

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

JEWS – KIELCE – MEMORY



ISBN 978-83-923016-2-2



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KIELCE 2009

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ISBN 978-83-923016-2-2

Printed by Drukarnia im. A. Półtawskiego, Kielce

Publisher:

Stowarzyszenie im. Jana Karskiego

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On 11 September, on the fifth anniversary of the New York tragedy, a monument “Homo Homini” was unveiled in Kielce. This is a work in commemoration of the victims of terrorism, created by a world renowned sculptor, Prof Adam Myjak.

At a press conference the same day one of the journalists asked me a question, “*World terrorism and Kielce... why such a monument in Kielce?*”

I find the answer quite obvious. Here in Kielce we not only have the right but the duty to cry out whenever there are innocent people killed. Right and duty, as we ourselves have experienced the great drama of “Cain’s sin”.

The “Homo Homini” monument is dedicated to the innocent and murdered, but for us, the people of Kielce, it is also a symbol of historical truth and a guardian of memory.

Wojciech Lubawski
Mayor of Kielce

JEWES IN KIELCE

Marek Maciągowski

Prior to World War II, there were about eighteen thousand Jews in Kielce. They were rightful and active citizens of the city, which they considered their home. Not many people realised that this was one of the youngest Jewish communities in Poland.

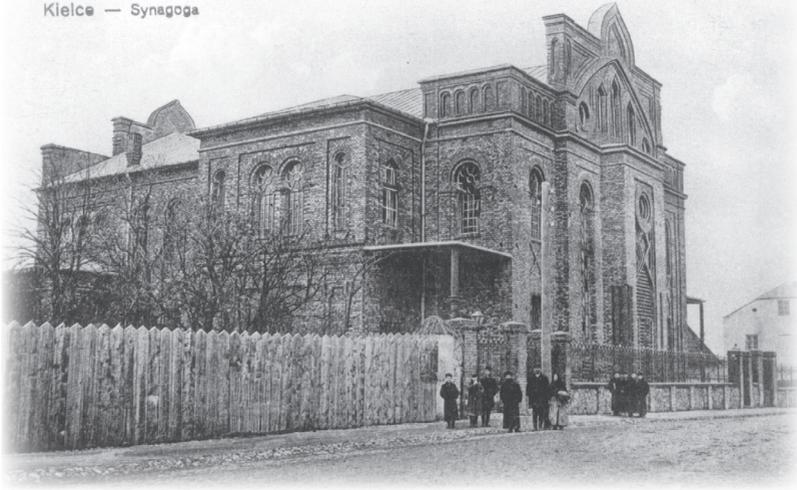
For many years, Jews were prohibited from settling in Kielce. They had lived for hundreds of years in nearby towns, such as Chęciny, Chmielnik, Pińczów, Raków, Wierzbnik, and Ostrowiec but the owners of Kielce, the Krakovian bishops, did not allow Jews to set up permanent residence in the city. This prohibition was finally lifted after the Tsar's imperial edict on the equality of rights for Jews in 1862.

In 1876, a decision to build a railway line from Dęblin to Dąbrowa Górnicza stimulated an increase in Jewish settlement in Kielce. In 1860, 2640 Jews were living in the city. They were predominantly involved in trade, which was a poorly developed industry in Kielce, and the newly-established companies quickly built up a solid reputation even with Polish clients. It took the townspeople a long while to come to terms with their Jewish competition.

The following quarter century was a period of tumultuous development for the city. Kielce's population had tripled since 1905 and now stood at nearly 30,000. In this period the number of Jews in the city increased four-fold, reaching 10,587.



Kielce — Synagoga



Jewish traders were present in all areas of trade. Handicrafts were advancing, and cottage industry was undergoing large scale expansion. The period also saw the establishment of industrial plants, which had been absent from Kielce until that time. Above all, there was an abundance of natural resources and wood to be utilized, and the Jews built the foundation for Kielce's wood and lime industries. Leather tanneries, small soap and candle manufacturers, small accessories producers as well as mills emerged. Kielce also became a city of cobblers.

The religious and social lives of Kielce's Jewish residents were overseen by the synagogue. In 1868, the first rabbi of Kielce district was appointed – Gutman Rapoport, and in 1878 a plot of land was purchased on Warszawska Street to serve as the location for a synagogue. At this time, members of the intellectual class started pouring into the city and two worlds clashed. One was the world of tradition, represented by Jews from the provinces raised in the age-old tradition. The other was of the world of modernity, represented by those who arrived in Kielce from other cities of the Russian empire. Until the end of the 19th century, the attitudes of Kielce's Jewish community were governed by tradition and Orthodox law, but the turn of the 20th century saw the emergence of a new generation who were open to the growing ideas of Zionism and socialism.

The community of Kielce Jews was for the most part poor. There were barely thirty wealthy families of industrialists and wholesalers, and about one hundred intellectual families lived at a decent level. But the vast majority of Kielce Jews lived very humble lives. Over one hundred families required permanent support from the district, and 1901 saw the establishment of the Society for the Aid of the Mosaic Poor.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Jews of Kielce undertook their construction project of the century – the building of their own synagogue. In 1901, Estera and Mojżesz Pfeffer donated a large square near Nowowarszawska Street as well as 20,000 rubles towards the cost of construction. The synagogue was ceremoniously opened in 1903. At this time, the rabbi in Kielce was Mosze Nachumem Jerozolimski.

After a great fire which destroyed the town of Chęciny in 1905, a significant part of the town's Jewish population relocated to nearby Kielce. The number of Jews in Kielce increased by seven thousand in the ten years between 1905 and 1915. Many Hasidic Jews came to Kielce during this time. Reb Chaim Szmuel Horowicz, the great-grandchildren of Zaddik Icchak Horowicz – the Seer of Lublin, one of the foremost representatives of Hasidism in Poland; Reb Motele Twerski, known as Rebbe of Kuzmir (from Kazimierz) the grandson of Mordechaj Motele and great-grandson of Nachman, known as Magidem of Czarnobyl; as well as Reb Chaim Majer Finkler, the brother of Zaddik Hilel of Radoszyc were among those who lived in Kielce.

With the arrival of the new century, the world of religion and tradition began to recede into the past and the new generation took over. They shunned submissiveness to the authorities and boldly stood up for their rights. A cinema – the first in Kielce – was established, Jewish political parties came into being, and cultural and sport associations were founded. Non-practicing Jews began to set up organisations for the advancement of Jewish culture.

The growth of Jewish trade and industry impeded the operations of the National Democratic party, which had a strong presence in Kielce. In 1912,



slogans encouraging the residents to boycott Jewish retailers, such as “Keep to your own”, began to surface, and a portion of the city’s population started to avoid Jewish stores, handicrafts enterprises and wholesalers.

Despite the offensive from the Kielce press, the boycott had little resonance with the citizens of Kielce. Jewish trade did not succumb during the boycott and new stores and wholesalers even opened. In 1914, Jews owned 276 stores in Kielce, including 85 groceries, 42 textile shops and 33 leather and shoe shops. The boycott didn’t affect the handicrafts market either.

In 1916, after the death of Rabbi Mojżesz Jeruzolimski, the position of Rabbi was filled by Abela Rapoport. By then, Kielce was home to 16,000 Jews.

The situation in Kielce became very grave after Poland regained her independence. Hunger abounded, medicine was scarce, unemployment was rampant and the merchants became impoverished. The difficult times, coupled with the National Democrats’ efforts, brought about a rift between the Jewish and Polish communities. Even though the city had up to that point never experienced anti-Semitic disturbances, just a spark was enough during the tense political situation. On November 11 of 1918, an anti-Jew street riot erupted in Kielce, resulting in the deaths of 4 Jews and injuries to over one hundred. After the police investigation, several people were arrested on charges of robbery. The delicate situation between the Poles and Jews would continue for another several months, resulting in Poles avoiding Jewish stores and vice versa. However, the situation shortly returned to normal.

Despite the tension, the Jews of Kielce voiced their support for the establishment of an independent Polish nation. The Jews celebrated the anniversaries of Poland regaining her independence on November 11 and of the constitution on May 3, which was accompanied by a festive service at the Kielce synagogue. The sentiment of unity with Poland was especially pronounced after Hitler’s rise to power in Germany.

The Kielce Jews were owners of industrial plants, steelworks, timber mills and quarries, and Jewish trade had expanded even further. The already existing stores, wholesalers and warehouses solidified their positions in the economy. Jews were at the forefront of the coal, building supplies, steel and paraffin trades and owned as many as 189 grocery stores. But trade in

OGŁOSZENIE.

Zarząd Gminy Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Kielcach niniejszym
zawiadamia, że z okazji OBCHODU ROCZNICY

KONSTYTUCJI 3 MAJA

odbędzie się w *kielce* dnia 3 maja r. b., o godz. 10 rano
w Synagodze przy ul. Warszawskiej 6

UROCZYSTE NABOZENSTWO

Zarząd Gminy Wyzn. Żydowskiej w Kielcach.

<p style="text-align: center;">בעקבאמאכונג.</p> <p>די פרישלאנגען פון דער אידישער קהלה אין קיעלץ מאכט בעפאנגן, דאס אין צוזאמנהאנג מיט דער פרישונג פון דער קאנסטיטוציע פון</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3 טען מאי</p> <p>וועט פארקייטן</p> <p style="text-align: center;">10:30 זעהן</p> <p>אין דער שוהל (ווארשעווער 6)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">א נאטענדינסטא.</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">קיעלץ דעם 3טן מאי 1918</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">מודעה</p> <p>שטען הקהלה היהודית בקיעלץ מודיע, שלגילי התנהג של</p> <p style="text-align: center;">הקונסטיטוציה</p> <p style="text-align: center;">יום 3 במאי</p> <p>תקדיד ביום 3 במאי בשעה 10 בבקר בבית הכנסת הגדול (ווארשעווער 6)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">תפלת הודיה</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">קיעלץ דעם 3טן מאי 1918</p>
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Poland was generally small-scale, with handicrafts also suffering, and the proposition of a boycott on Jewish trade didn't catch on among the city's residents.

In the twenty year period between wars, the Kielce Jewish community was incredibly diverse, which was not without impact on political and social life. All of the existing organisations, from the communists to the orthodox radicals, were vying for attention. Jewish education developed and in 1918 the Jewish Denomination Middle School for boys, which enjoyed a high level of prestige, had around 200 students. The teachers of Jewish schools were very active in all of the social and cultural initiatives as well as in the Jewish community council. There were also a dozen or so private schools, of which Adolf and Stefani Wolman's eight-class school for girls was especially popular.

The Jews of Kielce also very actively participated in municipal government through their presence in the City Council, on which members of the Jewish intellectual class had made a significant mark. In addition, Jews were involved in freelance and self-employed fields, with Jewish doctors enjoying a great level of prestige and esteem.

Jews never constituted a majority in Kielce; they accounted for about one third of the city's population. But relations between Poles and Jews, although not without problems and occasional antagonism or reluctance resulting from the difficult living conditions, were generally acceptable.

The census of 1931 indicated that Kielce had a population of 58,236, of which 18,073 were Jews. It was a society comprised predominantly of small plant workers, petty merchants and craftsmen. For a large number of them, Kielce was just a stop on the road to a better life, which they hoped to find not only elsewhere in Poland but also abroad. Many Jews were leaving Kielce for larger cities or emigrating, chiefly for economic reasons.



EXTERMINATION

Shortly after they entered Kielce in September of 1939 the Germans initiated a reprisal against Poles and Jews. German soldiers robbed Jewish homes, organised raids and imposed forced labour. The Jews were made to do the most difficult work and forced to wear the six-pointed star on their clothing. Already by November 1939, Jews with the best homes in the centre of the city, which was designated as the German quarter, were being forced to leave their homes. In mid-December of that year, the Germans began to seize Jewish wealth, quarries, mills, brickworks and lumber mills, whose owners were immediately shipped off to concentration camps. Every Jewish store in the city centre was closed down.

Dr. Mojżesz Pelc acted as the chair of the Judenrat – the German-imposed Jewish Council, but eventually stepped down owing to his unwillingness to carry out German orders. He was replaced by Herman Lewi.

Food rationing stamps were introduced. From September 1940, a person was allowed a ration of 2.8 kg of bread, 200 g of sugar and 160 grams of grain coffee per month.

Throughout 1940 the Jews were being robbed of their property by the Germans and in 1941 the Germans took over even the small stores and workshops. All the while, more and more displaced people, for whom food and lodging had to be provided, were being brought to Kielce. The entire Jewish population was now enrolled in forced labour. During the round-ups, Jewish youths were mainly selected and sent off to labour camps.

On March 31 1941, an order was issued to create a “Jewish quarter in the city of Kielce”. The ghetto was located in the poorest part of the city, where most of the houses had no running water or sewage. There were 500 buildings within the area, which could accommodate about 15,000 people, yet the number of Jews in the city, including those brought in, was already at 27,000.

The Polish residents of that part of town were given three days to vacate their homes, from April 2 to April 5. All of the Jews had to move into the district. Poles were strictly forbidden, under penalty of having their homes confiscated, to provide the Jews with any kind of shelter. All Jewish stores and workshop outside the Jewish quarter were shut down. An old age home and an orphanage were relocated to the ghetto.

In April of 1941, a transport of one thousand Jews reached Kielce from Vienna, and the living conditions deteriorated even further. More and more people were relying on the soup kitchen near the synagogue. There were always very long queues of starving people at the cheap meal distribution points. The old age home and orphanage were still in operation, although it was becoming harder and harder to keep them running.

The Kielce ghetto was fenced in by a wall made of boards and barbed wire. Jews could only leave the ghetto if they had a pass. At first, Poles were allowed to enter the ghetto without any interference but it started to become dangerous because of the frequent checks carried out by the military police.

The Germans banned gatherings and prayers and the synagogue was converted into a warehouse. The situation in the ghetto was getting worse by the month. The price of food was increasing at an alarming rate. The Judenrat distributed soup but the lines were so long that people had to wait two hours for a bowl. The penalty for leaving the ghetto was death by firing squad. The executions took place at the cemetery in Pakosz.

It became clear in the summer of 1942 that the Germans are planning to physically eradicate the Jewish population. The first transport took place on August 20 at 4 am. Around six thousand Jews were shipped out on that first day. The Germans killed the old and the sick on the spot. The young and healthy were kept behind to work.

On August 22, people were taken from the area known as the little ghetto. Another six thousand were taken on that second transport. Among them was Rabbi Abela Rapoport, with his wife Sara, sons Boruch and Mordechaj, and daughter Zysla. The Rabbi walked wearing his Tallith and reciting the Widduj pre-death prayer and the Shema. The Germans killed around 500 people that day, mainly the old and sick, as well as children from the Jewish orphanage.



On August 23, the Germans killed all of the residents of the Jewish old age home, and ordered all of the patients of the Jewish hospital to be killed by poison.

On August 24, 7000 people were taken away in a third transport. Thirty pregnant women were shot to death at the wall of the synagogue.

The Nazis killed around 1200 people on the day the Kielce ghetto was liquidated. They sent another 21,000 to their deaths in Treblinka.

Around 1500 to 2000 people remained alive – those who were young and able to work. They were locked in a camp between Stolarska and Jasna streets. They were not paid for their work, only fed. Poles were not allowed to enter the camp or even approach the fence. Several people were shot and another dozen or so were sent to Auschwitz for trying to sneak food to the prisoners.

After the ghetto was liquidated, the Nazis claimed all Jewish real estate as “unowned property”. The lumber mills, quarries, lots and bank deposits belonging to Kielce Jews were confiscated.

On May 23 1943, the Nazis shot and killed 45 children at the Pakosz cemetery. The children were aged 18 months to 13 years and had lived at the work camp with their parents. The Stolarska/Jasna camp was shut down at the end of May 1943. Some of the prisoners were sent to camps in Skarżysko, Pionki and Starachowice, and the rest were divided among three camps near the Kielce industrial plants that were being used for the production of war supplies. They worked 12 hour days with one half-hour break in exchange for 200 grams of bread and a bowl of soup.

The camps operated until the summer of 1944, after which the worker were sent off to Auschwitz. Some of those who remained ended up in camps at the arms factories and others were sent to Buchenwald. Around 200 people were killed at these camps and dozens died of hunger and exhaustion.

Of the city’s twenty-some-odd thousand Jewish inhabitants, only around 500 survived the war and occupation. Those who survived attribute their survival largely to Poles. Among the passive and indifferent there had also been those who had risked their lives trying to help their Jewish neighbours. During the existence of the ghetto, Poles tried to commission jobs to Jewish craftsmen, paying them in food. Poles also arranged Arian documents for their Jewish acquaintances, thanks to which a dozen or so families survived the occupation.

After World War II, the Kielce Jewish community no longer existed.

ANTI-JEWISH POGROM IN KIELCE, 4 JULY 1946

Bożena Szaynok

On 4 July 1946, an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence took place in Kielce and claimed the lives of almost 40 Jews. In fact, there were 42 Jewish victims of the pogrom as several of the injured later died in hospital¹. The victims included a child, a newborn, a pregnant woman, and youths – 16 and 17-year-old members of the kibbutz. These events were sparked by a rumour that a Polish child had been abducted by Jews. The pogrom began in the morning and lasted for 6 hours, but the anti-Semitic atmosphere and attempts to incite more incidents lasted until evening. Most of the turbulence took place at a building on Planty Street, where the accused Jews resided. The attacks on the Jews were provoked by the actions of the communist police and the army through their authentication of the child's abduction and their incompetent handling of the aggressive mob that had gathered on Planty Street. In addition, it was the police and army who were the first to shoot at the Jews and their actions were seen as a justification for civilians to join in the violence. It is important to mention the impunity of those who committed the murders and looting against the Jewish community during the pogrom. It was shocking how utterly ineffective the city authorities, political parties and head of the Kielce security council, who at the time possessed the highest degree of authority, were in getting the situation under control. Residents of Kielce were involved in the murders from the beginning of the pogrom, but the second phase began when workers from the steelworks arrived in the afternoon.

The hatred and cruelty displayed on that day are described in eye-witness accounts. We hear about innocent victims being shot, about young girls being thrown from a second story window only to be finished off by the crowd gathered below, about a young man being stoned to death. Most of the tragic violence happened near and around the building on Planty but Jews were being murdered in the entire city of Kielce as well as on trains passing through the city.

Even such a brief account of the events in Kielce is enough to demonstrate how tragic the situation was. It had an enormous impact on Jews in all of Poland and on Polish-Jewish relations. For those who miraculously survived those extermination attempts in Kielce it was a confirmation of Poland's anti-Semitism and an acknowledgement of the fact that Poland was not a safe place for them. The pogrom led to a higher rate of Jewish emigration from Poland, and it sparked even those who had previously decided to stay in Poland to leave. It should be emphasised here that the emigrating Jews took with them the worst possible image of Poland and Polish peo-

ple. In order to understand the Kielce incident, it is important to recall the state of Polish-Jewish relations up to July of 1946, which had laid the groundwork for the eruption on the day of the pogrom.

The killings in Kielce occurred just over a year after the end of the war. It is crucial to remember what had happened between Poles and Jews during the war and even in the period “just after the war”. The war had huge implications to Polish-Jewish relations. The policy of the Nazis clearly indicated that it was acceptable to strip a people of their rights and condemn them to extermination; that it was acceptable to eliminate “strange” and “other” peoples on the basis of “moral obligation”; and that these peoples could be robbed, humiliated, beaten, and murdered. Gradually, interaction between Poles and Jews was being limited and a public space into which the Jews were not allowed eventually became the normal reality of German-occupied Poland. The forced marking of the Jewish community with armbands with the star of David on them at every turn underscored the “alienness” of the situation the Jews found themselves in. And all the while anti-Jew propaganda was manipulating the population. The consequence of the Nazi policy was isolation, e.g. the establishment of ghettos resulted in Jews disappearing from neighbourhoods of which they had previously been active residents.

An important aspect of the occupational reality was the legitimisation of corrupted attitudes and the empowerment on the part of the authorities of criminal actions towards the Jews, as well as the abuse by certain Poles of the Jews’ predicament. Equally important was the fact that such behaviour was permitted and that the representatives of the new authorities actively participated in the looting and killing.



The war-time struggle with the difficulties of everyday life affected the character of Polish-Jewish relations tremendously. People looked out for themselves and became less concerned with the fate of others. This climate only reinforced the distance that had already existed between Poles and Jews before the war and discouraged any attempts to break free of indifference in the most dramatic war-time moments. We must also remember that these types of attitudes overlapped with the sentiments of indifference, animosity and reluctance which had been swelling even before the war. Other factors plaguing the occupational reality, such as the paralysis of civic development and the increasing isolation, contributed to the divide between Poles and Jews.

An important aspect of the war-time relations between Poles and Jews was the necessity of all-around aid from non-Jews. But for the most part, helping Jews was prohibited and punishable, even by death. But a rational justification for denying help did not make the refusal less painful, thus the situation “built” new relations which involved many extreme emotions. The appearances of Jews “on the Arian side” were very dramatic situations, and fear was a significant element in these “encounters”.

The reactions of Poles to the Holocaust were varied. We most often hear about the extremes: Poles helping Jews or Poles taking part in the crimes against Jews. Yet it is worthwhile to mention the other cases which demonstrate the conscious state of the witnesses to the crimes. One of the accounts says that, “people are dwelling on various faults of the Jews in order to alleviate their grief and reduce the amount of pity they feel.”² In another we read, “lightning bolts do not come down from the sky to kill the murderers of children, and spilt blood does not call for revenge. Perhaps it is true that the Jew is a cursed creature, against whom crimes go unpunished.”³

The awareness of death is ubiquitous in the accounts of the Holocaust. Death loomed for “being a Jew” as well as for sheltering Jews. The recollections are replete with memories of violence. An important part of the accounts concerning the attitudes towards Jews is the feeling of danger among those who decided to help Jews, as well as the feeling of helplessness and feebleness in the face of the gravity of the situation.

The war also dictated that, “one’s life depended on whether he was a Pole, a Jew, a Ukrainian, or a Lithuanian.”⁴ A new understanding of the concept of “other” was a consequence of the events described here. One of the war-time accounts recalls a “feeling of strangeness which was not felt toward one’s own people.” Such an atmosphere caused the disappearance of compassion and empathy.

The war-time reality brought about certain phenomena which shattered the prior order, such as the “mildening of death” as a result of public mass executions, life in camps, or from seeing the dead bodies laid out for public display. One of the most significant characteristics of the war-time generation is that they are ingrained with death but also accustomed to it.

Śmiercią męczeńską w Kielcach, zginęli:

AJZENBERG

ALBERT

BARUCH IZRAEL

DUCZKA (dziecko)

FAJNKUCHEN

FISZ REGINA

FISZ ADAS (dziecko)

FRYDMAN BERL

GERTNER BAJLA

GURSZTUC BAJLA

GUTWURZEL POLA

HORENDORF LEJZOR

DR. KAHANE SEWERYN

przew. Wojew. Kom. Żydowskiego

KARP SAMUEL, sierżant

KERSZ HERSZ

KERSZ SZ.

KOS

MIKOŁOWSKI MENDEL

MOROWIEC MOJŻESZ

PEŁTNO SZULIM

PRAJŚ IZAK, por.

PROSZOWSKA ESTERA

RABINDORF

RAJZMAN

SAMBORSKI

SOKOŁOWSKI CHIL

SZULMANOWICZ Z.

SZUMACHER FANIA

TEITELBAUM NAFTALI

WAJNBERG

WAJNREB, kapitan

WAJNTRAUB ABRACHAM, ppor.

WUZDELER

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7 NAZWISK NIEZNANYCH.

W głębokim smutku zawiadamiamy o bolesnej stracie, jaką poniósł nasz Ruch przez śmierć zamordowanych w pogromie kieleckim:

DRA SEWERYNA KAHANEGO
członka Rady Naczelnej „Ichudu” w Polsce

oraz chaluców:

FANI SZUMACHER

BEJLI GERTNER

RACHELI ZANDER

NAFTALEGO TEITELBAUMA

których los okrutny dotknął tuż przed planowanym wyjazdem do Erec.

Centralny Komitet „Ichudu” w Polsce
Komenda Naczelna Młodzieży „Ichudu”
w Polsce

Cześć Ich. Pamięci!

New phenomena in cross-ethnic contact also emerged during the Soviet occupation⁵. And as was the case during the German occupation, these phenomena had a decidedly negative impact on the relations between the peoples inhabiting the eastern part of the 2nd Republic of Poland. The causes were manifold; ranging from the basic, connected to the difficulty of everyday life, through the most complicated, concerning the participation of certain people in the new Soviet power structure. The consequence to Polish-Jewish relations was the “assimilation of Jews” into the Soviet system and thus the assimilation of the hatred for Soviets with the hatred for Jews⁶.

The phenomena of 1939-1946 described above did not subside with the end of the war. “Just after the war” we notice the Polish and Jewish communities confining themselves to their own environments. A martyr mentality, exemplified by the statement, “The camps seemed like the apogee of cruelty so we never even thought twice about the ghetto”⁷, emerged along with post-war migration. In a time when thousands of people were forced onto a “wandering path”⁸, consolation amidst the difficulty of abandoning a “little motherland” was found in those with common experiences. People sought cultural, religious and historical commonalities.

The political climate in Poland, i.e. the USSR-aided rise to power of the communists, also had a considerable impact on Polish-Jewish relations “just after the war”. Most Poles considered the issue as yet another partitioning of Poland or a new occupation. In respect to Polish-Jewish relations, this belief led to the Jews being identified as the ones responsible for the arrival of the new, unwanted, communist authority, and set the stage for more seemingly-justified criminal behaviour. It is a fact that some of the Jewish leaders and part of the Jewish community supported the new authority, yet some Poles extrapolated this to mean that the entire Jewish community supported the Soviets. This bred a negative opinion of the Jews. The

change in power also ushered in an environment of crime and violence. The depravity of the authorities posed a huge problem – communist police and the army took part in anti-Jew demonstrations, often going unpunished. That aside, the new “just after the war” reality meant looting, robbery and murder on a day to day basis.

These tensions affected the Jews enormously. By July of 1946, attacks on and murders of Jews were occurring in all of Poland. Anti-Jewish riots and attempted pogroms took place in Rzeszów, Tarnów, Kalisz, Lublin, Paczewo and Kolbuszowa. In August 1945 one person was murdered during a pogrom in Krakow. The motivations behind these eruptions were various: robbery, anti-Semitism, the activity of certain Jews within the communist system. Occasionally, rumours of ritual killings acted as the pretext for anti-Jewish uprisings, as was the case in Kielce.

However, in spite of the above mentioned causation, it was of no consequence to a community so crippled during the war whether the murders were motivated by robbery, by an organised initiative, or by the desire to eliminate an entity which was believed to be plotting against Poles. To the Jewish community living in the shadows of the Holocaust, the killing of Jews elicited unequivocal connotations.

In order to understand Polish-Jewish relations after the war it is necessary to consider the stance of the main public bodies of Poland with respect to the problems which were occurring at the time. The communists, who wielded the greatest degree of power to shape public opinion (censorship, media monopoly), focused all of their energies on politics. The subject of Jews also arose in this context. Aside from declarations of sympathy for Jewish comrades or proclamations of compassion for the Jewish community in light of the Holocaust, the communists exploited Jewish issues for the fulfilment of their own political agendas, e.g. the battle with anti-Semitism was used as a pretext for eliminating political rivals, who simply had to be accused of anti-Jewish activity. Such tactics were employed in order to compromise peoples’ confidence in the anti-communist opposition, yet they had the side-effect of ultimately strengthening the negative sentiments associated with Jews in post-war Poland.

The entanglement of Jewish issues in politics forced the remaining participants in the political scene to take action, especially since some of them (the opposition, the Catholic Church) were being blamed by the communists for the anti-Semitic uprisings. Retaliation to the communists’ manipulation was yet another feature of the political tug-of-war that further compromised the chances of a genuine approach to the hostile and unfriendly attitude maintained by a portion of the Polish society towards Jews.

Jewish issues were apparent also in underground independence movement. Here, the attitude towards Jews was a factor of, on the one hand, the complicated political situation in Poland, and, on the other, the political provenance of the various groups. A part of the problem resulted from the fact that some of the groups were involved in initiatives of which the victims were Jews, on account of them being seen as loyal-

ists to the new authorities. To some degree, these complications were linked to the problem of “criminality”, resulting from the impossibility of returning to a normal life, among a portion of the underground fighters after the war.

In addition to the above mentioned political spheres which had influence over how and what Poles felt about their Jewish fellow citizens, it is necessary to talk about the Catholic Church. The Church’s stance after World war II was largely informed by the post-war political reality and experiences during the war. The communist ideologies and administrations were scorned by the Church and it was believed that a confrontation was inevitable.

As a result, the fate of the Jews was a marginal concern in the Church’s post-war initiatives. But the attitude were mixed within this margin: indifference, sympathy and denunciation of the crimes, but also a political exploitation of Jewish issues, such as negative and hostile reports about Jews.

Post-war Polish-Jewish relations is one of the most difficult subject in recent history. Unfortunately, hostility and hatred towards Jews is a significant part of these relations. Post-war anti-Semitism thrived on the separation and isolation of the Polish and Jewish communities, and continued to develop within the difficult and complicated conditions after the war. Finally, the exploitation of Jewish issues in political manoeuvring prevented the possibility of a rational discourse on the subject.

Most of the phenomena described here are apparent in the days of the Kielce pogrom. The hatred towards Jews, the perception of them as “alien” or “other”, and the conviction that they pose a threat to Poland drove some Poles to take part in the blood-shed. It let others stand by and watch with indifference or voice indictments against the hated Jews. It convinced others still that Jews are bent on killing Polish children. The feeling of impunity and a lack of conscience were parts of that reality. After the pogrom, the Polish sociologist Stanisław Ossowski, wrote in his essay on the Kielce tragedy that it, “to a large degree [...] was a result of conditioning during war – the murdering of Jews was no longer something extraordinary. Why should those people be concerned by the deaths of 40 Jews if they were used to the idea that Hitler had murdered Jews by the millions?”

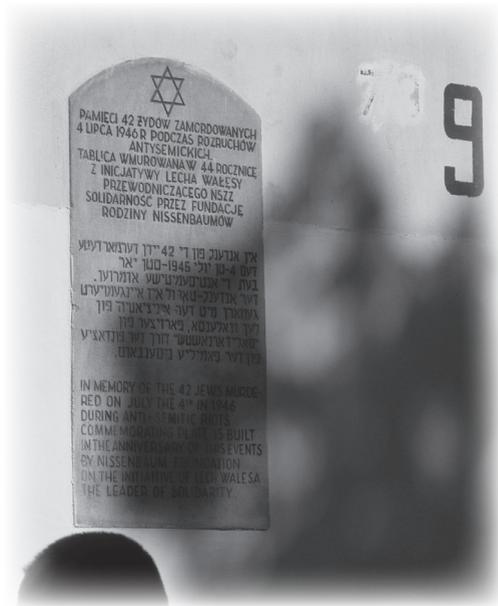
The indifference on the part of the communist authorities, in whose hands lay the responsibility of preventing the crimes, is not surprising either. The potential of utilizing the crime for political gain, which was already being done two days after the pogrom, was more important than the deaths of those people. In the aftermath of the Kielce tragedy, it was not the fight against anti-Semitism that was a priority, but the fight against political opponents (the manipulation of information, accusations, the polemics limited by censorship...). The fact that the communist authorities abandoned any attempts to quell the pogrom resounds of impunity.

The more unclear and the more manipulated the information about the pogrom by the authorities, the more speculation grew. Knowledge about the Kielce pogrom

was founded on, lies dispersed by the authorities, on the one hand, and suspicions and doubts of the opposition, on the other. Censorship and the limited reach of the free press that remained prevented the majority of the public from being able to form objective conclusions about the tragic events in Kielce. The rejection of the communist version of the story due to the lack of liberal discussion on the pogrom, resulted in a perception of the events that was largely based on gossip, rumours and unsubstantiated information. In the summer of 1946, the fundamental discourse on Polish-Jewish issues, as well as the Kielce tragedy, became entangled in politics and the communists accusations against the broadly-understood opposition thwarted any possibility of addressing the issue of anti-Semitism in Poland. Krystyna Kersten, the outstanding Polish historian, wrote, “the propaganda did everything to establish a myth about the relationship of anti-Semitism and the pogrom with the opposition to the new order, in effect giving the opposition and the Church a devious choice: to either join in the political/propaganda campaign regarding the Kielce tragedy or to themselves become the assailants, in a large degree responsible – if only in a moral sense – for the crime.”¹⁰

The fact that the Kielce tragedy became marred in politics cause the emergence of various stances on the issue. This was the case in, for example, the Catholic Church, which was convinced that it was the authorities who should have suppressed the uprising. The Church standpoint was mixed, expressing both sympathy and denunciation

of the crime while at the same time describing the Kielce tragedy and post-war Polish-Jewish relations from the perspective of political changes that had taken place since the Second World War. In this description, the Jews were responsible for introducing communism to Poland. In some statements, a sincere belief was expressed that the Jews really abducted Polish children. What was lacking on the part of the Church in this dramatic moment was, above all, a consideration for the Church’s teachings about Jews, called by Isaac Jules “the teaching of contempt”.



It is worth noting that the perception of Polish-Jewish relations “worked out” in the summer of 1946 was “frozen” until as late as the 1980’s due to a lack of access to archival resources and an impossibility of holding independent discussions. The contemporary discourse on the Kielce tragedy also has its limitations owing to our inability to accurately reconstruct all of the events of 4 July 1946, which results from the fact that some of the source material has been destroyed. But above all, and in spite of the historical accounts, we must remember that the pogrom in Kielce was a mass murder of 40 innocent people.

The text was based on the following sources: B. Szaynok, *Polacy i Żydzi lipiec 1944 – lipiec 1946* [*Poles and Jews July 1944 – July 1946*] as well as *Spory o pogrom kielecki* [*Disputes About the Kielce Pogrom*] [in:] *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego* [*On the Kielce Pogrom*], ed. Ł. Kamiński and J. Żaryn, Warsaw 2006. B. Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach. 4 VII 1946* [*The Pogrom of Jews in Kielce. 4 July 1946*], Warszawa 1992

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1. 2-3 Poles were also killed during the pogrom. Their cause of death was gunshot. The circumstances of their deaths are unknown.
 2. *Życie i Zagłada Żydów polskich 1939-1945. Relacje świadków* [*The Life and Extermination of Polish Jews 1939-1945. Witness Accounts.*], compiled and edited by Michał Grynberg, Maria Kotowska, Warsaw 2003, pp. 42-43.
 3. F. Tych, *Długi cień Zagłady* [*The Long Shadow of the Holocaust*], Warsaw 1999, p. 43.
 4. K. Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem. Polska 1944-1956* [*Between Emancipation and Captivity. Poland 1944-1956.*], London 1993, p. 11.
 5. On the basis of an agreement between the 3rd Reich and the USSR (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) on 17 Sept. 1939 the USSR took control of half of pre-war Poland. The annex by the USSR was followed by repression of Polish citizens. The Soviet occupation lasted until the outbreak of the Soviet-German War in June 1941.
 6. M. Wierzbicki, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na zachodniej Białorusi w latach 1939-1941* [*Polish-Jewish Relations in Western Belarus 1939-1941.*] [in:] *Wokół Jedwabnego. Studia*, ed. P. Machcewicz, K. Persaka, Warsaw 2002, p. 154.
 7. B. Engelking, *Zagłada i pamięć* [*The Holocaust and Memory*], Warsaw 1994, p. 247.
 8. In the case of Polish citizens, one quarter of the people lived in a different place than they did in the period before 1939.
 9. S. Ossowski, *Koszula Nessosa* [*The Shirt of Nessus*] [in:] “Kućnica”, 1946, no. 38(56).
 10. K. Kersten, *Polacy. Żydzi. Komunizm. Anatomia półprawd 1939-1968* [*Poles, Jews and Communism. An Anatomy of Half-Truths 1939-1968*], Warsaw 1992, p. 101.

O EARTH, COVER NOT THOU MY BLOOD, AND LET MY CRY HAVE NO PLACE

Book of Job, 16:18

Bogdan Bialek

In the article entitled "Nasza bardzo wielka wina" [Our Very Great Guilt], which I published in the local edition of "Gazeta Wyborcza" daily ("Gazeta lokalna", 27-28 May 1995), I wrote, "Let us be frank. For the people of Kielce the pogrom is a very, very difficult subject. There was no talk about it not only because this was the wish of the communist regime, which could be the reason for the many years of silence in schools and the media. But there was not talk about it in churches and during religion lessons. There was no talk about it at home, in families, among friends. And when finally the talk began, it was that Jews themselves procured this fate, or that it was the Soviets who massacred 42 people in the very center of the city, who kept on killing the entire day through. As if Kielce became deserted for this one day and all the righteous citizens took a day off and left the city for a bit of rest in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains nearby. (...)

The subject is difficult – if only to recall the words of John Paul II in Kielce, who upon his visit here mentioned the pogrom and instantaneously evoked numerous outraged voices – why are WE told this, after all we now have nothing to do with all that. Many of us think that the pogrom of Jews is a dirty trick somebody played on us.

It is difficult – if only to see how the post-communist city authorities, when planning festivities in relation to the anniversary (50th anniversary of the pogrom – from the editor) next year, write in the program of the events that they are expecting «a large number of Jews coming to Kielce» hence they propose to install two plaques commemorating the murder of 26 thousand Jews killed by Germans and Ukrainians, and another plaque on the Jewish cemetery, commemorating the inhabitants of Kielce and the region who have received the title of Righteous Among Nations. Not a word about the pogrom”.

The 50th anniversary of the pogrom did finally take place and the celebration was indeed grand, with many guests from Poland and abroad, with speeches by the then Polish Prime Minister, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, who expressed his grief and remorse, and by the Nobel Prize winner, Ellie Wiesel. But even years after the event, in January 2008 at a meeting in Kielce with Jan Gross, the author of "Fear" – a book describing anti-Semitism in Poland after World War II, one of the participants said, "How is it possible that having been born in Kielce years after the war, I did not learn about the pogrom until I was an adult?". In interviews after the Kielce

launch of the book, Gross himself said that, “the Kielce meeting was emotional also because of the fact that both the organizers and we, who were sitting behind the table, were expecting the worst: we were told what to do in case of a bomb attack. Boguś Białek, who has been for years involved in Polish –Jewish issues in Kielce, has had such situations happen to him. But the meeting was fantastic. People were very moved and spoke about the book, showing that the issues discussed have been to a great effect already digested. Of course, there were mad voices too, but it was evident that there was no support for them in the room. The rest was a normal and open discussion.”

The several hundred people who came to the meeting with Gross, to talk and listen to the painful past and the difficult present, no doubt must have disappointed the media who had hoped for a turmoil. Nothing of the kind happened.

Before the state and local authorities announced the festive celebration of the 50th anniversary of the pogrom in 1996, together with a group of citizens of Kielce we addressed the Jewish community with the following letter:

“...we, the people of Kielce, Christians associated in the Civil Association of “Memory – Dialogue – Reconciliation”, express our pain and shame for the events of the past. Regardless of what was the actual mechanism of the crime, nor what was the actual participation of Polish and Soviet official institutions, we fail to understand why our older brothers, fathers, neighbors, having so much suffered during the Nazi and then the Bolshevik occupation, stained their hands and conscience with the blood of their brothers in suffering – the Jews. We are not able to understand nor accept a justification of the situation based on twists of history and turns of politics. We observe that our society was not free – nor is it still, unfortunately – of ethnic and religious prejudices, of an aversion to «others», or even hostility which in 1946 took the form of crime.

We are aware of the fact that **NO WORDS CAN ERASE THE SUFFERING AND HUMILITATION OF VICTIMS**. Speaking upon the need of conscience we ask, however, the families of the murdered, their kin and all the Jewish community for forgiveness. We ask on our own behalf and on behalf of all those who join us in this act of repentance.” The letter was published by the biggest Polish daily – “Gazeta Wyborcza”.

The process of recovering and taming the memory of the pogrom has been long and complicated and is still pending. The first public act of memory took place in 1981 upon the initiative of local Solidarity – it was a holy mass dedicated to the victims of the pogrom celebrated at the Kielce Cathedral by the then parish priest and later bishop, father Mieczysław Jaworski. This was unfortunately a one-time event, never repeated. In the following years individual people tried to annually, on 4 July, commemorate the pogrom – either in front of the house on Planty street, or at the Jewish cemetery. The secret security police always tried to prevent

these events from happening. A larger manifestation of several dozen took place in 1986 – also stifled by secret security services. The following year was pivotal – a large group of Jews, former inhabitants of Kielce, came to town after a renovation and a rededication of the Jewish Na Pakoszu cemetery (the Communist authorities refused to grant them entry the previous year, in 1986, on the 40th anniversary). In his address at the cemetery, David Blumenfeld, a rabbi from Kielce, appealed for reconciliation. Many local scientists, such as Krzysztof Urbański, Zenon Guldon, Regina Renz, Stanisław Markowski or Marta and Stanisław Meducki began systematic studies on the Jewish history in Kielce and the region. Unfortunately, apart from a voluminous work by Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona, the difficult Polish-Jewish topics, including the pogrom of 1918, the times of occupation, namely the problem of “szmalcownictwo” [a pejorative Polish slang word used during World War II that denoted a person blackmailing hiding Jews or blackmailing Poles who protected Jews during the Nazi occupation – from the translator, following Wikipedia], or the pogrom of 1946, were omitted. The mentioned work by Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona (*Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946* [*Anti-Jewish Events in Kielce of 4 July 1946*]) was a magnificent exception. Prof father Jan Śledzianowski offered an original take on pogrom in his publication *Pytania nad pogromem kieleckim* [*Questions on the Kielce Pogrom*] with echoing journalistic publications by Jerzy Daniel (*Żyd w zielonym kapeluszu* [*A Jew in a Green Hat*]) and Tadeusz Wiącek (*Zabić Żyda* [*Kill a Jew*]), in which the authors also try to grapple with the difficult and painful history. Increasingly more texts began to appear in the press: reportages, interviews, some perhaps a tad sentimental but recalling the Jewish history of the city, the Jewish presence and coexistence with Poles.



In 1990 two commemorative plaques were placed on the wall of the building on Planty street – the scene of the crime. The first one was founded upon the initiative of Lech Wałęsa, who was then the chairman of Solidarity. From that year on the local and regional authorities have been coming to the place on 4 July with flowers and candles. Upon the initiative of Methodist pastor Janusz Daszuta and myself, Memory Marches are organized each year, beginning 2000. The trail leads from Planty street to the Jewish cemetery, to the mass grave of those murdered in 1946. 100 people participated in the march in 2008 – a clear sign of memory which is increasingly accepted by the inhabitants of the city. Even if it is not the number of participants that counts, the annually increasing group of pilgrims is reason for joy.

The Jan Karski Association was established in 2005 as a continuation of the “Memory – Dialogue – Reconciliation”. This was preceded by naming one of the schools in Kielce after Jan Karski, an event which took place with the participation of a special guest, Dr Marek Edelman – the legendary commander of the insurrection in the Warsaw Ghetto. He addressed the youth of Kielce with the following words:

”I was in Kielce the day after the pogrom. I saw dead people, blood on the pavements. I never came back here again. 50 years have passed. Time has eradicated evil from this town. Kielce now is a different, better city.”

The same year, together with a group of people, we have founded (founders included Marek Jach, Sławomir Burnsztejn, Leszek Walczyk, and myself) a monument of Jan Karski, located in the center of the city. A year later Kielce hosted the Ninth National Day of Judaism which is celebrated in only two other local churches: Italian and Austrian. The Jan Karski Association was the initiator and organizer of the event. Members of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews came to Kielce, where they met with school youth, participated in joint prayer sessions, scientific meetings, and concerts. Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, addressed the people of Kielce and the media, ”We can get to know each other and be open. Because history is not only all that is good, but also what is atrocious. We say how it was. We do not forget but we also say: not everything was bad. This is a chance. It is important that we are saying this in Kielce. After all the history of Kielce is not only this terrible hour from 60 years ago.”

The Jan Karski Association also came up with the initiative to place a plaque on the building on Planty street with the expiation prayer written by John Paul II which the Holy Father put in the crack of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The celebration was attended by Bishop of Kielce, Prof. father Kazimierz Ryczan. When unveiling the plaque, Prof. Władysław Bartoszewski, an honorary citizen of Israel and a Righteous Among Nations, said,”

“It must be clearly said: those who live in Kielce today bear no responsibility for what happened here in July 1946. This city is absolutely different from the one 60

years ago. Kielce, which has become a sad symbol, is today an example for others. This is the first Polish city which began to speak about truth after the war, a city which has found a way out of lies and falsehood. It was here, in 1996, that truth about the pogrom was told. The words of the prayer of John Paul II, engraved in the plaque on the wall of the building at Planty, is a sign that the seed of the Pope's thought has fallen on fertile soil – here in Kielce. The citizens of Kielce can walk with their heads up high as they have shown how to cope with the difficult problems of history.”

The same year, an official celebration of the 60th anniversary of the pogrom was held. A (somewhat controversial) monument by the American artist, Jack Sal, “White Wash II”, was unveiled. Apart from the many distinguished guests from Poland and abroad, the event was also attended by many citizens of Kielce. The festivities, organized by the Jan Karski Association with a huge support and engagement of the Mayor of Kielce, Wojciech Lubawski, included a fantastic concert of the greatest Jewish cantors at the local amphitheatre.

In 2007, in the year of the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the Kielce Ghetto and genocide of over 20,000 people of its inhabitants, the Association founded a “Menora” monument by Marek Cecuła, a world renowned ceramist, a native of Kielce and survivor of the Holocaust and pogrom. The celebration reminded the people of the town that there was a ghetto in Kielce and that the Holocaust of the Jewish nation took place also on these territories.

Kielce has become a town which is free and open, free from hatred and open to others. For a very long time there have been no chauvinistic incidents, no anti-Semitic graffiti on city walls. There are many people and institutions who are involved in different pro-reconciliation and pro-dialogue activities on a daily basis – meetings, discussions, performances, books – all without pomp and circumstance. And even if we do not always think along the same lines, and for many the subject of the past is difficult, there is more that unites us than divides us. And there is always the common love for the place.

In 2006 minister Ewa Juńczyk-Ziomecka, representing the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, wrote in a letter to Mayor Wojciech Lubawski and me, chairman of the Association:

”I deeply appreciate the involvement, work, and respect shown to both victims and the present citizens of Kielce. (...) the efforts undertaken by the city and the association can serve as an example for all those who want to face the past in the spirit of reconciliation, striving for historical truth. (...) positive effects are already visible. The celebration was met with gratefulness of different communities in Poland, Israel, and the United States. I have received many such signals.”

We have not forgotten. And we shall remember.