

Russians, Jews, and Poles: Russification and Antisemitism 1881-1914

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Abstract

Relations between Poles and Jews deteriorated significantly in the three decades leading up to World War I. Many reasons for this phenomenon can be given, for example: economic competition, a general atmosphere of acute nationalism, increased migration, perceived threats to traditional forms of life and religion. Exacerbating all of these factors, however, was the fact of Polish statelessness and the extreme sensitivity of Poles to perceived threats to their culture and nation. In particular within the Russian Empire, Poles perceived the very future of their nation at risk. In such circumstances the continued existence of Jewish cultural difference combined with the development of specifically Jewish forms of national awakening (e.g., the Bund and Zionism) were understood by many in Polish society as ingratitude and collaboration with the Russian occupier.

The rise of modern Polish antisemitism cannot be understood outside the context of Polish statelessness in the nineteenth century. The perceived and real threat to Polish culture and nationality was particularly acute in the Russian Empire after the failed insurrection of 1863. This period of russification lasted, in a broad sense, to the end of Russian rule over Polish lands. This half-century to 1914 also witnessed aggressive anti-Polish politics in the German Empire (the *Kulturkampf* and German attempts colonization in Poznania) and the rise of Ukrainian nationalism challenging Polish hegemony in Galicia. In short, these were years in which Polish patriots could reasonably (if with some exaggeration) argue that their very national existence was under threat. The perceived failure of Jewish assimilation to Polish culture in these years added impetus to antisemitic agitation. With the nation under threat, so the argument went, anyone not with us (and *ipso facto* fighting actively against the Polish nation's enemies) was denigrated as an enemy. In what follows I will argue that given this hostile environment for Polish patriotism a crisis in Polish-Jewish relations was well-nigh inevitable. And given that the Russian Empire pursued the most aggressively anti-Polish policies, it was logical that modern Polish antisemitism took shape in that empire.

Definitions and Historical Background to 1881

For the Russian authorities, the Insurrection of 1863 proved beyond a doubt the unreliable nature of the Poles and discredited any attempts to reconcile Polish national interests with those of the Russian imperial state. While Poles would not agree that pre-1863 Russian policy had been particularly benevolent, the period following the uprising were far more brutal. The policy that

characterized these decades into the early twentieth century is generally labeled “russification.” The complexities of this term and of the actual policies pursued by St. Petersburg need not concern us overly here: for our purposes what is more important is Polish perceptions.¹

While present-day historians generally agree that Russian policy did not, in fact, aim for the cultural assimilation of Poles (though this perception continues to linger in Polish historical memory), a contemporary Pole could well feel threatened. After all, education in Polish was severely curtailed and the one Polish-language university in Russian Poland converted into the Russian-language and russifying University of Warsaw. The official name “Kingdom of Poland” was abolished in favor of the more anodyne “Vistula land” (to be sure, the old name continued to be used widely), implying the end of cultural separateness. While it was not illegal *per se* to teach or learn literacy in Polish in the “Vistula land,” the school system nearly always favored Russian (especially at the secondary level) and, more importantly, stagnated in this period. In the early twentieth century it appeared that literacy in Polish had actually fallen in the past decades.² While publishing in Polish grew, including in Warsaw and Łódź, censorship was harsh and arbitrary. Add to this the strict administration by imported Russian officials and the overbearing presence of the Russian military in the Polish provinces and one can easily understand why Poles could perceive a real danger for the further development, even existence, of their nation.³

The Insurrection of 1863 formed a watershed in modern Polish history. Its failure ended the period of “romantic nationalism,” to use Andrzej Walicki’s term, and ushered in an era of more sober Polish national politics.⁴ This generation in Polish history – roughly to the mid-1880s – is generally described with the phrases “positivism” and “organic work.” The Warsaw positivists, most famous among them Bolesław Prus and Aleksander Świętochowski, espoused liberal values like education, hard work, and sobriety, calling on Poles

¹ There is a huge literature on Russification. For an overview, see Theodore R. Weeks, “Russification: Word and Practice 1863-1914,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 148/4 (2004): 471-489; and Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on Russia’s Western Frontier 1863-1914*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).

² See, for example, Adolf Suligowski, *Miasto analfabetów* (Kraków: W.L. Anczyc, 1905). While the argument of stagnating or even falling rates of Polish literacy seem convincing, the dearth of reliable statistics makes it difficult to be absolutely certain.

³ Recently scholars have pointed out that more Poles served within the Russian administration than had been traditionally believed. However, they also corroborate the fact that Poles (and often Catholics in general) mainly held low-level positions without much responsibility or prestige. Andrzej Chwalba, *Polacy w służbie Moskali*, (Warsaw: PWN, 1999); Katya Vladimirov, *The World of Provincial Bureaucracy in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Russian Poland*, (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 2004).

⁴ Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

to educate themselves and work hard, rather than press for specific political goals. In many ways the positivists were typical liberal figures: skeptical about religion (but not atheists), obsessed with education as the means for self-improvement, and moderate in their politics. Given the national trauma felt in the wake of the 1863 defeat and anti-Polish measures afterwards, positivism provided middle-class Poles with a welcome psychological respite, allowing them to cultivate culture and education rather than risk confrontation on the public stage.⁵

The positivists, like other liberals, were not especially interested in questions of religion and nationality. Their main interest was cultivating the *Polish* nationality, not in examining the prickly issue of Poles' relationship to other nations, including those who had for centuries lived within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (i.e., Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews). The positivists' attitude toward the Jews was doubly complicated by their reluctance (or disinterest) toward both nationality and religion. For liberals (and the left more generally) throughout Europe, the "Jewish question" was fundamentally a mirage. As societies progressed toward modernity, secularism would grow, literacy would increase, and simultaneously prejudice against Jews and Jewish separatism would wither away. Obviously such a belief was far easier to hold in Turin or Paris than in Warsaw or Lublin, but both Prus and Świętochowski steadfastly argued in this period that as Polish society itself matured (by incorporating the peasantry into itself, for example), Jews would also naturally gravitate toward Polish culture. Thus the positivists saw assimilation (but not necessarily total cultural identification nor religious conversion) as the fundamental solution to the problem of Poles and Jews living together in one country.⁶

When discussing Jews and Poles in the context of the Russian Empire, one must distinguish between Jews living within the Polish provinces (Kingdom of Poland, Vistula land) and those residing to the east, within the Pale of Settlement proper. The legal situation of Jews in these two areas was quite distinct. In 1862 Jews in the Kingdom of Poland were granted "legal emancipation" (*równouprawnienie*) and henceforth would enjoy rather better legal conditions of life than their brethren to the east in the Ukrainian, Lithuanian,

⁵ There is a large literature on positivism, though more on its literary than cultural-social aspects. See, for example, Maria Brykalska, *Aleksander Świętochowski: biografia*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: PIW, 1987); and Janina Kulczycka-Saloni and Ewa Ihnatowicz, eds., *Warszawa pozytywistów* (Warsaw: Instytut Literatury Polskiej UW, 1992).

⁶ I have tried to develop these ideas in *From Assimilation and Antisemitism: The "Jewish Question" in Poland, 1850-1914*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 57-64. See also Stanley Blejwas, "Polish Positivism and the Jews," *Jewish Social Studies*, 46/1 (1984): 21-36; and Agnieszka Friedrich, *Bolesław Prus wobec kwestii żydowskiej*, (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2008).

and Belarusian provinces (the so-called “Western land” – *Zapadnyi kraj*).⁷ Clearly even after 1862, within the overall legal context of the Russian Empire, Jews in the “Vistula country” did not truly enjoy equal rights. But equally clearly, Jews in the Polish provinces were better off than their coreligionists residing in the Pale. This fact was to grow in importance in the decades before 1914 as thousands of Jews migrated west in search of employment, a migration demonized by Polish antisemites in the figure of the “Litwak.” Another issue related to the 1862 “emancipation” needs to be considered: in the 1880s and 1890s, one argument frequently cited against the Jews was the “failure of assimilation” despite a generation of “equal rights.”

Significant numbers of Jews in Warsaw did support the Polish struggle against the Russians in 1863, though outside the capital city Jews tended to try to keep out of the conflict altogether.⁸ After 1863, Jews in the Polish provinces were in a peculiar position: the Russian authorities wished to keep Jews apart from Poles (i.e., to prevent assimilation to Polish culture), but the Russian attitude toward Jews – in particular among conservative and administrative circles – was far from judeophobic. Even in the Pale of Settlement and in Russia proper, the official attitude toward Jewish assimilation toward Russian culture was shot through with contradictions.⁹ Certainly the authorities did not, with rare exceptions, like Jews in their present socio-economic and cultural condition. But as befits the servitors of a deeply conservative empire, Russian officials viewed with misgivings the muddying or mingling of categories of identification like “Russian” or “Jew.”¹⁰ In the Polish provinces, Jews were forbidden to use Polish within the rare reform synagogues, but it is clear that despite all restrictions, in the decades after 1863 increasing numbers of Jews were taking on Polish language, outward appearance, and culture.¹¹

Deteriorating Relations: 1881-1904

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the long process culminating in emancipation, see Artur Eisenbach, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1770-1870*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

⁸ On the myth of 1863, see Israel Bartal and Magdalena Opalski, *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood*, (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1992).

⁹ This comes through, for example, in the so-called “Rabbinical seminaries” set up by the Russian authorities ostensibly to produce modern, enlightened, and Russian-speaking Jewish elites. See, e.g., Verena Dohrn, *Jüdische Eliten im Russischen Reich: Aufklärung und Integration im 19. Jahrhundert*, (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008).

¹⁰ On the complicated issue of Russian attitudes toward Jewish assimilation, see, for example, Eugen M. Avrutin, *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Hans Rogger, *Jewish Politics and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). John Klier has pointed out that Jewish attitudes toward Russification were often positive, but his examples are from the Pale, not the Kingdom of Poland: J. Klier, “The Polish Revolt of 1863 and the Birth of Russification: Bad for the Jews?”, *Polin* 1 (1986): 96-110.

¹¹ On attitudes toward assimilation among both Poles and Jews, see Alina Cała, *Asymilacja Żydów w Królestwie Polskim (1864-1897): Postawy, konflikty, stereotypy*, (Warsaw: PIW, 1989).

The period beginning with the pogrom wave after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II to the Russo-Japanese War witnessed a steady deterioration of Polish-Jewish relations. It was during this period that the first programmatically antisemitic periodical in Polish, *Rola*, began publication (on *Rola* see the article by Maciej Moszyński). The political passivity (real or perceived) of the positivist generation increasingly appeared out-dated, even cowardly and anti-patriotic. New, more activist political groupings took shape, among them the Polish Socialist Party, founded in 1892. The failure of the new tsar, Nicholas II, to offer any serious cultural or political concessions to the Poles pushed the youth further toward radical solutions. Toward the end of this period, the National Democratic Party took shape and in its 1903 party program took a clear antisemitic stance. In short, this was a period of increasing national consciousness, continued resentment toward the Russian authorities, and a growing perception that Jews were turning their backs on Poles while taking advantage of economic growth and doing better than Poles.

The pogroms of 1881, as is well known, began in the south-western provinces (today's Ukraine) several months after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881.¹² Reactions in the Polish press to the pogroms during the summer months were muted, in part no doubt due to censorship. Most of Polish society, it seems clear, felt that this primitive anti-Jewish violence could not spread over into the Polish provinces. They were thus shocked when Warsaw witnessed a pogrom against its Jewish citizens beginning on Christmas Day 1881. The pogrom caused extensive damage to Jewish neighborhoods closest to downtown (the riot began at the Church of the Holy Cross on Nowy Świat street).

Attempts to explain the pogrom may be divided into three categories. First of all, there was the "outside agitator" thesis, i.e., that either Russian or German revolutionaries or antisemites egged on the ignorant rabble to attack and rob the Jews. Second, some blamed the Russian authorities though, of course, censorship would prevent any such opinions from being published within the Russian Empire. Finally, the pogrom could be seen as a warning sign that relations between Poles and Jews were seriously strained and that new, more energetic measures needed to be taken to integrate Jews into Polish culture and society. Very few specifically antisemitic voices were heard in the pogrom's immediate aftermath. In late 1881 and early 1882, Polish society seemed most interested in helping the pogrom victims and explaining away the violence as a regrettable but atypical outbreak. Few writers – Świętochowski is the major

¹² John D. Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

exception – used the occasion to examine more deeply the fundamental assumptions that underlay Polish-Jewish relations.¹³

Jan Jeleński, the father of modern Polish antisemitism, began publishing his weekly *Rola* on 6 January 1883 (new style). The periodical would outlive its editor and principle author who died in 1909. While Polish society before the turn of the century tended to mock Jeleński as a hack probably in the pay of the Russians (Prus's satires are particularly sharp – and amusing), by the time of his death he would be praised as a prophet for Polish patriotism. These changing attitudes toward the man and his ideas reflect a shift in Polish attitudes toward Jews.

At the same time, acculturation was proceeding apace among Jews both in the Kingdom of Poland and in the Russian Empire proper. Interestingly, in the 1882 Warsaw census, an overwhelming majority of Jews signed up as of the “Polish nationality” (*natsional’nost’* / *narodowość*). Given the existing socio-linguistic realities of the day, this figure seems quite unbelievable. Stephen Corrsin provides the answer, based on Jacob Shatzky’s memoirs: the assimilationist Warsaw *kehilla* (Jewish community) put out the word that Jews should declare themselves Jewish by religion but Polish by nationality. This incident is telling in two ways: it reveals that for most Warsaw Jews in 1882, “nationality” was a category without great significance. Secondly, it shows the influence of a Polish-speaking and assimilationist *élite* in the city.

Looking at the far more thorough and scientific census of 1897, Corrsin notes that by that point 13.7% of Warsaw Jews declared their native tongue (*rodnoi iazyk*) as Polish (83.7% - Yiddish, 2.2% Russian).¹⁴ Two points need to be made here: first, the census recorded only “native tongue” and insisted that respondents choose one language only. Second, from anecdotal evidence we know that many Jews, both in privileged and working classes, spoke Polish with varying degrees of fluency by this point. It is remarkable that already at this point one out of seven Jews in Warsaw spoke Polish as his *native* language. No doubt many others spoke Polish on a frequent basis, including at home, despite the obvious predominance of Yiddish.

Warsaw was obviously unusual in its large numbers of Polish-speaking (including native speakers) Jews. When one looks at the Kingdom of Poland as a whole, the figures were much smaller, merely 3.5% of Jews claiming to be native speakers of Polish.¹⁵ Still, even in small towns many Jews knew enough

¹³ Świętochowski’s articles *preceding* the Warsaw pogrom and arguing that Polish-Jewish relations were intolerably strained were published in *Pravda*, n. 18, 19, 21 (May 1881, n.s.). For more on the 1881 Warsaw pogrom, see Weeks, “*From Assimilation to Antisemitism*”, 71-86.

¹⁴ Stephen D. Corrsin, “Aspects of Population Change and of Acculturation of Jewish Warsaw at the end of the Nineteenth Century: The Censuses of 1882 and 1897,” *Polin*, 3 (1988): 128-132.

¹⁵ Stephen D. Corrsin, “Language Use in Cultural and Political Change in Pre-1914 Warsaw: Poles, Jews, and Russification,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 68/1 (1990): 72.

Polish to trade with the local peasantry. More importantly, during these decades hundreds of thousands of Jews and Polish peasants emigrated to industrializing cities (especially Warsaw and Łódź) to seek employment. In other words, more and more Poles and Jews came into direct contact with one another in a new, rough, urban environment. The increased friction between Jews and Poles as neighbors and competitors (for employment, housing, etc.) in burgeoning urban areas also added to tensions.¹⁶

Another factor complicating Polish-Jewish relations was the migration of Jews from the Pale of Settlement to the Polish provinces. François Guesnet and other scholars have shown that this so-called “Litwak invasion” so often bewailed by contemporary Polish commentators was more a myth than an actual demographical reality. Nonetheless, the myth played a very important – and negative – role in exacerbating Polish-Jewish relations.¹⁷ While the flood of Russian-speaking Litwaks taking over Polish cities was certainly a paranoid fantasy of perfervid Polish patriots, the experience of meeting, seeing, or hearing about recently-arrived Jews speaking a Russian patois would have been real enough for many Poles. Compared with the economically moribund Pale of Settlement, the Polish provinces offered diverse opportunities for commerce and employment. And it was only natural that a Jew from, say, Berdichev, would address a Gentile in the only non-Jewish language he knew, a kind of east-Slavic jargon that sounded alarmingly like Russian to a Pole. Unfortunately, this harmless attempt at communication could easily be blown up into a scenario of “Litwaks as agents of the Russian linguistic invasion” by zealous nationalists.

Poles were not the only ones affected by an increased atmosphere of national feelings. In the 1890s the two modern Jewish political movements that would dominate until the *shoah*, Zionism and the Bund (Yiddish-based Jewish socialism) came together. The Bund was officially founded in Vilna (today’s Vilnius) in October 1897. Zionism in its modern form (emphasizing Jews as an ethnicity, not simply a religious group) was taking shape from the 1880s but was electrified by the publication of Theodor Herzl’s *Judenstaat* in 1896.¹⁸ Both of these movements were deeply troubling to liberal Polish society, as both suggested – in very different ways, to be sure – that Jews should retain some

¹⁶ The city of Łódź which practically arose from nothing in the second half of the nineteenth century is perhaps an even better example of new urban Polish-Jewish relations than Warsaw. On the city and national-religious relations, see, for example: “The Jews in Łódź 1820-1939”, *Polin*, vol. 6 (1991); *Polen, Deutsche und Juden in Łódź, 1820-1939: eine schwierige Nachbarschaft*, ed. Jürgen Hensel (Osnabrück: Fibre, 1999); *Polacy, Niemcy, Żydzi w Łodzi w XIX - XX w. Sąsiedzi dalecy i bliscy*, ed. Paweł Samuś (Łódź: Ibidem., 1997).

¹⁷ On demography and the “Litwaken-Mythos,” see François Guesnet, *Polnische Juden im 19. Jahrhundert: Lebensbedingungen, Rechtsnormen und Organisation im Wandel*, (Köln: Böhlau, 1998), 29-86.

¹⁸ On this early period, the work of David Vital has not been surpassed. David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

level of identity *as Jews*, even in the modern state. At first antisemites welcomed the Zionist idea or at least the idea of exporting Jews to their own country, but soon antisemites denounced Zionism as another Jewish *szwindl*. As for the Bund, its socialist views and ideal of Poles and Jews living together in harmony in a socialist republic were anathema to most patriotic Poles. The fundamental difficulty was simple: Polish society as a whole, with rare exception, could not accept the idea of Polish Jews retaining in the long run anything more than a religious difference from other Poles. This belief was hardly limited to Poles – even in the USA and western Europe such ideas were common. But given the strong ethno-linguistic difference between (Christian) Poles and Jews even into the early twentieth century, this inability to accept a measure of cultural difference between Poles and Jews did not augur well for future relations.

Revolution of 1905

The Revolution of 1905 has been called – by V.I. Lenin, no less – the “dress rehearsal” for the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917. Obviously such a statement benefits overly from hindsight. Still, even at the time the revolution seems to mark a new era in Russian politics – and in policy toward non-Russians. After 1905, censorship would be considerably lightened (though by no means non-existent), allowing a much freer discussion of relations between Poles and Jews. The year 1905 started hopefully – if with considerable violence – with broad segments of Polish society seeing real hope for more cultural autonomy (at least) for their nation. For most of the year, the Polish press was relatively free of antisemitic sentiment. It appears that for the most part, Poles and Jews were fighting together against the Russians. When the tide began to turn against the revolution late in the year and into 1906, Polish society, following the lead of the National Democrats (Endeks), turned increasingly antisemitic.¹⁹

Throughout the revolution, the leader of the Endeks, Roman Dmowski, was consistent in his disapproval of armed struggle against the Russian Empire while the Russo-Japanese War continued.²⁰ Dmowski even traveled to Tokyo to counter his countryman Józef Piłsudski’s attempts to gain Japanese support for the Polish cause. Dmowski held that socialists like Piłsudski much overestimated the ability of Poles to wrest their own freedom from Russian hands. Once the tide had shifted, in particular as Russian troops were brought back to Europe to crush the revolution, Dmowski and his party comrades were able to argue a) that “real Poles” had not supported the revolution and b) that

¹⁹ In general on the revolution of 1905, see Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 2 vols., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, 1992); and Robert Blobaum, *Revolucja: Russian Poland 1904-1907*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

²⁰ For an energetic new interpretation of the National Democrats’ leader in this period, see Grzegorz Krzywiec, *Szowinizm po polsku. Przypadek Romana Dmowskiego (1886-1905)*, (Warsaw: Neriton, 2009).

it was socialists and Jews (as well as, of course, Jewish socialists) who had pressed hapless Poles into the unequal struggle. After the bitter disappointment of 1905, when in fact Poles gained no major concessions on autonomy, Dmowski's cynical ploy was very effective. A wounded nation sought a scapegoat which was conveniently provided in the form of "the Jews."²¹

In a sense both the accomplishments and the failures of 1905 ended up working to the detriment of Polish-Jewish relations. Among the accomplishments that were not entirely swept away (though, to be sure, considerably abridged and narrowed) were an elected Parliament (the Duma), religious freedom (for the first time the right to convert *out of* Orthodoxy), and broadened the freedom of the press.²² As we will see in slightly more detail below, the election campaigns to all Dumas (four in all, the final election taking place in 1912) served to aggravate relations between Poles and Jews, culminating in the anti-Jewish boycott after elections to the fourth Duma in 1912. As for the right to convert from Orthodoxy, this new freedom had the effect of many tens of thousands of officially Russian Orthodox peasants converting to Catholicism to the considerable dismay of tsarist officials. The mass conversions were blamed on Polish Catholic pressure (quite unfairly, in fact); Russian authorities consequently increased pressure on Catholic clergy to restrict their activities, once again heightening Polish sentiments that their culture was under attack.²³ Finally, increased press freedom allowed for the first time the creation of a large and vibrant Yiddish-language press in Russian Poland. Some Poles even claimed, gloomily, that the Yiddish press in Warsaw published more newspapers than the Polish press. The claim was absurd, but indicates the degree of shock felt by many Poles at the swift transition from absolutely no daily press in Yiddish (the first Yiddish daily had been allowed – in St. Petersburg – just before 1905) to numerous dailies, weeklies, and other visible Yiddish-language periodicals.²⁴

²¹ I have developed my ideas on 1905 as a key-event in Polish-Jewish relations in "1905 as a Watershed in Polish-Jewish Relations", *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews*, eds. Stefani Hoffmann and Ezra Mendelsohn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 128-139. See also the important new work, Scott Ury, *Red Banner, Blue Star: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw Jewry*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

²² Peter Waldron, "Religious Toleration in Late Imperial Russia", *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, ed. Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 103-119.

²³ The most egregious government project to "protect Orthodox people against Catholics" was the creation of a separate Kholm (Chełm) province out of the eastern districts of Siedlce and Lublin provinces. On this project, see Weeks, "*Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*", 172-192; and Matteo Piccin, "La politica etno-confessionale zarista nel Regno di Polonia: la questione uniate di Cholm come esempio di *nation-building* russo (1831-1912)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Università "Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2011).

²⁴ The Yiddish press in Russian Poland and the Russian Empire more generally certainly deserves more scholarly attention. Meanwhile, see the excellent comparative work Sarah Stein, *Making Jews Modern: the Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

Thus the overall political situation in Russian Poland after the Revolution of 1905 was far from propitious or conducive to improved inter-ethnic relations. Poles were embittered at the failure of the revolution to bring the autonomy that they had hoped for, the National Democratic party openly called the revolution a Jewish attempt to push their own, anti-Polish interests, and Jews, particularly of the younger generation, were generally unwilling to accept without question the superiority of Polish culture or to agree to unconditional assimilation. The repressions carried out by the Russian authorities in the wake of the revolution served only further to embitter relations. The heightened feelings of anger and resentment against the Russians made arguments against the Jews all the more palatable to broad expanses of the Polish public.

Increasing Tensions, 1906-1914

As we have seen, already in the immediate aftermath of 1905 relations between Poles and Jews were very strained. Various events of the subsequent years were to push these strains to the point of a total breakdown. As mentioned, Duma elections from the start intensified national feeling, inevitably leading to a rise in antisemitic expression. In their election rhetoric, the National Democrats were quite adept and consistent in their equating of any political opponents (Jew or Gentile) with anti-Polish Jews. In this atmosphere, Polish progressives increasingly felt the need to distance themselves rhetorically from Jews, even polonized Jews of quite similar political outlook. By the eve of World War I, aside from the socialists and the aristocratic conservatives (“realists”), Polish society had nearly entirely turned its back on the idea of integrating Jews into the Polish nation.

The most notorious example of liberal alienation from a generally pro-Jewish, pro-assimilationist stance was the episode in Polish political and intellectual history known as “progressive antisemitism” (*antysemityzm postępowy*).²⁵ The best known “antisemitic progressives” were the publicist and educational reformer, Iza Moszczeńska, and the journalist and publisher, Andrzej Niemojewski. Both of these figures had impeccable progressive records of opposing national chauvinism and clericalism. For example, in 1906 Moszczeńska published a series of articles in the assimilationist *Izraelita* in 1906 where she emphasized cooperation between Poles and Jews. By 1911 Moszczeńska had given up on the possibility of Poles and Jews working together and developed this new position in a book entitled *Progressivism at a Crossroads*.²⁶

Moszczeńska describes Polish progressivism as a cause that “must serve the Polish cause and nothing else.” Patriotism was a simple instinct for self-

²⁵ For more detail, see Theodore R. Weeks, “Polish ‘Progressive Antisemitism,’ 1905-1914,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, 25/2 (1995): 49-68.

²⁶ Moszczeńska’s series of articles, entitled “Kwestja żydowska w Królestwie Polskim” (The Polish Question in the Kingdom of Poland) in the first eight issues of *Izraelita* for 1906.

preservation, hence “A Pole who is a sincere progressive, must be a sincere patriot...”²⁷ She then proceeded to argue against the recently-prevalent conception of progressivism and Jews as extremely closely linked, if not synonymous. Far from being intrinsically progressive, “specifically Jewish traits” were “slavery and fanaticism”; progressive ideals such as freedom of conscience, religious toleration, and equality before the law regardless of origin developed among the “Aryan peoples” in a “Christian atmosphere.”²⁸ Jews at present did not constitute a nation, but demonstrated the “petrified” remains of one. Existing traditional Jewish society was full of backwardness, intolerance, and hatred for the modern world – a fact reflected in Orzeszkowa’s *Meir Ezofowicz*.²⁹

To be sure, both Jewish and Polish progressives had long bewailed the backwardness of Jewish religious circles. What was truly new here was Moszczeńska’s open disavowal of assimilation: “two chosen peoples in one territory must sooner or later clash.” And Jewish defeat was also inevitable “for they [Jews] cannot exist without Aryans, while Aryans can live without Jews.”³⁰ In order to achieve the necessary polonization of towns and the economy, Poles must learn to live without the Jews. The only solution is through Polish strength: “The strong always have the Jews on their side; the weak – against them. Thus, let us be strong. This is the best solution of the Jewish question ...”³¹

Even more than Moszczeńska, Andrzej Niemojewski reflected the shift in progressive opinion on the Polish-Jewish relations, in particular in his journal *Myśl Niepodległa* (Independent Thought). Niemojewski was a considerably more radical, anti-clerical figure, but firmly within the progressive camps. Up to around 1906, he had consistently criticized nationalists, antisemites, and the religious (mainly, as befits a radical *à la française*, the Catholic clergy, but not sparing Jewish Orthodoxy). Very rapidly the Jewish question became an almost constant feature in *Myśl niepodległa*, and references to Polish Jewry were seldom friendly or conciliatory. Like Moszczeńka, he criticized the equating of Jews and progressivism, but also excoriated Polish liberals who – according to Niemojewski – refused to countenance any criticism of the Jews. Now, he insisted, Polish progressives must regard the matter with less sentiment and more realism, and while not advocating legal restrictions on Jews, should take on those Jewish elements who hurt the development of Polish culture and

²⁷ Iza Moszczeńska, *Postęp na rozdrożu*, (Warsaw: E. Wende, 1911), 3-5, 11, 25-28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-52, 63-65.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-70. Moszczeńska’s use of Orzeszkowa’s novel is, of course, one-sided but not entirely false. For a recent discussion of the novel, see Gabriella Safran, *Rewriting the Jew: Assimilation Narratives in the Russian Empire*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 80-87.

³⁰ Moszczeńska, *Postęp na rozdrożu*, 75.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

economy. To do any less would be to abdicate their duty as Polish intellectuals and progressives.³²

Niemojewski's rhetoric about "the Jews" became increasingly strident, even shrill, in the next years. In 1910 *Myśl Niepodległa* published an article entitled "Critique of Assimilation" that at least in the present political situation, when Poles lacked their own state and political power, assimilation as "the answer" to Polish-Jewish relations could no longer be accepted. What future principles should guide Polish-Jewish relations he did not spell out, but he seemed to foresee a more combative relationship: "We can not trifle with sentiments. Life is struggle."³³ Later articles became even less friendly to the Jews and more openly embracing of antisemitism, as titles such as "Antisemitism as a Struggle for Culture" and "Antisemitism or Battling the Invasion" suggest.³⁴

The next years saw a sharpening in Niemojewski's attacks on the Jews, culminating a series of articles entitled "The Composition and Attack of the Army of the Fifth Partition." In these rambling, disjointed pages Niemojewski attacks socialism, Esperanto, the nascent Lithuanian national movement, "social anarchism," and finally the Jews. Despite the fact that Jews had lived in Poland for 600 years, they remained a foreign body or caste. Jews continue to live apart from Poles, and the Talmud justifies their disdain for and mistreatment of "goys." The falsity of assimilated Jews can be seen in their attempts to defend the Talmud or to deny that its tenets continue to affect Jewish behavior. In any case, assimilated Jews took on at best the external trappings of Polishness but never its deep spiritual essence. Whether assimilated or traditional, Zionist or "progressive," all Jews constituted the "army of the fifth partition," opposing Polish interests, defaming Poles, and acting against the most sacred Polish values. Niemojewski ended by declaring emotionally that "as long as he could hold his pen," he would defend Poland against this army.³⁵ From this point on, Niemojewski became a full-fledged antisemite, obsessed with Jewish plots, as his works denouncing the (false) "ethic of the Talmud" reflect.³⁶

Both Niemojewski and Moszczeńska, for all their differences, agreed on a fundamental shift in Polish-Jewish relations. Whereas before 1905 Jews were seen primarily as potential members of Polish society, within a few years after the revolution even progressives like these saw Poles and Jews as antagonists in a long-term struggle. In economic matters, Niemojewski and Moszczeńska alike argued that Jewish influence must be reduced, and that cities must be

³² "Kwestja żydowska," *Myśl niepodległa*, 61/5 (1908), 577-604.

³³ "Krytyka asymilacji," *Myśl niepodległa*, 149/10 (1910), 1393-1404, quotation from 1403.

³⁴ "Antysemityzm jako walka o kulturę," *Myśl niepodległa*, 150/10 (1910), 1461-9;

"Antysemityzm czy walka z najazdem," *Myśl niepodległa*, no. 193 (January 1912), 1-12.

³⁵ Andrzej Niemojewski, *Skład i pochodzenie armii piątego zaboru*, (Warsaw: "Myśl Niepodległa," 1911).

³⁶ A. Niemojewski, *Dusza żydowska w zwiernadzie Talmudu* (Warsaw: Biliński i Maślenkiewicz, 1914); *Etyka Talmudu. Odczyt* (Warsaw: Druk. "Jan Cotty", 1917).

“polonized.” And both, revealingly, noted that Jews conspired with the Polish nation’s enemies – foremost among them, of course, Russia. While censorship prevented open attacks on the Russian government *per se*, its “agents” – the Jews – could be attacked rather openly.

The “Russian connection” was made even clearer in the figure of the “Litwak,” or Jew from the Russian Pale of Settlement. An article of 1909 in the liberal *Kultura Polska* may serve as emblematic of depictions of the “Litwak menace.” It began with the provocative statement, “The Jewish question in Poland (*u nas*) is either a nightmare that torments the nation and keeps it in a constant feverish state, or an old nag that serves to drag garish signboards or shrill slogans around the country.” Why this exacerbation of the Jewish question? Very simply, because of Russian policy: “Russia, systematically and ever more energetically draining its fields of Jewish waters, has designated the Kingdom of Poland as the main reservoir for this outflow.” In other words, Russia aimed to rid itself of Jews by pressing them to emigrate to the Polish provinces. Russian policy, the article continued, had created a situation in which “more and more the Kingdom of Poland has been transformed into some sort of caricature of a Polish-Jewish-German Switzerland...”³⁷ In other words, St. Petersburg was now pursuing a new kind of russification, with the Litwaks as its agents.

The increasing difficulty of reconciling Polish and Jewish identities caused different reactions among polonized Jews. The most common of these, it would seem, was to protest ever more strongly their commitment to the Polish nation and society, explicitly distancing themselves from “Jewish solidarity” with Russian-speaking Litwaks. This was the approach taken by the long-standing organ of Polish assimilationism, *Izraelita*, in the years after 1905.³⁸ A diametrically opposed defensive reaction was that adopted by the erstwhile socialist Józef Unszlicht who, initially publishing under the more Polish-sounding pseudonym “W. Sedeci,” combined socialist fractionalism (PPS vs. SDKPiL) and nationalism in a poisonous antisemitic brew. Sedeci/Unszlicht explicitly accused the members of the non-Polish-patriotic SDKPiL as serving Russian interests, dubbing the party’s platform *sojallitwactwo* (“Social(ist) Litwakdom”). After being “outed” as a Jew (by birth), Unszlicht made a virtue of necessity by arguing that only those Jews who entirely broke with the ethnicity (from his point of view) of their birth and indeed criticized Jews as the enemies of Poles (as he did) could be accepted as true Poles.³⁹

³⁷ *Kultura Polska*, 2/12 (1909): 1-3 (see quotations 1, 2).

³⁸ On the ideology of assimilationism and the so-called “Pole-Jews” (*Żydzi-Polacy*), see Theodore R. Weeks, “The Best of both Worlds: Creating the *Żyd-Polak*,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, 34/2 (2004): 1-20.

³⁹ This is expressed most explicitly in Julian Unszlicht, *O pogromy ludu polskiego (Rola sojallitwactwa w niedawnej rewolucji)*, (Kraków: Druk. Związkowa, 1912). On Unszlicht’s remarkable life (he ended up a Catholic priest), see Grzegorz Krzywiec, “Nadwiślański Weiniger? Przypadki Juliana Unszlichta (1883-1953),” *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały*, 5 (2009): 243-257.

For all the mounting tensions in Polish-Jewish relations, a dialogue more or less remained open until the end of 1912. The failure to reach a compromise on the “non-Russian representative” from Warsaw to the Fourth State Duma provided the incident that brought a near complete severing of relations.⁴⁰ The salient facts are quickly told.⁴¹ According to the electoral law of June 3, 1907, the city of Warsaw sent only two delegates to the Duma. One of these delegates was elected by the Russian population of the city, the other by all non-Russians voting together. Due to peculiarities of the voting system, which was neither direct nor universal, by late summer 1912 it became evident that Jewish electors would elect the single non-Russian representative from Warsaw. These were mainly acculturated, wealthy businessmen, far from Jewish nationalism and with no interest in exacerbating already strained relations. Hence they sought a compromise with their Polish neighbors, offering to vote for any Polish candidate who would unconditionally support Jewish equal rights.

Unfortunately for all concerned, one of the major topics of the day was the form that elective city government should take in the Russian Poland. The endek-dominated *Koło* demanded that Jewish representation in the future city governments must be restricted by statute, in order to prevent Jewish domination of urban administrations (after all, in most of the cities of Russian Poland, Jews made up a third or more of the population). The Polish candidate, Jan Kucharzewski, who was not, by all accounts, an antisemite, refused to disavow publicly possible restrictions in the future city governments. The Jewish electors thus voted for another Pole who did promise to support equal rights for Jews, the otherwise unremarkable socialist candidate Eugeniusz Jagiełło, and the latter became Warsaw’s non-Russian representative in the Fourth Duma.⁴²

Once again, the Russian government’s policies to restrict Polish rights had the unintended effect of exacerbating Polish-Jewish relations. Had Warsaw been allowed a more reasonable (given the city’s population and ethnic make-up) number of Duma representatives instead of the absurd two, one of whom was reserved for the small Russian community, it seems likely that the 1912 elections would not have been so bitter. With only one representative for all “non-Russians” in Warsaw, a clash between the Polish majority and the large Jewish minority (ca. one third of the total population) was only too likely. The Polish response, led by the Endeks, was immediate and furious. The antisemitic press urged Poles to avoid not just Jewish shops, but Jewish

⁴⁰ For some contemporary accounts of the events of 1912, see Stephen D. Corrsin, trans., “The Jews, the Left, and the State Duma Elections in Warsaw in 1912: Selected Sources,” *Polin* 9 (1996): 45-54.

⁴¹ For more detail on the 1912 Duma election in Warsaw, see Corrsin, “*Warsaw before the First World War*”, 89-104; and Grunbaum, “*Milkehamot yehudei polin*”, 153-161.

⁴² More generally on the elections and boycott, see Robert Blobaum, “The Politics of Antisemitism in Fin-de-Siècle Warsaw,” *Journal of Modern History* vol. 73 no.2 (2001): 275-306.

doctors, lawyers, singers, performers -- in short, all relations between Poles and Jews was to cease.⁴³ This campaign was led by the endek papers *Gazeta Poranna - 2 Grosze* and *Gazeta Warszawska* but found wide resonance across the political spectrum. *Pravda* printed a furious editorial denouncing the behavior of the Jewish electors: “Polish society must answer battle with battle: the instinct of national self-defense demands it of us.” “Polish Jews (*Żydzi-Polacy*), or the so-called assimilators, have too long deluded us with pretensions of their influence over the broad waves of the Semite flood. They wanted to play the role of some sort of Polish Embassy among Jews, and Jewish Embassy among Poles.” Such double-dealing could no longer be tolerated: “... there will be henceforth no place for mediation, there will be no place for half measures, for half-Poles and half-Jews. *On one side stand the Jews, on the other - without distinction of race, religion, or origin - stand the Poles.*”⁴⁴ By the end of 1912, *Rola* had good reason to celebrate the “Victory of the idea.”⁴⁵ The idea, that is, propagated by the journal’s founder, Jan Jeleński, of antisemitism, strict separation between Poles and Jews, and, over the long run, a uniformly Catholic Poland.

The anti-Jewish boycott ran from November 1912 to the outbreak of World War I. It seems clear that the boycott was generally ignored by the peasantry and on the whole not very effective economically.⁴⁶ The importance of the boycott, however, went far beyond the economic sphere. It was generally noted at the time that the larger and wealthier Jewish businesses suffered little from the boycott while smaller shops and professionals were much more hard-hit.⁴⁷

The moral impact, in any case, was enormous. Even if the Jewish community in Poland was not devastated by the boycott, relations between Poles and Jews in some sense never recovered. The boycott crystallized the rhetoric of antisemitism in Polish society, emphasized the stark and unbridgeable differences between “Poles” and “Jews,” and made possible for broad sections of Polish society to advocate radical measures such as expulsion and economic coercion. Jews in Poland, whether “acculturated” or Orthodox, came to be seen almost universally as “ungrateful guests” – to quote the title of Konstancy Wzdulski’s 1912 pamphlet – rather than potential brothers. Henceforth

⁴³ For a detailed *ex post facto* account of the boycott by a contemporary, see S. Hirszhorn, *Historja Żydów w Polsce od Sejmu Czteroletniego do wojny europejskiej (1788-1914)*, (Warsaw: B-cia Lewin-Epstein i S-ka, 1921), 302-333.

⁴⁴ *Pravda*, November 16, 1912, 2-4 (quotations 2-4). Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ “Zwycięstwo idei,” *Rola*, November 23, 1912, 739-40.

⁴⁶ Blobaum, “The Politics of Antisemitism,” 275-306; see also Frank Golczewski, *Polnisch-jüdische Beziehungen 1881-1922: Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Antisemitismus in Europa*, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981), 106-119. For a contemporary’s view (from a Zionist perspective), see Isaac Grunbaum, “מלחמות ההרם כנגד יהודי פולין” (1913-1940) (The anti-Jewish Boycott 'Wars' in Poland), (Jerusalem: Khvarim, 1941), 1-15 (originally published in *Ha-olam העולם* in 1913).

⁴⁷ Both Polish and Russian liberal opinion emphasized the economic harmfulness (for both Poles and Jews) of the boycott. See, for example, “Polożenie ekonomiczne,” *Nowa Gazeta*, Morning edition, January 6, 1913.

“Polish” and “Jewish” interests would almost invariably be seen as mutually exclusive and antagonistic.

Conclusions

Many factors contributed to the deterioration and near total collapse in Polish-Jewish relations during the two generations preceding World War I. Economic competition, a general atmosphere of acute nationalism, increased migration, perceived threats to traditional forms of life and religion – all of these elements combined to effect a heightening of tensions between Poles and Jews. But throughout this period and as a background and general context, the fact of Polish statelessness and seemingly relentless anti-Polish policies pursued by the Russian authorities served to further aggravate the situation. Poles felt, with some justification, that their culture and religion were under direct attack from the Russian authorities. In 1863 and for two or three decades afterwards, Jews were regarded as allies – at least potential allies – in this struggle against the Russian occupier. So when from around the turn of the century broad segments of Polish society began to perceive Jews as having rejected assimilation, tensions rapidly led to a showdown.

Throughout this period, a binary opposition was at work: “us” and “them.” While in 1863 Jews could be included, at least by liberal Poles, as “ours,” after 1905 Jews were nearly always seen as alien and hostile. The growth in numbers of educated Russian-speaking Jews (outside of the Polish provinces) certainly was a factor in this development. Similarly, the rise of specifically Jewish identities (whether Bundist or Zionist) among the younger generation was often perceived in this strained atmosphere as a “betrayal” of the Polish cause.

The tragedy of Polish-Jewish relations in these years (and, in a sense, even more so in the interwar period) was the failure to recognize as normal, even beneficial, the realities of ethno-cultural difference. The Russian desire to “russify” the Polish provinces, to control this region and spread Russian culture at least as a unifying element for the empire (if not as an attempt at total assimilation) exacerbated Polish feelings of national vulnerability. These feelings of vulnerability made good relations with Jews contingent, ironically, on their agreement to shed their own national-cultural identity. The Jewish “spurning” of this offer of Polish culture, increasingly perceived from the later 1880s, shocked and incensed liberal Poles, paving the way for the demonization of the Jewish other.⁴⁸ Ironically russification did succeed in making Poles more like Russians – but only in the sense of intensifying Poles’ demands that other ethnicities take on Polish culture entirely or be considered

⁴⁸ While concentrating mainly on the interwar and later period, there are many insights to be found in Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

an enemy. In this way one form of chauvinism gave birth to another, possibly even more virulent, form of aggression towards the ethnic other.

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