

**Scott Ury and Theodore R. Weeks**  
**O Brother, Where Art Thou?**  
**The Search for Interethnic Solidarity**  
**in the Late Imperial Era**

\* Editor's note: The following text was originally prepared for a project known as the International History Initiative, sponsored by the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation in Salzburg. The project sought to engage scholars who study the relations between groups that have been in conflict with one another at different points in their history in reconciling competing popular versions of that history, in the belief that a shared narrative of the past is necessary for improving intergroup relations in the present. The history of Polish-Jewish relations was identified as an appropriate subject for such an effort, for it continues to arouse broad public controversy in Poland, Israel, and the Polish and Jewish diasporas. Accordingly, ten scholars were invited to collaborate in an attempt to produce a readable synthesis of the latest findings of reputable scholarly research on the subject.

The unique feature of the project lay in the idea that each of the book's chapters would be written collectively by teams of scholars, each of whom specializes in a different aspect of Polish-Jewish relations and considers the subject from a particular vantage point. Each team was charged with creating a single chapter focusing upon a chronological division: the late partition years, the two decades of the Second Republic, the Second World War, the period of communist domination, and the postcommunist era. Teams were told that their chapter could present a single, agreed-upon narrative but did not necessarily have to do so; areas of disagreement could be identified and even highlighted.

The overarching theme of the volume was to be how the changing political and demographic conditions of the past century and a half have affected both the character of Polish-Jewish interactions and the way Poles and Jews conceived and talked about one another among themselves. The teams preparing each chapter were asked to address a common set of questions: 1. How did Poles and Jews conceive their respective collective identities during the period in question? 2. What was the range of Polish attitudes and actions toward Jews and the Jewish question and of Jewish attitudes toward Poles and the Polish question? 3. In what ways did Poles and Jews learn about each other and form impressions of one another? 4. How did Poles and Jews influence the behavior of one another in various aspects of life (particularly cultural aspects)? 5. What changes took place during the period in question? What legacy did the period leave for the future?

The images of one another that Poles and Jews carried into the modern era were the product of several centuries of continuous interactions between the two groups. Indeed, Jews had long been a part of the social fabric, economic infrastructure, and urban landscape of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Jewish cultural, economic, political, and religious life thrived from the time of the earliest documented Jewish settlements in the thirteenth century to the Machiavellian dismemberment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by the three great partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795.

Although it is always difficult to be certain about premodern population figures, the best available estimates note the growth of the Jewish community in the early modern Commonwealth from approximately 50,000 individuals in the sixteenth century to 150,000 in 1660, with a sharp rise to roughly 750,000 in 1765. The relative number of Jews increased during this period from less than 0.5 percent of the total population in 1500 to over 5 percent of the general population on the eve of the first partition in 1772. Two factors fueled the early growth of this Jewish community: first, migration from the German lands, motivated on the one hand by social discrimination, economic restrictions, blood libels, expulsions, and other hardships many Jews encountered there, and on the other by the economic opportunities that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth offered; and second, a lower death rate, particularly among newborn infants.

Backed by local and countrywide charters of rights granted to Jewish residents in private and royal towns, Jews tended to concentrate in three main realms of employment: leaseholding, the production and sale of alcohol,

It was initially intended that the chapters be published anonymously, so that readers would be compelled to engage the text without any preconceptions concerning the authors' identities. The plan was also to publish the text simultaneously in English, Polish, and Hebrew versions, so that the authors would not be inclined to address their versions of the past to any specific audience. It was hoped that these techniques would result in a narrative that did not seek to assign praise or blame for any specific feature of Polish-Jewish relations or for their overall tenor but that simply related, matter-of-factly, the rudimentary dimensions of those relations and the historical processes and conditions that shaped them.

For reasons that have not been shared with us, the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation recently decided to withdraw financial support for the project. While we regret the Institute's decision, we are pleased that the authors of the first chapter have agreed to publish their work in *Gal-Ed*, under their own names. We hope to be able to publish additional chapters in future volumes, with the authors' agreement. The text should be read not as a scholarly but as a popular history. It also serves as a primary document indicating what two early twenty-first century professional historians regarded as essential features of the narrative of Polish-Jewish relations during the late imperial period.

and commerce. Leaseholding involved Jews paying local nobles and other members of the ruling class for the right to manage rural properties and early manufacturing endeavors. Known as *arendarzy*, or lessees, such Jews were responsible for everything from collecting peasant dues to administrating estate affairs. They were pivotal to the economic, social, and political survival of the Commonwealth's feudal system. Other Jews figured in key aspects of everyday life for peasants, townsmen, and other residents of the Commonwealth by acting as producers, distributors, and servers of grain alcohol. In commerce, Jews traded everything from lumber to grain and from textiles to foodstuffs on the local, regional, and international levels. Their work in this field was critical to the movement of goods within Poland and beyond.

Concentration in these three main spheres of economic activity influenced where Jews lived. Because of their involvement in the administration of magnate estates, approximately 27 percent of Poland's Jews resided in villages in 1764–1765. In many cases there were two Jewish families or fewer per village, with each family having four members on average. Of the remaining Jewish population, over two-thirds lived in Poland's urban centers. Mostly merchants, these Jews tended to dwell close to one another and to the market. In many cases, these urban Jewish communities comprised half of a city's total population. 70 percent of the Jews lived in the eastern half of the Commonwealth. Some researchers have argued that these demographic characteristics, together with the structure of the early modern estate-based society, made it possible for Jews not to feel like a minority in the Polish-Lithuanian state.

Although direct evidence is relatively scarce, these economic functions and demographic patterns suggest ongoing interaction between Jews and non-Jews. Economic survival demanded a certain amount of adaptation, interaction, and, for lack of a better word, cooperation between members of the two communities. Whether as lessees, merchants, or participants in the profitable alcohol trade, many Jewish men and women had regular interactions with their non-Jewish neighbors. In the urban marketplace, in local inns, and on the magnate's estate, Jews and non-Jews bartered, traded, and closed deals that helped ensure the Jews' place in the local economy and social landscape. Moreover, while village Jews who resided in communities of less than a dozen Jews may have had more exposure to non-Jewish culture

and life, urban Jews were also dependent upon regular financial exchanges with non-Jews to survive, and these exchanges demanded, at the very least, some form of interaction.

On the more formal level, delegates from local Jewish communal councils and from intercommunal bodies such as the Council of Four Lands and the Council of Lithuania regularly met with representatives of the ruling powers on the local, regional, and national levels to negotiate a range of financial, political, and social matters. While such acts of intervention and intercession (*shtadlanut*) were often the direct result of perceived or anticipated moments of crisis, they underscore the extent to which Jews were integrated into and adapted to the reigning political culture. No Jewish resident or community could live without the cooperation of non-Jewish subjects, bureaucrats, and rulers, as the fate of local Jewish communities often depended on the actions of their non-Jewish contemporaries. Moreover, these regular moments of cultural, economic, and political exchange often reflected underlying bonds of trust and reciprocal relationships between Jewish communities and other social groups that composed the Commonwealth's estate-based society. Negotiating and renegotiating charters of rights, intervening in response to potential anti-Jewish measures, regularly appealing taxation policies, and liberally distributing a wide range of "gifts" to benefactors all demanded not only a high level of familiarity with the local political culture and hierarchy but also a degree of acceptance, an early version of a social contract according to which Jews and Jewish communities were, indeed, looked upon as integral and permanent parts of the social fabric. The crown and the nobility, in particular, played key roles as guarantors of this contract.

Jews' relations with the crown and the nobles helped the development of an elaborate internal Jewish communal life. Long recognized by local and national powers, Jewish community councils oversaw and directed an intricate set of educational, religious, judicial, and social institutions that helped create a sense of autonomy and community among Jews. The extent to which this sense contributed later to a feeling of modern nationhood among Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is debated by scholars today.

In the realm of education, many communities had not only primary schools that provided traditional religious education for young boys but also less formal educational institutions associated with local synagogues, such as the

local study houses. Larger or wealthier communities were sometimes able to support centers for advanced study for young men, known as yeshivot. The growth of such centers across the Commonwealth and their ability to attract students from the Germanic lands to the west is often seen as a sign of the Polish Jewish communities' good fortune and success.

Schools were part of a larger system of communal life that included self-administered religious institutions, such as synagogues, ritual baths, and facilities for slaughtering kosher meat. The Polish authorities allowed Jewish communities to charge members for using the facilities they provided for religious observance. The fees and taxes the communities collected for these services proved a regular and relatively secure source of revenue and allowed them to support additional religious and social welfare institutions.

Another integral aspect of communal life was an autonomous system of rabbinical courts. Disputes between Jews were adjudicated according to Jewish rabbinic law as interpreted by a local rabbi or, at times, a tribunal of three rabbis. However, the scope of Jewish judicial autonomy was limited, as appeals could be taken to non-Jewish courts, and cases between Jews and non-Jews were routinely tried there.

Although they ruled in rabbinic court cases and on matters of religious affairs, rabbis were not, in fact, the ultimate rulers of Jewish communal life. Community councils were usually composed of wealthy laymen. Only about ten percent of male Jews were usually eligible to serve on them. In many cases, the chairmanship of the council was a rotating position that changed hands every month.

The system of internal self-rule and communal autonomy fostered a relatively stable existence for Jews over the long term. Nevertheless, that stability was interrupted periodically by upheavals originating both within Jewish society and outside of it. In the middle of the seventeenth century the Chmielnicki uprising and the Swedish invasion of Poland brought widespread death and destruction to many Jewish communities. Messianic ferment instigated by followers of the mesmerizing Shabbatai Zvi (1626–1676), and later in a movement led by the colorful Jakub Frank (1726?–1791), also upset the regular rhythm of life among Jews and forced repeated readjustment to new circumstances.

Nor were the relations between Poles and Jews always idyllic. The era of the Counterreformation, beginning around the middle of the sixteenth

century, was particularly troublesome, as increased religious fervor often led to heightened intolerance toward Jews and growing tension between Jews and key forces within the Catholic Church. Although the Church was not a monolithic body, some of its representatives engaged in missionary campaigns, produced and distributed literature hostile to Jews, and spoke about Jews using inflammatory rhetoric. These actions led to repeated charges that Jews had murdered Christians in order to use Christian blood for Jewish religious ceremonies. These charges continued to be issued through the eighteenth century. Church-sponsored persecutions reached their peak in the 1740s and 1750s. Although the actual number of blood libels did not increase dramatically during these decades, the involvement of Church representatives in them was more pronounced, and far more Jews were sentenced to death by Polish courts. The timing is not coincidental, for around the same time the social fabric and political infrastructure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth began to unravel and, with it, the formerly secure place for Jews as a recognized and accepted part of that early modern society.

The equilibrium of Polish Jewry was further upset toward the end of the eighteenth century, when a new religious movement known as hasidism struck deep root among Jews in eastern Europe. Scholars debate how to explain hasidism's meteoric rise. Some argue that the repeated jolts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries helped create an atmosphere that invited a new style of Jewish community and leadership. Historians are also divided about the exact numbers of Jews in the Polish lands who turned to hasidism. Nevertheless, it is clear that by the early nineteenth century the movement was well on its way to acquiring a mass following, although it is uncertain what drew Jews to it. Whatever the case, hasidism offered, among other things, new ways of expressing Jewishness that encouraged linguistic and social separation from non-Jewish society.

Another religious and intellectual current also entered east European Jewish life around the same time — the Jewish enlightenment (*haskalah*). As with hasidism, scholars debate the number of followers of the *haskalah* in the Polish lands, although most agree that they comprised a small group. More significant than numbers, however, is the fact that several characteristics of the *haskalah* in central Poland left their imprint on relations between Jews and Poles as they developed during the nineteenth century. Polish

*maskilim* were generally less committed to the Hebrew language and Hebrew belles-lettres than their fellow enlighteners in the eastern borderlands. Instead, many of them, including Jakub Tugendhold (1794–1871), Antoni Eisenbaum (1791–1852), and Abraham Stern (1762–1842), advocated that Jews take conscious steps to integrate into the larger Polish society. They called for Jews to take up occupations (especially agriculture) that were regarded at the time as more “productive” than commerce, as well as to embrace secular, non-Jewish education.

Both hasidism and the *haskalah* were just beginning to crystallize in Polish lands when the partitions of Poland introduced a new element into the relations between Poles and Jews — the imperial governments and societies of the partitioning powers. The final partition (1795) took place just as the impact of the French Revolution was being felt in central and eastern Europe. Napoleon’s defeat of Prussia led in 1807 to his creation of a Duchy of Warsaw, seen by Poles as an embryonic Polish national state. Jews living in the Duchy continued, however, to be subject to legal disabilities. With the defeat of Napoleon and the creation of the Kingdom of Poland at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the number of both Poles and Jews living under indirect Russian rule increased significantly. In all three partitions — Russian, Austrian, and Prussian — Jews were subject to a variety of restrictions on their legal and professional rights. At the same time, the autonomy that Jews had enjoyed in prepartition Poland was increasingly whittled down as the partitioning states extended their taxation, educational, and legal systems to include — though seldom on an equal basis — Jews. In the period before 1795, Jews could in principle play noble and royal interests against each other or at least seek the best deal from one of the other power centers. In the nineteenth century, however, the position of the Polish nobility was considerably weakened and the strength of the state much enhanced. Both Poles and Jews found themselves the objects of foreign rule from Vienna, Berlin, and St. Petersburg.

The most important single event in Polish history between the Congress of Vienna and the revolutions of 1848 was the November Insurrection which began in late 1830 in Warsaw. While the insurrection was itself primarily a battle of Poles (mainly of the nobility and educated classes) against their Russian overlords, the large numbers of Jews living on Polish lands under Russian rule (both in the Kingdom of Poland and in the so-called Western

Provinces of the Russian Empire, roughly present-day Lithuania, western Belarus and western Ukraine) were also forced to take sides in this moment of historical “truth.” Even though the vast majority of Jews avoided getting directly involved in the conflict, young *maskilim* and other acculturated Jews saw the rebellion as an opportunity to express their allegiance to the Polish cause and nation. One example of such expressions of Polish patriotism among Jews was the figure of Józef Berkowicz, a Jew who, following his father’s patriotic Polish example during the Napoleonic Wars, fought for the Polish cause in 1830–31. In some 250 cases, somewhat acculturated Jews joined the Polish National Guard. Moreover, many of those who could not meet the National Guard’s demands that Jewish soldiers don European dress and shave their beards created a Jewish Civil Guard of some 1,000 combatants that was financially supported by Warsaw’s Jewish community. While the number of Jews who actually joined the Polish military units was ultimately small, many others contributed to the Polish cause by donating money, working in military hospitals, and organizing the provision of troops. Thus, while the numbers of Jews who actively supported the uprising was relatively limited, this participation in the November Uprising demonstrated to many observers that Poles and Jews could work together against the common (Russian) enemy.

The impact of the failed November Insurrection was grave. The Kingdom of Poland lost its autonomous parliament, the Polish army was disbanded, and educational institutions like the University of Warsaw were shut down. After 1831 Russian administrators, not Poles, ruled over the Kingdom of Poland. In the Prussian and Austrian partitions, too, autonomy and privileges previously enjoyed by Poles were reduced. While these steps did not have an immediate and direct impact on Jewish life, the fact that by the late 1840s Poles nowhere had their own administration, educational institutions, courts, and the like meant that it would be increasingly difficult to make the case that Jews should adopt Polish culture (acculturation) rather than German or Russian.

The next round in the Poles’ confrontation with the partitioning powers came in 1846, in the nominally independent Free City of Kraków, and again in 1848, in connection with the general European “springtime of nations,” when short-lived National Committees tried to assert Polish independence. In launching their uprisings, the Polish revolutionaries debated whether the



independent state they sought should be a “republic of many peoples” (as they imagined the Old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) or a state for the ethnically-defined Polish society alone. That debate highlighted again the question of how Jews fit into the evolving Polish nation.

For their part, Jews had somewhat different concerns. In Poland, as throughout Europe, they hoped that the upheavals of 1848 would sweep away the legal restrictions to which they were subject under the various partitioning regimes. Indeed, Jews were subject to special restrictions and taxes unlike any Christian national minority. They included limitations on residing along certain streets in Warsaw and Wilno and even the total prohibition of residence in some towns. Jews also had to pay many special taxes. Hence Jews were often among the 1848 revolutions’ most vocal supporters.

However, the events of 1848 affected Polish-Jewish relations in the three partitions in different ways. Generally, rural and traditional Jews were touched least of all, no matter where they lived. In the Prussian partition, Jewish liberals often cooperated with local German liberals who were pushing for a united Germany. In this respect Jews came into conflict with the Polish patriotic movement, which wished to retain as much autonomy as possible in Prussia’s mainly-Polish eastern provinces. In some cases these frictions degenerated into physical attacks by Poles on Jewish property and individuals. Other Jews enthusiastically embraced the Polish national cause. Ludwik Lubliner, a Polish Jew living in western Europe, wrote and spoke eloquently in favor of Polish independence, arguing that “without a free Poland the Germans cannot be sure of their own freedom.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Habsburg Empire, too, some Jews, most famously Rabbi Ber Meisels of Kraków, supported Polish independence along with political liberalization. Galician Jews were often heavily involved in aspects of the revolutionary movement, including participating in national guards, presenting petitions to the ruling powers, and joining forces with both early Polish national advocates and German-oriented liberals. Even some German-speaking Jews from parts of the Habsburg realm that were not historically Polish, like Adolf Fischhof of Vienna, were highly visible among advocates of the Polish cause. On the other hand, the Russian

1 Quoted in Artur Eisenbach, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780–1870*, Oxford 1991, p. 342.

Empire was hardly affected by the events of 1848. As a result, the Jewish subjects of the tsar did not experience the revolutionary events of the period, nor did their legal situation change.

In the end, Poles gained virtually nothing from the revolutions of 1848. For Jews the balance sheet was mixed. Although they temporarily received equal rights in many German principalities, including the Habsburg lands, these reforms were often rescinded once the revolution was defeated. Moreover, in some cases, reaction against liberal demands and continued unrest led to anti-Jewish violence in German and Austrian lands. Still, an important point had been made and accepted broadly among Christian liberals: subjecting Jews to discriminatory laws was fundamentally unjust and out of line with basic liberal concepts like civil rights and the rule of law. By the 1860s, following this principle, legal discrimination against Jews had been abolished nearly everywhere in Europe, with the notable exception of the Russian Empire. In the Polish parts of the Empire, however, some movement toward lifting anti-Jewish restrictions was made in the early 1860s under the leadership of Aleksander Wielopolski. More generally, the fact that some Jews and Christians in the Polish lands worked side by side for liberal political reform was a novelty. But on the other hand, the support of many Jews for the German national cause often inflamed anti-Jewish sentiments among Poles. Torn between German-oriented liberals and Polish national demands, many Jews in Galicia resolved this conflict by returning to the age-old alliance with the crown, this time represented by the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph.

The next major developments in the relations between Poles and Jews took place in Russia, where the aftermath of the 1848 springtime of nations and political and social reforms introduced by Tsar Alexander II after 1856 led to growing expectations that Poles in the Congress Kingdom might be granted self-rule. However, Polish expectations exceeded what Russian officials were prepared to grant. This situation led to a series of violent conflicts in early 1861. Wielopolski tried to contain the violence, but his actions backfired. Responses to those actions led not only to a growth in the size, intensity, and scope of the confrontations with the Imperial authorities but also to a burgeoning sense of nationhood and nationalism among Poles.

In this context the question of who ought to be considered part of Polish society reappeared. After 1861 many Polish leaders hoped to create an

inclusive community in the Congress Kingdom among a coalition of groups and interests united under the all-encompassing banner of “the Polish nation.” Toward that goal, and in the spirit of liberal reform, Polish liberals encouraged Jews to take part in the Polish revolt as “brothers” and “children of Poland.”

Although exact numbers cannot be determined, many Jews responded positively to these pleas and to the accompanying commitment to equal Jewish civil rights. The funeral for the five non-Jewish victims of a violent confrontation with government forces in February 1861 soon turned into a massive public ceremony that included both Poles and Jews, an expression of intergroup solidarity beautifully memorialized by the Polish Jewish painter, Alexander Lesser. According to some historians, as many as one thousand Jews participated in the 1863 insurrection, of whom approximately four hundred were killed, wounded, or punished by Tsarist authorities. Not only leading progressive Jews and *maskilim*, like the rabbi and preacher of Warsaw’s Progressive Synagogue, Markus Jastrow, but representatives of traditional Jewish society such as Ber Meisels, who had become chief rabbi of Warsaw in 1856, came out publicly in favor of the Polish cause.

Other Jews were far less open to Polish demands for national autonomy and either remained neutral or, in some cases, allied themselves with imperial rule, language and culture centered in St. Petersburg. A rising fear of conflict between representatives of the local nation and those of the Tsarist apparatus led many Jews to stake their claim with more conservative forces of social and political order associated with the power inherent in imperial institutions and cultural practices. Still other Jews began the long process of searching for another, alternative way out of this tug of war between decaying imperial orders and rising national consciousnesses, that of Jewish self-determination.

Not only the actual events of 1861–1863 but the way they were subsequently recalled influenced Polish-Jewish relations. For those Jews who yearned for a Polish-Jewish symbiosis, these events represented a key moment in those relations, one to which they could point in order to demonstrate Jewish loyalty and commitment to the Polish cause. Optimistic visions of solidarity and brotherhood notwithstanding, however, the defeat of the Polish insurrectionaries and the Russian government’s subsequent steps to weaken the foundations of Polish national existence — including the abolition of the autonomous Polish Kingdom, restrictions upon the use

of the Polish language and dissemination of Polish culture, and measures to undermine the economic position of the nobility — represented critical blows to Polish efforts to achieve independence. Those blows caused many Poles to rethink earlier strategies. In the process of that rethinking, ideas about the place of Jews in the Polish community were also reexamined.

The dominant trend in the post-1863 Polish reevaluation has been dubbed “positivism.” Its basic premise was that the defeat of 1863 proved that, at least for the immediate future, Polish patriots should concentrate on cultural and economic development, leaving politics for a more propitious (and distant) future. Positivists also made certain assumptions about the way Polish-Jewish relations ought to develop, although those relations were not their primary concern. Like most European liberals of the time, they considered religion a private matter. They also thought that with the spread of education and literacy Jews would shed what positivists pejoratively called their “medieval,” “Asiatic” dress and dietary customs and become outwardly indistinguishable from other Poles. Similarly, they expected that Jews, seeing the utility and beauty of the Polish language and culture, would abandon their Yiddish speech, which positivists, along with many Jewish reformers, disparaged as a mere “jargon.” The positivists were generally quite ignorant of Jewish culture and religion, but such ignorance was normal among Christians of the era. That ignorance, however, did not prevent them from demanding that Jews give up their particular language, dress, culinary customs, and general way of life and become “Poles of the Mosaic faith.”

For Jews, the post-1863 generation was one of continuities rather than stark change. While many Jews had fought alongside Poles in the early 1860s, the Jewish masses remained largely traditional, following religious Orthodoxy and living a life mainly apart from their Christian neighbors. Nevertheless, acculturation continued, except that now Jews in the eastern part of historical Poland (covering approximately present-day Belarus, Lithuania, and western Ukraine) turned toward imperial Russian culture instead of Polish as the preferred milieu into which to assimilate. This decision had less to do with politics or love of Russia than with the practicalities of life — “getting ahead” economically — in the Russian Empire. Even so, this trend affected only a minority of Jews.

No matter how small the extent of Jewish Russification, however, its appearance injected an important new tension into Polish-Jewish relations.

So too did a very significant “non-change:” the failure by the Russian government, despite a number of proposals and discussions, to repeal the rights granted to Jews in the Kingdom of Poland in 1862. As a result of this inaction the legal situation for Jews in the Kingdom (or “Vistula land,” as Russian officials now had it) differed significantly from that in other parts of the Russian Empire. While scholars debate the actual benefit that Jews in the Polish provinces derived from this situation, contemporaries were convinced that Jews were far better off there. Many also believed that the difference in legal status was enticing thousands of Jews to migrate from the Pale of Settlement to cities like Warsaw and Łódź. Little is known about the actual extent of this migration, but, like Jewish Russification, the fact that it was widely perceived to be significant had far-reaching consequences for the development of Polish-Jewish relations from the final decades of the nineteenth century onward.

Those consequences stemmed largely from the rapid growth of national sentiment in east-central Europe, in particular after the triumph of national unification in Italy and Germany (1860s–1871). Toward the end of the nineteenth century many Poles, along with other non-Russian or German-speaking communities in the Tsarist and Habsburg Empires, began to assert the principle that states ought to be constituted by ethnically homogeneous “nations” — groups of people who shared a single language and culture and lived together in a single “national territory.” Moreover, in states constituted by nations, the educational system, military, and bureaucracy were supposed to serve first of all the needs of the constituting nation’s members. Such idealized monocultural states did not easily fit the realities of multiethnic, multilingual eastern Europe, where several nations often inhabited the same space. That situation, however, did not daunt Polish or other local nationalists.

For Jews in eastern Europe, many of whom lived in places that more than one nation claimed as part of its national territory, this situation posed a serious problem. In theory Jews could join one or another emerging nation through a process of far-reaching acculturation. But in practice there were three obstacles to achieving that end. First, by choosing to acculturate to one nation, Jews ran the risk of alienating other nations with competing territorial claims, not to mention the Imperial authorities. Jews’ feelings of being caught in conflicts not of their making, which had surfaced during the

1863 uprising, became even more acute as national sentiments intensified. Second, the Imperial Russian and German cultures appeared at the time to offer Jews greater advantages than Polish. Even in Austrian Galicia, where Poles retained much of their cultural, political, and economic influence, the position of Polish as the language of commerce and high culture was challenged if not eclipsed by German. In the Russian Empire, economic advancement demanded facility in the Russian, not the Polish, language. Both German and Russian (to a lesser extent) were imperial languages, backed by powerful states. Polish could not make such a claim. Finally, under conditions of Imperial rule, the means to acquire the culture of any local national group were often lacking.

In Russia, the authorities discouraged Jews from attending Polish-language schools, which were in any case few and highly restricted in their curriculum. No universities there taught in Polish, and even secondary education was exclusively in Russian. And yet some Jews did learn Polish — even to the extent of teaching it to their children as their first language. These were the several thousand annual subscribers to the Polish-language Jewish weekly, *Izraelita*, which appeared from the mid-1860s until the eve of the First World War and attempted to combine Polish patriotism with a liberal Jewish religious identity. But even those Jews, with few exceptions, wished to preserve an identity as Polish Jews, a “dual identity.” That possibility was rejected by nearly all Polish nationalists and, increasingly in the twentieth century, by many Polish liberals as well. The ideal of a monocultural nation-state meant that Jews could become part of their “host” nation only after surrendering most, if not all, aspects of their Jewishness. Increasingly even the most Polonized Jews were called upon to cut themselves off entirely from the community of their birth. Thus Polish-speaking, patriotic Jews like the writer Aleksander Kraushar complained at the end of the nineteenth century that even though he no longer identified with traditional Jewish culture, there were certain Poles who refused to consider him a member of the Polish nation. Indeed, in the decade before the First World War, entirely Polonized Jews were sometimes accused of “hiding their Jewish origins” in order to claim false membership in the Polish nation.

These general trends were also affected by specific events. One was the March 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II and the subsequent wave of anti-Jewish violence that engulfed over 250 cities and towns across

southwest Russia. These violent outbursts, called pogroms, led to a deep political, social and ideological crisis for Jews and Russians alike. At first, many Polish observers looked upon the violence taking place elsewhere in the Russian Empire with a sigh of collective relief and an acute sense of self-righteousness. Pogroms and other violent expressions of ethnic hatred were, in their minds, something that happened only in “the East,” whereas Poland belonged to the enlightened West. Thus the Polish press repeatedly used the first wave of pogroms in the spring of 1881 to illustrate the extent to which Polish society was not only geographically but morally distinct from and superior to the Russian Empire’s eastern regions. For their part, many members of the liberal Jewish intelligentsia subscribed to the view that no matter what tensions might mar Polish-Jewish relations, Polish society was somehow immune to violent displays of intergroup hatred.

Those assumptions were challenged during Christmas of 1881, when anti-Jewish violence erupted in the heart of Warsaw. The immediate impetus for what many came to call the “Christmas pogrom” came after Sunday afternoon mass at the Church of the Holy Cross was interrupted with cries of “Fire!” In the ensuing panic and rush for safety, over two dozen people were crushed to death inside the Church, and many others were injured. Soon thereafter, rumors began to spread that Jewish pickpockets were responsible for the false alarm and the panic. These charges spurred three days of looting Jewish shops and rioting in Jewish neighborhoods, despite the heavy concentration of Russian police and troops in the city. All told, nearly two thousand Jewish homes were damaged and over two thousand rioters were arrested.

The Jewish journalist Nahum Sokolow wrote an unpublished report on the events in Warsaw that provides a particularly vivid description of the violence:

On 25 December, between noon and one o’clock in the afternoon, panic broke out in front of the church on Krakowskie Przedmieście. Many policemen stood there and heard the rioters saying that the hand of the Jews had done them harm and that Jews were the ones that had brought the terrible disaster upon themselves... Young, rash people came from all over as if they had been waiting in ambush. Before they had any idea about the events that had taken place inside the church, their loud cries of hurrah were heard in unison! They attacked the

Jews and beat them, and the policemen did not do a thing in order to calm the mob.... The waves of rioters grew larger and larger, the crowd started to act wild. Their voices were loud, and it was announced that the mob was headed for the houses of the Jews....<sup>2</sup>

The violence exacerbated the increasingly uneasy relations between Poles and Jews in the former Congress Kingdom. Determined to protect their good name and firmly convinced of the essential differences between Poles and other residents of the Russian Empire, many Polish observers, despite the lack of evidence, claimed that outsiders, and not Poles, had provoked and perpetrated the violence. Many continued to believe in a rather involved conspiracy in which government-planned pogroms were designed to besmirch the otherwise good name of the Polish nation.

At the time, many Jews promoting Polish acculturation also accepted the conspiracy theory. Sokolow believed that Russian authorities, their local representatives, and unsavory provocateurs were responsible for planning and executing the violence. Noting that Polish society and the Polish press had overwhelmingly condemned the crowd's behavior, *Izraelita* repeatedly represented the Christmas violence as an aberration in the otherwise good relations between Poles and Jews. This particular disturbance was seen as an action by the uneducated masses, not by the leaders of Polish society, who were still genuinely interested in integrating "good Jews" into Polish society. "As for us Israelites," the newspaper urged, "let us show that despite everything, the virtue of perseverance we have exhibited to such great effect for so many centuries in the defense of our faith can also be applied effectively to the preservation of our civic feelings of solidarity."<sup>3</sup> As a scholar of the era has noted, "the violence of Christmas 1881 needed to be attributed to the vices of individual hooligans... [and was] by no means... [taken as] a warning sign of any serious, deep-seated problem, or as a signal that Polish-Jewish relations were themselves dangerously tense."<sup>4</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the 1881 pogroms it seemed that little had changed in relations between Poles and Jews. The ideal of assimilation

2 "Undated draft of an article about the pogrom in Warsaw, December 1881," in Ela Bauer, *Between Poles and Jews: The Development of Nahum Sokolow's Political Thought*, Jerusalem 2005, pp. 159–61.

3 Quoted in Theodore R. Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The "Jewish Question" in Poland, 1850–1914*, De Kalb, IL 2006, p. 81.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 82.



continued to be strong among the Polish intelligentsia, but most Polish Jews remained traditional and, therefore, largely unconcerned with the way of life of their Polish neighbors. Moreover, no significant alteration in the Jews' legal status in the Kingdom of Poland occurred. In the Pale of Settlement, however, the infamous May Laws of 1882 further restricted Jews' rights to reside outside of cities and to keep businesses open on Sundays and Christian holidays. The laws made it even more difficult than before for many Jews to earn a living.

At the same time, dissatisfaction among some Poles over the ostensibly slow progress of acculturation among Polish Jews increasingly found voice in openly anti-Jewish publications. Whereas the 1860s and 1870s were dominated by the liberal-positivist approach of assimilation, the last two decades of the century revealed mounting irritation at "the Jews" for their alleged failure to join and strengthen the Polish nation. Also, whereas earlier the Jewish question had been of marginal concern to the Polish intelligentsia, from the 1880s it commanded greater attention.

The single most important landmark in Polish-Jewish relations after 1881 was the establishment of the journal *Rola* in 1883. Its editor, Jan Jeleński, dedicated himself to warning his countrymen of the Jewish menace. He encouraged them to form Christian cooperative shops, to isolate the Jews economically, and to press Jews to emigrate, all in order to increase peasant prosperity. Jeleński emphasized his devotion to the Catholic Church and to "Christian values." Although he rejected the possibility of mass assimilation as an illusion, he did not deny that individual Jews might redeem themselves by converting to Catholicism. Also, Jeleński and his followers insisted that they did not encourage violence against Jews. However, the fact that they drew a sharp and nearly impassable line between the two groups made the possibility of cooperation or even peaceful coexistence between Poles and Jews unlikely. Furthermore, by constantly harping on "the Jews" as the main source of Poland's ills, Jeleński's rhetoric replaced the view of the Jewish community as a group of human beings sharing space with Poles with an image of an irremediably different and implacably hostile enemy. In his representation of current affairs, Jews were implicated in every social problem; they were behind every attempt to "demoralize the people by means of the ruble." Thus he constructed an all-encompassing world view

out of already existing prejudices and hostility. Reading *Rola*, one could be sure that whatever ailed Polish (or European) society, Jews were at fault.

*Rola* was published in Warsaw until the eve of the First World War. However, it never achieved mass circulation, and it remained outside the mainstream of the Polish press. Nevertheless, its influence grew in the 1890s and early twentieth century, as mass-circulation newspapers and populist politics permeated the Polish lands. Indeed, by the 1890s numerous pamphlets and books on the “Jewish Question” denounced Jewish vices as too strong and lasting to be “washed away” by assimilation. One of the most popular of these was Konstanty Wzdulski’s *Polish Jews in the Light of Truth* [*Żydzi polacy w świetle prawdy*], first published in 1887. As the brochure’s subtitle (“A Social Study”) indicated, Wzdulski saw himself as a sober social scientist pointing out problems that others preferred to ignore. Wzdulski’s pamphlet was remarkable for the way it combined longstanding accusations against the Jews (including an absence of moral standards toward non-Jews, failure to learn Polish properly, and demoralization of the peasantry through drink and of noblemen through easy credit) with his evaluation of the political and economic situation of post-1863 Russian Poland. Wzdulski specifically denounced the granting of civil rights to the Jews of the Kingdom of Poland in 1862 as a major error, lamenting that Poles were now the “servants” and “slaves” of the Jews.

Anti-Jewish feeling was also growing in Galicia. A deputy to the Galician parliament (Sejm), Teofil Merunowicz, denounced “Jewish radicals” in speeches and in print, arguing that specific measures needed to be taken to reduce Jewish power in the province. Even more influentially, a Galician parish priest, A. Morawski, propagated “asemitism” — total avoidance of contact with Jews. For all his protests that he, like Jeleński, did not hate Jews, Morawski presumed that Jews would not join the Polish nation and that their influence was inherently detrimental to Polish causes. Furthermore, Morawski’s position as a priest and his “cultured” approach to the Jewish question made his ideas acceptable to many who despised rabblers like Jeleński. Thus, while the political situation in Galicia differed significantly from the one in Russian Poland, here too the 1890s saw the spread of ideologies hostile to Jews.

Those ideologies spread together with new ideas about how the Polish nation as a whole ought to think about and prepare for the future. By the

late 1880s, the influence of positivism had run its course. For young Polish patriots of the 1890s the positivist approach to the Polish question, stressing small, incremental advances in education and economic development as a path to eventual liberation from foreign domination, seemed ineffective and uninspiring. Instead they turned to two new ideas that were supposed to propel the Polish nation quickly into modernity and independence — socialism and nationalism.

The Polish Socialist Party (PPS), founded in 1892, was one of the first socialist organizations to be formed in the Russian Empire. Though championing the industrial working class in particular, the PPS program specifically included the establishment of an independent Polish state as a goal. In this regard it opposed the more radical internationalist Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) which argued that an independent Polish state would inevitably be reactionary. The PPS also made strong overtures to Jews: it published pamphlets in Yiddish and, in time, created a section to propagandize in Yiddish among Jewish workers. Some PPS theorists, like Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, even recognized a distinct Jewish nation entitled to collective national rights in a multiethnic Poland. Most, however, foresaw Jews and Poles living together in peace and harmony in a future socialist Polish republic. In practice, the PPS's Jewish policy did not differ enormously from the assimilationist ideal of the liberals, except that its attitude toward religious beliefs, practices, and institutions was even more negative.

Polish nationalism took its early institutional shape in the form of the National League (*Liga Narodowa*), later to become the National Democratic party (*Narodowa Demokracja*), founded in 1897. The National Democrats (or “Endeks” from the acronym, ND) claimed to champion the Polish common people (*lud*) instead of focusing on the urban working class only, as did the socialists. In their first party programs (1897 and 1899) Jews were barely mentioned. The crucial issue in these early programs was the internal organization and reinvigoration of the Polish nation; relations with non-Poles were of only secondary concern. In the next few years, however, a marked increase in anti-Jewish rhetoric can be seen in Endek writings.

The sharpening of National Democracy's attitude toward non-Poles was reflected in the party program of 1903. Here, unlike in the original program of 1897, Jews and other non-Poles were discussed at length. According to

the program the ND opposed any attempt to define the Jews as a nationality or nation. Jews were portrayed instead as alien residents of the Polish lands who would ultimately have no choice but to subordinate themselves to the Polish national interest. Should Jews join forces with the partitioning powers or with other enemies of the Polish nation, the party would oppose them and work for their expulsion from Polish territories. On the other hand, Jews who adopted a neutral position would be treated with tolerance, although the party would continue in any case to work against Jewish economic and social influence. Finally, any Jewish individuals who identified themselves unconditionally with the Polish cause, especially when they did so against Jewish interests, were to be accepted as Poles. In practice, of course, the demand that they openly oppose the Jewish community meant that very few Jews were likely to meet the new requirements for admission into the Polish nation.

Despite the passing of the feelings of solidarity associated with the 1863 insurrection, the looming threat of violence, the increasing popularity of ideas like the ones expressed in *Rola*, and the rise of the National Democrats, the central and more established Jewish organizations and figures in Polish lands continued to place their faith in the gradual opening of Polish society. This faith in progress, however, was not universal. As with Poles, Jews turned increasingly during the 1880s and 1890s to new political organizations and parties designed to revolutionize the conditions under which they lived.

The first such parties sought answers for Jews' problems outside of Poland. Starting with the Lovers of Zion (*Hibbat Zion*) movement, which sprang up in the immediate aftermath of the pogroms of 1881–1882, organizations dedicated to supporting new Jewish agricultural settlements in Ottoman Palestine were formed in Białystok, Warsaw, and other Jewish population centers. In 1884, representatives of about twenty such groups came together in the Silesian city of Katowice and established an umbrella organization. Many early supporters, like the head of the Warsaw branch of *Hibbat Zion*, S. P. Rabinowicz (Shefer), were both products and advocates of the *haskalah*.

Early signs of growth notwithstanding, however, the movement's development was uneven during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. While nascent concepts of nationalism often resonated among Jewish intellectuals, the *Hibbat Zion* organization did not become a popularly-supported, mass-based party by the turn of the century. Many

potential Jewish sympathizers remained either confused by or simply indifferent to the new language and style of early political movements. Moreover, Jewish nationalism was not the only new ideology competing for Jewish allegiance. Socialism also made inroads among many Jews beginning in the 1890s. Its appeal stemmed largely from rapid industrialization and breakneck urbanization in Łódź, Białystok, Warsaw, and other smaller cities with large Jewish populations. The General Jewish Workers Federation of Russia, Poland, and Lithuania (known commonly as the Bund, after the Yiddish word for “Federation”), was the most prominent Jewish socialist organization. A product of the merger of local self-help organizations for Jewish workers with more ideologically-motivated educational circles, illegal Bundist political groups grew quickly in Congress Poland’s industrial centers. By the early twentieth century, Warsaw, Łódź, and other industrial cities had small but determined circles of Bund activists and supporters who regularly met in clandestine locations to discuss theoretical issues, publish illegal materials, and organize public protests. According to Bund literature, the party boasted some 2,000–2,500 members in the Congress Kingdom by the end of 1904.

Although small in number, the Bund and other revolutionary parties like Poale Zion began to influence the nature and content of Jewish cultural affairs, in particular after the demise of the Revolution of 1905 by late 1907. Popular educational programs, self-help organizations and ostensibly apolitical cultural organizations conducted in Yiddish, Polish and, at times, even in Russian, opened up new, secular avenues of self-expression that changed the nature of leisure time activity and related forms of socialization for Jews in large cities, regional centers and, although less pronounced, even in small towns.

While the Bund’s mixture of revolution, Jewish culture, and, eventually Jewish nationalism attracted many, other Jews, particularly those who were comfortable in Polish-speaking environments, were attracted to non-Jewish revolutionary groups such as the PPS and SDKPiL. Whereas some historians have argued that the presence and influence of Jews was pivotal in these organizations, other, more nuanced studies have traced the extent to which these and other parties actively sought support without appearing to be too Jewish. Regardless of motives, many of these revolutionary organizations

tried to function as the long-coveted neutral societies where Poles and Jews could meet as comrades and brothers under the banner of revolution.

While some Jews sought to integrate into Polish society via the vision of socialist revolution, the Polish lands still remained a strong center of liberal integrationism. Centered around *Izraelita* in Warsaw and progressive and reform synagogues in Kraków, Warsaw, and Lwów, voices advocating a measured degree of liberal reform, a healthy diet of local patriotism, and the integration of Jews into almost all aspects of Polish society remained strong throughout the imperial era. Thus, while the established Jewish leadership and organizations were certainly challenged by the sudden appearance of the Jewish nationalists and revolutionaries, advocates of earlier programs of acculturation retained their dominance in many cases.

Moreover, many Jews remained oblivious to the ideological battle that divided the avant-garde. Many Jews — particularly young people, for whom politics became a part of a new Jewish youth culture — were used to changing their positions and party allegiances, sometimes more than once, without paying much heed to the bitter ideological wars that activists waged. A former resident of Warsaw who later became a hero of the labor movement in Palestine, Berl Katznelson, once confessed that as a young man he “‘betrayed’ every party that [he] ever belonged to.”<sup>5</sup> He was not alone. These were heady and potentially confusing times for many Jews, and the lines that divided different political and cultural organizations were often as fluid and ill-defined as those that still separated Jews from Poles. These lines, however, would soon be clarified and hardened by a series of events in the early twentieth century that irrevocably changed the nature of Jewish and Polish societies.

Some of those events took place in Galicia. Just as in Russian Poland, relations between Poles and Jews in the Habsburg Empire were strained in the final years of the nineteenth century. The political institutions and economic realities in Galicia differed significantly, however, from those in the Russian or Prussian partitions. Since 1867 Galicia had enjoyed broad cultural and political autonomy, even electing its own provincial diet. Poles were the dominant ethnic group in the province both numerically and economically. The Galician nobility was almost entirely Polish. However, except for the relatively prosperous cities of Kraków and Lwów, Galicia —

5 Berl Katznelson, “*Darki laArets*,” in *Kitve B. Katznelson*, vol. 5, Tel Aviv 1947, p. 385.

particularly its eastern regions — remained among the poorest provinces of the Habsburg Empire. Impoverished Galician peasants depended upon Jewish middlemen to sell their agricultural products, and the province's underdeveloped system of credit forced them frequently to seek loans from Jews. The traditional figure of the Jewish innkeeper was also familiar to Galician peasants, and no more popular there than in other Polish regions.

These economic strains exploded into physical violence against Jews across much of western Galicia in 1898, when rural misery, peasant land hunger, and near famine conditions were exacerbated by an anti-Jewish propaganda campaign. In particular, the “peasant priest,” Stanisław Stojałkowski, who had founded the “Christian Folk (Peasant) Party” in 1896, played a key role in fomenting the violence. Stojałkowski combined religious anti-Jewish rhetoric with modern economic arguments (the demand for peasants to rid themselves of Jewish middlemen), concluding that the only solution to the Jewish question would be the complete separation of Jews from Poles, followed eventually by the emigration of Jews from Poland. To this extent Stojałkowski agreed with Jeleński and the National Democrats, although his rhetoric and specific arguments sometimes differed from theirs. He played upon longstanding peasant resentment of the economic position of Jewish innkeepers, distillers, and moneylenders (who were sometimes the same person), as well as upon the peasants' tendency to identify Jews as the primary cause of their hardship instead of larger economic trends and their bitterness at what seemed to them to be the Jews' upward social mobility. The Catholic hierarchy looked upon political agitation by priests with some misgivings, but Stojałkowski's popularity among the Galician peasantry precluded any harsh disciplinary action against him.

The first attacks on Jewish-run shops and taverns occurred in small towns to the south of Kraków in June 1898, quickly spreading throughout the rural areas of that region but not to larger towns. Jewish businesses, including the residences of Jewish estate managers, were the primary targets of the crowds' wrath. While numerous injuries and dozens of deaths were reported, the violence was directed almost exclusively at Jewish property, not at Jews as individuals and not at synagogues or homes (except when they were connected to places of business). As in the Russian pogroms, after initial confusion and hesitation, the Austrian authorities took measures against the peasant rioters, which many peasants understood to mean that Vienna

was supporting the Jews. In the Viennese parliament (*Reichsrat*) the Polish political club unanimously condemned the violence, as did the Catholic hierarchy (although some local priests supported the attacks).

Farreaching economic and social changes also produced unrest in the Russian Empire, culminating in the revolution of 1905. The revolutionary ferment was accompanied in some six-hundred places by anti-Jewish violence. In 1906, violent riots against Jews took place in Białystok and Siedlce. In response to the revolutionaries' demands, Tsar Nicholas II agreed to create a State Duma, or parliament. The elections to the first three Dumas, held in early 1906, early 1907, and late 1907, stand as another key series of events in the evolving relations between Poles and Jews. The experience of semidemocratic elections led to situations in which both communities repeatedly faced one another in a rapid succession of angry public campaigns over the representation and definition of key symbols of national identity and self-determination. Ultimately, these electoral campaigns set a series of social, political, and cultural precedents that would repeatedly appear throughout the twentieth century.

Polish-Jewish electoral confrontations stemmed largely from the fact that most Jews lived in cities, where they formed a significant percentage of the population (in some places even a majority). Jews' votes were thus crucial in determining the outcome of voting in many cities. Concerned by what they regarded as the increasingly hostile stance of Polish nationalist parties like the ND, they often preferred alliances with liberal groups, no matter what their ethnic makeup. Jews were especially inclined to work together with the Russian Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party. In many cities Jewish-Kadet coalitions were successful. In Warsaw, on the other hand, Polish nationalist alliances, headed by the National Democrats and their outspoken leader Roman Dmowski, swept the first three Duma elections.

In many cases, the coalitions spearheaded by the National Democrats spoke out vigorously against Jews as part of their effort to deter potential voters from supporting Jewish-liberal coalitions. In time they railed against the so-called *Litwacy* (Litvaks), Jewish migrants to Congress Poland from the Pale of Settlement, who allegedly displayed no loyalty to Poland, interfered with the absorption of true Polish Jews into the body of the Polish nation, and served the Imperial government as agents of Russification in Polish lands. Raising the specter of Jews as a hostile, foreign body that



had usurped the Polish middle class and warning that any organization or party that was somehow linked to “the Jews” was bound to fall under their harmful spell, no doubt helped the National Democrats propel their slates to electoral victories. In the process they delegitimized Jewish participation in the political process. In time, many of these themes would determine the prevailing image of Jews and “the Jews” in modern Polish politics.

In addition to the precedents they set for talking about the Jews in mainstream political discourse, the electoral campaigns also highlighted the growing irrelevance of Polish liberal parties. Their inability to defend their coalitions with Jewish partners constituted a crushing blow to Polish liberals, as the political center collapsed under pressure from the National Democrats. This disappearance of a strong liberal element no doubt contributed to the tendency toward political extremes that characterized politics not only in Poland but throughout eastern Europe between the two world wars.

One of the manifestations of the weakness of Polish liberalism after the 1905 revolution and the first three Duma elections was the increasing use of rhetoric hostile to Jews by the parties that labeled themselves as “progressive.” To be sure, the establishment of such parties in 1905 was unthinkable without the participation of acculturated Polish Jews (Żydzi-Polacy). But therein lay a problem: Polish progressive parties were repeatedly denounced by the right as “Jewish,” or at least as “serving Jewish interests.” The vehemence with which several key progressive Polish figures — especially Iza Moszczeńska and Andrzej Niemojewski — attacked Jews after 1905 can be regarded as a (futile) attempt to prove their own Polishness against Endek attacks.

In 1906 Moszczeńska published a series of articles in *Izraelita* criticizing national intolerance and calling for cooperation between Poles and Jews. In the last of these articles, however, Moszczeńska warned that Polish-Jewish relations could deteriorate significantly if Jews failed to ally with the Poles against the centralizing pretensions of the Russian state. Five years later, Moszczeńska saw Jews not as potential allies but as sworn enemies of Polish interests. She developed this idea at some length in a book entitled *Progressivism at a Crossroads [Postęp na rozdrożu]*. In that book Moszczeńska — no doubt thinking of the recent Duma elections — noted that Polish society had come to regard progressivism and Jews as extremely closely linked, if not synonymous. She dismissed this idea at length, writing

that Jews were far from being intrinsically progressive. “Specifically Jewish traits,” she claimed, included “slavery and fanaticism,” whereas progressive ideals such as freedom of conscience, religious toleration, and equality before the law regardless of origin developed among the “Aryan peoples” in a “Christian atmosphere.” Traditional Jewish society was, in her depiction, full of backwardness, intolerance, and hatred for the modern world. Moszczeńska went on to argue that the only way Jews could be integrated into the Polish nation would be through complete and absolute obliteration of any specific Jewish identity. Assimilation as envisaged by nineteenth-century positivists would do Poland no good, she claimed. Instead of looking for support among Jews, Poles had to depend on their own efforts and resources, by learning to live without Jews. “The strong always have the Jews on their side; the weak — against them,” she wrote. “Thus, let us be strong. This is the best solution of the Jewish question.”<sup>6</sup> In essence, Moszczeńska’s solution differed little from that of the National Democrats: while individual Jews might assimilate totally, the Jewish masses were to be isolated, cut off economically, and obliged to emigrate.

Even more than Moszczeńska, Andrzej Niemojewski reflected the shift in thinking among Polish liberals on Polish-Jewish relations, particularly in his journal *Myśl Niepodległa* (Independent Thought). A long article in May 1908, probably by Niemojewski himself, excoriated the “philosemitism” of the Polish progressives and the false accusations of those who claimed that the Polish Nation (*Naród Polski*) had never treated the Jews fairly. In this article Niemojewski aimed both to defend Polish honor and, more importantly, to advocate for Polish progressives a new, tougher approach toward the Jews. Up to the present, Niemojewski wrote, progressives had remained silent when Jewish weaknesses were pointed out; they had not protested when Jews prevented the development of Polish cooperatives and small businesses or when criticism of the Jews was labeled “antisemitism.” Now, he insisted, Polish progressives must regard the Jewish question with less sentiment and more realism. He did not advocate legal restrictions on Jews but proposed that progressives should take on those Jewish elements that damaged Polish culture and economic life.

By 1911, Niemojewski’s attacks on the Jews had become open and vicious,

6 Iza Moszczeńska, “Kwestja żydowska w Królestwie Polskim,” *Izraelita*, No. 1–8 (January–February 1906).

culminating in a series of articles entitled “The Composition and Attack of the Army of the Fifth Partition” (“Skład i pochod armji Piątego Zaboru.”) In these rambling, disjointed pages Niemojewski attacked socialism, Esperanto, the nascent Lithuanian national movement, “social anarchism,” and finally “the Jews.” Despite the fact that Jews had lived in Poland for at least 600 years, they remained to his mind a foreign body or caste. Niemojewski accused Jews of continuing to live apart from Poles and of using the Talmud to justify disdain for and mistreatment of “the goys.” The disingenuousness of assimilated Jews can be seen, he raged, in their attempts to defend the Talmud or to deny that it continues to affect Jewish behavior adversely. At most it could be said that assimilated Jews had taken on the external trappings of Polishness but never its true spiritual essence. Whether assimilated or traditional, Zionist or “progressive,” all Jews constituted, in his view, the “army of the fifth partition.” They opposed Polish interests, defamed Poles, and acted against the most sacred Polish values. Niemojewski ended by declaring emotionally that “as long as he could hold his pen” he would defend Poland against this hostile army. From then on Niemojewski repeatedly purported to expose Jewish plots, especially in his works denouncing the supposed “ethic of the Talmud.”

Not all Polish liberals adopted this attitude after 1905, but other key figures did. Even the elderly “high priest” of Polish liberalism, the positivist veteran Aleksander Świątochowski, published articles between 1906–11 that expressed considerable anger toward Jews as a group. Still, although the general tenor of Polish public discourse was now hostile to Jews, seeing little chance for compromise or mutual accommodation, moderate voices could be heard. With few exceptions, the Polish Socialists attacked the nationalist stance on the Jewish question as retrograde and a blot on Polish honor. To be sure, the socialists could not publish openly in the Russian Empire and had little influence on mainstream public debate in Warsaw on the eve of the First World War. There were, however, numerous nonsocialist Polish progressives who continued to believe in the possibility of Polish-Jewish condominium and publicly expressed these views, especially after the elections to the Fourth Duma in October 1912 projected Polish-Jewish tensions to a more intense level than ever before.

Unlike in the elections to the first three State Dumas, in 1912 the National Democrats were unable to organize a wider coalition of Polish national

parties. Because many thought that his party had failed to achieve tangible political gains in the first three Dumas, longtime Endecja leader Dmowski found himself challenged by other groups claiming to represent the Polish patriotic camp. Backing the less pugnacious Jan Kucharzewski, a newly formed National Concentration, which had split off from the National Democrats, openly challenged Dmowski's electoral list and hoped to gain the backing of many of Warsaw's acculturated Jews. At the same time, Jewish groups began organizing, especially once they realized that Jewish voters represented a majority in the non-Russian curia in Warsaw. Although they did not put forth a specific candidate of their own, these Jewish groups did assemble a list of Jewish electors who vowed to support either a Polish candidate who openly backed equal rights for Jews or, if no such candidate could be found, a suitable Jewish representative.

The ensuing electoral campaign was particularly bitter, with Dmowski and the National Democrats castigating the National Concentration as Jewish lackeys and repeatedly threatening to introduce a boycott of local Jewish businesses. With the Polish patriotic camp split into two sparring organizations, electors supported by the Jewish list took 40 percent of the 23,000 votes cast, garnering 46 of 80 electors to the local electoral caucus. The National Concentration and National Democrats split the rest of the electors: 23 for the Concentration and 11 electors for the ND. Following public threats designed to intimidate Jewish electors from putting forward a Jewish candidate, a relatively unknown elector from the PPS-Left, Eugeniusz Jagiełło, was chosen as Warsaw's representative to the Duma. Jagiełło received the support of all Jewish electors and no votes from either of the Polish nationalist organizations. Labeled "the Jewish delegate," Jagiełło's election led to a marked increase in tensions between Poles and Jews. Jagiełło himself was so frightened by the calls for physical violence that he actually went into hiding for several days.

The National Democratic daily, *Gazeta Poranna*, and other papers responded to the embarrassing political defeat by calling for an economic and social boycott of Jews and Jewish owned businesses, under the slogan of "*swój do swego po swoje*" (roughly, "stick to your own kind"). The Jewish journalist Bernard Singer recalled the unsavory tactics as relations between Poles and Jews reached what seemed to be a new low: "The paper unmasked Jewish shops which had Polish names and called for a boycott of

Jewish doctors and lawyers.”<sup>7</sup> While the exact impact of the boycott, which was accompanied by sporadic outbursts of anti-Jewish violence, is unclear, the campaign did little to improve the delicate state of relations between Jews and Poles in the Congress Kingdom. Singer further noted how “walks [by Jews] into the Polish section gradually ceased. [Jewish] Music-lovers stopped going to the Philharmonic.... The Jewish public abandoned the Philharmonic. Gradually it also gave up the [Polish] theatre.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the National Democratic press, formerly mainstream journals, including the still popular daily *Kurjer Warszawski*, joined the fray with charges that “the Jews’ triumph is momentary. We have a profound conviction that the Jews will pay dearly for it. Society must now begin quiet consideration, far from emotional outbursts, about systematic means of defense against enemies, and means of struggle with a separatist and dangerous element.”<sup>9</sup>

In this climate of hostility, there were still some Polish liberals who publicly rejected the anti-Jewish boycott as counterproductive, un-Polish, and shameful. For them, the boycott represented a betrayal of the most cherished Polish traditions of tolerance, culture, and enlightenment. They argued that anti-Jewish actions could not help solve the Jewish problem in Poland but would only humiliate Poles abroad and serve Poland’s enemies. Indeed, Russian reactionaries in the Duma sarcastically pointed out the Polish inconsistency in demanding national rights for themselves while denying them to the Jews. Along the same lines, the Zionist journalist and politician Vladimir Jabotinsky wrote in 1913, “Poles protest against the Russification of Jews only because they demand their Polonization.” For many liberals, the hostility toward Jews expressed by broad segments of the Polish middle class was a betrayal of the cause of liberty and progress, not a “domestic matter,” as some Poles argued.

Perhaps the most famous Pole who protested the boycott was the linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay. Rejecting the division of the world into “ours” and “theirs,” he refused either to love or to hate the Jews as a people,

7 Bernard Singer, “The Elections and the Boycott,” in Stephen D. Corrsin, “The Jews, the Left, and the State Duma Elections in Warsaw in 1912: Selected Sources,” *Polin* 9 (1996): 50.

8 Ibid.

9 Quoted in Stephen D. Corrsin, “Polish-Jewish Relations before the First World War: The Case of the State Duma Elections in Warsaw,” *Gal-Ed* (1989):50.

and dismissed with scorn the idea that Yiddish was somehow an inferior language or merely a “jargon.” Arguing along rationalist, liberal, and antinational lines, Baudouin de Courtenay condemned the boycott as the work of ignorant fanatics, cynical political manipulators, and fools. Polish traditions, political and economic progress, morality, and simple practical considerations demanded that Poles and Jews live together, if not in complete harmony, then at least without open conflict.

A more emotional appeal appeared immediately after the boycott declaration, penned by the liberal-conservative Ludomir Grendyszyński. Grendyszyński’s pamphlet bore the title “I protest!;” harking back to the days of the Polish Commonwealth when one noble Sejm delegate could undo a decision by simply saying “Nie pozwalam” — “I don’t allow it” — and also to Emile Zola’s famous “J’accuse!” that brought the Dreyfus Affair to international attention in France. For Grendyszyński, the boycott was fundamentally unjust in targeting all Jews and impractical as a solution to the Jewish problem. He proposed instead a “serious, positive program for the solution of the Jewish question,” based on continued industrialization and helping Polonized, progressive Jews to spread enlightenment and European culture throughout Polish and Jewish society. The boycott, Grendyszyński argued, hurt neither Jewish nationalists nor enemies of Poland but primarily poor Jews who could not even vote in the Duma elections. He ended with a rhetorical warning of the possible escalation of the boycott movement: “They write ‘defense’ and read ‘boycott.’ They say ‘boycott’ and carry out ‘terror.’ From terror it is only a step to *pogrom*, and after pogroms, as we know from sad experience, comes *robbery and banditry*. I do not want this shame for my nation and thus protest!”<sup>10</sup>

Another Pole disgusted by the nationalistic and antisemitic furor of 1913 wrote that the ugliness of the boycott campaign reflected poorly on Polish traditions of humane treatment of minorities. Starting her pamphlet with a summary of the Polish defeat in the Duma election, Teresa Lubińska noted, “Yes, it was a defeat. So we of course look for a scapegoat. And we don’t say to ourselves that we ourselves are at fault for ideology, inefficiency, lack of organization, arrogance, squabbling, and building castles in the air.” The boycott, she warned, served only to cover up Polish faults rather than correct them. They also underestimated the historically-proven Jewish

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10 Ludomir Grendyszyński, *Protestuję!*, Warsaw 1912, p. 16.

ability to weather adversity. Boycotting the Jews would simply make matters worse, she argued, dividing even further two peoples who shared a common territory. Rather than blame the Jews for Polish troubles, Poles needed to improve themselves, all the while working together with Jews so that, in the long run, “all on the Polish land will feel themselves to be Poles.”<sup>11</sup>

Surely these protests required courage at a time when expressing reservations about the boycott was widely considered tantamount to national treason. On the other hand, however, even these fervent opponents of the boycott often used anti-Jewish stereotypes and argumentation. Perhaps Jan Baudouin de Courtenay came closest to accepting the idea of a “supernational” Polish state that could deal equally with Poles and Jews. But his rejection of nationality as an ordering principle and his hyperrationality, which failed to consider the powerful feelings associated with a sense of national identity, prevented his ideas from finding broad resonance. Lubińska’s argument that a Polish boycott against the Jews would unleash far more harmful economic measures against the Poles was based on a mythological view of Jewish economic power. Both she and Grendyszyński attempted to distance themselves from the now discredited idea of “assimilation,” but they had little new to offer in its stead. None of the three took seriously or elaborated on the demands of the Jewish national movement in any of its branches. In essence, all argued that relations between Poles and Jews should return to the (somewhat mythical) tolerance and “enlightened” attitudes of the Wielopolski era. One may doubt whether such well-meaning suggestions had any possibility of influencing behavior and attitudes in the highly-charged nationalist atmosphere of these years.

In the eyes of many Jewish observers, the angry rhetoric and widespread support for the boycott appeared to spell the end of earlier visions of inter-group solidarity. With each passing political crisis, 1830–31, 1863, 1905–7 and then 1912, unfulfilled expectations for a new era of Polish-Jewish solidarity were repeatedly followed by the cruel realities of *realpolitik*. Writing in Polish several decades later, the Jewish journalist Bernard Singer vividly recalled the painful sense that “the Jews” had been expunged from the Polish body politic as the doors that previously seemed to lead to new worlds repeatedly revealed a Pandora’s box of suspicion, tension and hatred between Poles and Jews. “The boycott spread. Dmowski won among the

11 Teresa Lubińska, *Do sumienia waszego mówię!*, Warsaw 1913, pp. 4, 14.

Polish bourgeoisie. Nationalism won on the Jewish street...I was sentenced to return to the ghetto. Walking in [Warsaw's] Łazienki Park, I was hit with a stick from behind. From then on, I went beyond [the Jewish district of] Nalewki only unwillingly."<sup>12</sup>

As others have noted in regard to the Jews of Germany, the realization that one was no longer welcome in the larger, surrounding society was the bitterest pill of them all for most Jews; one that many had much difficulty swallowing. The repeated experience of rejection (in the political arena, social forums and, simply, on the streets), the subsequent sense of humiliation and bitterness that it often produced and the manner in which these experiences were reproduced in the Jewish collective memory would influence and shape mutual images, exchanges and impressions between Jews and Poles for the remainder of the most horrific century of them all, the twentieth century.

Such was the state of Polish-Jewish relations on the eve of the First World War.

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12 Singer in Corrsin, "Elections," pp. 51–52.



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