PRO MEMORIA

Acta Poloniae Historica
121, 2020
PL ISSN 0001–6829

JERZY JEDLICKI
(14 JUNE 1930 – 31 JANUARY 2018)*

I seem to be able to recall the exact moment that I first encountered the name Jerzy Jedlicki. It was spring 1981. I was waiting for a bus home at the stop on Marszałkowska Street near the handicraft store Cepelia in the centre of Warsaw. The bus stop was crowded, and still, there was no bus in sight. I managed to buy a copy of the *Tygodnik Solidarność* weekly from a news kiosk. A column caught my eye. It offered a somewhat grotesque take on the growing social conflict that had led to the military and their tanks being deployed on the streets: "there is something thumping and grinding outside my window…". I spotted the name of the author. It was Jerzy Jedlicki. It meant nothing to me. But I remembered it again seven months later, on 13 December 1981.[1] This was when martial law was imposed in Poland.

Jerzy Jedlicki was born Jerzy Grossman on 14 June 1930 in Warsaw into an intelligentsia family. Both his father's and his mother's families were of Jewish origin, thoroughly Polonised for several generations. His father Wilhelm Grossman, who came from Galicia, was a chemical engineer and graduate of Lviv polytechnic. His mother Wanda, née Perlis, studied German at the University of Warsaw. Her family came from Łódź. In various interviews and discussions, Jedlicki spoke of a peaceful and happy childhood spent in the Warsaw district of Mokotów. His family converted to the Reformed Church in the 1930s. As Jedlicki himself explained, this was a typical path for families of assimilated Poles of Jewish origin to take. Later, during the war, he and his family converted to Catholicism.

---

* A longer version of this text first appeared in Polish in *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cxxvi, 4 (2019), 851–67.

[1] Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Rękopis znaleziony w …', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 9 (29 May 1981), 2.

The day before the outbreak of the Second World War, Jerzy Jedlicki's father was called up to the army. Jerzy, together with his mother and brother, left for Lviv, where his father's family lived. They encountered the Soviet occupation there. They left for the Nazi-controlled General Governement in 1940, legally, as part of a programme to reunite families. They hoped that the German occupation would be less harsh than the Soviet one. On the bridge at the border in Przemyśl, Jedlicki recalled, a German officer summoned a soldier to help them carry a heavy suitcase. His mother breathed a sigh of relief: they were back in Europe after all. Throughout the rest of the war, Jedlicki reminded his mother of her words with bitter irony in his voice.

After departing Lviv, his family adopted the surname Jedlicki and spent the rest of the war and occupation in Warsaw. Jedlicki recalled these years in a text written by him but signed with his mother's name in a volume edited by Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna featuring testimonies relating to the wartime rescue of Jews, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej* (Warszawa, 1967).[2] Jerzy Jedlicki, his brother Witold, and their mother survived the Nazi occupation. His father, who was hiding separately, was killed. The rest of his family who remained in Warsaw and Lviv were killed too.

After the war, Jedlicki, his brother and mother initially settled in Łódź, where Jerzy started a degree in sociology in 1948. In common with a large number of members of his generation, he followed a path that led from a patriotic pre-war education through a turn to Marxism followed by a stark rejection of communist ideology and practices. He joined the ruling Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR] in 1952. I never dared to ask him about this. We once discussed Krystyna Kersten's article that suggested that a provocation might have been the trigger for the 1946 Kielce pogrom. Jedlicki replied more or less so: Dear Maciek, if your generation ever asks my peers (or perhaps he phrased it even more strongly: if you ever demand an explanation from us? I can't remember exactly) why we supported communism in our youth, then in my case the question of the Kielce pogrom would be of crucial significance. I did not yet know him well at that point; it must have been the late 1980s or perhaps the early 1990s. I did not dare to push the matter any further.

---

[2] English version: *Righteous Among Nations: How Poles helped the Jews, 1939–1945* (London, 1969) and *The Samaritans: Heroes of the Holocaust* (New York, 1970).

Hanna Świda-Ziemba was one of Jedlicki's coursemates on the sociology degree. She recalled many years later, with Jedlicki and his young Marxist comrades in mind, that "I could never understand how such intelligent young people could believe in such nonsense".[3] Perhaps I am overinterpreting, but it sometimes seemed to me that Jedlicki also found it somewhat strange years later, as if he found it necessary – once he had become a stringent opponent of communism – to explain to himself how he had come to accede to it. In one discussion he compared today's radical nationalists to the young Marxists of the early 1950s. He was particularly disturbed by the similarities in the rapturous and intoxicating atmosphere of the group marches and battle songs that he witnessed among his colleagues several decades earlier.

I think that he was right when he told the journalist Magdalena Bajer that "it was not Marxism that seduced me". Given his belief that ideas, consciousness, emotions, and irrationality are all essential elements of history, he was not inclined to accept the theories of base and superstructure, or any mechanistic belief in an automatic, teleological succession of historical epochs. His master's dissertation, which he defended in 1953, was supervised by Nina Assorodobraj. It was written using the obligatory jargon of the day, yet it seems as if Jedlicki thought using 'normal' language before translating his ideas into vulgar Marxist terms. There are clear traces of the traits that were typical of his later works. Even the title was indicative of that: 'Rozwój i położenie klasy robotniczej w przemyśle Królestwa Polskiego w latach 1864–1882. Przegląd literatury przedmiotu oraz próba zarysu problematyki badań' [The Development and Position of the Working Class in the Industry of the Kingdom of Poland, 1864–1882: A Literature Review and Outline of Existing Research]. Even then, as in his later research, Jedlicki was interested in reconstructing how people thought rather than in the course of events; thus he attached more considerable significance to historians' opinions of industrialisation than to the process itself. In the introduction to his dissertation, he wrote: "There is no genuine work of scholarship that is not based on a scientific theory that provides a framework for a given set of phenomena". It was only the theory that could establish what was typical "once

[3] Hanna Świda-Ziemba, *Uchwycić życie. Wspomnienia, dzienniki i listy 1930–1989*, ed. by Dominik Czapigo (Warszawa, 2018), 143. I am grateful to Dr Bartosz Kaliski for helping me to identify the quote.

a statistical vision of typicality no longer proved sufficient". Anyone familiar with Jedlicki's later works would immediately recognise here some of the issues that he focused on throughout the rest of his career: the refusal to believe that the facts under investigation would 'automatically' form a coherent image and his scepticism towards quantitative explanations.

Jedlicki abandoned communism relatively quickly. A significant influence of this decision was something that Dominik Czapigo recently described in the journal *Karta*.[4] Jedlicki discovered falsifications in the officially published collections of sources on the history of the workers' movement. He noticed that there were not only biased commentaries on the sources, but that the sources themselves had been falsified. Jedlicki was familiar with the original materials from his archival research. He decided to make this public, not as a critique of the system but as a part of the constructive criticism that Party members had been encouraged to engage in at Party meetings. He soon learned that constructive criticism had its limits. He revised his text several times in accordance with the editors' recommendations. This continued until the breakthrough of October 1956 occurred. Jedlicki then decided to publish his text in the weekly *Po prostu*. It was accepted by the editors but stopped by censors, thus it was never published until the article in *Karta* drew on it.

The shift in Jedlicki's stance towards the communist system in Poland in the second half of 1956 can be traced in articles preserved among his personal papers. One features a handwritten note from the author stating "unpublished, rejected by [the daily newspaper and official PZPR press organ] *Trybuna Ludu*, July 1956". Titled 'Partia a środowisko naukowe' [The Party and Academics], it demanded complete freedom in conducting research. Party organisations' role in scholarship was to be limited to "creating the conditions that would enable research to develop without restrictions, as quickly as possible and to take directions that were essential to society".[5] Jedlicki was then still attached to the idea of reforming socialism, yet just a few months later in another unpublished article he was already sceptical

[4] Dominik Czapigo, 'Przegrana partia', *Karta*, 97 (2018), 112–21.

[5] Jerzy Jedlicki's personal papers are held at the KARTA Centre in Warsaw. Kolekcja prof. Jerzego Jedlickiego, Ośrodek *Karta*, ref. no. FOK/120/3/4, 22–8; here: 24.

towards such a position as he rejected the very notion of 'errors and distortions'. As he wrote in 'Czy będziemy mieli naukową genealogię teraźniejszości?' [Will We Have a Scientific Genealogy of the Present?], during the Stalinist era "there were no errors, only a mercilessly pursued system of principles of socialist education".[6] He could thus see that what happened under Stalinism was not a distortion of the system but a realisation of its true essence.

Jedlicki left the PZPR in 1968, later regretting that he had not done so in 1956 already. In the 1970s he became involved in the activities of the opposition, in particular, what was known as the Flying University (which provided education outside state control). He taught a private seminar at his home on the history of ideas. After the proclamation of martial law, he was interned between December 1981 and July 1982 owing to his public engagement during the period when Solidarity operated legally in 1980/81.

Let us return to his scholarly career. His doctoral thesis, which he defended in 1961, was supervised by Witold Kula. He had a significant influence on Jedlicki. This is more evident in the general similarity in their approaches to the past rather than in any overlap in research interests. Jedlicki's doctoral thesis was published under the title 'Nieudana próba kapitalistycznej industrializacji' [A Failed Attempt at Capitalist Industrialization]. This work made explicit something that had been evident in Jedlicki's work from the outset: an interest not only in how a particular institution functioned (in this case an industrial enterprise) but also, and above all, in how people think: how they make investment decisions, the nature of their worldview, and how they imagine the potential for progress and development. The central hypothesis of his study was that industrialisation efforts in the Kingdom of Poland from the 1820s to the 1840s (the 1830/31 November uprising did serve as a significant caesura in the context of investment policy) were unsuccessful. This was because of mistaken assessments as regards the tendencies in and perspectives of industrial development. The authorities opted for hydropower rather than steam power, and for forced labour (sending bonded peasants to the factories) rather than hired labour, while also investing in old production methods. As a result, industrial enterprises only survived for as long as they were funded by the Polish Bank. As soon as the financing dried

[6] *Ibid.*, 62.

up, the businesses went bankrupt. Jedlicki cited Bolesław Prus, who stated: "No government has ever been a good entrepreneur nor will it ever be". This, of course, was read as a necessarily political statement in the early 1960s. Jedlicki recalls that censors did not object to this quote featuring in the book, but they refused to allow it to be cited in conclusion as a summary of the central argument. It was the publishers who suggested that Jedlicki add the adjective 'capitalist' to the original title of his thesis in order to avoid any potential associations with contemporary Poland. The suggested version was used in the published work, although, as Jedlicki later recalled, the case study did not explore attempted capitalist industrialisation but rather a 'feudal' variant that was based in pre-capitalist principles and practices. It was indeed the weaknesses in the capitalist elements that ultimately meant it was unsuccessful.

Alongside the issue of the effectiveness of top-down modernisation initiatives, another research question was crucial to Jedlicki's book. Did the industrial policy of the authorities in the Kingdom of Poland, whatever its economic rationale, play a role in the country's long-term modernisation? For example, did the infrastructure that was developed at that time contribute in any way to Poland's further development? Jedlicki was sceptical. He did not believe that there was any significant degree of long-term gradual accumulation of primary capital in Poland. Instead, he argued, particular periods of accumulation went to waste, making it necessary to start from scratch.

His next study was much more of a history of ideas than a socio-economic history. It was on the transformation of the Polish nobility (*szlachta*) in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Jedlicki sought to comprehend the crucial moment of change when a modern society emerges in conditions where the norms for understanding and describing social structures remain rooted in the estate-based order. He addressed the question of how the concept of the nobility shifted in this crucial moment of social transformation.

Krystyna Zienkowska highlighted an interesting aspect of Jedlicki's study. He outlined the ennoblements that took place during the Four Year Sejm (or Great Sejm, 1788–92) as part of the royal programme of reforms. The far-reaching expansion of the noble estate to new members, particularly from the burgher class, was intended to weaken estate-based barriers and thus contribute to the modernisation of Polish society. Zienkowska, however, argued differently, noting that

the estate-based institutions were perfectly capable of adapting to the new blood entering them for as long as the principle of the division of society into estates remained in place. The influx of enterprising and resourceful burghers into the noble estate only served to strengthen the latter while weakening the bourgeoisie, which was subsequently deprived of its most capable individuals. As far as I am aware, Jedlicki did not counter Zienkowska's arguments. I mention this difference of opinion because it reveals one way in which the questions addressed in Jedlicki's work could be expanded upon.[7]

In the 1982/83 academic year, having been released from internment, Jedlicki launched a lecture series for students largely focused on collective emotions in history following an invitation from Prof. Antoni Mączak, then director of the Institute of History at the University of Warsaw. Jedlicki's perhaps most important book, *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują. Studia z dziejów idei i wyobraźni XIX wieku* appeared in 1988.[8] Indeed, the imagination (or imaginaries) as the subject of historical investigation was itself already something innovative in the Polish context. The book described Polish attitudes towards modernisation and capitalism and it had some distinctive features. It addressed a crucial subject, one that had hardly been explored at that time and remains as pertinent today as it was at the time of the book's publication. The book was reflective and devoid of simple generalisations, employing an analytical approach that was sophisticated and skilful, though presented in a writing style that was not always easy to follow. It made artful use of emotions, from sentiment to irony; it employed an excellent selection of quotations that were accompanied by fitting comments. All these elements make the book a classic, one whose appeal both to professional historians and to a broader readership has remained undiminished for decades.

One particularly engaging aspect of this book that, in my view, added much to its value, is that it was open in considering a variety of arguments. Jedlicki was not 'objective' in the sense that he avoided stating an opinion. His admiration for the Warsaw positivists is abundantly

[7] Krystyna Zienkowska, *Sławetni i urodzeni. Ruch polityczny mieszczaństwa w dobie Sejmu Czteroletniego* (Warszawa, 1976), 133–7.

[8] English version: *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-Century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest, 1999); the original Polish title would read as *What Kind of Civilization Poles Need. Studies in the History of Ideas and Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*.

clear, as Stefan Kieniewicz noted with well-meaning irony in a highly positive review in the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. At the same time, by expressing his views, he also offered an alternative perspective on others' perspectives, whether those of conservatives who feared change or socialists who sought the most radical change possible. Jedlicki believed that the very existence of public debate and disagreement was beneficial, as it gave expression – as the final line of the book puts it – to "the ethereal glimmer of hope without which a subdued nation stagnates in the humdrum of everyday existence".[9]

While the work was written in the late 1970s, it only made it to the publishers in 1982, when it was held back due to censorship. It finally appeared in an opportune moment, proving highly relevant in the late 1980s when Poles had to take a stance towards another phase of significant modernisation that in many respects would prove similar to those that had evoked fear, enthusiasm, hope and reservations in the protagonists of Jedlicki's history. The book was thus reviewed extensively and became the subject of many discussions that interwove the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The interweaving of the past and the present is a common impression left after reading Jedlicki's works. Obviously, he did write history books with the intention of understanding and explaining the problems of the epoch under investigation, with the majority of his works focused on the 'long' nineteenth century. He once said that following the collapse of communism, there was no longer any need to write about the past as a pretext for discussing the present. However, certain phenomena and models of thought could repeat themselves, from Lancashire to New Guinea, as he wrote in the introduction to *Jakiej cywilizacji*, and historians' role was to examine these repetitions and their particular rhythms. This was not the same as forcing the past to appear up-to-date. This 'supra-epochal' perspective is typical not only of that book but of all of his studies, from his doctoral thesis to this final longer work, the second volume of *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej* [The History of the Polish Intelligentsia], where the image of the dramatic circumstances leading to the fatal decision to launch a national uprising in January 1863 could not but produce analogies with the decision to trigger the 1944 Warsaw uprising, a parallel that Jedlicki was fully aware of.

[9] *Ibid.*, 287.

After *Jakiej cywilizacji*, Jedlicki planned a continuation that would explore similar debates during the period of the crisis of positivism, the *fin-de-siècle* and in the Young Poland (Młoda Polska) movement. He once mentioned that he had an almost complete draft of a chapter on the debates surrounding Stanisław Szczepanowski's *Nędza Galicji w cyfrach* [Poverty in Galicia in Numbers]. But because Polish debates on Western civilisation were so deeply rooted in the broader crisis of European positivism, Jedlicki decided to focus largely on this general European context of debates on the crisis of civilisation. Thus a follow-up to *Jakiej cywilizacji*, unfortunately, never appeared, although he did write *Świat zwyrodniały*,[10] which explored debates on the crisis of European culture. This book was less coherent than its predecessors. At its heart, constituting over half the book, was the section 'Degeneracja po angielsku' [Degeneration in English], a study of British debates on the crisis. The rest of the book is made up of shorter sketches (some previously published) addressing similar themes but with reference to Poland and, to a lesser extent, Germany and France. The common theme brings the book together, while the different structure of the particular case studies does not harm its readability. The message is similar to his previous work – the very fact that the crisis was being debated was in and of itself valuable, since even if critics at the time offered somewhat hyperbolic views, then their most tragic prophecies never came to pass precisely because they had expressed them, thus forewarning society which could then work towards preventing their fulfilment.

His final large-scale project was his editorship of the three-volume *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej* to which Jedlicki himself contributed the second volume, *Błędne koło 1832–1864* [A Vicious Circle, 1832–1864].[11] I wrote the first volume, while a colleague from our Section at the Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute of History, Magdalena Micińska, wrote the third. The research on the history of the intelligentsia lasted many years, and indeed decades, drawing on the research programme drawn up by Witold Kula and his colleagues on the history of social structures in Poland. It was continued by the Section's long-serving head, Prof. Ryszarda Czepulis-Rastenis, a colleague and friend of

[10] English version: Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Degenerate World* (Frankfurt am Main, 2016).

[11] English version: *A History of the Polish Intelligentsia,* Part 1–3, ed. by Jerzy Jedlicki (Frankfurt am Main, 2014).

Jedlicki's. Czepulis-Rastenis established a research group at the Section of the History of the Intelligentsia that was interested in this subject, with Barbara Petrozolin-Skowrońska, Barbara Konarska, and sometimes Andrzej Szwarc and Wiesław Caban, along with many others, attending its meetings. Several edited volumes emerged on the history of the intelligentsia from this collaboration, while the head of the Section herself wrote three important works. There were also numerous studies by researchers who were in some way connected to the Section. Jedlicki believed it was his duty towards his late colleague and predecessor Czepulis-Rastenis to produce a synthesis, thus he approached his role as editor of the three-volume series highly conscientiously. He repeatedly discussed the schedule with the remaining authors, and before writing his book, he published a volume on existing research on the educated classes in various European countries.

Jedlicki substantially modified the existing research paradigm on the project. Ryszarda Czepulis-Rastenis' important work *Klassa umysłowa* [The Intellectual Class] presented a quantitative analysis of that class in the Kingdom of Poland between the uprisings of 1830/31 and 1863. The book paved the way for many similar studies employing official documents to establish the numbers of members of the social structures of the educated classes. Jedlicki was sceptical as he did not believe that the incomplete archival data on the nineteenth-century could be quantified. He was adamant that it was impossible to apply criteria that had been derived from a theoretical framework to historical material because such uses always involve some degree of arbitrariness. It did not make sense, in his view, to apply statistical operations to limited datasets, particularly those that were not representative of society as a whole (this was the case because the available materials did not constitute a representative random sample of the entire source base that had been created). As a result, Jedlicki was sceptical of the potential of applying such approaches to efforts to understand social processes in nineteenth-century Poland, although he did not deny the value of quantification where this was indeed possible. He presented his methodological reflections on this subject in the article 'Historia struktur społecznych. Obrona i krytyka' [The History of Social Structures: For and Against], which was published in the journal *Dzieje Najnowsze*, viii, 1 (1976). He maintained these views until the end of his life. Indeed, they might have even become more radical as time went on. He once said that the flourishing of quantitative sociological

research after the Second World War was one reason for the crisis in that discipline – important questions were replaced by those that could be answered through quantitative approaches. Adam Kożuchowski was right to argue that Jedlicki, particularly in his later years (though essentially from the outset of his career) "was suffocated by the corset of 'scientification'".[12] He was increasingly fascinated by problems for which there was no 'scientifically' correct answer.

On the other hand, he was unwilling to adopt a postmodern perspective that would entail making all historical narratives equal. This perspective enabled the study of language, but not of the reality beyond language – meaning that one could write about the transformations of the concept of the intelligentsia, but not about the social group that is described using this term. In contrast to this attitude, Jedlicki remained attached to an 'objectivist' vision of history. He was aware that obtaining the objective truth was impossible: as he stated in one lecture, it was evident that two equally-qualified historians with access to precisely the same sources could draw different conclusions from them. Still, he was in no doubt that it remained the task of historians to strive for the historical truth, even if this was an impossibility. Jedlicki thus sought to distance himself from both scientistic utopias and from postmodern epistemological nihilism.

In my view, the most important part of *Błędne koło* are the final two chapters on the period from 1856 to 1864. Jedlicki presented there a masterful account of the tragic history of an era that began with great hopes of liberalisation and prospects for development but ended with the disastrous defeat of the uprising, which resulted in a long delay to Poland's civilisational development. Jedlicki once stated that he sought in this part of his study to present an alternative image of the era to the one which had been proposed by the most outstanding scholar on the subject, Stefan Kieniewicz, in his work *Powstanie styczniowe* [The January Uprising]. Jedlicki did not accept the argument that the significant benefits that emerged in hindsight (peasants had better conditions for acquiring property in the Russian-controlled Kingdom of Poland than in the Austrian and Prussian-controlled partitioned lands, and the speedier development of capitalism in the Kingdom than in Galicia) could be used to justify the uprising. He believed

[12] Adam Kożuchowski, 'Jerzy Jedlicki jako historyk XIX stulecia', *Klio Polska*, x (2018), 25.

that while such arguments might have boosted spirits, they were ultimately nothing more than gravely mistaken ex-post justifications of a tragic mistake.

Essays and shorter sketches were an important form for Jedlicki, equal to books. I will not go into his contributions to journalism with column pieces that appeared mainly in the 1990s, primarily in the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* and occasionally in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Among his numerous articles, I will mention just a few, in chronological order, starting with the review article 'Wokół Tyzenhauza. Stanisława Kościałkowskiego opus vitae' [On Tyzenhauz: Stanisław Kościałkowski's *Opus Vitae*] in *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxxi, 1 (1974). In this paper, Jedlicki addressed a recurrent theme in his work, namely to what extent detailed analysis could contribute to general arguments. Each time that he returned to this question he reached the same conclusion: detail without a general conception or framework is insufficient to represent the past, while a surfeit of detailed but unconnected facts can only make genuine understanding more difficult. In this essay, he posed a key question, one that was perhaps essential to his reflection on the historical method: "Is everything about which something can be known necessarily worth knowing?" He did not give an explicit answer in this text, but there is no doubt that he had a firm 'no' in mind. At one seminar he once stated that it is not by chance that the most important and still most thought-provoking syntheses of Polish history were written in the nineteenth century. Their authors did not yet possess as many detailed facts as us; therefore they could construct compelling general arguments. It is an illusion to claim that a synthesis can be produced inductively on the basis of aggregated detailed knowledge. The reverse is, in fact, true: the role of syntheses is to mark the paths that future detailed case studies should take.

Jedlicki's perhaps most important essay 'Dziedzictwo i odpowiedzialność zbiorowa' appeared over a decade later in 1988.[13] Its idea is simple: the present inherits the past in its entirety and thus it is impossible to inherit exclusively positive past traditions and legacies. The ensuing collective responsibility is something that, as Jedlicki was well

[13] English version: Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Heritage and Collective Responsibility', in *The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals*, ed. by Ian Maclean, Alan Montefiore, and Peter Winch (Cambridge, 1990), 53–76.

aware, liberals were suspicious of as they recognised only individual responsibility. Jedlicki explained that what he had in mind, however, was a particular kind of responsibility, "responsibility without guilt and punishment". If we accept an inheritance together with the debts that are attached to it, then we in no way carry moral guilt for the accrual of those debts. This, though, does not alter the fact that we are duty-bound to repay them. Similarly, we are not guilty of evils committed by members of previous generations of the group that we feel an affiliation with (a nation, denomination, political party or indeed political class), but we have a moral duty to recognise that evil and confront it openly and, if possible, atone for it. Jedlicki was convinced that coming to terms with the past in such a manner can offer moral catharsis, enabling an honest and lasting reconciliation with former opponents or enemies.

Jedlicki's text should be seen in the context of the intellectual climate of the late 1980s when liberalised censorship restrictions meant that it was possible to engage in broader discussions about the relation of troubling aspects of the past to the present day. It could be compared to Jan Błoński's famous 1987 essay *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*[14] or with Stefan Swieżawski's less well-known argument on the need for the Catholic Church to rehabilitate Jan Hus. Jedlicki's text inspired significant discussion, perhaps more than any of his other articles did. It is, therefore, interesting to note that Jedlicki's views on this question did shift to some degree over time. In the 1990s, as increasingly barbed debates over the past threatened to intensify conflicts between nations and social groups, Jedlicki found that it was perhaps too idealistic to assume that working through past collective wrongs internally could be sufficient to ensure reconciliation. He recognised that a certain degree of distance towards the past and collective misfortunes – not amnesia but distancing – could provide a more practical means of overcoming animosity between nations. He expressed his views in the article 'Historical Memory as a Source of Conflicts in Eastern Europe', published in the journal *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. This short text might be far less well-known than 'Dziedzictwo i odpowiedzialność zbiorowa', but it does supplement and even correct the earlier article in essential ways.

[14] English version: *The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto* is available at https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/the-poor-poles-look-at-the-ghetto-144232.

Finally, I would mention one of Jedlicki's last significant essays: 'Kompleksy i aspiracje prowincji' [The Complexes and Aspirations of the Periphery], which was published in the volume *Polska czyli prowincja. Cykl wykładów fundacji Centrum im. Profesora Bronisława Geremka* [Poland is Provincial: A Lecture Series at the Bronisław Geremek Centre Foundation], Warszawa, 2011, 7–27. Here Jedlicki offered a general overview of the peripheral nature of Poland covering a thousand years of history. The text was not without simplifications (Larry Wolff has written an interesting commentary on Jedlicki's text),[15] yet it is a fascinating attempt at a general interpretation of the totality of national history. My impression is that Jedlicki was minded to expand this sketch into a broader piece of scholarship, perhaps even into a book, but his illness put paid to those plans (if they indeed ever existed).

Jedlicki was hardly an adherent of the notion of teleological progress. He believed that events were open and unpredictable. On the other hand, he was also far away from any pessimistic philosophy of history. He believed that a change for the better was possible, though never guaranteed. Some of the consequences of this way of thinking are evident, I believe, in 'Kompleksy i aspiracje'. Backwardness was a reality and not (as postmodernists believe) merely an element of discursive violence. Jedlicki was not an adherent of postcolonial approaches. He did not consider adopting Western models to be a form of neo-colonial subordination but rather an opportunity for less developed countries. He once joked that "the only thing worse than the exploitation of a human being by a fellow human being is the absence of exploitation of a human being by a fellow human being". He was, of course, mocking the language of communist propaganda, although there was something deeper hidden behind his statement, the same idea that Immanuel Wallerstein had expressed in *The Modern World System*, namely: in a system of global dependencies, even a peripheral region that is dependent upon a more developed centre enjoys some opportunities because a peripheral region that nevertheless forms part

[15] Jedlicki's text in English: Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Europe's Eastern Borderland: An Essay on the History of Flows of Civilization Innovations', *East Central Europe*, xli, 1 (2014), 86–104; Wolff's text: Larry Wolff, 'Cultural Precedence and Reciprocity between Eastern Europe and Western Europe: Some American Reflections on Jerzy Jedlicki's Europe's Eastern Borderland', *ibid*., 105–11.

of a world system has a chance, with a bit of luck, of becoming part of the centre over time (as was the case with Britain), whereas a region excluded from these dependencies is denied even this opportunity. I think that Jedlicki's position was similar in 'Kompleksy i aspiracje', albeit expressed in a rather condensed form. It is a shame that he did not have an opportunity to develop these ideas more fully.

It is necessary to mention the great significance that he attached to the form of his works. He said that a historian's medium is the word, just a sculptor works in marble. Without possessing some literary talent, it would be impossible to be a good historian who gives expression to nuances and fully elaborates his or her position. As far as I am aware, he never presented a full theoretical justification of his belief in the crucial role of literary form in the historian's craft. I think that what he had in mind was primarily the ability to give clear expression to ideas and make it easier for readers to gain an overall impression of the problem being discussed. I once asked him what he most liked about being a historian: was it collecting source materials, reading other studies, or analysing and interpreting materials? He answered instantly: writing. The moment when ideas crystallise, take shape and acquire structure, transforming into the written text.

The co-editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Sidney Lee, once wrote that the most important task of biography is "to transmit a personality". In the case of a personality as powerful as Jedlicki, this seems particularly apt. His books and articles will remain available and can be referred to forever, but the man himself is etched only in the memories of those who knew him. And it is the man rather than the researcher who should be remembered. Jedlicki generated resonance with the way he spoke and his entire manner; not only through what he wrote. His lectures took the form of a dramatic monologue, perhaps even a monodrama, into which he invested all of his talent and emotion. Jedlicki emanated enthusiasm and energy. He never got stuck in a routine, and he approached every issue earnestly. It is sometimes the case that a speaker or author might say or write something because it is good form to do so or because they have thoughtlessly adopted specific phrases or ideas from books that they have read. I would not exactly say that Jedlicki did not tolerate such behaviour, rather – he simply did not understand it. For him, there were no "thoughtless" words, opinions or statements.

During one discussion at the Section of the History of Ideas and the History of the Intelligentsia at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN) in autumn 2018, Prof. Jerzy Borejsza compared the late Jerzy Jedlicki to Franc Fiszer, a legendary figure in interwar Warsaw's cultural and social life. I do not think that Jedlicki would have been offended by the comparison – albeit with the caveat that he was a Franc Fiszer who not only resonated thanks to the way he spoke, but also because he wrote and published texts. At the seminars of the Section for the History of the Intelligentsia at IH PAN, or at the joint departmental seminars with the section led by Prof. Janusz Żarnowski, Jedlicki was a keen participant in discussions and his contributions often transformed entirely the way others viewed the matter being debated. Woe betide any speaker who would bore or talk nonsense (or, even worse, read it from the page). Jedlicki would not say a word; he might sometimes put his head in his hands or snort; eventually, he would get up and take large steps, pacing between the door and windows in the tight space between the seats and the wall behind the backs of those in attendance. He would keep his hands in the pockets of his unbuttoned cardigan, or start eating a sandwich that he had removed from his bag. I could never understand how the unfortunate speaker managed to avoid being vanished into thin air, swallowed up by the ground or spontaneously combusting.

Prof. Ryszarda Czepulis-Rastenis later retired, and Jedlicki became head of the Section for the History of the Intelligentsia. He never aspired to join the ranks of research administration and much preferred being an ordinary scholar. However, he believed that he owed it to his predecessor to complete the projects she had initiated. He reorganised the Section's seminars. He started inviting speakers, and bores stopped appearing. The seminars of the Section for the History of the Intelligentsia became must-see events. The most outstanding figures in the humanities in Poland appeared on Fridays at precisely 10 a.m. in the Kościuszko Room at IH PAN. If the audience was too broad, then the session would be moved to the Lelewel Room. Jedlicki always chaired, maintaining order during discussions, and would interrupt if someone spoke for too long and became annoyed if someone made irrelevant points.

Inspiring both respect and fear among his colleagues, he also managed to introduce – and I am not really sure how, as this seems to be inherently contradictory – entirely democratic structures into

the section, as PhD students and professors could participate in discussions on equal terms and were heard with equal attention. This was something that seemed obvious to me and probably to my colleagues too, so we were highly surprised to discover once we had become 'mature' historians that this was not the norm in academia. This scholarly democratism had two sources, I would say. Firstly, it was a result of his genuine respect for colleagues; secondly, it came from his constant interest in new and different points of view. Jedlicki was regularly filled with doubt, constantly questioning the relevance of the analytical frameworks and concepts that he had adopted. This was why he was keen to listen to others. His doubts and hesitation have been described in an engaging fashion in Marcin Kula's beautiful book, *Jerzy Jedlicki, historyk nietypowy* [Jerzy Jedlicki, an Exceptional Historian]), which I would warmly recommend to readers.[16]

Many historians not affiliated with our Section presented their papers at the seminars: Stanisław Bylina, Jacek Banaszkiewicz, Marcin Kula, Antoni Mączak, Andrzej Nowak and Janusz Tazbir, specialists in various eras and themes. They were invited because Jedlicki believed that historians should not limit themselves to 'their' era. Other speakers included some of the most outstanding representatives of the humanities: Bronisław Baczko, Bohdan Cywiński, Norman Davies, Maria Hirszowicz, Maria Janion, Ryszard Kapuściński, Antonina Kłoskowska, Jacek Kochanowicz, Leszek Kołakowski, Ireneusz Krzemiński, Hanna Świda-Ziemba, Andrzej Walicki, Piotr Wandycz and Alina Witkowska. The best-attended event was a discussion on Jan Tomasz Gross's book from 2000 *Sąsiedzi*.[17] The debate lasted several hours in the Lelewel Room, which was packed to the rafters. Gross, Marek Edelman and many others participated in a discussion, where various opinions were expressed and emotions reached boiling point. Even if this was not the most academically significant seminar in the history of the Section (it is symptomatic that I recall the atmosphere rather than any details of the discussion), it was certainly the most

[16] Marcin Kula, *Jerzy Jedlicki, historyk nietypowy* (Warszawa, 2018). This book is discussed in Joanna Schiller-Walicka's highly recommended review article, 'Jak być (zostać) dobrym historykiem', *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki*, lxiv, 1 (2019), 159–66.

[17] English version: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001).

emotional. It was also socially significant as it played an important role in the widespread public debate on Gross's book.

Jedlicki inspired awe – and not only in me. At the same time, he was – however much what I say might appear to be filled with pathos – an exceptionally good man, even if this was not always immediately obvious. He was kind to people, regularly helped a great many people, doing so with high sensitivity. He was loyal to his friends, whatever problems and difficulties they were facing.

Jerzy Jedlicki believed that it was the duty of the intelligentsia to have an opinion on social issues and express their views publicly. He often stressed his affinity to liberalism, the social variety rather than the extreme laissez-faire form. He considered himself left-wing, and he certainly was in many respects, although his worldview was complicated and it would be difficult to file it under a single category. Jedlicki often stressed, too, that he was keen on the idea of political correctness. At the same time, he had a particular interpretation of the idea. He stated that political correctness simply reflected the principle of behaving decently in public life, thus not offending others. But if this really was the case, then the left would be bound by this principle as much as the right. If offending ethnic and sexual minorities is out of bounds, then so is offending religious feelings. Knowing that he was in the minority in his milieu, Jedlicki argued that the legal protections afforded to religious feelings were necessary, even if there was a danger, of which he was well aware, that these provisions could be abused.

When discussing Jedlicki's worldview, it is worth stressing one more thing. Particularly when engaged in polemics, he could be ironic – sometimes almost cruelly so. He could give the impression that irony was his way of understanding the world. However, this would be to misunderstand his use of irony fundamentally. Such remarks came easily to him, as if unconsciously, yet they always remained on the surface, so to speak. Ultimately, when he spoke and wrote on matters that were important to him, he was idealistic and principled, often moralising and even full of pathos. His irony was in no way cynical or nihilistic. This was evident in his statements on matters of public importance, particularly where social and national questions were addressed, or tolerance and exclusion were the subjects of discussion. As old-fashioned as this might sound, there is no way of avoiding his deep sense of patriotism. In accordance with Polish tradition, he explicitly differentiated patriotism from nationalism. He stressed the

significance of patriotic sentiment to the development of individuals. He believed the left was mistaken in neglecting the significance of patriotism and national feeling. At the same time, he was starkly opposed to nationalism. His involvement in Otwarta Rzeczpospolita (Open Republic – Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia) and his columns in the press are a testament to that commitment. In his scholarly works, Jedlicki never concentrated on Jewish topics, although he did address them on occasion. It was perhaps only after the huge debates surrounding Gross's *Neighbors* that moved him to explore Jewish history more closely. He wrote several texts defending Gross's book, noting that its moral dimension, stemming from its revelation of a hitherto hidden truth, imposed a moral, rather than scholarly, obligation to respond to these aspects of the past. Jedlicki believed that the oversights in Gross's work did not change the overall message of the book, nor did they undermine its moral dimensions. Jedlicki's contributions in the press on this subject contained complex arguments that defied simplistic interpretation. They are worthy of in-depth analysis, something that is not possible in my short text here. I can only offer an indication of how Jedlicki approached the matter. It is worth noting that while Jedlicki was highly critical of Polish anti-Semitism when he was invited to a conference in the USA by his colleague and friend, the US-American historian Robert Blobaum, he decided to present a paper on Polish opposition to anti-Semitism.

Jedlicki's attitude towards religion is likewise worth noting briefly. He was a professed atheist – not an agnostic, but an atheist. In the early 2000s, he was a keen reader of Helena Eilstein's polemics with Leszek Kołakowski's late works. She defended atheist views and Jedlicki regretted that Kołakowski refused to engage in a debate with her. At the same time, Jedlicki was well aware not only of religion's social functions but also of its importance to people of faith. Once he became involved in the anti-communist opposition, he acquired many Catholic acquaintances and friends. He was immensely proud of the Medal of St George that the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* awarded him in 2011. He once embarrassed me by demonstrating his knowledge of Pope John Paul II's social encyclicals. While critical of many aspects of religious life, he was nowhere near being a superficial anti-clericalist.

2009 was the first year since 1946 that he had not gone skiing in winter. He complained of backpain, and in spring 2010 he opted to undergo an operation, believing that he would enable him to

remain mobile. The operation was unfortunately unsuccessful, and he spent the next near-on eight years in growing pain. Throughout this time, he had to take painkillers in ever-increasing doses while their effectiveness grew weaker. He suffered increasingly from their side effects while finding himself in ever-increasing pain. At the same time, his indefatigable energy meant that he refused to give up and he continued to seek out new forms of treatment, never losing faith that he would return to full health and would remain active socially and academically. Around 2015 I still had the impression that he had so many ideas and plans, so much hope, that that there was enough to share among several younger colleagues. He once said that one of the saddest things for him was that he was missing out on his old age. His condition made it impossible for him to realise all of the projects he had postponed putting into writing until his retirement. In autumn 2015, he received Poland's highest scholarly award, the Foundation for Polish Science Prize. His short acceptance speech at the award ceremony proved to be one of his final public appearances.

His condition deteriorated significantly in the second half of 2017. Jerzy Jedlicki died on 31 January 2018.

He was married to Hanna Bocheńska (1923 – 2018). They had no children. His wife made an impression on everyone who met her thanks to her personal charm, sense of humour and outstanding intelligence that she combined with spontaneous kindness. It was impossible not to like her. She lived on without her husband for four weeks before passing away on 26 February 2018.

Jerzy Jedlicki supervised the doctoral theses of Lesław Sadowski, Adam Kożuchowski and myself. He was also co-supervisor of Timothy Snyder's doctoral dissertation. Snyder often stressed the role that Jedlicki played in his intellectual development.

On 4 April 2019, my colleagues from the Section and I organised a memorial seminar for Jerzy Jedlicki to accompany the publication of Marcin Kula's abovementioned book. Prof. Janusz Żarnowski said something along these lines (I am drawing on my notes from the seminar): "Outstanding individuals transcend their surroundings". Jedlicki was, without doubt, one such outstanding individual; he towered above his colleagues. He could well have repeated the words that Piłsudski is said to have uttered to his collaborators: "I see things that you do not". However, such outstanding individuals also have difficulties with those around them – how to maintain fruitful contacts without

creating an impression of arrogance or disdain towards others. Jerzy Jedlicki managed this well. I first met him in 1951, said Żarnowski, although I did not become friends with him, he was not a partner with whom one might communicate freely. These sincere and direct words, coming from an outstanding historian, made an exceptionally powerful impression on me. I wanted to talk to Professor Żarnowski about this in person, but unfortunately, he died four weeks afterwards.

Jedlicki did not complete his life's work. He expressed the regret on many occasions that "more important matters give way to more urgent matters" in reference to the texts that he did not have time to write. This sense of incompleteness was something that many of his acquaintances noted, and Marcin Kula also put into writing. I had a similar impression. But on the other hand, I sometimes wonder if this sense of 'unfulfillment' is not, in fact, an inherent condition of greatness and indeed underlines just how outstanding Jedlicki's completed works are. In order to be able to write profound and considered texts that went further than others' works, he had to think and read a great deal. Indeed, the breadth of the material he read and the depth of his ideas are quite evident in his texts. His colossal effort was not in vain.

Writing in memory of Tadeusz Łepkowski in 1989, Jedlicki remarked that

> conventionally such a text should end with the remark that his death is a significant loss to Polish scholarship. But scholarship is bound to experience such losses, and subsequent generations will ultimately balance out any losses now. His books will remain and they will be supplemented by what he left in his personal papers. So today I am reflecting on what losses he himself endured, what hurt he experienced. […] How bitter that he will not be able to experience the continuation of history, to co-create and see this new Poland and new Europe that will emerge from the current crisis.[18]

I would like to continue this train of thought: of course, Polish scholarship has suffered a great loss as a result of Jerzy Jedlicki's long-standing illness – a condition that made it impossible for him to produce a general summary of his vast knowledge and ideas. But Polish scholarship has above all benefitted from the fact that a figure such

[18] Jerzy Jedlicki [in memory of Tadeusz Łepkowski], *Przegląd Polski*, suplement of *Nowy Dziennik* (New York, 18 Jan. 1990), cited in: Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Historyk gorącego czasu', [Afterword] in Tadeusz Łepkowski, *Polska – narodziny nowoczesnego narodu 1764–1870* (Poznań, 2003), 303–13, here 312.

as Jerzy Jedlicki contributed to it. It is always beneficial for a group to have a member who can constructively question, always with good reason, the guiding principles that shape a group's activities. We can only hope that the benefits that he brought will be put to good use and Polish historiography will make the most of Jerzy Jedlicki's legacy – not only the findings he produced in his research but also the questions that he left open.

trans. Paul Vickers

Maciej Janowski
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2966-0227