nozyk Synagogue. They removed their coats and greeted each other with kisses. Upstairs, the women's section remained empty, as downstairs people quickly outnumbered the modest group of men who usually occupy these seats on Friday nights. Only some of the visitors were Jewish, and none were there to pray. They had come to watch a panel about a film that had come out six months before.

Pokłosie, or "Aftermath," has been drawing intense criticism from Polish nationalists, who accuse the film of being "anti-Polish" propaganda and a gross manipulation of historical truth. Over the past few months, Pokłosie has so riled the Polish right wing that it has been banned from some local cinemas, while its leading actor, Maciej Stuhr, has received death

threats. There is no righteous Gentile savior at the center of its plot, no shadowy scenes of reenacted horror, no survival against all odds or triumph of the human spirit. In fact, there are no scenes of the war at all, and not a single Jewish character. The film is strikingly devoid of the tropes of Holocaust cinema. Indeed, while the film is squarely about Polish-Jewish relations and the destruction of Poland's Jewry during World War II, there are no carefully reconstructed flashbacks to when Jews were still around. But that is precisely the source of its unexpected power.

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Pokłosie, originally titled Kaddish, was written and directed by Władysław Pasikowski, who is best known for making action movies and TV thrillers and who co-wrote the script for Andrej Wajda's internationally acclaimed 2007 film Katyn. Pasikowski is little known outside of Poland, where Pokłosie premiered at the Warsaw Film Festival in October. The film takes place in the 2000s and tells the story of Franciszek Kalina, a Polish man living in the United States who begrudgingly returns to his backward hometown in the contemporary rural Polish countryside where his brother, Jozef, maintains their family farm. Though nothing has changed in this quaint village of farmers and babushkas, Jozef has. His wife has left him, and Jozef has been drawing the ire of his neighbors through his new-found fascination with the village's former Jewish inhabitants, whose disappearances remain an unspeakable subject. Jozef spends his nights wresting old Jewish tombstones—long ago stripped from the old Jewish cemetery and used as paving stones (a common practice in Poland both during and after the war)—from the sidewalks and squares around town and then firmly planting them into a new Jewish cemetery he's created in one of his wheat fields. He painstakingly restores each tombstone, the Hebrew inscriptions of which he's taught himself to read.

At first, Franciszek is puzzled by his brother's fascination, but then it takes hold of him, too. Together, Franciszek and Jozef exhume everything from land records to bodies, and they soon discover that the stories the villagers have been telling—about Nazi genocide and Jews intent on returning to reclaim their lands—are lies.

Long before Pokłosie was released, the Polish press documented the various obstacles Pasikowski had in the decade-long process of making his film, from securing financing for his controversial script to struggling with how to best approach what is, for many Poles, still a largely taboo subject. Though Pasikowski is notorious for ignoring interview requests, it was widely reported that he was inspired to write the film after reading Jan Gross' Neighbors, a historical account of how the entire Jewish community of Jedwabne was murdered on July 10, 1941 not by the Nazis, as was once asserted by official Polish history, but by their Polish neighbors.

When Gross' book was first published in 2001, it created enormous controversy in Poland, where Communist revisionism not only rewrote the Holocaust's role in Poland's national narrative, but also reinforced the Poles' perception of themselves as absolute victims. Many Poles point to the fact that, unlike most European nations, Poland never officially collaborated with the Nazis, never ran their camps or established Polish SS groups. As a

result of this resistance, more than 20 percent of the country's population was destroyed. For that reason, Auschwitz has long been considered a site not of Jewish suffering, but of Polish suffering—even though half of the country's death toll included 90 percent of its Jewish population.

After almost six decades of repressed memory, it was Gross' book that finally got Poland talking. While right-wing, ultra-Catholic nationalists accused Gross of anti-Polish slander, Neighbors inspired among many Poles, including Pasikowski, a new curiosity in Polish Jewish history and its more disagreeable truth. "The changes are dramatic from when Neighbors came out," Gross told me from his office at Princeton University, where he is a professor of history. "The big difference over the last 10 years is that all the fantastic research on the Holocaust is now being done in Poland."

Neighbors not only ruptured the Polish silence regarding things Jewish, but it also challenged the widely accepted taxonomy first proposed by the historian of Shoah fame, Raul Hilberg, who claimed that everyone during World War II fit neatly into one of three categories: victims, bystanders, and perpetrators. If the Poles were victims, how could they also be bystanders, at best, or perpetrators, at worst?

"I think a lot of [Polish] self-complacency is a result of this triparte division coming from Hilberg, which is so contentious," Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, a cultural anthropologist who specializes in Polish-Jewish relations, told me. "These categories are inappropriate for what was really going on in Poland. It wasn't so black and white, but quite gray. This moment with Neighbors made people realize that we needed a new language to talk about the war."

Though the movie was inspired by Neighbors, it is not an adaptation of the book, nor a reconstruction of historical events, a fact that is often lost on the film's dissenters, who include Tomasz Terlikowski, the editor of Fronda.pl, a right-wing nationalist website. Terlikowski, who also participated in the Nozyk Synagogue debate, maintained that the film's greatest problem was that it was "historically inaccurate," a statement that elicited disagreeable sighs from the audience.

But the movie is genre-bending in other ways. Pokłosie is, for example, also devoid of the genre's favorite stock character: the righteous Gentile savior. Jozef Kalina comes closest to this role as we watch him stubbornly memorializing the dead in one of his fields. But Jozef is on a fool's errand, despite his good intentions. The dead cannot be saved, and Jozef, living on their land, is guilty by association, plagued by an irresolvable mourning that leads to his destruction. And Jozef isn't responsible for discovering the truth about the Jews' murderers, either. That quest is reserved for his brother Franciszek, who is a reluctant detective. When Franciszek first arrives in the village, he doesn't seem bothered by the anti-Semitic graffiti that greets him. Instead, he's annoyed that he had to return to the Old Country. In America, where he now lives, there are no bad memories, though there are plenty of "Jews running the country," Franciszek tells Jozef, as they fix a combine together.

Played by the acclaimed Polish film and stage actor Ireneusz Czop, Franciszek captures the off-the-cuff, lightly anti-Semitic talk that pops up in Polish public discourse. Yet, at the same

time, Franciszek hunts down court records, digs up bones, wanders the ruins of the old Gestapo headquarters, and asks hard questions of a dying old lady, the last of the generation who lived through the war.

Anonymous Polish villagers wreak havoc on the Kalina brothers as they conduct their search, but they are never shown in the act. Only the evidence of their work is left behind—a rock through a window, graffiti on a barn door, flames engulfing a field. When we do see the villagers, they appear as innocent bystanders, shifting blame to others: delusional in their self-perception of absolute goodness. In Pokłosie, there is no uniformed boogieman to scapegoat, no righteous character to identify with, no absolute victims for whom we can have empathy. By the end of the film, everyone is implicated in the violence of the past. The safe old categories no longer hold.

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Through last winter, Pasikowski's film provoked an outpouring of public criticism, launching a second round of the Neighbor's debate that began in 2001. Soon after the film's release, Polish patriots and ethno-nationalists accused the film of being part of a Jewish conspiracy to tarnish Poland's reputation. Obsessed with the film's tangential relationship to Neighbors, they began invoking Gross' name and attacked Pokłosie for misrepresenting Poland's history. "The reaction was not a shock," Dariusz Jabłoński, one of the film's producers, said at the Nozyk Synagogue panel. "We knew we were dealing with a subject that was still very much a taboo."

Still, it was surprising, even to Gross, that the one who received the most ire was Maciej Stuhr, the actor who played Jozef. Soon after he began receiving death threats, Wprost, a national magazine, featured him on its cover, provocatively scrawled in anti-Semitic graffiti meant to echo both the film and the very real harassment to which Stuhr was being subjected. Inside, Magdalena Rigamonti's article, "Stuhr, You Jew," chronicled the anti-Semitic backlash against Stuhr—who doesn't identify as Jewish, though the right-wing press continues to insist he is of Jewish origin. Rigamonti didn't necessarily approve of the vitriol being hurled at Stuhr, but wrote that she believed Stuhr had brought it upon himself. "He has become a symbol of simplicity and manipulating history for commercial gain," she wrote.

Others have rallied behind the film. Gazeta Wyborcza, one of Poland's most widely read newspapers, embraced the work as "outstanding," while Dwutygodnik, an online arts and culture weekly, ran several simultaneous reviews that all agreed Pokłosie was an important film for all the reasons that made it so hard to watch. For Tokarska-Bakir, the public debate has been emblematic of how far, or not, Poland has come since Neighbors. "The situation is much better and much worse," she said. "There are so many more people who are inhabiting this space of anti-anti-Semitics. And, at the same time, there is much more acceptance of anti-Semitism in the mainstream culture. Positions have been reinforced."

Still, much like the film, the one voice that seems strikingly absent from the discussion is that of the Jewish community. Poles are forced to work through the tragic past alone. Even if Jewish audiences from abroad were engaged in the debate, Pasikowski suggests that they could never offer the Poles any real comfort or redemption. In the final scene of the film, a Jewish youth group, like those that frequently come to Poland to tour Holocaust sites, prays at Jozef Kalina's virtual cemetery. As they shuckle, they stand entirely apart from the film's action, unaware and untouched by what has just transpired in this little town. They look like alien invaders. Their return does not offer comfort or redemption but only dramatizes the distance between the Jews of the past, the Jews of the present, and the Poles, who exist outside the frame, no better off than before the truth was revealed.

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http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/129082/in-the-polish-aftermath