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## Pawns in Other People's Games

The concept 'allosemitism' has been coined by the Polish-Jewish literary historian and critic Artur Sandauer<sup>1</sup> to grasp the unique mould in which the Jews have been cast in Polish, but more generally European-Christian, culture. 'Allus' is the Latin word for the other, for a being with an identity different from one's own, and 'allosemitism' refers to the practice of setting the Jews apart – as a category of people radically different from those who think and speak of them; so different, that they cannot be grasped and dealt with in terms normal for ordinary people and need separate concepts to describe and comprehend them, as well as special treatment in all or most forms of social intercourse.

Allosemitism should not be confused with antisemitism (or, more generally, with Judeophobia). Unlike those two more common and *eindeutig* – straightforward, though also shallower (phenomenal rather than phenomenological) – concepts, allosemitism stands for endemically *ambivalent* attitudes and practices. It suggests neither hatred nor love, neither attraction nor repulsion, though it entails a mixture of them all and is capable of generating them all in any imaginable combination. In its inner ambivalence allosemitism is akin to the phenomenon described by Kant under the name of 'sublimity': the perception of an object as simultaneously fascinating and frightening, alluring and revolting, inspiring awe as much as horror. Allosemitism casts the Jews as a phenomenon of many and varied hues and colours, none of which, however, may leave the viewer indifferent and, indeed, unperturbed.

I propose that the ideologies and practices of age-old Judeophobia and modern antisemitism and their protracted and resilient presence in Christian/European socio-cultural setting cannot be properly grasped nor explained unless traced back to the non-ideological, indeed pre-reflexive allosemitic proclivity

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Artur Sandauer: O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku (Rzecz, którą nie ja powinienem był napisać) [On the Plight of the Polish Writers of Jewish Origin in the 20th Century: An Essay Which I Should Not Have Written]. Warsaw 1985.

endemic to that setting. I propose as well that the Judeophobia or antisemitism can be best seen as a product of a *soi disant* chemical reaction between the cognitive frame of allo-Semitism and the behavioural predisposition best described as proteophobia; they are discharged once the allo-Semitic substance is treated with the reagent of proteophobia, that complex sentiment of confusion, insecurity, apprehension, vexation and anger related not to something or someone disquieting just because of their strangeness, but to something or someone that does not fit the structure of the orderly world, does not fall easily into any of the habitual, established and comfortably familiar categories, and thus emits signals which tend to be viewed as contradictory or incoherent and for that reason behaviourally confusing. In other words, proteophobia is targeted against something or someone which blurs, or effaces altogether, the borderlines which ought to be kept watertight – and so undermines the reassuringly monotonous, repetitive and predictable nature of the life-world. If all activity of spacing, ordering and structuring is aimed at making some sequences of events more probable and reducing the probability of others, so that the business of anticipation and choice is made somewhat less risky and nerve-breaking – then the stubborn presence of things or persons resistant to such manipulation uncovers the limit to ordering intentions or hopes, revealing thereby the endemic fragility of order and the feebleness of ordering efforts. ‘The misfits’ become a fissure in the world-order through which the ultimately invincible chaos is, reluctantly and depressingly, sighted. There is – to use again a chemical concept – a genuine ‘elective affinity’ between allo-Semitism and proteophobia, which makes their synthesis highly probable: logical ambiguity and related behavioural ambivalence lay at the foundation of that affinity.

Ambivalence is what all ordering activity swears, sets out, and hopes to eliminate. Ambivalence is the *cause* of all ordering concerns: life-business needs clarity about the context of action and certainty about the choices and their consequences, and it is precisely the absence of that clarity and that certainty which rebounds as ambivalence, triggering an effort to introduce order – that is, to clear the mess: to confine every object and every situation to the category of their own and *only* the category of their own – and so to make the obscure transparent and the confused straightforward. But ambivalence is also, in turn, *the effect* of ordering bustle. The produc-

tion of order has its toxic waste; new ambivalence is the inevitable outcome of the vain and doomed attempt to impose discrete classes upon the non-discrete time/space. Inevitably, all classification must have its leftovers, which sit awkwardly across the sacrosanct divide between the classes. No filing is neat and complete enough to do without cross-references and a thick file of 'miscellany', which poke fun at the serious business of filing; and no garden design, however ingenious, can avoid re-casting some plants as weeds. There is hardly a couple as divorce-proof as that of order and ambivalence. Ambivalence is one enemy without which order cannot live. The outcasts of any society, concludes the great Norwegian ethnographer Fredrik Barth<sup>2</sup> as a result of his studies, are those who 'break the taboo', those who break what cannot be broken if the group at large is to keep its identity. The destruction of such outcasts, whether physical or symbolic, is a *creative act*; their extinction (or, short of extinction, then their expulsion; short of expulsion, their confinement; short of confinement, their branding) is the construction of order.

### Christianity and the birth of allo-Semitism

In the course of its self-definition and boundary-drawing, Christianity marked the Jews as, above all, an oddity: the uncanny, mind-boggling and spine-chilling incongruity that rebelled against the divine order of the universe. Many varieties of logical incoherence – indeed, all unresolved contradictions swept under the carpet in the orderly home of the Christian Church – converged in the image of the Jew, laboriously constructed by Christian thought and practice in the long process of their self-assertion and re-assertion. That casting of the Jews as dis-order incarnate was in no way marginal or accidental; it was quite central to the self-definition and identity of Christianity; without that casting, the legitimating narrative of true faith could not be told; without the perpetual, timeless threat of the Jewish polluting ambiguity, the purity of the Church order could be hardly asserted.

The image of the Jews contained a disconcertingly heterogeneous mixture of two mutually exclusive and arguably very potent epitomes of subversion against the order of things: the

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fredrik Barth: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. Bergen 1969, pp. 30ff.

motifs of parricide and infanticide. On the one hand, Jews were the venerable ancestors of Christianity, who nevertheless refused to step aside, to surrender or to pass away once Christianity was born and took over. On the other hand, the Jews gave birth to Jesus only to reject, denigrate and disown (in the end, to kill) Him. For those two reasons combined, the Jews were guilty of blurring the most vital boundary separating the believers from the non-believers, the true faith from paganism: The Jews were not heathens (there was a sense in which they were more un-pagan-like than the Christians themselves) and yet they were simultaneously more pagan than the 'ordinary' heathens (they rejected Christ *knowingly*). While the other non-Christians around were the ignoramuses waiting to be enlightened, to receive the Good Tidings and sooner or later to be converted into Christians – the Jews were *infidels*, who from the beginning stared the truth in the face and yet refused to admit and embrace it. The ordinary heathens gave meaning to Christian mission and paved the road to Christianity's future; the Jews challenged Christianity's past and clouded its present. One may say that the Jews served as the waste yard onto which all the ambivalence squeezed out of the universe could be dumped, so that the self-identity of the Christian world could be of one block and at peace with itself.

Allo-Semitism, which is thus far endemic to the Western civilization, is the legacy of Christendom. The Christian Church's struggle with the inassimilable (yet indispensable precisely because inassimilable) modality of the Jews bequeathed to the later ages the two factors most crucial to the emergence and self-perpetuation of allo-Semitism. The first factor was the casting of Jews as the embodiment of ambivalence, that is, of disorder; once cast in this mould, Jews could serve as a dumping ground for all new varieties of ambivalence which later times were still to produce. And the second was the *abstract* Jew, the Jew as a concept located in a different discourse than the practical knowledge of 'empirical' Jews, and hence placed at a secure distance from experience and immune to whatever information may be supplied by that experience and whatever emotions may be aroused by daily intercourse. The unbridgeable divide between 'the Jew as such' and 'the Jew next door' was already firmly established when, at the dawn of the modern era, the Jews turned into the next-door neighbours.

The advent of modernity brought many changes to the traditional way of life, but one of the most seminal novelties was the sudden fragility of inherited order, the falling apart of traditions and the new unreliability of once secure habitual patterns of conduct. Once clearly marked boundaries became porous, once unambiguous orientation points started sending controversial and not easily legible signals. Identities turned from birthrights into distant goals and arduous tasks; all solids, as Marx observed, melted and all that used to be sacred was profaned. This earthquake, which shattered the foundations of human existence, coincided with the Jews emerging from the ghettos and donning the dress which made them indistinguishable from those whose identity their distinction once guarded. As Raymond Aron noted, it was tempting and all too easy to put two and two together; or, as Hume would have said, to take *post hoc* for a *propter hoc*. The long established Jewish ambivalence was ready to serve as the lightning rod for the tensions and occasional discharges of new, modern insecurity.

### Modern avatars of allosemitism

Modernity, one may say, refused God credit for the Creation and denied the perfection of His designs and irrevocability of His verdicts. The order of things ceased to be seen as the 'Divine Chain of Being', in which every creature, a milk cow and poisonous snake alike, had its reserved place and meaning. Now, order had to be *built*. And order-building means first and foremost elimination and confusion, annihilation of ambivalence. The advent of modern life transformed 'order' from something given into a task. The Modern Age is the Age of Gardening – the time when society is seen and treated as a garden needing design and cultivation; and as every gardener knows, an integral part of cultivation and the prime concern of the gardener is *weeding* – the protection of plants which fit the design against the voracious appetite and poisonous impact of those which do not. When *society* is turned into a garden, the idea of *unwertes Leben* is bound to occupy as central a place in every blueprint of a better society as the need to fight weeds and parasites is allotted in every good gardening handbook.

Modern practice stands out from other practices for its obsessive preoccupation with ordering, and all ordering is about

neat divisions and clear-cut categories, casting all ambivalence, automatically, as the prime and the most awesome of weeds. Making order is a synonym for the fight against ambiguity. The Jews, already inherited by modernity in their capacity of ambivalence incarnate, were predestined for the role of the eponymous weed – indeed, to become the generic name for and an archetype of all ‘social weediness’. Making modern Europe was synonymic with allo-Semitism veering towards its antisemitic pole.

As I proposed in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, there was no door shut on the way to modernity in which the Jews did not put their fingers. The doors of newly emerging nation-states were most prominent among them. The order which modern Europe built was to be the state-national order, and that involved political powers waging cultural crusades against ethnic minorities, regional customs and local dialects, so that the myth of national self-sameness could be made into the legitimizing formula of political powers. In this Europe of nations, states, and nation-states, the Jews were almost the only category that did not fit, with gypsies as their sole company. Jews were not an ethnic minority in any one of the nation-states but were scattered all over the place. Neither were they the locally residing members of a neighbouring nation. They were the epitome of incongruity – a monster of non-national nation – and so cast a shadow on the fundamental principle of modern European order, namely that nationhood is the essence of human destiny. Hannah Arendt once witnessed Jewish exiles from Germany at their first meeting on the French side of the border. The chairman of the meeting said: ‘we have been exemplary Germans, there is no reason why we could not be exemplary Frenchmen’. No one laughed, Arendt noted.

The sacrosanct borders between the nations were not the only ones across which the Jews awkwardly sat. Class boundaries, so crucial in the modern ordering of social scene, were another. In 1882, Leo Pinsker\* noted: “For the living, the Jew is a dead man; for the natives, an alien and a vagrant; for the poor

\* Editor’s note: Leon Pinsker (1821–1891) was a Jewish physician from Odessa who helped found the proto-Zionist Hovevei Zion movement in reaction to an increasing antisemitism in the 19th century. He became famous for his 1882 publication “*Autoemancipation!*” *Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden* (Autoemancipation! A Warning to His Fellow People from a Russian Jew).

and exploited, a millionaire; for patriots, a man without country; for all classes, a hated rival."<sup>3</sup> In the case of Jews, the mutually inconsistent and jointly incongruous images mixed, without blending, into the most fantastic and mind-boggling combinations, into the very epitome of incoherence. The resulting composite image of the Jew made light of all social, political and cultural distinctions crucial to life-orientation and, indeed, of the idea of the world as essentially an orderly place.

To summarise, modern allo-Semitism was a constant field of the modern ordering flurry. Accordingly, the Jews were the most obvious disposal site for the otherwise disparate class-bound and nation-bound anxieties, the most convenient buckle with which to pin such anxieties, hold them together and harness to the state-initiated ideological mobilization, and the most obvious effigy in which to burn them. The Holocaust was but the most extreme, wanton and unbridled expression of that tendency to burn ambivalence and uncertainty in effigy, one reached by a state bent on a total order of a made-to-measure society (note how only the death of Stalin prevented the Jews from being destroyed Hitler-style in another state bent on total order); it was the extreme which many wished to reach, but not all dared and fewer still had the chance to achieve.

### The Polish case

Where once Central European Jews lived, Jewish gravestones slowly disintegrate for the lack of grieving descendants of the dead. The corpses beneath the gravestones have not been truly put to rest, however – because of the haunted memories of the then witnesses, now survivors.

From time to time, in a desperate yet vain attempt to exorcise the ghost of the murdered neighbours, great hearts repent the guilt of the silent and indifferent ones. Polish poet Jerzy Ficowski\* confesses that repentance will never be final in the haunted land:

<sup>3</sup> Quoted after George L. Mosse: *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*. London 1978, p. 188.

\* Editor's note: Jerzy Ficowski (1924–2006) was a Polish writer, poet, translator and ethnologist from Warsaw. During the Second World War he was active in the underground resistance against German occupation and fought in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

I'd wish to be silent  
But keeping silence, I lie

I'd wish to walk  
But while walking, I trample

Czesław Miłosz\* bemoans the guilt which, even if not earned, cannot be washed out:

What will I tell Him, a New Testament Jew,  
Waiting two millennia for return of Jesus?  
My harrowed body will betray me  
And will count me among the helpers of death:  
The uncircumcised.

The crimes could be individual and private; the guilt is collective and shared. The survivors are guilty – guilty of their survival. This is not a guilt which will be recognized in any human court of justice. But then, moral conscience cannot be exonerated by human courts. In the words of another Pole, Władysław Bartoszewski, the only people who can say that they did everything they could are those who lost their lives.

Though not by any malice aforethought or any execrable crimes of their own, Jews are – cannot but be – guilty in the Polish eyes: being rounded up and transported to the death camps in the full view of their Polish neighbours and then shot and gassed on the Polish soil, they cast everybody around in the loathsome and despicable situation, which those who survived the shame are unlikely ever to forgive. The murder of the Jews forced the Poles into a position with no good moral choice – or at any rate, with no good choice which would not require a heroic posture not usually available to anyone but a few saintly spirits. The aftermath is a typical case of the mental turmoil dubbed by Leon Festinger\*\* as 'cognitive dissonance'. Faced with knowledge that would not conform to

\* Editor's note: Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) was a Polish poet who actively participated in the resistance against the German occupation and is honoured at Yad Vashem as one of the 'Righteous among the Nations'. In 1980 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

\*\* Editor's note: Leon Festinger (1919–1989) was a US social psychologist best known for his theory on cognitive dissonance, mentioned here by Bauman, and his theory on social comparison.



moral conscience, one can only twist it, deny it or force it to sink into oblivion. The choice is between diluting the crime against the Jews in the indiscriminate mass of universal suffering, stifling the whispers of moral conscience by convincing oneself that nothing could be done to prevent or arrest the crime, or denying the criminality of the act altogether by asserting that the Jews had it coming anyway and brought the disaster upon themselves by their past and future vices and misdeeds.

The need of psychological remedy will hardly ever dry up, as no evidence of innocence, however voluminous, is likely to argue away a guilty conscience. The Polish-Jewish scholar Emanuel Ringelblum,\* writing in hiding shortly before his deportation to the death camp in April 1943, left a balanced picture of Polish reactions to the rounding up and mass murder of their Jewish neighbours: "The attitude of the Poles to Jews were not uniform ... Polish fascism, embodied in an excrescent, bestial antisemitism, created conditions unfavourable to saving the Jews massively murdered by German, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Latvian SS-men ... Taking into account special conditions in Poland, we must admit that the acts of Polish intelligentsia, workers or peasants who do hide the Jews are exceptionally noble, loyal to the spirit of tolerance which permeated Polish history".<sup>4</sup> Every Jew who has survived can recite a long list of Poles who helped him, often putting their own life at risk. And every Jewish survivor will never forget those countless unknown enemies whose hatred or greed transformed into an act of heroism what could be, under different circumstances, an expression of the ordinary humans' human impulse. Those who died will never, of course, give us the account of the weeping, joyful or cold eyes that watched their last journey. On the other hand, all such accounts, even if pos-

\* Editor's note: Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944) was a Jewish historian, educator, and publicist who started and ran a secret archive in Warsaw's Jewish Ghetto. The archive was hidden from the Germans by those who worked in it and was eventually found after the war.

<sup>4</sup> Emanuel Ringelblum: *Stosunki Polsko-Żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej* [Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War]. Warsaw 1988, pp. 178 ff. In a thorough, insightful and carefully balanced analysis of the survival and transformation of 'Jewish memory' in contemporary Poland, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka admits a crucial role of the suppressed memory of Holocaust horrors: "The problem here might be that Poles were such close witnesses that they automatically interpret any general questions about the Holocaust as a challenge". See her *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland*. New Brunswick 1989, p. 166.

sible, would not help much. The stubborn fact cannot be wished away: a great nation which for eight hundred years shared the glory and the misery of Polish history has been rounded up, transported to their death and murdered, and their death has not been prevented. This means guilt. One may try to argue that guilt away; rational arguments can be raised that the potential rescuers stood little chance of success – only a huge chance of adding their own lives to the millions that perished. But *rational* arguments have notorious difficulty with the absolution or *moral* guilt – though admittedly, not for the lack of trying. “It is too late; this line will never be washed clean” – wrote Polish writer Andrzej Kuśniewicz.\* And because it will never be washed clean, it is unlikely to be ever pulled out from the dark remote corner of the family wardrobe and aired in public. The suppressed memory of the massive murder poisons the consciousness of the nation who witnessed it; the fact that the nation of silent witnesses did not contribute actively to its perpetration does not make the matter much easier. And because the subconscious knows that the guilt is there and will hardly ever go away, the consciousness rebels and vehemently seeks excuses. If only the victim could be blamed...

This seems to be the secret of the most spectacular thing to survive the Holocaust: antisemitism. It lives now in Poland, so to speak, without its traditional environment: truly, out of its element. It has no new nourishment. No living experience to forage and to fatten on. It is not alive, as a matter of fact. The hatred that outlived its objects is more like a rock. A solid rock, immovable and resistant to the sharpest of cutters. It is made of an indestructible substance of a suppressed guilt. Gravestones remained of the Polish Jews; stony, *fossilized* antisemitism remained after eight hundred years of the joint Polish-Jewish history.

How this joint history is retrospectively read depends on what one wants to find in it. From behind the fossilized hatred, most visible in that history is a long record of Jewish treachery. In filmed interviews with the witnesses of the Kielce pogrom,\*\* two persons remember the hostel run by the

\* Editor's note: Andrzej Kuśniewicz (1904–1993) was a writer, poet, and diplomat. During the war he worked actively in the French Résistance but returned to Poland in 1950.

\*\* Editor's note: On 4 July 1946, in the city of Kielce in southeastern

Jewish Committee in which the homeless remnants of the once lively Jewish community were housed. According to one person, "these people were sad and frightened, somehow out of place, not intending to stay; they did not fit the landscape at all". The other person saw something else: "They were well off, well fed, well provided for. They got food parcels and money from America". The interviewees were asked to speak about the militiamen and thousands ordinary residents of the town who pursued dozens of Jews through the streets and beat them to death; instead, some spoke of the injustices the Jews were guilty of committing: "they, the Jews, boasted: the streets belong to you, but the houses are ours ... No wonder people did not like them ..."

Memory of the millions of men, women and children goaded to their death under German occupation is not the only guilt that needs suppression. Isaac Deutscher pointed to the no less sinister, yet quiet pragmatic reason for renewed post-war antisemitism: "The grave of the Jewish middle class became the cradle of a new Gentile middle class in eastern Europe ... a *lumpenproletariat* which turned overnight into a *lumpenbourgeoisie*. The death certificates of the murdered Jews were their only valid trade license ... The only way in which the new 'middle class' can save not so much its newly acquired wealth but its nerves and a pretence of respectability is by smoking out the surviving Jews".<sup>5</sup> Empty houses, shops and workshops did not stay empty for long. When the few survivors among their past owners emerged from hiding or boarded westward trains from their Russian exile or refuge, they were met with eyes filled with fear and fear-fed hatred, lest they should claim their property, and on this occasion remind the new owners of the moments better to be left forgotten.

Moulding and twisting history to blame the victim was not a particularly difficult task, to be sure. The long Polish-Jewish cohabitation was a variegated and pliable stuff, fit to be shaped

Poland, more than 40 Jews who had survived the war returned to their hometown only to be murdered by the local residents. The name Kielce has thus been deeply burned into Jewish memory and is often used as a synonym for this phenomenon that occurred in the immediate postwar years in parts of Poland. See also Jan Tomasz Gross: *Angst: Antisemitismus nach Auschwitz in Polen*. Berlin 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Deutscher: *The Non-Jewish and Other Essays*. New York 1968, pp. 88f.

by notoriously selective and whimsical historical memory to suit many interpretations and to supply telling, cogent, convincing arguments for almost any thesis. The theses themselves changed over time. One thesis, which was to become dominant in the Polish mind and fully mature during the convoluted history of the century now coming to its close, was that the Jews were an alien, hostile, and poisonous body in Polish national organism, threatening health and the very existence of notoriously besieged and precarious Polish national identity.

This sentiment could have hardly appeared, let alone gained dominance, before the Polish national identity had acquired its modern shape, i.e. turned into a purpose calling for the conscious political administration of social development, cultural crusades, and the forceful transformation of chaotic leftovers of past history into a designed order. As Alina Cała, a most perceptive student of Polish-Jewish shared history, points out, “[t]he idea of a single nation state, and the programmes associated with it of assimilating national and ethnic minorities, was foreign to pre-modern Polish thought. If a nineteenth-century peasant were ever asked if Jews should assimilate or emigrate, he would have been surprised and unable to respond. For him they were part of the unchangeable landscape as God had first created it. A demand to change the existing order would have seemed revolutionary to him” – that is, contrary to God’s will: truly, a prelude to apocalypse. “The Jews with their side-curls and kaftans were part of life as created by God, testimony to the Passion of Christ, something threatening and strange, but necessary and unalterable”. It was modern Polish nationalism, with its programme of cultural homogeneity, with its struggle for a *Polish state* which was to become a *state of the Poles*, that was to deliver a decisive blow to the habitual and natural, God-ordained order of things, “melt the solids and profane the sacred” – and so set the habitual and unreflexively familiar world in turmoil. The unclarity of the new situation and the sudden disappearance of divine sanction was deeply upsetting and frustrating. In the search for new *Eindeutigkeit*, the Jews, with their endemic ambivalence, were predestined to play the role of the ‘alter Ego’, the benchmark for the new Ego identity. “The frustrations caused by participation in these stormy changes were channelled in the direction of totalitarian utopias. One of them was antisemitism ... It is one of the paradoxes of history that antisemitism strengthened the

role of the Jew (or rather his myth) as a determinant of Polish national consciousness. Whole social groups discovered their national allegiance as an offshoot of the feeling of separateness from the Jews".<sup>6</sup>

National identity offered an escape and a shelter against that threatening ambivalence of which the Jews had become now the prime specimen. Russians or Germans, by far the more awesome, potentially disastrous danger by any standard, played second fiddle to the Jews as a negative support of the budding Polish national identity; they were enemies all right – but too *unambiguously* hostile and indisputably alien for the purpose. Only the Jews were truly fit to exemplify in a clearly visible form 'the other' of the national identity; that indiscriminate morass of ethnicities, dialects, customs, ways of life out of which the national unity should have emerged.

The 'new and improved' Jewish ambivalence destined to serve as the focal point of nation-formative processes was itself a product of these processes. A crucial part of the *Kulturkampf* of the rising nation was the achievement of Polish cultural hegemony over the territory of the future nation-state, and thus the cultural conversion of ethnic minorities: this, first and foremost, meant the assimilation of Jews. Yet the assimilatory programme, in Poland as elsewhere, was (had to be) as ambiguous as the cultural map it aimed to homogenize; in its operation more ambivalence was, as a rule, generated than eliminated. Jews who stuck to their traditional ways were singled out as proof of the essential estrangement of Jews as such from the national ambitions of the Poles. The real ogres were, however, the Jews attracted by indubitable splendours of Polish culture, those responding with goodwill and enthusiasm to the invitation to join. It was they who were 'in but not of', all the more 'not of' for trying hard to get 'in'; they became Kafka's *Odradeks* – mongrel creatures of unclassifiable identity, neither strangers nor 'our own', eluding all clear-cut, unambiguous assignment and, by the same token, discrediting in advance the order yet to be installed. The more successful their Polonization was, the more threatening was the resulting ambivalence. They dressed like Poles, behaved like Poles, spoke like Poles, lived like Poles; for all one

<sup>6</sup> Alina Cała: The Question of the Assimilation of the Jews in the Polish Kingdom (1865–1897): An Interpretive Essay. In: Polin 1 (1986), pp. 130–150, here pp. 148f.

knew, they could be easily *mistaken* for Poles. Hence their ambivalence was of the worst possible kind: an ambivalence escaping discovery. Such ambivalence calls for constant vigilance. Vigilance against Jewish duplicity and slyness turned into the major weapon of the border-defence of the Polish nation.

In the age when modern nations were born, the Poles were not only deprived of the political instruments of national self-construction, but were divided between the realms of three foreign dynasties. However hard the core, the peripheries of such a nation must have been diluted and the boundaries unclear. Polish nationalists had to fight off not just the political pretences of hostile and powerful states, but also the cultural claims of rival – strong or weak, but militant and ambitious – nationalisms. Without a state of its own, Polish nationalism could rely only on the power of cultural proselytism. It needed as many allies as it could muster among the culture-creators and culture-distributors. One had to refrain from asking too many questions about the birth certificates of the writers and the artists who treated the magnificence of Polish culture as their sacred cause. The cultural door of the nation-in-search-of-statehood stayed ajar and the newcomers were welcome (the door was to be slammed shut later, but not before real border guards manned real political entries and exits). The nation needed cultural strength to deputize for the political weakness. Whatever the cause, the invitation seemed – and was – unconditional.

It did attract an uncounted number of Jews seeking escape from the ghetto. Polishness meant to them, like to all others within the orbit of Polish cultural influence, the chance to share in a highly attractive culture – but it also meant the liberation from a caste-like (or, rather, outcast) condition. Since, however, the membership in Polish culture was, in the case of refugees from the ghetto, *acquired* and hence not axiomatically legitimate, it was precarious – the Polishness of the Jews was easily distinguished by its exaltation: “an exaggerated care for the excellence of language, pedantic observance of all customs considered distinctly Polish, a cult of Polish literature and art, often a truly fanatical nationalism and chauvinism”. The exaggeration followed (one is almost prompted to say: *logically*) the situation in which the examiners’ attentions never relaxed, test-passing never stopped, and there was no way of guessing whether the performance, however spec-

tacular, would be accepted as satisfactory.<sup>7</sup> However understandable, the Jewish zeal was nevertheless destined to be interpreted sooner or later as a sign of inborn tactlessness, arrogance and pushiness.

And thus, paradoxically, the Polish excellence of the Jews carried the seeds of Polish allo-Semitism; though split into the anti- and philo-Semitic camps, the majority of Poles agreed on the *otherness* of Jews. Whether because of their exceptional cunning or exceptional gifts, the Jews were not quite like the Poles and neither could nor should be treated as Poles.<sup>8</sup> The less there was left of the once highly visible peculiarity of the Jews, which locked them in their caste-like existence without any need of ideological or scientific formula, the more the repulsion had to be theorized and made into the topic of public discourse and political initiative.

In the independent Polish state that came into existence after the First World War, Polish nationalism lost (or, rather, discarded and disowned) its proselytizing zeal. The project of cultural conversion of non-Polish ethnic groups inhabiting the territory of the Polish state went on unabated, now assisted also by administrative manipulation and political coercion – but only in relation to the sections of larger national groupings whose main habitat remained outside the borders of the new Polish state; in other words, groupings who could raise their own reunification claims against Polish territorial possessions. As the Jews could not possibly come forward with such a demand, their declarations of Polishness offered little political profit.

For Polish nationalists, and particularly for the rising Polish national intelligentsia, three million Jews residing inside the Polish state constituted a tangible threat to the Polish domi-

<sup>7</sup> Aleksander Hertz: *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej* [Jews in Polish Culture] Warsaw 1988, pp. 164–166. Hertz remembers a letter received from his friend, decorated with the highest Polish distinction awarded for supreme military gallantry: “I had to be courageous. Did I falter, it would be said that the Jew was a coward”.

<sup>8</sup> A striking example of the allo-Semitic view can be found in the *Diaries* of Witold Gombrowicz, hardly an antisemite: “When I hear from those people that the Jewish nation is like other nations, I feel like listening to Michelangelo insisting that he does not differ from the others”, “These who received the right to superiority have no right to equality”. “[The] History of that nation is a secret provocation, similarly to the biography of all great man – a provocation of the fate, inviting of disasters that can help fulfil the mission of the chosen nation”. See his *Dziennik 1953–1956*. Paris 1957, p. 121.

nation of cultural life: it was in the area of culture, through which the Jews had once been called to enter the Polish nation, that a sizable part of the Jewish minority most spectacularly excelled. The emergent modern culture of Poland was full of converted and non-converted Jews. Coming from urban centres and boasting the best education Poland could offer, they easily assumed the role of cultural umpires whom the native poets and writers, more often than not of rural if not peasant extraction, looked toward for guidance and accolade. Expectedly, the growth of their importance in Polish culture went hand in hand with the increase in the intensity and spread of Polish antisemitism. Hence the “unique phenomenon: the most beloved writers become, as persons, the most hated”.<sup>9</sup> This incongruity profoundly affected both the Jews and their hosts. As the great part of Polish culture was now the product of persons ‘tainted’ with alien and resented origin, culture and intellectualism as such became suspect; the nation did not trust its own artistic and literary culture, and such distrust offered a fertile soil for all sorts of anti-intellectual, obscurantist and retrograde movements for which inter-war Poland gained infamous notoriety. For the Polish cultural creators of Jewish origin, on the other hand, this duality turned out to be an additional asset on top of the usual artistic and philosophic stimuli inherent in the contradictions of the assimilatory process.

To quote Sandauer again: “‘to assimilate’ means to ‘stay, defenceless, under the gaze of the others’ and to accept without murmur the judgmental canons and aesthetic criteria of others. By so doing, the ‘assimilating individual’ must also ‘consent to his own ugliness’”.<sup>10</sup> Jewishness was declared ugly, and

<sup>9</sup> Sandauer: *O sytuacji pisarza* (like in footnote 1), p. 460.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468. Of the interwar life of the Jews assimilated into the Polish culture, Efraim Kaganowski, a Jewish writer from Warsaw, left a few shuddering, perceptive sketches: “Café Ziemiańska, where the avant-garde of the Polish-Jewish congregate. Writers, poets, artists come here – a curious family, that on every opportunity complains of the ‘Jewish gathering’. They are not yet sure of their Polishness and suddenly notice that they are surrounded only by Jews. This is why they feel here so well ‘at home’. ‘It is hopeless in the narrow Jewish streets. But it is also gloomy in the affluent Jewish flats. And only late at night in a large Jewish bourgeois restaurant ... you can meet creatures from another world, whom you have never seen so far in any Jewish place. They come with an expression of people who are lost in their way or of tourists in search of the exotic. One journalist whispers: ‘Do you see that man over there, with that woman? Do you know who they are? They found themselves for the first time in Jewish surround-



so were all the so-called 'Jewish traits'. One could do something (at least in theory) to escape the ugliness of Jewish religion – by conversion – or of Jewish habits or manners of speaking – by self-drill. There was nothing one could do about one's looks – and this heinous and treacherous gift of the genes tended to emerge unscathed, no matter how many buckets full of baptismal water were used. Polish poet Antoni Słonimski, born Christian of an already Christian father, inherited from his ancestors a distinctly Jewish face together with their passionate adoration of Polish culture; the second did not help him against the first. Like the others – the unconverted, those who openly flaunted their Jewish roots and those who tried to hide or deny them – Słonimski had been disqualified as a Jew. The more racist Polish antisemitism turned, the more unambiguously so.

One can resist and renounce antisemitism (in its racist form more than in any other), explaining to others and first of all to oneself that disqualifying people for what they are, rather than for what they are doing, is contrary to the principles of humanity and goes against the grain of values in which the civilized and enlightened world is grounded. Following this line, one can even develop and instil some immunity to antisemitic temptation. With allo-Semitism, though, it is not that easy. It does not lend itself readily to rational argumentation and does not openly contradict humanistic values. Rejecting antisemitism, overtly and internally, as repugnant prejudice, is not a sufficient condition of emancipation from allo-Semitic sentiments. One of the greatest writers and most sober and perceptive of post-war Polish thinkers and a staunch critic of crude antisemitism, Maria Dąbrowska,\* could not help but to note shortly before Polish October of 1956 that in Nieborów (a favourite haunt of the elite of Polish writers), where she met some of the most distinguished representatives of Polish literature, she found herself "in the company of Jews only". She

dings ...' After a while I saw that famous assimilator dancing with his companion among the Jewish crowd. But this Jewish night-life does not intoxicate. On their way back home the night guests do not feel drunk. The Jewish eyes are fearful and vigilant. These men want to be crushed in the crowd so that they can stop feeling how lonely they are". See his *Warszawskie Opowiadania* [Warsaw Stories] Warsaw 1958, pp. 174f.

\* Editor's note: Maria Dąbrowska (1889–1965) was a very well-known Polish writer who fought against human rights violations in Poland already in the interwar period. During the German occupation, she was active in the Polish underground.

admits: “if any free and creative thought rattles anywhere, it is in them” – but adds right away: “This annoys people however: it is as if someone who is not entirely one of us wished to live our lives for us in everything we do – this is, I guess, how also the communist must feel”.<sup>11</sup>

Treated as aliens by the Polish man in the street, Polish-Jewish writers of the inter-war period found their retreat and shelter in the Polish language. Here they felt at home. As the home stood in the midst of a social desert, they lavished on it all their elsewhere unspent emotions. The language benefitted from this, though not the benefactors. Most of the latter perished as Jews, only posthumously upgraded to the rank of the Poles – in recognition of their martyr death rather than their creative life. The few who survived easily recognized in the post-war Poland the all-too-familiar atmosphere of surveillance and vigilant censorship. Now, to be sure, they were not charged with the crime of Jewishness. The accusation was re-phrased and re-worded again and again, to suit the changing circumstances. Sometimes they were resented simply as the carriers of an unspecific ‘alien spirit’. At other times as ‘cosmopolites’, or ‘Zionists’, or ‘Communists’, or ‘Russian helpers’ (when it came to the settling of accounts with the Stalinist episode, the Jewish collaborators, as always, bore the brunt of responsibility which in fact they shared with countless others, Poles beyond suspicion, and were expected to engage in a much louder breast-beating than anyone else; with much less benefit, however, than in the case of anyone else).

Though the pool of assimilating Jews keen to embrace Polish culture never dried up, it had become clear well before the Polish nation-state was created that, for the ever more conspicuously resented Jewish masses, assimilation was not a feasible, realistic prospect. Already towards the end of the nineteenth century alternative ways out of the ghetto began to be sought, debated and tried, and the most popular among them led to the distinctly modern forms of Jewish national identity: the most influential were Jewish nationalism in the shape of several varieties of Zionism and Jewish socialism in the shape of Bund (with its programme of guarding and developing Jewish cultural uniqueness in the context of a humane, socialist Polish state tolerant of human differentiation). This political

<sup>11</sup> Maria Dąbrowska: *Dzienniki Powojenne 1945–1965*, vol. 3. Warsaw 1996, p. 111.

map survived through the twenty-one-year period of Polish independence. During that period relations between the Polish state and its large Jewish minority were tense and fraught with mutual acrimony. Jewish political elites aroused the suspicions of Polish nationalists by siding with other national minorities of the multi-ethnic state in their shared resistance against the monopolistic aspirations of the ethnically Polish political elite (Jewish political leaders, in fact, initiated a sort of 'united front' with the Ukrainians, Belarusians and other non-Poles, hoping to force the government to observe the rights of minorities). On the other hand, however, the rising Polish nationalism and antisemitic sentiments, aided and abetted by the authoritative explanations of persisting economic depression, made it increasingly clear to the Jews that they were unwanted; their right of residence on the land where their ancestors had lived for centuries was now questioned. The last years of Polish independence took place under the auspices of constantly discussed anti-Jewish, Nuremberg-style legislation (never, to be sure, introduced in Poland) and with the Polish foreign minister canvassing European governments to 'solve the Jewish problem' by providing outlets and resources for a massive Jewish emigration from Poland. The Jew most feted by the Polish government was Zhabotynski,\* the leader of the revisionist branch of Zionism, who agreed with the Polish rulers that there was no place for the Jews inside the Polish state and promised cooperation in organising the exodus of the Polish Jews.

No wonder that, by the time the war broke out, many a Pole was sufficiently primed to think or at least not to object to his neighbours saying that 'after the war we would have to erect Hitler a monument'. Jan Tomasz Gross\*\* suggested that even if the Germans punished all assistance to the Jews in Poland much more severely than in any other occupied country, and

\* Editor's note: Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880–1940) was originally from Odessa. He was the founder of the right-wing Revisionist Zionist Movement. In 1936 he supported the idea to have the majority of Polish Jews transferred to Palestine, a plan that was met with resounding resistance by the Jewish communities but was welcomed by parts of the Polish government.

\*\* Editor's note: Jan Tomasz Gross (\*1947) is a Jewish-Polish-American historian and sociologist. As a participant in the March 1968 demonstrations, he spent several months in prison and emigrated to the US in 1969. Early in the 2000s, Gross initiated one of the most far-reaching debates on Polish antisemitism during the Second World War.

even if their threat proved effective in preventing massive resistance to the Holocaust, a large part of the explanation resides in the resentment felt for the Jews by a majority of Poles and the resulting isolation of the Jews. "Brutal persecutions are easiest when aimed at small groups of people isolated from their own society ... The antisemitism widespread during the occupation among Polish society was the reason for which the Germans so brutally and mercilessly murdered the Poles who did help the Jews – and the reason why the Poles find it so difficult to discuss the subject".<sup>12</sup> The 'righteous among the Poles' often felt as isolated and abandoned by their own society as the hunted Jews they saved.

The Germans were not the only invaders of the Polish soil. The eastern lands of Poland, where most of national minorities lived, were occupied in 1939 by the Soviet forces. For the Poles, there was little difference between the two enemies. For the Jews, the difference was one between life and death. Horrified, offended and disgusted, the Poles watched the enthusiasm with which most Jews greeted the Red Army. "Very many Jews" – writes Aleksander Smolar\* in his exemplarily balanced account of the Polish-Jewish antagonism – "greeted the Red Army with enthusiasm, because they did not treat Poland as their Fatherland; they were pushed out of it, as the way to get rid of the Jews became the main topic of public debate ... The Jews, communists and non-communists, educated and half-educated, as trustworthy people, entered the local administration and helped to organize Soviet power. Worse still, they assisted Soviet authorities in their chase of Polish army officers and members of the pre-war Polish administration". This treachery was never to be forgotten, let alone forgiven, by the Poles. Like a textbook example of the self-fulfilling prophecy, the Jews behaved exactly as the Polish antisemites kept saying they would, and this repeated accusation prompted and pushed Jews to behave in this manner. After the war, Smolar points out, the same situation repeated itself. The Jews, "grateful to the USSR for saving their lives, socially isolated, culturally uprooted, aware of the resentment of hostility of

<sup>12</sup> Jan Tomasz Gross: *To jest z ojczyzny mojej ... ale go nie lubię* [He is of my country ... but I don't like him]. In: *Aneks* 41–42 (1986), pp. 32, 24.

\* Editor's note: Aleksander Smolar is a publicist and political scientist who was born in 1940 in Białystok. He was sentenced to prison for his participation in the student demonstrations of March 1968. In 1971 he emigrated to West Europe and returned to Poland in 1989.

their environment but dreaming of equality, fraternity, and of giving a good lesson to the 'forces of reaction', made an excellent material for the new power. Not to mention the committed communists of the old guard, among whom the percentage of Jews was very high".<sup>13</sup>

Transformed by the inherently ambiguous assimilatory pressures into the frightening and hateful symbol of ambivalence and a threat to national existence, the Jews (and *particularly* the assimilating Jews, the Jews eager to embrace Polish culture and Polish nationhood), were forcefully excluded from the membership of Polish national community and faced with choices which could only add credibility to their estrangement and erect new obstacles to mutual understanding. Acceptance conditioned on assimilation proved to be a contradiction in terms. Assimilatory pressures contributed most heavily to the destruction of their own ostensible purpose. On both sides, the drama left a pungent aftertaste which made the 'washing up of dirty linen' all the more difficult.

There are more than enough episodes in Polish-Jewish history which one or the other side would rather not discuss and preferably not remember. Suppressed and never faced in all their unpleasant truth, the memories fester and poison. Debates are inconclusive as they leave unsaid the very things, which made them necessary in the first place. There is more than enough food to nourish the Jewish unhealed though one-sided aggravation against their erstwhile homeland and the bizarre phenomenon of Polish antisemitism without Jews.

### Allosemitism modernised

Jürgen Habermas is on record as defining the end of the war and the discovery of Nazi crimes as the 'turning point' – the moment of great shock and revulsion making antisemitism all but impossible to preach, let alone practice. Whether that verdict applies to the West is a moot question. There is little evidence, though, to support Habermas' sanguinity in East-Central Europe's post-war history. Polish antisemitism emerged from Nazi occupation unscathed – if anything, it was reinforced by the new aggravations added to the list of past grudges and animosities. The Jews emerging from their hid-

<sup>13</sup> Aleksander Smolar: *Tabu i niewinność* [Taboo and Innocence]. In: *Aneks* 41–42 (1986), pp. 97, 119.



1 Group portrait of Polish survivors who are living temporarily in Szczecin before leaving for the west

ings or returning from Soviet exile/shelter had reasons to fear that Polish armed gangs or just their neighbours wary of the Jewish repossession claims would wish to complete the job left unfinished by the Nazis. According to various estimates, between 1000 and 3000 Jews were murdered in Poland in the months following the end of the war. The 'rail action' alone (in which Jews were picked up from the trains bringing exiled Poles from Russia and shot on the spot) resulted in about 200 deaths and was designed and managed by the NSZ ('National Armed Forces'), reputedly the most extreme right-wing sections of the Polish underground. By July 1945, the Central Committee of Polish Jews reported more than 100 people murdered all over Polish territory in just two months – in Przedbórz, Suchedniów, Żerán, Wierzbnik, Zabłudów, Suchowola and Tarnogród. There was a pogrom in August 1945 in Kraków, another in February 1946 in Parczew; anti-Jewish riots were recorded, among other places, in Rzeszów, Lublin, Radom, Miechów, Chrzanów and Częstochowa. Murders were perpetrated without mercy, sparing neither women nor children; some victims, before being murdered, were demeaned and humiliated. Some incidents were particularly heinous – such as when two armed men entered the Szarytek hospital in Lublin and murdered all Jewish patients, or when Jewish children with tuberculous were attacked in the Rabka Sanatorium. Of

all anti-Jewish atrocities, the infamous Kielce pogrom gained greatest notoriety – but well before it occurred, Jews were being murdered in and around Kielce; 13 of them in June 1945 alone.<sup>14</sup> The intensity of violence against the Jews in the months immediately following the retreat of German troops could be blamed on the general atmosphere of lawlessness, the proliferation of armed resistance against new powers considered by the majority of the Poles as a foreign – Soviet – implant, and the widespread coarsening of habits and the lowering of respect for human life only to be expected in the aftermath of a protracted and cruel war and occupation. Most importantly, the violence emanated, to a large extent, from the fresh memory of unresolved issues that accumulated in the years of the Nazi rule – the fear of settling accounts being most prominent among them. The post-war outburst of anti-Jewish violence was gradually suppressed when a degree of order had been imposed, the underground disarmed, and the new powers found their feet. The violence against the residual Jewish population was, however, suppressed and silenced, rather than met point blank and fought in the open. Not having been vented in public, the episode added to the festering wound of conscience and reinforced the mental blocks built of cognitive dissonances. Old accounts had not been settled, but new ones were added to the list, offering new reasons for feared resentment. The chapter of ‘allosemitism’ and its antisemitic effluvia in Polish history had not been closed; on the contrary, new paragraphs – indeed, whole new chapters – only started to be written in earnest.

Two overlapping and intertwined processes made sure that new tasks would be found for the dormant, but never extinct allosemitic sentiments. The first was the intense and radical modernization undertaken by the new communist rulers of Poland (in however mutant or distorted form), thereby tearing up extant social structures and the hierarchies of trust and command, sapping habitual behavioural patterns, undermining the familiar authorities and cognitive frames, setting new challenges, calling for new life strategies and all in all breeding new uncertainties. The tensions normal in all rapidly modernizing populations were, in case of Poland, overlaid with those

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Alina Cała, Helena Datner-Śpiewak (ed.): *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944–1968, Teksty źródłowe* [The History of the Jews in Poland 1944–1968, Primary Sources]. Warsaw 1997, pp. 15–18.

generated by the new vulnerability of Polish national identity. Whatever the human price that all modernization demands, in different circumstances the process could be seen by many as desirable and worth suffering for; as, indeed, the belated fulfilment of the dreams of a country left behind for many years. But the Poles had good reasons to view the managers of modernization as agents of foreign powers – and the satisfaction which might have been prompted by the growing industrial strength of the country or the rising level of education and social services was irredeemably poisoned with the resentment of the constraints imposed on national sovereignty. Indeed, the situation was ambivalent to the utmost. On the one hand, it could be hardly denied that the rapid industrialization, full employment and unheard of chances of social promotion and self-improvement were, so to speak, ‘in the national interest’. On the other, all that was done on foreign behest, under foreign pressure and supervision – and its long-term result was to strengthen the much resented dependency on the ‘big brother’ and future undermining of the economic, military and political aspect of national independence. How to set apart laudable patriotic acts from odious collaboration with the enemy? The Poles actively involved in the ‘re-building’ of their country and inscribing their own life-projects in the process were bound to be haunted by acute cognitive dissonance. They were engaged in doing something they felt they could be proud of, yet simultaneously should be ashamed of doing; something praiseworthy and condemnable at the same time, a task simultaneously attractive and repulsive ...

There was an almost textbook case of *Wahlverwandtschaft* between the Jews – perpetually and endemically ‘in yet not of’, potent and enviable yet at the same time treacherous and repulsive – and that new unresolvable quandary of double standards, in which the wedding of challenges of modernization and national dependency cast Poland under the communist rule. Whatever tensions might have been the outcome of that quandary, they were eminently suited to be vented in allosemantic terms. As moulded by allosemantic sentiments, the Jews – already cast as the ambivalence incarnate – were ‘good for thinking’ (or, rather, good for thinking the unthinkable) and therefore the prime target against which to release the pent-up steam and the prime term with which to articulate the *Angst* that was otherwise ineffable and better to be left heavily disguised or, best of all, totally illegible. One could hardly reject



point-blank the modernizing processes just on account of their unsavoury kinship with the Soviet rule; neither could one in good conscience declare modernization to be an unmitigated evil, whatever the private pains and agonies the overall shake-up may have been causing. One could however burn the ambient fears in effigy, and the Jews fit better than anyone to play the effigy role. They were 'foreigners inside' (Władysław Gomułka's use of the term 'fifth column' was a masterstroke, even if intuitive rather than calculated), they came from outside, settled in, but never stopped being an alien body; they were shrewd and clever like the rest should be but were not; wily and cunning, they easily wormed themselves into the highest echelons of power and influence – and once there, because of their indisputable foreignness, they turned even the ostensibly good, desirable moves into insalubrious and evil deeds. Purifying the 'socialist modernization' of the Jews, one could cleanse it of everything unpalatable while retaining whatever was desirable. One could truly square the circle: make the ambivalence null and void. And along the way one could resolve a multitude of personal grievances – to get rid of the Jews who block the upper reaches of power would clear the way for the long-awaited, but slow-in-coming promotion for so many up-and-coming people, whose hopes were aroused only to be dashed.

The circulation and renewal of elites was always a daunting task for the communist regime. Having politicised all social assignment and all social mobility, the regime overloaded the mechanism of official, state- or party-controlled appointments with the burden which in more diversified social system is divided between a number of alternative itineraries. The pressures to 'make room at the top' tended therefore to be focused directly on political structures and took the form of political demands. Stalin's way out of the problem (later repeated by Mao on no lesser a scale) was periodical (in fact, continuous, with intermittent condensations) purges, which kept in constant motion the upward mobility otherwise likely to fade and grind to a halt. Once massive purges were abandoned (in Khrushchev's and later Brezhnev's Russia), the infamous period of stagnation, coupled with the deepening senility of the ruling elite and managerial cadres, soon followed.

In post-war Poland, the beginnings of the new regime threw the gates to upward mobility wide open to millions who never previously dreamed of any career. But the regime promised to



2 Antizionistische Demonstration in Kielce im März 1968

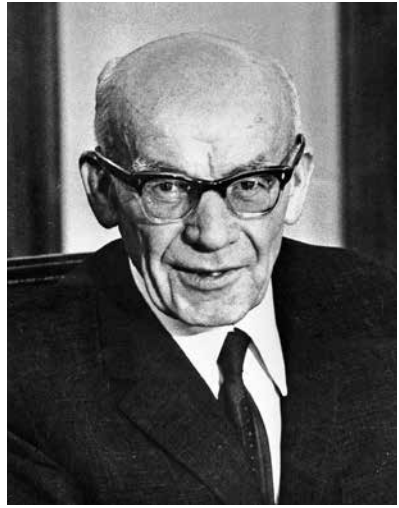
make the universal and unbridled upward mobility a permanent feature of 'socialist society'. This soon proved to be a false promise. Even the lavish and rash, often witless and most of the time economically unsound industrialization, like that undertaken under the communist auspices, could offer only limited room at the top. With expectations let loose, the pressure for purges soon turned into the endemic feature of the system.

Polish post-war industrialization was telescoped into the lifetime of one generation. The inevitable result was that the channels of upward mobility quickly clogged: the widening of the avenues of promotion could not match the pace with which popular expectations grew. Already in the early 1960s the rungs of the social ladder were occupied from top to bottom by individuals of the same or almost the same age category: lieutenants were but ten or less years younger than the generals, and for the subalterns the prospects of quick promotion through the natural process of ageing and retirement became uncomfortably and irritatingly remote. In the party bureaux, in state offices, in the army, the suffocating feeling of overcrowding and claustrophobia became stronger. That feeling was reinforced by the problems encountered by the second, younger generation, now knocking on the doors of the adult world: the newly promoted elite were keen to use their new influence to secure for their sons and daughters access to higher education – inevitably at the expense of those left thus far behind, devoid of power and powerful protectors. Discon-

tent was therefore widespread, and so was impatience and the desire that something radical is done and done fast. Any suggestion that the blockage was the result of alien conspiracy and that it could be repaired overnight just by rounding up and chasing away the conspirators was welcome news – bound to find many willing ears. When Gomułka promised to get rid of the ‘Zionists’, who wriggled into the position of power and clogged the universities with their sons and daughters, the hall responded in one voice: “today, not tomorrow!” (“jeszcze dziś!”).

Those impatient, exasperated and itching for immediate and radical reshuffling in the corridors of power were the natural constituency of the ‘Moczar faction’\* operating from the network of state security offices. The faction appealed to that constituency with much better awareness of what they were doing than Gomułka, when following the scenario they suggested. There is ample evidence that the Ministry of Security fed to the party leadership evaluations of the ‘popular mood’ calculated to force Gomułka’s hand and, while playing the ‘Zionist’ card, engaged in the total overhaul of the party hierarchy. For instance, the authors of the *Information* sent by the Ministry to the Party Central Committee on 13 March 1968 pointed out that “in the working-class as well as among the intelligentsia anxiety is expressed that correct reaction of the party and state authorities should not limit itself to the margins, as it happened in the aftermath of the Israeli aggression”. The document collated a few days later, on 21 March, after Gomułka’s televised speech, was even more outspoken and also full of but thinly veiled threats:

“The working class expected that comrade Gomułka in his speech would take a more determined attitude toward de-



3 Władysław Gomułka

\* Editor’s note: Mieczysław Moczar (1913–1986) was a communist politician and leader of the so-called ‘Partisans Faction’, whose members had all been active in the communist underground during the Second World War. They stood in opposition to the so-called ‘Moscow Faction’ – functionaries of the regime who had spent the war in the Soviet Union. Among their members were many Polish Jews. The fight of the Partisans Faction against the ‘Moscovites’ increasingly adopted antisemitic overtones in the 1960s. Moczar was also one of the main initiators behind the antisemitic campaign of 1968.

mands of society to purge the ranks of the party and the state organs of Zionist elements [...]. There are many voices that say the speech was 'too liberal and too unspecific' [...]. [According to teachers from Olsztyn] the speech reassured only the Jews, while irritating the Poles [...]. [In the technical intelligentsia circles dominates the opinion] that the speech did not bring the results expected, that Zionists must be removed from the Party and Government [...]. [University people in Poznań] express the view that comrade Gomułka tackled the Zionist question by halves, despite the fact that he enjoys in this area the full support of Polish society [...]. [In factories and offices in Poznań] voices are heard that the First Secretary of the Central Committee intends to carry out a conciliatory policy towards the Zionist elements."

Lower down in the political hierarchy, the sentiments needed no disguise and did not hide behind diplomatic phrases. Beata Dąbrowska, one of the many Polish students arrested and interrogated by the secret police in connection with the March 1968 events, heard the interrogating officers expressing their viciously antisemitic feelings freely and leaving no doubt why they felt that way. One of the officers explained to Dąbrowska: "We Poles must now call the tune, since as long as the Jews occupy all positions, the Poles cannot rise in the world. For example, it may transpire that there is no job for you in the University".<sup>15</sup>

The diverting of pressures arising from the urge of generational change at the uppermost and intermediate ranks of power and influence into the orthodox allosemantic channels (in which the Jews were simultaneously omnipotent and contemptible) had an added advantage of glossing over the inner faults and incongruities of the regime itself; the cause of the trouble was 'in but out' – a cancerous growth in an essentially healthy body.

And such a gloss was timely, since in the 1960s the communist regime in Poland suffered an acute crisis of legitimacy. Of the three types of political legitimacy listed by Max Weber, two (the traditional and the legal-rational) were from the start out of bounds: the communist regime, as all modernizing powers, declared an open war on tradition – and having been

<sup>15</sup> Quoted after Grzegorz Sołtysiak, Józef Stępień (eds.): *Marzec 1968, Między tragedią a podłością* [March 1968: Between Tragedy and Baseness]. Warsaw 1998, pp. 227, 251–253, 363.

installed on Polish soil by the alien army, it could not count on the popular acceptance of its legal continuity with the former Polish state. In addition, the numerous shortcomings of the planned economy were much too evident and tangible for the arguments of rationality to sound convincing. The third, charismatic legitimation, obtained and enjoyed by Gomułka briefly after his show of resistance to the progressive Sovietisation of the country, was – like charismatic legitimacy not invigorated by successive shows of strength – fast fading and in the late 1960s virtually non-existent. Reverting to the ‘purge of the Jews’ one could, obliquely, by proxy, and without the risk of arousing the vigilance of the Eastern neighbour, flirt with yet another legitimation, absent from Weber’s list: the nationalist one. Once the sanitation of the ailing communist system was re-presented as essentially ‘the problem of Jews’, it could be sold to the country, indirectly, as the ‘Polonization’ of the regime; political capital contained in the suppressed national aspirations could be (or, at least, so it was hoped) recovered and put to the use of communist powers.

All in all, had the Jews not already been pre-cast in the existing allosemitic moulds, these would have needed to be invented ... As it happened, there was no need to invent them – only to re-allocate them to new uses.

There seems to be a long, perhaps endless list of uses to which allosemitic sentiments can be put. March 1968 demonstrated but one of them. Long as the list is, March 1968 came nowhere near its end. In present-day non-communist Poland, allosemitism is, so to speak, alive and kicking, kept in good shape and daily rejuvenated by the ever new services it might render in channelling away and temporarily mitigating the tensions arising from the new, ever more profuse and ever more daunting uncertainties. The challenges of facing global markets and cut-throat competition will see to it that the need for new services will never dry up – not soon, at any rate.

*Redaktion: Dona Geyer*

BILDNACHWEIS

Abb. 1 United States  
Holocaust Memorial  
Museum/David Rynecki  
Abb. 2 PAP/Włodzimierz  
Wawrzynkiewicz  
Abb. 3 CTK/PAP