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STATE POLITICS AND LOCAL CELEBRATIONS. COMMEMORATIONS OF KRAKÓW’S JEWISH PAST

INTRODUCTION

Two important anniversaries related to the history of Jewish citizens of Poland were celebrated in Kraków in March 2018. The 75th anniversary of the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto, which is an important date in the calendar of Kraków commemorations, and the 50th anniversary of the events of March 1968¹. The former had a local character, while the latter was country-wide, with the main ceremonies taking place in Warsaw. Not even two months beforehand, the Polish government had disclosed the text of The Amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance², which stirred a heated debate both in Poland and abroad. The document, better known as the “Holocaust law”, among other things penalised ascribing to Poland and the Polish nation “responsibility or co-responsibility” for the crimes of the Third Reich. One of the chief arguments of the law’s authors was that the use of the term “Polish death camps” is historically false and should be prevented. This article does not aim to analyse the merit and legal aspects of the document (see: Baranowska, Gliszczyńska-Grabias 2018); instead, it is dedicated to the way in which the public debate was reflected in local ceremonies. This text is based on ongoing ethnographic research dedicated to commemoration of Jewish past in Kraków which seeks to understand in-depth and bottom-up perspective of city inhabitants on local history and memory³.

¹ March ’68 is an important date in the recent history of Poland, which is connected with both the political crisis initiated by student strikes and the anti-Semitic campaign, which resulted, among others, in the forced emigration of several thousand Polish Jews. The article focuses attention on those celebrations which raise the subject of events concerning Jewish communities in the context of the policy of the government of the People’s Republic of Poland at that time.

² The Amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance <http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/DU/2018/369/1> (in Polish) accessed 04.12.2019.

³ This work is part of the HERILIGION project (*The Heritagization of Religion and the Sacralization of Heritage in Contemporary Europe*) within the HERA program *Uses of the Past* (2016–2019). This project is financially supported by the HERA, NCN, AHRC, FCT, DASTI, NOW. The project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 649307. The project’s Polish section is based at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of History, Jagiellonian University. The article is based on fieldwork conducted by the author in the first quarter of 2018 and included notes from participant observations and transcriptions of records

Due to the fact that the commemorations are a shared topic between the two fields of critical heritage studies and memory studies, and that both approaches are interested in political aspects, it is apparent that this framework allows one to outline the relations between the official discourse and the course of specific events.

The debate concerning the amendment and the commemorations are part of the broader context of Polish-Jewish relations and contemporary interpretations of the common past. According to Dacia Viejo-Rose, “studying how traumatic events are publicly remembered has become just such a focus because it brings to light the ethical and political, the uses and abuses, of both social memory and heritage” (2015, p. 6). The main aim of this article is to consider how the debate associated with the amended act impacted the speeches and discussions related to the Kraków anniversaries. The question of how official politics influences the activities and attitudes of various groups taking part in commemorations is a question about interpretations of the past. It is also worthwhile taking a closer look at the model of the nation presented in this discussion: does it have an egalitarian character and how do the processes of inclusion and exclusion of minority groups within it proceed? Bringing individual and emotional attitudes to “memory” and “heritage” to the centre of attention shows the personal dimension of counter-narratives and the ways of contesting the prevailing images of the past.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATE ON THE AMENDED ACT

The draft of the amended act was adopted on January 26, 2018, by the Polish national parliament. The media debate quickly gained strength and voices of critique and protest, mostly from Israeli politicians, were heard a day later. These voices included the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, the prime minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, and Institute Yad Vashem⁴. On January 27, the celebration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the 73rd anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz took place. During the celebrations, the Ambassador of Israel in Poland, Anna Azari, made a statement in which she indicated that the provisions of the act can be viewed as penalising some testimonies of Holocaust survivors, and called on the Polish parliament to reject the draft and seek a compromise. She emphasised that there is no doubt about “who built Auschwitz and other death camps, but [the act] can be seen as stopping people from telling the truth about the Shoah”⁵. It is not

made during the 75th anniversary of the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto and meetings related to the 50th anniversary of March '68 events in Kraków. Additionally, information from informal interviews and conversations (about thirty), which the author conducted with the participants of these events during or shortly after, was used.

⁴ See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/27/it-could-soon-be-a-crime-to-blame-poland-for-nazi-atrocities-and-israel-is-appalled/> accessed 04.12.2019; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/27/israel-criticises-poland-over-draft-holocaust-legislation> accessed 04.12.2019.

⁵ Recorded and available at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/73rd-anniversary-of-the-liberation-of-the-german-nazi-auschwitz-camp,1294.html> accessed 04.12.2019.

hard to see how the short interval between the day the draft was made public and International Holocaust Remembrance Day impacted the way it was criticised. In her speech Azari emphasised that the topic stirs heated emotions. This much is important because the emotional dimension on both sides of the debate not only dominated the debate itself, but also the commemorations of the anniversaries. Likewise, a vivid reaction to the amended act also occurred in Poland. Polish Jewish communities (see: Open statement of Polish Jewish organizations to the public opinion⁶) and scholars (the Polish Center for Holocaust Research the 2016 statement criticizing the document and confirmed its relevance⁷) protested against the new regulations. Many well-known figures from the Polish world of politics, science, and culture, including some from Kraków, also supported the criticism of the act (Appeal concerning the Amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance⁸).

Did the amended act and the debates shape the perception in society of Jewish and Polish pasts and, if so, in what ways? How did the officially promoted vision of history affect contemporary Polish-Jewish relations? The right-wing party Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*), ruling in Poland since 2015, consider historical policy as one of the key elements of its political programme (compare: Kridle 2018). Nowadays, the historical policy⁹ of the Polish government is based on, among others, the heroization of the past of Polish citizens, which could be seen, for example, in the exposé of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki that was delivered to the Polish state Parliament on December 12, 2017. He emphasised that:

Strengthening our identity, our great national heritage, is a commitment towards those who built our Republic through their work and blood through the centuries (...) The world should learn more about our contribution to the fight for freedom and justice. Our fight for the most important values of the Western civilisation. The history of opposing the evil¹⁰.

The prime minister proclaimed that he would fight for the memory of Polish heroes, “people, who – faced with dramatic events – displayed their unwavering spirit, courage and bravery”; he primarily mentioned “hundreds of thousands of Poles who rescued Jews during the second Apocalypse”¹¹. In the official government narrative

⁶ See: <http://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/2018/02/open-statement-of-polish-jewish-organizations-to-the-public-opinion/> accessed 04.12.2019.

⁷ See: <https://www.holocaustresearch.pl/index.php?mod=news&show=348&lang=en> accessed 04.12.2019.

⁸ See: <http://citizensobservatory.pl/ustawa/public-appeal-of-polish-intellectuals-to-reconsider-the-law/> accessed 04.12.2019.

⁹ “Historical policy” understood as state’s influence on shaping the narrations about the past, for example historical writing, museums’ exhibitions, commemorations.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.premier.gov.pl/en/policy-statement-by-prime-minister-mateusz-morawiecki-stenographic-record.html> accessed 04.12.2019.

¹¹ Ibidem. The overestimated number of Poles saving Jews was commented by Holocaust researchers in Poland, see e.g. a statement by Barbara Engelking: <https://oko.press/cukierkowa-opowiesc-morawieckiego-o-historii-polski-takiego-narodu-jeszcze-bylo/> accessed 04.12.2019.

there is no space for recognition of the involvement of members of Polish society in murdering Jews during and after World War II, despite historical research (see e.g.: Engelking, Grabowski eds. 2018a, 2018b). Let us recall the reflections of Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, who on the basis of her research on collective memory conducted among others in Poland, wrote:

In societies where the “national honor” has greater symbolic potency, and where self-criticism might not be a common or valued practice, we would expect the challenge represented by historical grievances not to be as amenable to accommodation, if at all (2009, p. 80).

A split in the thinking about the Polish Jewish and (non-Jewish) victims of World War II is recognizable in the public debate and it is currently partly related to the dominant vision of national identity that is based on ethnonationalism (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019, the same issue). The polarisation between different images of the past that has been observed in recent years is reflected in a report by the Center of Research on Prejudice that was requested by the Commissioner of Human Rights and released in March 2018. It examined utterances on the internet from the period immediately before and after the document was published. The authors noticed that the key and repeated element of the discourse was the “defence of the good name of Poland”, as was apparent in the opposition towards the usage of the phrase “Polish death/concentration camps”. In the discussions one could recognize numerous references to “the truth” and “historical facts”, which, according to the supporters of the act, established the status of Poland as a victim of World War II and emphasised the heroic stance of the Polish community, especially the Righteous Among the Nations. Another repeating element indicated in the report is a “bidding of wrongs”, also referred to as a “competition in suffering”. It is difficult to determine what real impact the amended act has had on the perception of Polish-Jewish past and the attitudes of Polish society; however, it is worth mentioning that when the authors of the report examined antisemitic comments on the internet, they indicated that, as compared to other surveys, the debate did not increase the amount of antisemitism in society, but caused it to become more clearly visible (Babińska et al. eds. 2018, p. 34). As will be shown later in the article, these antisemitic comments had a disruptive effect on the celebration of Kraków’s anniversaries.

Nowadays, in Poland, Polish-Jewish relations are dominated by the Righteous Among the Nations’ discourse (see: e.g. Żukowski 2018, Ambrosiewicz-Jacobs 2017). In the last few years this issue has come back in various ways: for example, in the form of The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II, opened in 2016 in Markowa, or the establishment in March 2018 of the National Day of Commemoration of Poles saving Jews during German occupation. At the same time, scientific works are being published which shed light on violence towards Jews by members of Polish society, both during the occupation and immediately after World War II. This can give the impression that these are not coexisting but competing narratives. As Jolanta Ambrosiewicz-Jacobs wrote, Poland is perceived in Polish public discourse

as a country that was a witness of the Holocaust and a victim of World War II; therefore, its participation in the crimes is being partly forgotten in collective memory (2017, p. 24) and in the public debates the postmemory of the Second World War and the postmemory of the Holocaust compete with each other for attention (2017, p. 31). The tendency of the current government to depict the stance of Polish society as purely positive and to treat all occurrences of violence as marginal is opposed by both the Jewish and the academic communities. Bringing up the Righteous Among the Nations in official narratives as the group which represented the stance of Polish society at large during World War II is divisive; it marginalizes the lived experience of the Jews who suffered violence from Poles and, we should add, robs the Righteous of their exceptional status at the same time. As Joanna Tokarska Bakir observes, “Jews who were saved during the war, were saved by individual effort undertaken against the society which is now proud of it” (2012, p. 49).

Geneviève Zubrzycki wrote about the conflicts surrounding the Polish-Jewish past: “we should not allow moral wrongs, on a large as well as a small scale, to go publicly unnoticed. When not confronted, discussed if not acted upon, the wounds do not heal, just deepen” (2017, p. 78). The way the official discourse on the past in Poland is shaped carries a risk for various counter-narratives. Some narratives which consider the involvement of Polish citizens in violence against Jews are undermined, marginalized, and in extreme cases considered as an expression of antipolonism¹². So it should be no surprise that academics’ voices of concern were raised in the context of the amended act. The worry was that the act would threaten both the testimonies of the Shoah and the freedom of scientific inquiry whenever the claims they might contain are found to be contrary to the official historical policy. Nevertheless, not only scholars’ research is at stake here as such tensions around the interpretation of the past most of all affect the members of Jewish communities in Poland. We should emphasize that scientific research is of great importance for World War II’s victims, their families, and members of the Jewish community in general (as a group burdened with the memory of the Shoah). For them, the possibility of extensive academic research into past events which affected their community (or them personally) seems crucial. Likewise in Kraków, the perspectives on World War II, on the occupation, on the history of the ghetto, and the experience of the Holocaust are often shaped by family memory. It is worth recalling that narratives on the past are one of the elements of the construction of identity, both for the dominant group and for minority groups. In this context, Jewish identity might be seen as being threatened. Therefore, one should not be surprised with the Jewish community’s keen interest in the consequences of the act and with the strong opposition towards it. The feeling of unease caused by the public debate was also a part of the atmosphere of commemorations held in Kraków in March 2018.

¹² It is worth pointing out an article by Jan Woleński who indicates that perceiving of antisemitism and antipolonism in terms of symmetry is misperception, see: <http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/jan-wolenski-symetryzm-polsko-zydowski-antypolonizm/> accessed 04.12.2019.

KRAKÓW – A PLACE OF REAL DIALOGUE?

For a number of reasons, Kraków remains one of the central places for Jewish heritage in contemporary Poland. Kazimierz, the local Jewish district which has existed since the 14th century, became one of the most attractive districts of the city after the dynamic changes of the 1990s (see: Murzyn 2006). The well-preserved architecture constitutes a reminder of the presence of a Jewish community in the city before World War II. The synagogues in the Kazimierz district of Kraków perform a variety of functions: they are places of religious rituals, museums, and places of commemorations and social gatherings. Here in Kazimierz, the active Jewish Religious Community (*Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska w Krakowie*) has its headquarters. Since 2008 people of Jewish origin have been brought together by The Jewish Community Centre (JCC, *Centrum Społeczności Żydowskiej w Krakowie*). Numerous initiatives devoted to Jewish history and culture are joint efforts of both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, which makes Kazimierz a rare space of dialogue between members of Jewish communities and other residents of the city. As Erica Lehrer wrote about Kazimierz,

The result is an evolving Polish-Jewish heritage site, a “conciliatory” space that works against more conflictive notions of Poland’s Jewish heritage – dominant in both Jewish and Polish society – that pit Jewishness and Polishness against one another (2013, p. 15).

One of the oldest and biggest Festivals of Jewish Culture (*Festiwal Kultury Żydowskiej*) has taken place here every year since 1988. It is organized by non-Jews but with the cooperation with Jews from Kraków and from all over the world. The division into Jewish and non-Jewish initiatives is difficult to outline and the boundaries are often blurred. Jewish organizations like JCC and the Jewish Socio-Cultural Association (*Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce oddział Kraków*) organize open meetings dedicated to all residents of Kraków. On the other hand, The JCC and Galicia Jewish Museum (*Żydowskie Muzeum Galicja*), which were established by and is run by non-Jews, often gather members of the Jewish community.

This network of various Jewish and non-Jewish initiatives which I observe in fieldwork seems to create a space for face-to-face Polish-Jewish relations. Among the numerous activities, some are dedicated to difficult topics related to the past and commemoration of victims of the Holocaust. Kraków is a place where Shoah memories are especially important and embodied in space. For many visitors from around the world, the geographical vicinity of Auschwitz–Birkenau, a globally recognized symbol of the Holocaust, is a significant reason for a trip. For others it may be the Kraków ghetto, popularised by Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993), at times mistakenly assumed to be located in Kazimierz. Some people are sure to visit Oskar Schindler’s Enamel Factory (*Fabryka Emalia Oskara Schindlera*), a branch of the Museum of Kraków. Above all, however, Kraków remains a place where members of the Jewish communities are also residents of the city who along with non-Jews actively participate in commemoration and shape local heritage. There are some spaces within the city that are directly connected to the Holocaust: these are situated on the grounds of

the former Kraków ghetto, which functioned between March 1941 and March 1943 in Podgórze, as well as in KL Plaszow, where the former inhabitants were moved after the liquidation of the ghetto. In 1944 the latter was transformed into a concentration camp (Konzentrationslager der Waffen SS Krakau–Plaszow) and operated until January 1945. Both places are the subjects of various commemorative practices; they contain plaques and signs – the results of institutional and private initiatives. Aside from that, they are filled with places with “hidden histories” that are not commemorated in any way and are unknown to laymen. One of the most important events dedicated to the remembrance of the Kraków ghetto and KL Plaszow’s victims is the annual March of Remembrance. It starts at Concord Square (*Plac Zgody*, nowadays known as The Ghetto Heroes Square – *Plac Bohaterów Getta*) and ends in the place where the concentration camp used to be. This is the same route that Kraków Jews were forced to walk to the camp. Amongst other initiatives worth mentioning, the Museum of Kraków is currently working on opening another branch on the ground of the former concentration camp. This would constitute an additional stop on the so-called Path of Memory, which includes Schindler’s Factory, the Under the Eagle Pharmacy (*Apteka Pod Orłem*) and the former Gestapo headquarters at Pomorska Street (*Pomorska*).

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIQUIDATION OF THE KRAKÓW GHETTO¹³

“In heritage it is through place (...) that the past is made present” (Macdonald 2013, p. 94). This remark suits the commemorations on the Ghetto Heroes Square perfectly. It was in this place that the Jews were gathered before being deported to concentration camps. The March of Remembrance has been held since the 1980s; it first started as a local initiative and later achieved a more institutional level. Today it is a joint venture under the patronage of the Jewish Community in Kraków, the Jewish Culture Festival and the city authorities. Also, the Polish Society of Righteous Among the Nations, JCC, the Israeli embassy in Poland, representatives of the Catholic Church and many others are involved in the commemoration. The March of Remembrance is an important annual event which has permanently inscribed itself in the calendar of Kraków celebrations. In 2018, during the 75th anniversary, the official speeches concerned the local, national, and universal meanings given to the Shoah. One conviction was repeated time and time again in nearly all of the statements: the memory of the Holocaust could help to prevent similar tragedies from happening again, and the past should be a lesson for the present. For example, cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz spoke about common values, saying that “The March of Remembrance is

¹³ In the further part of the text, unless otherwise stated, all statements come from the author’s recordings, transcriptions and field notes as well as from short interviews and conversations with people participating in the 75th anniversary of the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto and meetings devoted to March ’68.

a positive message about hatred, about the manipulation of history and emotions, that we are sending to the world. We are trying to show that the one thing that matters is respect for the fellow man”.

On the one hand, the march is an expression of remembrance about the Holocaust victims – a manifestation of the statement “We remember”. As one of the speakers declared, taking part in the march is a “testimony to the presence” of the past. On the other hand, the march is proof of the still “Being here” of the Jewish community, and of the people for whom Jewish heritage is precious. This dualism found expression in the speech of the director of the Jewish Culture Festival, Janusz Makuch: “We remember the death, but we celebrate life”. It was also emphasised that witnesses of the Holocaust are passing away and it is therefore the responsibility of the young to transmit the knowledge and memory of Shoah.

Scholars have been highlighting the importance of phenomena related to the memory since the 1990s. The observation that we are living in times of increased – occasionally obsessive – activity in this area (Macdonald 2013) might be proved by the number of official, local, and private initiatives commemorating the past events, places, and figures. Commemorations are key elements of processes that shape heritage and indicate what a given group (national or other) sees as its heritage. “Memory and heritage in practice are both partial, subjective, contested, political, subject to particular historical contexts and conditions, and thus dynamically changing – never fixed and static” (Sather-Wagstaff 2015, p. 191). In the context of the march, the annual celebrations confirm the meaning given to past events and set the role they are to play for future generations. They are also part of the social and political context – and are shaped by it.

During the 75th anniversary, Jakub Kolarski (a proxy of the Polish President Andrzej Duda), as he was paying respect to the victims of the liquidation of the ghetto, emphasized that he was officially representing the government. In his speech, he declared that the lesson to be learned from the tragic events of the past should be an inspiration for Poland as a country with “no place for antisemitism and no place for hatred”. Certain key elements of the public debate on the act were also present in the speech. For instance, Kolarski stressed that KL Płaszów was a “German death camp” and reminded the audience about the history of *Żegota*¹⁴ and its Kraków branch, created in 1943. Kolarski made clear that Poles who saved and helped Jewish citizens of Poland are national heroes. “I am here today to show that it is this stance that the free, sovereign Poland wishes to represent”. The direct appeal to the debates surrounding the amended act was most apparent in the emotional speech of Tadeusz Jakubowicz, the chief of the Jewish Religious Community. As a child he himself experienced the Kraków ghetto and walked from Plac Zgody to the camp in Płaszów in 1943; thus, in

¹⁴ The Council to Aid Jews *Żegota* – an underground Polish humanitarian organization which operated during the World War II, and undertook activities to help Jewish inhabitants of the country. It was part of the Polish Underground State established on December 4, 1942. About Kraków’s branch of the organization, see Chwalba 2016, pp. 147–162.

addition to his public role, he is a witness of history as well. He pointed out that he had always been apolitical and condemned the usage of the term “Polish death camps” as hurtful for the Polish nation. At the same time, Jakubowicz criticised the new law as “disastrous”. He commented on other aspects of contemporary political situations in Poland which he assessed as enabling “reactivation of fascist organizations”. He also mentioned the growing unease and anxiety of the Jewish community as a result of the media debates and the unearthed antisemitism. In this context, Jakubowicz appreciated the presence of the people who gathered at the March of Remembrance as an act of solidarity. He also discussed the need for mutual respect and said he was proud how this commemoration looked like and mentioned that the fact that so many people [also non-Jews] were there made them [Jews] feel secure. Kolarski and Jakubowicz’s speeches had a conciliatory tone, but each of them included references to the current policy. The statements presenting divergent approaches reflected the tensions between the official historical policy and the perspective of members of Jewish communities in Poland. A multiplicity of perspectives was apparent during the 2018 commemorations. Representatives of the Jewish community, of the government, and of local agencies related to Jewish culture were present. It is also worth mentioning that the political and media debate caused many people to take part in the March of Remembrance – people who would not have done so otherwise. They wanted to express their solidarity with Jewish communities in Poland and their disapproval for the rhetoric of the debate surrounding the new law.

COMMEMORATIONS OF MARCH '68

The second anniversary discussed in this article is the anniversary of March 1968, which had national importance and happened at the same time as the commemoration of the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto. The term “March '68” indicates a complex of political and social phenomena which peaked in March 1968 as a result of the political crisis in the Polish People’s Republic. One element included student protests against government policy (including the intensification of repression and censorship). At that time, antisemitic propaganda (so-called anti-Zionism) associated with the process of the ethno-nationalisation of the communism model in Poland, the power struggle in the structures of the Polish United Workers’ Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*) and the reaction to the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, became a political tool used by the state authorities. The persecution involved, among other things, an antisemitic campaign in the media and the firing of employees. The result of these actions was the forced emigration of citizens of Jewish origin and their families from the country. Between 1968 and 1971, the reported number was about 13,000 (Stola 2000). As Krystyna Kersten wrote: twenty years after the events of March 1968 “anniversaries provoke us to think in the categories of the long term” (Kersten 1992, p. 143). The relevance of those words is apparent in the context of the events described here.

On the one hand, the celebration of the anniversary can be used as a pretext for deeper reflection on past events, and, on the other, to create comparisons between the past and the present. For example, the main anniversary celebrations in 2018 in Warsaw, promoted by the media, were shadowed by political conflicts and debates. They were divided into those happening at Warsaw University, with the prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki in attendance, and those on Warszawa Gdańska¹⁵ railway station in Warsaw organised by the Shalom Foundation. During the latter, the ambassador of Israel in Poland Anna Azari once more criticised the Amended Act on the Institute for National Remembrance and made the following appeal: “I would like us to be able to look at the past in an open and honest way. The truth does not only help us to understand the past, but also helps us to build a democratic and tolerant society today”¹⁶. The anniversary, instead of having a mood of deep reflection on the past, was disturbed by current disputes about its contemporary interpretations and antisemitism. What was striking in the public debate was the presence of analogies to past. The Jewish magazine *Chidusz* wrote about the anniversary celebrations that “their most important element was the conviction that the atmosphere of March ’68 is returning today”¹⁷. The authors pointed to the amended act as one of the elements of today’s historical policy, which sidelines the Jewish perspective on the past. Different utterances in the media were compared to those that could be found in the propaganda of the communist regime during the antisemitic campaign of March ’68. Also, in an exhibition *Strangers at Home (Obcy w Domu)* in POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews the authors presented similarities between fragments of past and contemporary antisemitic comments in the media¹⁸. The well-known motive of the Jew as the stranger which was deliberately used as stereotypical in the name of the POLIN exhibition has been thoroughly researched. Joanna Beata Michlic wrote that the antisemitic phrases present in everyday language stem from the tradition of ethnic nationalism, by which the social and political role of the myth of the Jew as a threat was used to increase the sense of national unity (Michlic 2015). It seems that in the context of the antisemitic comments in media and social media accompanying the debate on the amended act, the stereotype had a similar purpose (see: Babińska et al. eds. 2018, pp. 10–12). At the same time they reflected a perception of Polish society divided into “us” and “them”. Furthermore, they expressed a refusal to see the history of the Jewish citizens of Poland as part of the general history of the

¹⁵ Warszawa Gdańska is a symbolic place which refers to the departures of March emigrants. Every year in March, the Shalom Foundation organizes meetings here, attended by representatives of the authorities, members of Jewish organizations and representatives of the March ’68 generation.

¹⁶ The speech is available on the website <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fe6Cq6z-hXY> accessed 04.12.2019.

¹⁷ Summary of the celebration of March ’68 published by Chidusz Editors, see: <https://chidusz.com/50-rocznica-marca-68-podsumowanie/> accessed 04.12.2019.

¹⁸ This part of the exhibition was prepared in cooperation with prof. Michał Głowiński, whose research is devoted to “March speech”. The authors of the exhibition wanted to draw attention to the lowering of public debate standards.

Polish nation and left no space for the historical perspective of the Jewish citizens of Poland, a perspective that would include the “dark pages” of Polish-Jewish relations that describe the conflicts and violence of World War II and the antisemitic campaign of 1968. The antisemitic comments made in the debate surrounding the new law stirred strong emotions among all participants of public debate and in particular affected members of Jewish communities in Poland. The atmosphere of anxiety caused by the public debate was also mirrored amongst members of the Jewish communities in Kraków.

There were a few local events concerning March '68 in Kraków, organized by three institutions, two of which bring together members of the Jewish community (The Jewish Socio-Cultural Association, JCC) and one which addresses Polish-Jewish heritage (Centre for Jewish Culture). All of them elaborated the topic of antisemitic propaganda and the emigration that took place after March '68. The guests shared their experiences of past events – the memories of those who were forced to leave and those who stayed in Poland – and analysed the aftermath of March '68. At each of the meetings the new law was discussed. Participating in such gatherings enables an anthropologist to step away from pure analysis of discourse. The atmosphere and the emotions visible whenever the topic of the amended act was brought up during the debates are just as important as narratives and participate in process of constructing anthropological knowledge (Beatty 2014; Hemer; Dundon 2016). The tangible tension observed and shared by anthropologist during events amplifies the conclusion that the official national debate did affect the local celebrations of the anniversaries. In fact, it interfered with them.

The two-day conference “50 years after March '68”, held by the Judaica Foundation Center for Jewish Culture and the “Kuźnica” Association, started with the statement “today the talk about March '68 cannot be only a jubilee celebration”, which was a direct reference to the debate caused by the amendment. By that, the speaker meant the necessity of discussing the contemporary threats of antisemitism, not only those of the past, as he explained later. During one part of the conference, guests (Barbara Toruńczyk, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Jan Lityński and Andrzej Friszke¹⁹) not only shared their memories, but also considered the universal meanings of the issues at stake. Strong links between the past and the present allowed a new understanding of the former to be created. The analogy between the current media debate and the rhetoric of antisemitic propaganda in 1968 provoked audience's voices stressing the importance of transferring knowledge to the younger generation to prevent future intolerance. The moderator of the debate, Paweł Sękowski head of “Kuźnica” Association and historian, and guests wondered how to talk about the past in a way that does not create it as “distant history” but which does transform the lessons derived from '68 into the foundation for a tolerant society, based on respect for other human beings.

¹⁹ Guests, publicist and literary historian Barbara Toruńczyk, journalist Seweryn Blumsztajn, politician Jan Lityński and historian Andrzej Friszke, were invited due to their experience and professional knowledge of March '68. It provided different perspectives on discussed events.

The impact of the amended act debate was particularly visible during the meeting “March ’68 – memories, opinions”, held by The Jewish Socio-Cultural Association. The topic of the current historical policy dominated the original concept of the event and overshadowed the recollections of March ’68. Most of the time, invited guest Jerzy Fedorowicz²⁰ was encouraged by the audience’s questions and continuously returned to the topic of the new law and its potential impact. The voices of concern, frustration and bitterness prevailed. What also appeared was fear that a heated media debate might cause the rise of antisemitic attitudes. The participants shared their own unpleasant experiences of recent antisemitic behaviour towards them. The direct relationship between debate and individual experience reveals another dimension of the impact of official politics on the everyday life of minority members of Polish society. In the debate accompanying the amended act during the meeting, the difference in perspectives between representatives of Jewish communities and the critics’ voices that appeared in the media debate on the part of Israel’s representatives was also evident. Critical opinions of audience on the amendment more often referred to the situation of Jewish communities in Poland than to the situation between Poland and Israel or the United States. Participants of this meeting who were immersed in the Polish historical and cultural context, along with the criticism of the document itself, also opposed the stereotypical perception of Poland in foreign media. There was also genuine concern among these people for the negative image of Poland in the world. Participants of the debate had mentioned that many people belonging to Jewish communities take initiatives to change the negative image of their country among members of diasporas elsewhere in the world. One can notice the paradox of this situation: members of Jewish communities acted as protectors of the good name of Poland, but in the official narrative they are positioned not as allies, but as opponents. This subject was raised by one of the participants of the meeting who was of the opinion that Poles and Jews had never been in an official conflict, neither during World War II nor since, but the tensions presently create such an impression. Another remarked with concern that the situation of March ’68 may repeat, that is, “they [Jews] will be put back on the other side of the barricade again”.

The debate concerning the act itself that was organized by JCC, “The Dispute Over Poland’s Historical Memory Law”, was particularly interesting²¹. The invited guests, Daniel Tilles, a historian and author of a popular blog *Notes from Poland*, and Marcin Makowski, a journalist from the right-wing paper “*To The Right*” (“*Do Rzeczy*”), were supposed to represent the two sides of the debate. The former was to criticize the act, whereas the latter was to defend it. JCC managed to create a proper, less emotionally charged atmosphere for the discussion. Emotions were also not visible in the speakers,

²⁰ Jerzy Fedorowicz – Polish actor and politician. Since 2015 he has been a member of the Senate on behalf of the opposition party Platforma Obywatelska. He was the chairman of the Senate Culture and Media Committee when the amendment was proceeded (the majority of votes in the Senate had the Law and Justice party).

²¹ Recorded and available at: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=JCC%20IPN&epa=SEARCH_BOX accessed 04.12.2019.

who calmly discussed different aspects of the amended act, something that was rare in the mainstream public debate. It is a noteworthy fact that it was a minority group that invited a representative of the government's stance, and not the other way around. This sort of initiative constitutes a bold attempt to counter the increasing polarization of views and look for dialogue. The discussion was devoted to the substantive issues related to the text of the act. According to the discussants, the language used in the document itself and terms such as anti-holocaust law and anti-defamation law caused misunderstanding on both sides. The speakers surprisingly often agreed with each other, as in the cases of the crisis of international relations between Poland and Israel and the impossibility of applying the law in practice. The reason for the disagreement was the issue of historical facts and the truth concerning the Holocaust and the past. Makowski claimed that the facts are established, but they are not widely known and "as a nation we [Poland] don't have anything to hide in the context of World War II". Tilles stressed that Poland has the right to fight for its good name, but the discussion does not concern facts, rather their contemporary interpretations. He pointed out that the debate on the amended act shapes the memory of the Holocaust. They discussed the impact of the debate on Polish-Jewish relations in the local and broader context, and the event concluded with conciliatory rhetoric. Makowski stated that the repair of relations is achievable only in direct communication. As an example, he referred to the meeting as a significant attempt of this approach. Tilles, in turn, suggested that the debate triggered by the official policy might make it possible to return to difficult issues in Polish-Jewish relations and face them again.

CONCLUSIONS

The Amended Act on the Institute for National Remembrance not only caused international debate, but was also reflected in local environments such as Kraków. It seems that the act constituted an attempt to strengthen the image of Poland as the victim of World War II and to strengthen the discourse about the positive role of Poles in saving Jews. However, the use of the past for the purposes of historical policy, the marginalization of the Jewish perspective and the antisemitic codes have led to a strong protest against it. The emotional character of the debate was noticeable in the way the new law was perceived. The amended act was seen as, on the one hand, threatening the personal and family memories (of the witnesses of the Holocaust) and, on the other, as threatening the freedom of scientific enquiry concerning the "dark sides" of Polish-Jewish relations during the World War II and afterwards. Both sides of the conflict claimed to be arguing in defence of historical facts and were making claims for the truth which implicate the ethical background of speaking about the past. The issue is that the official narrative predominates the various counter-narratives and therefore it should be sensitive about social harm among others caused by ignoring the voices of minorities about their past. In my opinion, establishing the proper official narrative about "historical facts" (which is also a matter of interpretation)

should provide a sense of social justice (compare: Irwin-Zarecka 2009). Tokarska-Bakir wrote about the difficulties of the Polish-Jewish relations in the following way:

In today's Poland, one has to really take into account this heritage, extremely difficult to overcome due to disappearance of witnesses, deformation of memory, and accumulated influences of politics of history (2011, p. 133).

And these words are extremely relevant today. The anniversaries described in the article are connected with the Jewish past which require both proper scientific study and contextualizing in collective memory and the heritage of the whole Polish society.

I do not wish to claim that the debate associated with the amended act was the main point of the events described. I do claim, however, that two important anniversaries were disrupted, and they progressed in an atmosphere of unease and anxiety caused by the official narrative linked to specific historical policies. The aim of the article was to present this local context and to focus on the discussions, emotions and expectations of members of the Jewish community and people engaged in shaping Polish-Jewish heritage, which may give partial insight into the perspectives from which they perceive the official historical policy in contemporary Poland. The analysis of the Kraków commemorations which is based on ethnographic fieldwork, shows a different approach to the debate about the past. The analysis derives from the framework mentioned by Beverly Butler: “the focus on the «memorial approach» to the «past» (...) provides a means to bring into focus what can be best described as «alternative» or «parallel» heritages” (2006, p. 471). The analysis of Kraków events raises questions about dominant official discourse’s ethical dimension and its impact on members of the Jewish community. The recalled events show how official historical policy and media debate can be exclusionary and harmful not only to the minority group but above all, to the individual. However, the aforementioned examples also indicate the active role of Jewish communities in opposing the one-dimensional narrative of the past. The anniversaries, together with the debate concerning the amendment act, show that conflicts of memories influence the negotiation of meanings given to the past and that collective memory and heritage are both dynamic processes, shaped by the people involved. The local context also reflects the broader issues of contemporary Polish-Jewish relations, and the discussed events in Kraków, which present a parallel perspective to the official discourse, allow a better understanding of the Polish-Jewish past.

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STATE POLITICS AND LOCAL CELEBRATIONS.
COMMEMORATIONS OF KRAKÓW'S JEWISH PAST

Keywords: commemorations, heritage, Kraków Jews, The Amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance, Kraków ghetto, March '68

In 2018, two dates were particularly important for the Kraków's commemorations: the 75th Anniversary of the Liquidation of the Kraków Ghetto and the 50th anniversary of March '68. At the beginning of the year, The Amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) was presented, which is more widely known as Poland's new 'Holocaust law'. The question of legal regulation of the usage of the term 'Polish death camps' polarized public opinion and revealed existing divisions between different narratives concerning World War II and perspectives on the past in contemporary Poland.

The article aims to investigate how official politics of the state toward the past is reflected in locally held anniversaries and commemorations. The influence of the public debate during the celebration of March of Remembrance, the anniversary of March '68, and related events, has reflected in people's opinions and emotions. Discourse analysis and ethnographic research reveal how the past is interpreted in those circumstances and show the complexity of relationships between enduring and counter-narratives about the past.

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