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## **Drinking vodka with anti-Semites. A case study of 'Polish-Jewish relations' today**

I would like to give an account of a series of events which occurred between December 31, 2016 and January 6, 2017. Both events were local or, many would venture to say, marginal. It is not my intention to attribute great importance to them. I rather treat them as meaningful case studies which exemplify how anti-Semitism operates in Polish culture at present and, probably more importantly, the roadblock encountered when problematizing anti-Semitism. I will discuss these events as a certain spectacle, whose actors played either the roles they chose or the only roles available to them (perpetrator, victim, bystander, and mediator). I also suggest viewing these events from the point of view of certain elements of Polish history.

### **Description of events**

On January 3, 2017, the author of the blog *Gburrek.pl* described an event which occurred on the night of December 31. Since her text triggered an avalanche of responses I am quoting it in its entirety. The text is titled "*Catholicism" the Polish way. How we were attacked in the center of Warsaw at Café Foksal*. The title is followed by the following reservation: "This text criticizes intolerance, not faiths (the word Catholic in the title is in quotation marks on purpose)."

The study was conducted at author's own expense.

No competing interests have been declared.

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"A few hours before, I, my partner, and another couple celebrated New Year's Eve. The four of us were sitting at the bar of a randomly chosen pub and talking; occasionally we would get up for a dance. The family of one of us has long lived in Israel and one day prior to the event I am referring to here, our friend had returned from there. Our private conversation did not revolve around any controversies, politics or religion, and it naturally drifted towards Jewishness. When my colleague remarked that he appreciated the Jews he knew for their diligence, we were attacked for the first time. This was only a verbal attack for now. – Can you talk about such topics somewhere else? I am a Catholic and I won't have it!, shouted a female bartender who had been serving on us for an hour without the smallest problem. We were speechless. We gave each other incredulous looks, but since we didn't want to spoil the rest of the evening, we replied that this was a private conversation, we were not offending anybody and we would ignore the bartender's remark. She did not like that at all. She demanded that we leave the pub. We had no intention of doing so, so the angry woman started to offend us: 'Get a shrink!,' 'Take a trip to Sobieski!' [Warsaw Psychiatric Institute], 'Get together with Michnik!' When we demanded that she change her tone, she threatened she would have us escorted out of the pub and call the police. She didn't call the police, but she was joined by her colleagues at the bar. A scuffle ensued. Seeing my partner being choked, I grabbed my cellphone and, dialing 112, I ran to the nearest table asking them to give me the name and address of the place. At that time of night, the pub turned out to be frequented mainly by the bartender's acquaintances (later on I heard them calling her by her first name), who... smiled ironically telling me – How should we know?

I ran outside, checked the address and called the police. After several minutes my friends left the pub having been beaten up. The police arrived after a further thirty minutes.

This event has made me realize a handful of sad facts which I thought did not concern me.

- In my homeland, I can be attacked in a public place for expressing my private, non-aggressive and non-offensive views in a private conversation.
- I can call the police, but before they come I can be badly injured.

I have reasons to be concerned about the future of my child. What if he has to grow up in a society which understands Catholicism in such a way."

*(Katolicyzm po polsku. Jak zostaliśmy zaatakowani w centrum Warszawy przez obsługę Cafe Foksal [Catholicism the Polish way. How we were attacked in the center of Warsaw by the employees of Café Foksal], 2016).*

Café Foksal is located in the tourist center of Warsaw, on Foksal Street, which abounds in pubs, restaurants and clubs. It is one of a few streets in Warsaw where such places are open also at night.

The text was published on the *Gburrek.pl* blog, which is neither activist nor interventionist in nature. The posts there address matters of fashion, beauty, diet, raising children, working for corporations, intimate relations and so on. The blog is written<sup>1</sup> by a person who introduces herself in the following manner: "My name is Karolina, I am 32. I am a working mother of a three-year-old boy. I live with his father and our dog near Warsaw." Judging by her posts, the author of the blog is a university graduate, a member of the middle class whose lifestyle implies affluence and high cultural capital.

The blog *Gburrek.pl* has a Facebook fanpage with nearly 3,000 followers. Yet, over a dozen or so hours following the publication of the text a tumultuous discussion ensued. Initially, everything happened on Facebook. On January 3, an event *Bojkot Cafe Foksal 2017 – dość przemocy i antysemityzmu* [Boycott of Café Foksal 2017 – down with violence and anti-Semitism] was created, joined by 886 persons. A day later, another event was created: *W obronie Cafe Foksal – STOP obrażaniu chrześcijan w Warszawie* [In defense of Café Foksal. – STOP offending Christians in Warsaw], joined by 223 persons. On January 4, the owner of the café, Anna Żelezik published her statement on Facebook. It is quoted below in its entirety:

"Since the accounts of the events which took place on the New Year's Eve and their assessments have been published on social media, a few words of explanation are necessary. For the 24 years Café Foksal has operated, it has been open to guests of different origins, faiths and worldviews. Yet it has never witnessed any instance of physical or verbal violence. Our pub is frequented by persons from different circles, which has always created conditions for **dialogue** and **exchange of ideas** [all emphasis – A. Z.]. Seeking to protect the values the guests of Café Foksal find valuable, we ensure an **atmosphere promoting freedom of conscience and faith**. That is why on New Year's Eve, the staff reacted to the behavior of several guests who offended the religious feelings of Christians and admonished these guests, who responded with aggression. Unfortunately, the accounts on social media present an untrue description of this event and its alleged reasons, arousing social sensitivity and extreme emotions. Café Foksal has never approved of anti-Semitism or other xenophobic attitudes, therefore we adamantly reject all the harmful and untrue accusations which tarnish the reputation of our pub and are in no way related to the actual events on New Year's Eve. Café Foksal would like to ensure our guests that we will do our best to make them feel safe and **free from any form of aggression** caused by any reasons, including religion and worldview."

(Bernaciak & Zimny, 2017)

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<sup>1</sup> I am not sure if the blog still exists. On November 4, 2017, the website was inaccessible.

The above post was accompanied by an account of events by a man describing himself as a “witness to the event.” Below is his account on Facebook, which was subsequently published in the media [punctuation and orthography as in the Polish original – translator’s note]:

A group of four people two women and two men were sitting at the bar for 5 hours. **Pleased with themselves** [all emphasis – A. Z.], they drunkenly began to talk loudly about the superiority of the Jewish religion over Catholicism. During this conversation, they referred to the Virgin Mary as a woman of easy virtue, to put it mildly. They also questioned the divine origin of Christ. They emphasized the superiority of the Jewish religion over Catholicism. The bartender remarked that they were not alone, and that they should stop saying such things because this might bother others as it was certainly bothering her, being a Catholic. At that moment, one of the participants in the feast, in fact the partner of the blogger who wrote this **slander**, threw an object at the bartender. The bartender said that she would not put up with such behavior and asked the group to leave the pub. They refused. Two other guests repeated the bartender’s request. This was honestly done in a cultural manner, there was not a single curse or threat a part from the information that the police would be called. During this conversation, the male part of the group of feasters **threw themselves** at the customer who had backed the bartender. The other **aggressor** was restrained and held by the other defender. When the skirmish ended, and the other aggressor was set free, the blogger’s company **attacked** again... This time, they threw beer glasses, hitting the bartender and a customer. The situation inside the pub was brought under control, and the aggressors were pushed outside, suffering no harm. The blogger’s company kept **threatening that they had contacts with *Gazeta Wyborcza*** and they would ‘end’ this place. You would think this was the end... but this was not so. While outside, they threw a metal ashtray and other objects at the pub’s window. The providence of the Lady they were offending prevented any harm that might have occurred when the **blogger and her company** were trying to break the window panes. Then the police came.”

(Bernaciak & Zimny, 2017)

## Three reversals, two contexts

The local media and some nationwide media took up the topic. From January 2 to 5, over a dozen primarily centrist newspapers published materials on the “brawl” in Café Foksal. Internet users posted innumerable comments. Initially, the opinion prevailed that the blog’s author made the whole thing up to get publicity. For the first two days, the media mainly

spoke in the vein of “clashing accounts” and “one account versus another.” On the third day, after the statements had been posted by the pub’s owner and the witness, the media became sympathetic to Café Foksal. On January 4, the *Metro Warszawa* newspaper published an article under the characteristic title *Seria nienawistnych telefonów po awanturze w Cafe Foksal. Poszło o rozmowę o Żydach* [A series of hateful phone calls after the brawl in Café Foksal because of a conversation about Jews] (Bet & Jankowska, 2017). The issue was presented as a violent and hateful smear campaign against the pub. “A bucket of filth has been poured over the pub’s employees, the Internet has already lynched Café Foksal,” the journalists wrote. Importantly, their newspaper is published by the Agora media group, as is *Gazeta Wyborcza*. I am mentioning this since the status of the latter is significant. But first, let me discuss the three instances of events being reversed in this case.

Reversal number one: the violence demonstrated in Café Foksal was not anti-Semitic but anti-Catholic. The persons who claim to have been offended and suffered anti-Semitic violence actually offended others, were aggressive and intentionally directed their aggression against Catholics. The pub guests insulted the Mother of God, talked about the superiority of Judaism over Christianity, and finally attacked the bartender physically. Those who represent the Jews were hostile and aggressive. The Catholics only defended themselves.

Reversal number two: it was not the blogger’s behavior – calling the police first, and describing the event later – that was motivated by her respect for tolerance, openness and multiculturalism (the popularity of these terms deserves a separate analysis), but rather the bartender’s reaction. The pub owner stressed in her statement that the bartender was justified and courageous in defending the oppressed and offended, that is Christians. Therefore the Christians were presented here as a minority demanding protection.

Reversal number three: after the event, Café Foksal, its employees and the owner were deemed to have been the victims, whereas the person who described the event was viewed as the perpetrator. The anti-Semitic violence in Café Foksal disappeared from the picture and was replaced by a smear campaign against Café Foksal which was triggered by false accusations.

The mechanism of blaming the victim was employed here *ex post*, when the event had been described and the perpetrators had talked about their motivations and presented themselves as defenders against aggression (it is implied: Jewish aggression). This mechanism has had a long tradition in Poland. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, who studies Jewish pogroms in

prewar and postwar Poland, argues that every pogrom started with gossip that the Jews had done something against the Christians: profaned the Host, kidnapped a Christian child, or desecrated a church (Tokarska-Bakir, 2008, 2012). For instance, the pogrom in Kielce in 1946, was directly triggered by a boy who, having come home after several days, lied that he was late because the Jews had locked him up in a cellar. This lie referred to the classic scenario of "blood libel," where the Jews kidnap a Christian child to drain his or her blood for their Jewish rituals. The boy was taken to the militia by adults to testify.

This event has yet another historical context: being thrown out of a pub "for Jewishness" and a statement that this club is "Polish" or "Catholic" is an echo of the prewar period in Poland. Starting in 1907, the "economic boycott" of Jews was a postulate of National Democrats, whose hit squads implemented it in practice; regular violence against Jews took many different forms (Rudnicki, 2008). In the 1930s, this violence was made legitimate. Trading on Sundays was banned. For the Jews who earned their living from trade this meant two days without income. Local authorities moved market days to Saturdays in order to exclude Jews from them. The associations of merchants and producers refused to accept Jews as members. Banks refused loans to Jews. Supporters of National Democrats attacked Jewish stores and stalls and vandalized Jewish workshops. They intimidated people willing to buy from Jews. People who had sold land or houses to Jews were branded by posting their obituaries on the walls, thereby symbolically putting them to death. Finally, to return to the event in Café Foksal, in 1937, the Ministry of Industry and Trade made it obligatory for stores and workshops to bear the full first and last name of their respective owners on the signboards (Ogonowski, 2012). This legally sanctioned the practice of marking different places with "This is a Christian store" or "This is a Polish club" signs. This was an ostentatious anti-Semitic practice intended to discourage Jews from entering such premises, while inviting the enthusiasts of the economic boycotting of Jews. The statement "This is a Catholic pub" was a threat to Jews and an unofficial ban on their entering such a place.

## **Credibility, gender, bystander**

I return now to 2017. The credibility of the first account of the event, and the only one mentioning anti-Semitism, was undermined by gender stereotypes. Because of them, women are perceived as emotional individuals incapable of the rational assessment of a given situation. The author of the blog was deprecated as somebody who exaggerates,

over-interprets and is oversensitive. Since the story was told by a woman who described the behavior of another woman (the bartender), the media started chanting the mantra of “emotions that prevailed.” Quarrels between women are the theme of comedies and satires in Polish culture. They have even acquired the derogatory name of a “mangle” (Pl. *magiel*), which signifies a “womanish racket” that should not be taken seriously. I believe that this was the reason for having a male “witness:” to objectively decide what actually happened.

The category of witness (bystander, onlooker) is also present in abundance in the Polish discourse on Jews. The term has become highly popular as the most adequate description of the status of Poles during the Shoah. The production of the discourse of the bystander (frequently described as “passive”) started in Poland as early as during the war (Kann, 2003; M. B. [Szymanowski], 2003), much earlier than Raul Hilberg’s proposal of a division into perpetrators, bystanders and victims (Hilberg, 2007). In light of what we know about the standpoints and conduct of Poles during the Holocaust, from the accounts collected and published as early as the 1940s, it is impossible to defend the claim that Poles were bystanders (Andrzejewski, 1945; Andrzejewski et al., 1947; Borowski, 1948; Janicka & Żukowski, 2016; Nałkowska, 1946). Polish discourse views the Polish bystander as someone who sees more, is impartial and – remaining uninvolved – becomes an external observer, an expert; in contrast to Jews, who represent a particular, and hence faulty and incomplete point of view. The stories of individuals defined as Polish witnesses to the Holocaust are counterpointed with the narratives of Jewish witnesses, who are allegedly too prejudiced, too emotional and too biased. This actually creates an interesting parallel with misogynist discourse. Jewish narratives, including the themes of Polish anti-Semitic violence, among other things, are classified in the same way as female narratives, and thereby discredited. Yet the testimonies of those who are described – the Poles – are classified as credible, balanced and conclusive.

The discrediting of the blog’s author was also contributed to by the police. Since a police patrol went to the scene of the event, the media asked them for information. Policemen kept saying that: 1. the men asked to leave the pub were drunk; 2. no visible marks of bodily harm could be seen; 3. although allegedly injured, the men did not press charges; 4. the personnel had the right to ask the guests to leave because it is a private pub (Bet & Jankowska, 2017). There is no mention of the woman who called the police and described the event in the statements uttered by the policemen.

## Arbitrators and reconciliation

What we are dealing with here is the female account of the blog's author against the female account of the bartender, a self-appointed male "witness" who confirms the bartender's version, the female owner of the pub who defends the bartender because she had defended Christians being offended, the police who present the event as the outcome of the guests' drinking, and the media that write about the event in terms of a "smear campaign against Café Foksal." Finally, there are also Internet users, who in great numbers took the side of Café Foksal, congratulated the pub and promised to be its faithful patrons. Why is this? Because Café Foksal opposed Jewish pressure; because, finally, somebody did away with political correctness and said the truth; because the good name of Poland, Poles and Catholics has to be cared for; and because the smear campaign against Café Foksal is an element of a Jewish conspiracy. The online posts defending Café Foksal are overtly anti-Semitic and nationalistic. Café Foksal emerges as a hero of the so-called patriotic youth (I deliberately do not talk about the right-wing youth, because the patriotic reference makes this group significantly larger) (Bernaciak & Zimny, 2017; Cafe Foksal, n.d.; Rogowski, 2017). The pub does nothing to distance itself from the throngs of new fans.

This is when the arbitrators enter the stage. The persons who assumed the role of the ambassadors of reconciliation defined this reconciliation in a specific manner. They were able to take this role on account of their symbolic capital, which was additionally multiplied by their conciliatory activity, as is frequently the case.

Arbitrator number one is Mikołaj Lizut, a journalist and editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. He used to represent the right wing of editors there. At present, he works for the radio Tok FM station, part of the same media group as *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

It is imperative to discuss the social perception of *Gazeta Wyborcza* here. Its enemies call it a "kosher newspaper." Some people joke about it, others treat it seriously, yet another group evidences this to be true; nevertheless everybody in Poland knows that *Gazeta Wyborcza* is labeled as Jewish. This label is supposed to discredit, ridicule or demonize the newspaper, but the paramount intention is to undermine its credibility as a biased medium. That is precisely why the guests of Café Foksal who backed the bartender shouted to the blogger and her friends: "Complain to Michnik." There are two justifications for *Gazeta Wyborcza* being Jewish: the fact that its Editor-in-Chief, Adam Michnik, comes from a Jewish family, and that the newspaper repeatedly discusses the issue of Polish anti-Semitism.

Since the beginning of Adam Michnik's political involvement, both the authorities and the Catholic-nationalist part of the opposition argued that – being Jewish – he has no right to represent Poles and does not deserve to be trusted. With time, this group has grown in size and solidified symbolically. Like other members of the political opposition of Jewish origin, Adam Michnik was viewed with suspicion. His Polishness has been investigated, questioned, or simply denied. His role as Editor-in-Chief of the biggest liberal daily in Poland can easily be interpreted in terms of the conspiracy theory about the Jews, who control information, thereby controlling society. His Jewish origin, the Communists in his family, political involvement, reputation as an opposition activist, and prominent position after 1989 – all make Adam Michnik almost a trope of Polish culture. For right-wing circles, including those of football fans, which have been dominated by the national movement, Michnik symbolizes everything that should be destroyed. Hate speech posts on online fora directed against this single individual would provide sufficient material for an extensive study.

So, one arbitrator was Mikołaj Lizut, Adam Michnik's right hand, his disciple, friend and collaborator. Another arbitrator was Michael Schudrich, since 2004, Chief Rabbi of Poland in the Jewish Community of Warsaw. Judging by his public statements, Michael Schudrich has adopted the strategy of presenting Poland as a country with good relations between Poles and Jews, and a perennial tradition of friendship and coexistence. He usually interprets anti-Semitic events in terms of the excesses of louts, and as exceptions to the rule.

The third arbitrator was Ryszard Schnepf, Polish ambassador to the United States from 2012–2016. Schnepf is publicly recognized as a Jew and enjoys high esteem in the public sphere as ambassador to such an important country as the US.

On January 5, on Facebook Mikołaj Lizut and Ryszard Schnepf invited everybody for a shot of vodka to Café Foksal, "in the name of reconciliation and concord." In order to take part in this event one had to wear a kippah. The media advertised this event ("Przyjadą do Cafe Foksal. Będą pili alkohol w jarmułkach," 2017), and announced the presence of celebrities. Later on, the media described it enthusiastically as a fortunate ending to an unfortunate misunderstanding (Karpieszuk, 2017). The pub's owner joined the campaign promising a round of drinks on the house. The purpose of this campaign was to prove that the blog's author had been wrong and Café Foksal was a friendly and tolerant place. The campaign was acclaimed as a success.

On the very same evening, the media published photos of men in kippahs and the pub owner making toasts with vodka (T. J., 2017). These photos are a pictorial, almost cartoon version of a legendary Polish declaration: "my friend is a Jew," which is frequently used as

an alibi by anti-Semites. It evidences that such a person cannot be an anti-Semite, therefore everything they say about Jews must be the truth.

## Masculinity and a mask

The character of this performance is worth examining. Firstly, it is symbolically “masculine:” drinking vodka together is a strongly masculinized and conventional ritual of male-bonding. The kippah is a traditional male head gear. On very rare occasions it is worn by women, but it usually symbolizes their membership of progressive Judaism. In Poland, the sight of men wearing kippahs on an everyday basis is extremely rare. At the same time, in the Polish iconosphere, the kippah is a symbol of Jewishness, alongside beards, side curls, protruding noses and money held in hand. “A Jew with a coin” is an anti-Semitic picture people hang at home as a lucky charm bringing financial success, which can be bought across Poland in souvenir shops, newspaper stands, florists, art galleries and bazaars. The figure depicted in such pictures wears a hat or kippah. Putting a kippah on may therefore be interpreted as a gesture of self-exotization. It is putting a mask on, and taking part in a masquerade in the role of a Jew, designed to meet the needs of the Christian audience. In 1939, poet Władysław Szlengel wrote about the masquerade of Jewishness being a form of anti-Semitic violence, in his poem *Maska Purymowa* [Purim mask]:

“Z waszej, Panowie łaski –  
dla waszej wyższości i dumy –  
nosimy rok cały maski  
I nędzne, błazeńskie kostiumy...”

[By your grace, gentlemen –  
For the sake of your superiority and pride –  
all year long we wear masks  
And miserable, clownish costumes]

(Szlengel, 2013)

This is not to mean that the kippah is by definition a costume rather than clothing. Yet I want to say that in the modern context, in Poland, it is a part of a “Polish Jew’s” costume, which

is partly the outcome of the phenomenon of the Jewish revival in Poland (Lehrer, 2013) that non-Jews have enthusiastically welcomed. In her book dedicated to the United States, *Represent and Destroy. Rationalizing Violence in a New Racial Capitalism* Jodie Melamed argues that by means of managing knowledge and the specific manner of diagnosing racism, official anti-racism policies of different states actually served the purpose of retaining racialization practices and numerous forms of racial violence (Melamed, 2011). By analogy, the *Jewish Revival in Poland*, as the process is enthusiastically named in the US, may be interpreted in terms of proposing a form of Jewishness which smoothly fits into Polish culture without destroying the anti-Semitic component of this culture. A plethora of Jewish festivals which bring Jewishness down to religion, or to the superficial esthetic-folk aspect, expressed in terms of specific outfits, music, dance, cuisine and customs, allow Poles to play the role of hosts who are kindly interested in "others" and extend morally justified hospitality by participating in such festivals. Many events of this kind both estheticize and exoticize Jews, thereby making the difference between Jews and non-Jews an object of fascination and celebration. Due to the discourse of difference, the majority acquires a tolerant identity while Jews remain at a comfortable distance.

The initiators of the Jewish revival in Poland eagerly refer to history, but they usually do not approach the history of Jews as the outcome of its key determinant, namely the Polish attitude to Jews. The political empowerment of Jews, the Jewish problematization of the majority-minority relation (or their relations with Poles), Jewish claims to equality and, last but not least, Jewish disclosure of violence – all go beyond the framework provided by the modern revival of Jewish culture in Poland, because they would spoil, rather than strengthen the sense of comfort of the dominant group. Within this framework, Jewishness can only mean a specific faith or an interesting lifestyle. Melamed argues that the literature of racial liberalism indicated the borders of possible identification of Afro-Americans and of the problematization of their biographic experience. By analogy, the Polish Jewish revival may be viewed as a cultural procedure of assigning "a place for Jews," where the majority group supervises the process of shaping permitted minority identities. "Permitted identities" in this context mean those which leave both the collective and individual Polish identities not so much intact as additionally strengthened by the component of being open to multiculturalism.

This very openness was to be confirmed by the campaign of drinking vodka at Café Foksal. It is difficult to ignore the fact that this confirmation was ensured by persons who represent Jewishness in the public perception. The organizers of the "reconciliation" assumed the role of the representatives of Jews in Poland and on their behalf signaled that "nothing

has happened." Let everybody see how we can have fun together, drink together and be friends, which would be impossible with anti-Semites. Neither the journalist, nor the rabbi or the ex-ambassador said on their own behalf what they thought about Café Foksal and the whole issue. On the contrary, they initiated a community campaign and this was how the media presented it. They created a collective subject and used it to present their initiative as a representative response of Polish Jews to the charges of anti-Semitism. They responded by saying: "We do not accuse Poles of anti-Semitism; on the contrary, we testify that they are hospitable to us." As mentioned above, in order to legitimize their anti-Semitic statements, Poles say "I have a Jewish friend." The campaign of drinking vodka in kippahs meant assuming the role of this friend, of offering oneself as an alibi.

I find the response of the representatives of Jewishness (I deliberately refrain from using the phrase "Jewish response," because in Poland individuals are marked as Jewish irrespective of their self-identification) to anti-Semitism interesting because, in my opinion, it reveals the boundary conditions Jews are required to fulfill in order to be allowed to speak and to make their voice representative. To put it more bluntly, I believe that this response shows the power of symbolic violence.<sup>2</sup> It shows how the dominant culture disciplines the individuals and groups that are branded within this culture, and therefore they are made to retake the "subordination test" over and over again (Żukowski, 2011).

## Ełk

What happens when one fails this test? Or if one does not intend to take it at all? In order to answer this question, the description of the events associated with Café Foksal needs to be expanded by the account of what was happening in Ełk at precisely the same time. The Polish media informed on the same New Year's Eve that "a young Polish male was killed nearby a kebab shop in Ełk" ("Bardzo gorąco w Ełku. Wściekli ludzie demolują kebab po zabójstwie (VIDEO i ZDJĘCIA)", 2017). The media referred to the alleged perpetrators of the killing as "Algerian," "foreign," "immigrants from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia," "men of Arab origin," and "an Algerian man with a Polish passport." The shop near which the man was killed was

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<sup>2</sup> I follow Pierre Bourdieu here, employing the category of *symbolic violence*, as the internalization of subordination and plights resulting from social determinants. I mean violence that is inflicted by an individual on him or herself, by means of implementing the mechanisms of subordinating to the dominant culture, in order to correctly and effectively replicate the patterns of this culture (Bourdieu, 2004).

described as a "bistro run by foreigners" (acis, kch, bz, pszl, pch, & dm, 2017; "Co się wydarzyło w Ełku (NAJWAŻNIEJSZE FAKTY)", 2017; "Daniel zginął od ciosów nożem, areszt dla kucharza i właściciela baru z kebabem," 2017; "Zabił 21-latkę w Ełku. Ze łzami w oczach tłumaczył się przed kamerami," 2017). According to media accounts, a 21-year-old man entered a Kebab Prince shop, took two bottles of Coca-Cola from the fridge and left without paying. He was not trying to hide, he behaved ostentatiously. His colleague threw a firecracker into the shop. Two shop employees ran after the thief. One of the employees was carrying a kitchen knife. He used it in the fight with the thief who sustained injuries that turned out to be lethal.

In the hours that followed a group of several hundred mainly young men gathered around the shop under the pretense of commemorating the victim. They chanted racist, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant slogans. The shop was vandalized. The police used pepper spray and arrested 28 people.

The media describing the events, and the experts who sought the causes of them did not use such words as racism or Islamophobia. At the same time, the same media kept stressing that the killers were Arab, Algerian, Tunisian, and foreign; whereas the victim was Polish. The Mayor of Ełk expressed his surprise at the event because "there has never been any information about any problems with the kebab shop run by the foreigners" (Ręczmin & Andrukiewicz, 2017). Asked for commentary, the Polish Foreign Affairs Minister, Mariusz Błaszczak said: "Poland is not affected by social problems such as those in Western Europe, where big enclaves of Muslim immigrants who do not integrate with the rest of society occur" (mart/sk, 2017). Asked about the behavior of the protesters in front of the kebab shop, Minister Błaszczak said that they were an expression of the "utterly understandable fears" triggered by the attacks in Berlin, Nice and Brussels (mart/sk, 2017).

The police arrested three shop employees. No charges were brought against two of them. On their release, they were assigned security staff because they might otherwise have been lynched. Later on, fearing riots, the police kept secret the dates of the only detainee's visits to the crime scene. Several hours after the news about "Polish man killed at a kebab shop," another shop, Superkebab, was vandalized in another part of Poland, in Lublin. The perpetrators wrote: "Fuck ISIS" (in Polish and in English) and "Fuck Islam" on the window panes (PB & ECH, 2017).

On January 3, the media published a testimony of a man who had been at the shop two hours prior to the killing ((ezio) & AIP, 2017). This testimony was originally posted on Facebook. It starts with a specific statement which, I believe, was intended as signifying an impartial and therefore legitimate observation: "I am in favor of combating terrorism, preventing and curbing

the inflow of immigrants from Arab countries. I adamantly condemn the immigration policy of Germany and France. Nevertheless, I am a man whose reason and senses let him see such events in an objective and rational manner." The witness goes on to describe that several drunken men were in the shop. Most probably, Daniel K., the later victim, was among them. They were shouting at the shop's employees: "Bring me this food, bitch, and make sure you don't spit on it, or I will smear your gob with it," and "On your knees, Paki, serve your master." The employees did not respond, although the witness says that they were clearly nervous.

Both these situations – Café Foksal and Prince Kebab – their ramifications and media accounts occurred at the same time. Was it significant for the choice of the strategy the arbitrators from Warsaw opted for? Did it have any impact on their decision to enter the stage as arbitrators in the first place? Is the story from Ełk interpreted in terms of a warning, of a bad scenario which may recur in Warsaw, and thus something has to be done to calm the situation? To my mind, the events from Ełk and Lublin cannot be ignored as providing a significant context to "drinking vodka with anti-Semites."

## Reciprocity framework

Mikołaj Lizut announced that the campaign of "drinking vodka at Café Foksal" was successful and concluded: "What matters sometimes is a cordial conversation without virulence and prejudice". "We live next to one another, and we should respect each other" – Ryszard Schnepf urged (*"Antysemityzm w Polsce*

PLAY LTE 11:27 80%

Mikołaj Lizut

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POSTS

Mikołaj Lizut  
36 mins · wyborcza.pl · 🌐

To był naprawdę niezwykły wieczór! Dziękuję wszystkim, którzy byli, a szczególnie Ani Żelazik, właścicielce Cafe Foksal. Czasem po prostu ważna jest serdeczna rozmowa, bez zajadłości i uprzedzeń

'Za przyjaźń i pojednanie'. Toast w kipach w Cafe Foksal  
warszawa.wyborcza.pl

👍❤️😱 22

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jest jak nowotwór. Mikołaj Lizut i Ryszard Schnepf zapraszają do Cafe Foksal," 2017). This narrative framework of reciprocity was immediately employed by other journalists and the media. The owner of Café Foksal wrote that this campaign was launched "against those who wanted to set us at loggerheads" (ej, 2017). The reciprocity framework was indeed employed from

**Cafe Foksal**

@cafefoksal21

**Strona główna**

Informacje

Zdjęcia

Recenzje

Posty

Społeczność

**Utwórz stronę**

**Cafe Foksal** dodał(a) nowe zdjęcia (3).

6 stycznia · 🌐

Wieczorem w Cafe Foksal. Bardzo miły wieczór w towarzystwie kilkudziesięciu wspaniałych mężczyzn w kipach oraz wspaniałych kobiet. Dzięki za fajną inicjatywę i wbrew tym którzy chcieli nas skłócić. Pozdrawiamy i mamy nadzieję że wszystko nas złączy! 😊 Dobrej nocy!

<http://warszawawpigulce.pl/przyjada-do-cafe-foksal-beda-pi.../>

Lubię to!

Komentarze

Udostępnij

the moment the post on the *Gburrek.pl* blog became a public matter. This framework is particularly robust in Polish discourse and encompasses such terms as Polish-Jewish relations,

Polish-Jewish attitudes and Polish-Jewish dialogue, as well as historic terminology, in particular that referring to the interwar period: conflict, skirmishes, economic competition, and over-representation. All of them produce an image implying that we are dealing with two equally strong groups with the same potential for agency, equally empowered and enjoying the same cultural legitimacy: Poles and Jews. In this picture, these two groups hold disputes, fight with each other and try to get along. This is a relation of partnership and reciprocity – of mutual prejudices, plights, clashing interests and getting along as equals.

In such a discursive framework an anti-Semitic statement and a statement about anti-Semitism function as two equally legitimate narratives and a “golden mean” between them has to be found. The contexts of anti-Semitic violence, the dynamics of minority-majority relations, domination mechanisms and the anti-Semitic themes of Polish culture are banned from this framework. Another thing which is erased from sight is the chasm between voluntary and compulsory involvement in the anti-Semitic spectacle. The difference in the social positioning of actors involved: (1) those who use anti-Semitism, (2) those who notice and oppose it, and (3) the Jews, who are the object rather than subject of these relations, is removed from sight.

## **Identity paradigm**

Let me stop for a moment to discuss Jews as an object. What I mean here, are the situations where anti-Semitic messages are not addressed directly at Jews; for instance, the graffiti produced by football fans. The walls in Polish cities, in particular in Kraków and Łódź, abound in inscriptions using the words “Jew” and “Jews” used as a derogatory and humiliating insult. They are typically addressed at the fans of the opposing team, sometimes law enforcement forces, and less frequently – the representatives of local or central authorities. Polish football fans are talking neither about Jews nor to Jews, but use the word “Jew” as an obvious insult. Therefore their language is not identified as anti-Semitic not only by cynical commentators (I repeatedly hear that in seeking anti-Semitism in such slogans as “Let’s fucking kill the Jews with machetes” I demonstrate my ignorance of fan slang because this is not about Jews) but also by Polish law.

Polish legislation features three articles of the Penal Code pertaining to hate speech: (1) Article 216: “Whoever insults another person in his presence, or though in his absence but in public, or with the intention that the insult shall reach such a person, shall be subject

to a fine or the penalty of restriction of liberty;" (2) Article 190: "Whoever makes a threat to another person to commit an offence detrimental to that person or detrimental to his next of kin, and if the threat causes in the threatened person a justified fear that it will be carried out shall be subject to a fine, the penalty of restriction of liberty or the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 2 years;" and (3) Article 257: "Whoever publicly insults a group within the population or a particular person because of his national, ethnic, race or religious affiliation or because of his lack of any religious denomination or for these reasons breaches the personal inviolability of another individual shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years."<sup>3</sup> Thus, an offence is committed only when you insult somebody because they are Jewish. If the insulted person is not Jewish, you do not break the law calling them "a Jew." The law does not provide for a third scenario, where you do not insult somebody because they are Jewish but by calling them Jewish.

The identity paradigm which governs Polish law produces bizarre verdicts in hate speech cases. Characteristically, the same paradigm prevails also in polls on anti-Semitism where attitudes to Jews are investigated. The example of the graffiti of football fans demonstrates that anti-Semitism is more of a code in Polish culture, where Jewishness is a communication tool. It is the object of communication, but not its target or addressee. "Jewish" is word-sign recognized as an insult. The paradigm of identity results in an interpretative shift which conceals more than it explains.

By coincidence, I was able to test how it works in practice. In January 2016, I reported to the police that someone wrote "Down with Jews" on the wall of the block of apartments where I live. Without asking me, the policeman who filed the report wrote down that I was a "person of Jewish nationality." When I pointed out to him that I never said anything to this effect, he asked, "so are you or aren't you?" For the next ten minutes, I kept telling this increasingly irritated policeman that I refused to answer this question. He tried to convince me that he had to know that because my status as a victim or witness in this case depended on it. I told him that "I felt injured by this inscription." Then he exclaimed in triumph: "So you are Jewish!" This is what I name the paradigm of identity. I think that this was the mechanism which prevented the author of the blog from pressing charges. She does not mention in her story whether she is Jewish or not. I believe that the policemen asked the same question of her, and then instructed her that they could not file a report unless she answered in the affirmative.

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<sup>3</sup> Penal Code – the Law of June 6, 1997, quoted after: "Mowa nienawiści: Kodeks karny – ustawa z dnia 6 czerwca 1997 r.," n.d.

## Epilogue

On July 2, 2017, I went with a colleague of mine to Café Foksal. At 2 pm we were the only guests. The owner (whom I knew from the pictures published by the newspapers in January) was still cleaning after a party the night before. The place is quite small. To make it look bigger, mirrors hang all over the place. On one of the mirrors I saw the following:

1. A sticker praising the Cursed Soldiers – the national post-war guerrilla fighters responsible for ethnic cleansing, including anti-Semitic crimes. As little as ten years ago they were deemed too controversial for Polish mainstream culture. Only the extreme right celebrated them ostentatiously. At present they are official national heroes.
2. A sticker praising Józef Kuraś, alias *Ogień*, initially a soldier of the underground Home Army, and a Cursed Soldier after the war. *Ogień's* anti-Semitic crimes were so numerous and spectacular that he is considered a troublesome figure even by historians from the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). For years, *Ogień* has been a hero for extreme right hit squads.
3. A sticker praising Danuta Siedzikówna, alias *Inka*, a female Cursed Soldier, whose memory is cultivated by the extreme right party *Ruch Narodowy* (Nationalist Movement) and football fans who side with them.



4. A sticker "Light up the light of freedom on December 13" (2016) – a campaign initiated by the Institute of National Remembrance, and covered by the patronage of Polish President Andrzej Duda. Every year, the anniversary of martial law is used by different groups, ranging from centrist to extreme right, to stage demonstrations. In 2016, the campaign "Light up the light of freedom" transformed into a rally to support the ruling party as being the only one that really wants to settle accounts with communism.

There are three huge calendars on the walls of the pub: one featuring Józef Piłsudski, one with the above-mentioned *Inka*; the third one is an advert for the National Security Bureau (BBN). Polish and American flags stand on the fridge. There are no other political statements in the pub.



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## **Drinking vodka with anti-Semites. A case study of 'Polish-Jewish relations' today**

### **Abstract**

This text analyzes the events that occurred between December 31, 2016 and January 6, 2017, namely the 'scandal' at the Café Foksal pub in Warsaw and its ramifications, as well as the simultaneous attacks on the Prince Kebab shop in Ełk. Both events were local or, many would venture to say, marginal. It is not my intention to attribute great importance to them. I rather treat them as meaningful case studies which exemplify how anti-Semitism operates in Polish culture at present and, probably more importantly, the roadblock encountered when problematizing anti-Semitism. These allegedly insignificant events from the turn of 2016–2017 are an excellent illustration of the conditions that Jews and other individuals perceived to be non-Polish have to accept in order to ensure relative safety to themselves. I discuss these events as a certain spectacle, whose actors played either the roles they chose or the only roles available to them (perpetrator, victim, bystander, and mediator). I also suggest viewing these events from the point of view of certain elements of Polish history.

#### **Keywords:**

anti-Semitism, bystander, Café Foksal, Mikołaj Lizut, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Ełk

## **Pijąc wódkę z antysemitami. Case study „relacji polsko-żydowskich” współcześnie**

### **Abstrakt**

Tekst stanowi analizę zdarzeń, które miały miejsce między 31 grudnia 2016 a 6 stycznia 2017: „afery” w warszawskiej Cafe Foksal i jej następstw oraz dziejących się równolegle ataków na bar Prince Kebab w Ełku. Zdarzeń o charakterze lokalnym, a wielu powiedziałoby także: marginalnym. Moim celem nie jest przypisywanie im wielkiego znaczenia. Traktuję je

natomiast jako symptomatyczne case study, na przykładzie którego widać funkcjonowanie antysemityzmu w polskiej kulturze dzisiaj i – co może bardziej istotne – blokady, na jakie napotyka jego problematyzowanie. Te pozornie nieistotne zdarzenia z przełomu 2016–2017 znakomicie pokazują, na jakie warunki muszą przystać Żydzi i inne jednostki postrzegane jako nie-polskie, by zapewnić sobie względne bezpieczeństwo. Omawiam te zdarzenia jako swoisty spektakl, podczas którego określone podmioty wchodziły w wybrane lub w jedyne dostępne im role (sprawcy, ofiary, świadka, rozjemcy). Proponuję także, by na zdarzenia te spojrzeć przez pryzmat wybranych elementów polskiej historii.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

antysemityzm, świadek, Cafe Foksal, Mikołaj Lizut, Gazeta Wyborcza, Ełk

**Note:**

This is the translation of the original article entitled "Pijąc wódkę z antysemitami. *Case study* 'relacji polsko-żydowskich' współcześnie", which was published in *Adeptus*, issue 11, 2018.

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