

Institute of National Remembrance

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08.05.2024, 06:29

12.03.2021

A researcher's analysis of the articles features on the Internet website of "The Jewish Voice" magazine

The logo for "The Jewish Voice" magazine, featuring the text "The Jewish Voice" in a white serif font, underlined with a red line, set against a solid blue background.

This text concerns 4 texts related to Poland are present. These are:

- *Poland's Perpetual Pogroms* of 4/04/2018.
- *Holocaust Remembrance Day 2019, Post-Pittsburgh Massacre* of 28/01/2019.
- *Auschwitz-Birkenau & Its Polish Roots* of 02/06/ 2019.
- *Polish TV: Call Them 'Jewish Death Camps' Because 'Jews Ran Crematoria'* of 02/07/ 2018.

Three refer to the period of World War II, one of them broadly

describing the history of Polish-Jewish relations from the 10th century to the present day. A common feature of these articles is a lack of knowledge about the history of Poland, an ahistorical approach, a tendency to highlight negative events in the mutual relations of both nations, in particular by emphasizing the physical violence which Jews experienced on Polish soil at the hands of Poles. Furthermore, they contain inconsistent and false statements which are in contradiction with the results of research conducted both by Polish and English-speaking researchers. The most important of them are discussed.

Article 1

Apart from many simplifications, mistakes, weaknesses and shortcomings not impinging on the merits of the case and resulting from a lack of knowledge of historical epochs, the article presents a series of facts indicating that over the centuries Poland is a country where pogroms occurred continuously. As proof of this, the centuries-long history of Polish Jews was described as miserable, mentioning various forms of their persecutions due to accusations of unfair competition, ritual murders and black death (the Middle Ages, the period of the First Polish Republic). Furthermore, the author describes the Chmielnicki Uprising, the Pale of Settlement, pogroms of 1918-1919 and 1920 in Poland regaining its independence and the restrictions of access to the civil service and many industries as well as ridiculing Jews in the Second Polish Republic, pogroms, street violence

and hatred towards Jews in the 1930s.

Moreover, considerations are accompanied by the erroneously established origin and specificity of the presence of Jewish people on Polish lands which obscures the importance of Poland as the major centre of the Jewish settlement and the culture of European Jews although it must be emphasized that the text also mentions positive aspects of the mutual relations of Poles and Jews but only with respect to Poland before the partitions.

The origin of the presence of Jews on Polish soil and the period of the First Polish Republic

This issue is probably the most important among all others which are discussed by the author in his “historiosophical” article. According to his interpretation, the beginnings of the Jewish presence result from three factors, i.e. the expulsion of Jews from Spain and the Crusades as well as economic needs of the Polish state which conditioned the warm welcome of Jewish merchants and traders. Although, indeed, these factors were of great importance they do not explain the mass inflow of Jewish population to Polish lands. This was not an ordinary migration. Jews came to Poland mostly because they were persecuted on a mass scale throughout the whole of Europe and expelled from many countries – from England (1290) where Jews could only return in 1656; from Germany (1346); Switzerland (1348); Hungary (1349–1526 and 1686–1740); France (1394); Austria (1420); Spain (1492) and

Portugal (1497). Until the end of the 14th century in the Czech lands, one kehilla survived in Prague. Jews also experienced persecution in an earlier period in Western Europe. Although we do not know the exact numbers, according to the Jewish sources thousands of Jews were killed during the Crusades (1096, 1147, 1188, 1251 and 1320) in Germany and France. This fact is mentioned by Jewish authors of that period and Ivan G. Marcus, in his article entitled *The Culture of the Early Ashkenaz*, claims that at that time Jews were forced out of the Christian community in every respect: physically, intellectually and spiritually.

Another pogrom wave in Western Europe was related to the bubonic plague pandemic called the black death (1348-1351). According to the estimates, in these years there were 350 pogroms of Jews – 60 major and 150 minor ones – and 150 Jewish communities were exterminated. The persecutions were accompanied by discrimination, e.g. the Jewish population was forced to wear markings, had pay higher taxes and they could only settle on lower quality lands, were closed in ghettos, etc.

Against this background the conditions of Jews in Poland was completely different. The history of small communities began in the 13th century. Thanks to King Casimir the Great who excluded Jewish communities from the jurisdiction of the German law, they became directly subject to royal courts which gave them a sense of security, protected their members and Jewish interests. From the times of the establishment of the Kingdom of Poland through the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth created in 1569 until the period of war defeats, the Chmielnicki Uprising and the Swedish Deluge in the 17th century Poland provided the Jewish population with unprecedented legislation and privileges which proves the phenomenon of the above-mentioned forms of state against a European background. A model of religious tolerance unknown throughout all Europe emerged therein. The following privileges and legislation for Jews should be distinguished:

- in the Statute of Kalisz of 1264 confirmed by King Casimir the Great and extended for the whole Kingdom of Poland, a provision unprecedented in other countries in which the amount of usury , i.e. the interest of money loaned by Jews, was not stipulated. Jews as non-Christians had the right to loan at interest. Furthermore, they could lend on security so they became the owners of real estate; they enjoyed religious freedom, and could freely move from town to town, etc.;
- the tolerance and protectorate of Polish rulers over Jews meant that in the middle of the 15th century, 80% of the total Jewish population lived on Polish lands, which became the focal point of their existence;
- under the rule of Sigismund I, the Old Jews were granted titles of nobility and the law was abolished that obliged Jews to wear distinctive clothing;
- under the rule of Sigismund II Augustus Jews were given autonomy in the field of community administration and the *de non tolerandis Christianis* series of privileges for Jewish towns prohibiting Christians to

settle, inter alia, in Kazimierz near Kraków and in the Jewish district of Lublin;

- in 1580 King Stephen Báthory established the Council of Four Lands (*Waad Arba Aracot*), the central body of Jewish authority in Poland. At that time Jews were perceived as the fifth estate of Poland – next to the clergy, nobility, the burghers and peasants.

- Alexander Jagiellon introduced the death penalty for the false accusation of ritual murder, while in 1618 Sigismund III Vasa prohibited the printing and dissemination of leaflets which could cause anti-Jewish riots. In the private towns in the area of fee tail Jews enjoyed exceptional privileges, often not only participating in the election of municipal authorities but also becoming members of town councils themselves.

- In 1623 the first session of the Waad of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania took place and in 1632 King Władysław IV confirmed the prohibition of printing and disseminating anti-Jewish content.

- Jews in the Republic of Poland had a special *hocaoth sejmiks* fund intended for paying interventions if sejmiks wanted to adopt a resolution to their disadvantage.

incidents, pogroms and court trials as a result of accusations of unfair competition and ritual

murders in Poland

There is no doubt that forms of violence and harassment towards Jews presented by the author occurred on Polish lands, as confirmed by literature on the subject. Nevertheless, firstly the scale of this phenomenon against the European background must be indicated in order to assess whether these events actually place Poland (the Polish state) among the countries which “perpetually”, as the author suggested in the title of his article, incited pogroms and made the Jews suffer. Secondly, one should ask about any actual connection between some of the events mentioned by the author to Poland and the Polish statehood.

Historian Jacek Wijaczka states that in Poland in the 16th-18th century, 89 cases of accusations and court trials related to ritual murders committed by Jews took place (17 in the 16th century and 35 in the 18th century). Similar numbers are given by H. Węgrzynek, differing slightly from those cited by Bernard Weinryb – 59 court trials (12 in the 16th century, 26 in the 17th century and 21 in the 18th century) – while according to Janusz Tazbir, 200-300 Jews were killed as a result of accusations and trials concerning ritual murders. Undoubtedly, some of the accusations caused conflicts and anti-Jewish incidents but it is difficult to state in how many towns they occurred because the lack of sources makes detailed and unequivocal findings impossible. They were most often economic or religious in nature and did not transform into pogrom waves. These were single events, not influencing the number of Jewish communities in Poland because their

number continued to rise, contrary to Western and Southern Europe. The most frequent anti-Jewish incidents occurred in Silesia, which should be linked to German influence – in these areas Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism were severe. In comparison to persecution in other European countries, violence on Polish lands was significantly smaller and was incidental.

the Black Death in Poland and the Jews

The European pandemic of the bubonic plague in Poland fell during the reign of Casimir the Great whose actions in favour of the Jews have been already discussed. At that time there was no persecution of Jews, as the author claims, and even on the contrary, Jews were granted many reliefs and privileges. In fact historians cannot explain until this day why the epidemic, although it reached Poland, did not take a heavy toll. Thus, the statement that in Poland Jews were victims of persecutions during the epidemic of the black death is untrue.

the Chmielnicki Uprising

Although this event took place on Polish soil, its relation to Polishness and even more with the Polish responsibility for Chmielnicki's actions is negligible. Moreover, the author's considerations are inconsistent – he suggests in the title that pogroms “perpetually” occurred in Poland, that Jews were “slaughtered” and “expelled”, after which he states

that the Chmielnicki Uprising is known as the first pogrom.

It should be recalled that Poles were also the victims of Chmielnicki's army. Furthermore, in *Jewish studies*, this event is mostly included within the problem of the Ukrainian anti-Semitism. Obviously, the slaughter of 100,000–200,000 Jews during the uprising is an unprecedented event and one can agree with the author that this was the first pogrom on Polish soil. However, it was not committed by Poles.

the Pale of Settlement

This limitation was introduced in the area of the Western part of the Russian Empire by Empress Catherine the Great. Thus, it is difficult to include this form of discrimination within the category of decisions related to Poland, as the Polish state did not exist during this period.

Pogroms, anti-Jewish violence in the 20th century and the situation of Jews in the Second Polish Republic

Violence against Jews on the wave of the reborn Second Polish Republic and in the 1930s is a fact. Its causes and contexts are a complex issue. Nevertheless, the claim that the time when a struggle was taking place for the final shape of the Second Polish Republic

and the period of the Second Polish Republic were only filled with such kinds of dramatic events, as one might conclude from the author's text, is not in line with the outcomes of studies conducted by either Polish or Jewish historians. In the inter-war period, an unprecedented flourishing of the Jewish culture, both high as well as shtetl and folk, was observed. Their political, social and economic life developed. These phenomena were broadly described in the literature, while this subject and the anti-Semitism in this period are well-known and not questioned by researchers. Thus, a reduction of Polish-Jewish relations to acts of violence in the Second Polish Republic is an extremely one-sided interpretation of the history of both nations in this period; it is far from the truth and negates the acquis of historians dealing with *Jewish studies* with respect to the Second Polish Republic.

As far as the access of Jews to the civil service and other professions in the Second Polish Republic is concerned, it was genuinely hindered, in particular in the second half of the 1930s but it was not closed. Moreover, in the inter-war period in some prestigious, free and strategic professions - from the perspective of the Polish statehood - the Jewish population was in a clear majority, e.g. physicians (about 55%) and legal practice (around 50%).

Articles 1 and 4

Polish collaborators, “trackers” capturing, denouncing and killing Jews under the German occupation. The issue of Polish responsibility

The work of Polish and Jewish researchers confirms that some Poles participated in capturing, denouncing and killing their Jewish neighbours, and also took part in pogroms; nevertheless, so far the scale of the phenomenon in the occupied areas has remained unknown. According to one of the authors, there were thousands of collaborating Poles, while another one claims that there were millions – these numbers are difficult to comment on. Paradoxically, these estimates are either too low or extremely overestimated.

There is no consensus on how many Jews were looking for rescue outside the ghetto. Different numbers are given – from less than 50,000 to 200,000. (Grzegorz Berendt, Szymon Datner, Jan Grabowski). There are also differences in interpretation and approach to this subject. For example, Gunnar S. Paulsson in his work entitled *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945* (Warsaw 2008) calculated for Warsaw that there were about 3,000–4,000 szmalcowniks [*blackmailers*] in the capital and on this basis he stated that 70,000–90,000 Poles gave assistance to Jews. The most important conclusion is that around 92% of Poles in Warsaw adopted a passive attitude towards the Jewish problem – they neither helped nor hindered. This publication is the best

documented case study concerning Jews and Polish-Jewish relations on the Aryan side; the statistical treatment is of note.

In 2008 Prof. Jan Grabowski arrived at a different interpretation concerning this subject as, for example, in the article *Szantażowanie Żydów: casus Warszawy 1939-1945* [*Blackmailing Jews: the case of Warsaw*] he stated that “in all diaries and recollections of Jews hiding in Warsaw on the Aryan side with no exception there are records regarding szmalcownik. The multiplicity of records is the actual (although difficult for quantification) evidence of the prevalence of this practice.” The conclusions were developed in his work entitled *Ja tego Żyda znam! Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie 1939-1943* [*I know that Jew! Blackmailing Jews in Warsaw 1939-1943*], Warsaw 2004.

Furthermore, in the classical *Holocaust studies* the status of *bystander*,, whoever he may be (the Polish nation, the Polish Underground State, the Polish Government In Exile), is usually classified as having a shared responsibility for the Holocaust due to the passive approach and in fact all discussed articles are written in this accusatory spirit. Not all historians share this view; for example, the above-mentioned G. Paulsson does not.

Articles 1 and 3

The publication of Jan Gross's book, *Neighbours. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland.*

This book was identified in Poland as an example of historical unreliability. It is a para- or quasi- historical work. Bogdana Musiał is the author of its most relevant review (*Theses concerning the pogrom in Jedwabne: critical remarks to the book "Neighbours" by Jan Tomasz Gross*). His analysis focuses on the following issues:

- court trial files as a historical source and how they were used;
- the recollections of Jews who survived the Holocaust. Affirmative and selective choice;
- number of victims;
- omission and distortion of the historical context;
- installation of the Municipal Council in Jedwabne and the mass murder.

In conclusion, B. Musiał wrote that J.T. Gross's work contains many discrepancies, erroneous interpretations, ahistorical speculations and false statements. Furthermore, he accused this researcher of a selective and manipulative manner of using sources. Thus, the

publication is not a reliable work and cannot constitute crucial evidence of the Polish participation in pogroms because there are too much distortion and false information. Moreover, two volumes of studies concerning Jedwabne were published (*Wokół Jedwabnego* [Around Jedwabne], under the editorship of Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, vol.1 Studies, p. 525, vol. 2 Documents, p. 1034, Warsaw 2002) which, taking into account all the weaknesses, in terms of facts they at least give data and numbers which are close to the real ones, e.g. they reduce the number of victims to around 300 people, etc. However, they are not available in English, so it is not surprising that the journalists of the analysed magazine did not use them, regarding J. T. Gross's analysis as reliable.

Articles 2 and 3

The Auschwitz-Birkenau and the issue of the Polish shared responsibility

In the Article 2 there is only one sentence concerning the Auschwitz extermination camp in the historical context:

When the Soviets breached the German Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp on Jan. 27, 1945, they not only started the camp's liberation process but would wind up creating an anniversary on which all would especially take time to remember the atrocities committed during the Holocaust against the Jewish people and other people deemed undesirable by the Nazis.

This fragment is incorrect – it is widely known that the Soviets did not establish an anniversary of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. This was done by the General Assembly of the United Nations only in 2005. Furthermore, they did not deal with commemorating the victims of the camp just after the war. In 1947 the Polish government, upon the request of former prisoners, decided to secure Auschwitz I and II with protection and pursuant to the Act passed by the Parliament it converted it into the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim. In order to do so, a small part of the camp infrastructure was rebuilt.

The Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 2nd July 1947 stipulated that,

the premises of the former Nazi concentration camp in Oświęcim together with all developments and equipment therein shall be preserved for all time as the Monument of the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and Other Nations.

In Article 3 under the symptomatic title *Auschwitz-Birkenau & Its Polish Roots* the issue of naming this camp (“the Polish camp”) indicating the Polish connotations is linked to the issue of participation of certain fractions of the society in issuing, killing and berating Jews during the occupation and a general conclusion is presented that they created a murderous *background* in relation to the main crime taking place in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. This perspective is in line with the results of research carried out by the New School for the Holocaust Studies which, however, does not use the term “Polish death/extermination camps”. It is not used by other recognised researchers either, because there is no doubt as to the fact that the camps were German and Nazi. However, this group introduced for example a new term – the German-Polish administration suggesting the Polish shared responsibility in the context of the extermination of Jews during the German occupation within the framework of the administration operating at that time. Furthermore, these researchers share their thoughts in writing and in interviews emphasizing the Polish perpetration and participation in the murder of Jews in different ways. This research direction taken in Poland by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research has been

consequently implemented for many years, starting from such publications as: *Such a beautiful sunny day. Jews seeking refuge in the Polish countryside, 1942-1945*, Jerusalem 2017 (the Polish edition – 2011); *Judenjagd. Polowanie na Żydów, 1942-1945. Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* [*Hunt for the Jews. Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*], Warsaw 2011; *Zarys krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec Zagłady, 1942-1945* [*The outline of the landscape. The Polish countryside in the face of the Holocaust, 1942-1945*], Warsaw, 2011, and finishing on the two-volume work entitled *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* [*Night without an End: Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland*], 2018. The discussed articles in “The Jewish Voice” are imbued with the rhetoric and knowledge taken therefrom. Recently an extensive polemical article by Tomasz Domański (IPN) has been published in which the author undermined the credibility of findings presented in the publications concerning the fate of Jews in selected poviats as well as the Polish perpetration and shared responsibility for the Holocaust (*Korekta obrazu? Refleksje źródłoznawcze wokół książki Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* [*The correction of the landscape? Source studies reflections concerning the book Night without an End: Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland*]). However, its English version is not yet available.

Article 3

The Kielce pogrom

As in other articles, here too the post-war period was reduced to the issue of violence perpetrated by Poles towards the Jewish community. Such a reality does not reflect the truth about this era. Anti-Semitism was not the only factor shaping Polish-Jewish relations after the war. The relevant description of this event and a reductionist perspective were undoubtedly taken from the publication by J.T. Gross entitled *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (2008).

As for the pogrom itself, there are at least two versions available, presenting two different interpretations of events and the origin of events which are promoted by Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki (IPN) and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir. He notes that the author of one of the articles in *The Jewish Voice* doubled the number of victims (killed) from 30 to 70.

Article 4

Anti-Semitic government in exile and the “nationalist” underground

Accusations of anti-Semitism against the Polish government in exile have been formed since 1950s although certain publications define differently what it entailed and how it was manifested. In more recent publications such strong statements as in the article of “The Jewish

Voice” are absent (e.g. D. Engel, *Facing a Holocaust. The Polish Government-in-exile and the Jews 1943-1945*). Nowadays it is mostly about the tardy reaction of the Polish political elite to the Holocaust (e.g. A. Puławski, *W obliczu Zagłady. Rząd RP na Uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, ZWZ-AK wobec deportacji Żydów do obozów zagłady (1941-1942)* [*In the face of the Holocaust. The Polish government in exile, the Government Delegation for Poland, ZWZ-AK in the face of the deportation of Jews to extermination camps (1941-1942)*] Lublin 2009).

The expression “the nationalist Polish underground” is incorrect as well. It does not have such a nature – in the AK [*Home Army*] and other military units and in the civil service there were many Jews and representatives of other nations/ethnic groups. Furthermore, the Polish government co-created the Council to Aid Jews “Żegota” – the only one organisation in Europe dealing with assistance for Jews; also in the AK structures specialised units for Jewish matters operated. On the commission of the Polish underground, Pilecki’s reports were drawn up in which the Holocaust crime was described for the first time; we also know about Jan Karski’s mission and Edward Raczyński’s note of 10 December 1942 – concerning the persecution and crimes committed against the Jewish population in Poland occupied by the Germans. It constituted the first official report on the Holocaust, informing the Western public opinion about German crimes. Obviously, there is more evidence for the reaction of the Polish underground structures and the Polish government in the face of the persecution and extermination of Jews. The most important achievements were mentioned above and

they are presented in scientific work.

Conclusions

The discussed articles contain false information/interpretations, although their Authors gained their knowledge on the basis of English-language literature as well as the acquis and public speeches delivered by representatives of the New School for the Holocaust Studies, so it is difficult to regard all their statements as untrue if they are based on experts in the field of Holocaust studies, in particular that journalists of “The Jewish Voice” do not know Polish and cannot either include or discuss the results of research made by Polish historians. Their lack of reliability depends instead on the presentation of Polish-Jewish relations only through the prism of anti-Semitism and the concentration of acts of violence which creates a one-sided view not reflecting the truth. All articles describe Poland in a pogrom frame. This issue does not concern only these articles. We deal with a much wider phenomenon, i.e. the existence of the specified research trend which is characterised by a selective choice of sources and presents a distorted view of Polish-Jewish relations. This methodology and a specific model of historical tools lead to the dissemination of a “new” interpretation. The model result of these actions, which was reflected in the discussed journalism, is the description of the life of Jews in the First Polish Republic as a sequence of pogroms despite of the fact that Jews at that time thrived on a scale unprecedented anywhere in Europe, creating the largest diaspora on this land.

The articles contain the following false statements and expressions

which are not confirmed by any recognised scientific publications: “Polish death camps”, the murder of 70 instead of 30 people in Kielce, Polish collaborators recruited for capturing and killing Jews. The characteristics of the First Polish Republic is completely inconsistent with the findings of historians. The rest of the claims can be found in scientific publications.

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