

A COMPLICATED PEACE: NATIONALISM AND
ANTISEMITISM IN INTERWAR POLAND

by

Joanna Dobrowolska

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

Approved:

Tammy Proctor, Ph.D.
Major Professor

Jonathan Brunstedt, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Anna Pechenkina, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Mark R. McLellan, Ph.D.
Vice President for Research and
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2018

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ABSTRACT

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by

Joanna Dobrowolska, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2018

Major Professor: Dr. Tammy Proctor
Department: History

During the interwar period, Poland hosted a large Jewish minority, but relations between Poles and Jews were not always peaceable. The 1920s and 1930s gave rise to antisemitic political movements, such as the National Democratic Party (NDP). Anxieties about the stability of Poland soon after it achieved independence in 1918 were driving factors in the NDP's ideological conclusion that in order for Poland to remain on the map of Europe, it would have to be ethnically pure. Jews, in particular, posed a special threat in the eyes of many of these nationalists. The National Democratic Party (NDP) was a leading nationalist party that exacerbated these tensions. Starting in the mid-1930s, the NDP began to encourage Poles all around the country to boycott Jewish businesses in the hope of encouraging their emigration. However, with these boycotts came increased reports of vandalism and violence targeting Jewish businesses and families. This work adds to a broader understanding of the motivations for European antisemitism in the interwar period and the impacts of rhetoric that others an ethnic group.

(79 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

A Complicated Peace: Nationalism and Antisemitism in Interwar Poland

Joanna Dobrowolska

This thesis examines the roots of antisemitic rhetoric expressed by Polish nationalists between 1918 and 1939. I argue that nationalist rhetoric and political campaigns during this period focused on calling for Poles to defend themselves against Jewish economic and political domination. The first half of this work utilizes pamphlets, books, newspaper articles, and other written works wherein Polish nationalists, in particular members of the National Democratic Party (NDP), expressed a fear of Polish Jews and called for their eviction from the country. Fear that Poland, a country that had been partitioned by surrounding empires for the past two centuries, would not last long as an independent country were central in the rhetoric of these authors. In their eyes, Jews threatened Poland's already compromised political and economic position. Throughout the 1930s, the NDP and other nationalist groups began to call for Jews to emigrate.

The second half of this thesis uses three Polish counties (Siedlce, Sokółów Podlaski, and Węgrów) as a case study to examine the effects of the NDP's campaign of boycotting Jewish businesses. All three counties had large Jewish populations concentrating in mostly urban areas. I undertake this study by examining reports produced by the Starosta Powiatowy, a state official in charge of describing political activities, crimes, and other major events in a given county. The reports revealed that there was a correlation between the increase in the NDP agitating for boycotts in 1936

and increased reports of Jewish families being terrorized by people breaking their windows.

By examining these dynamics, I illuminate some of the political, cultural, and economic forces that contributed to the rise of antisemitism in interwar Poland. In addition to emphasizing the NDP's language of national self-defense, thesis also highlights some of the impacts of this rhetoric.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Tammy Proctor, Dr. Jonathan Brunstedt, and Dr. Anna Pechenkina for their edits, suggestions, and support.

I would like to extend a special thanks to all the individuals who helped me research this topic in Poland. To Dr. Edward Kopówka and Jacek Odziemczyk, thank you for taking the time to sit and discuss this topic with me, recommending helpful books, and helping me understand the nuances of this topic from the perspective of Polish scholars. Thank you to the librarians and archivists who provided me with help and materials at the Sokolow Podlaski Library and at the Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach.

I am eternally grateful to the Tomaszewicz family for allowing me to be part of their family throughout my stay in Poland. Special thanks to Ania Tomaszewicz for driving me to archives, arranging meetings with local historians, giving me the confidence to interact with Polish archivists, and bringing me orzeszki at the end of stressful days at the archives. Your help and support meant so much to me; I don't know how I'll ever be able to repay your hospitality.

Finally thank you to my family: my parents for reacting with horror whenever I dramatically proclaimed that I wanted to give up, and to my Fabio, for realizing that I was only being dramatic.

Joanna Dobrowolska

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The story of the 1919 Miechów pogrom begins with a dispute amongst pimps and thieves. The Polscy brothers, two ethnic Jews, collaborated with an ethnic Pole in a heist. But when the time came to divide the loot, the thieves got in an argument that quickly turned bloody when the Polscy brothers stabbed the Pole, killing him. Officials swiftly arrested the Polscys, and the story of the murder quickly assumed a sectarian flavor, reverberating through Miechów and driving a wedge between the Polish and Jewish communities. What started as a dispute between criminals quickly began to feed into existing ethnic tensions as the local Christian community painted the stabbed Christian as a martyr and victim of Jewish criminality. Jewish and Polish opinion polarized further as the Jewish press defended the Polscy brothers, painting the murderers as innocent of all blame. Apolinary Hartglas, a Jewish representative of the Polish parliament, investigating the incident, lamented that by defending the perpetrators, Miechów's Jewish community only reinforced the stereotype of Jews being involved in criminality. The conflict reached a heated conclusion when a mob of angry Poles rolled through Miechów, demolishing Jewish property and beating any Jews who stood in its way. In subsequent days, additional violence erupted in surrounding villages. In the end, this incident resulted in several deaths and nearly one hundred injuries.¹

¹ Apolinary Hartglas, *Na pograniczu dwóch światów* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1996), 208. Hartglas, who recounts these events in a memoir, was part of the Sejm investigation of these events. While he represented a Jewish party within the Sejm, he was also accompanied by a member of the National Democratic Party and a member of the National Workers Party (Narodowa Partia Robotnicza). The story recounted here is the one upon which all three investigators agreed.

This work seeks to explore the dynamics that allowed for incidents of antisemitic violence to occur throughout interwar Poland. The story of the Miechów pogrom highlights the power of the stereotype of Jews as harmful “others” and the impact when a community uses it as a framework for a particular narrative. For the Poles of Miechów, the Jewish Polscy brothers, involved in thievery and murder, became representative of the Jewish population as a whole. The incident concluded with Poles, driven by a sense that they had to defend their community from this population, which they viewed as harmful. Throughout this thesis, I argue that antisemitic rhetoric and actions in interwar Poland arose from antisemitic perceptions that Jews economically and politically threatened the fragile and fledgling Polish state. It is this idea that led nationalist Poles to undertake a campaign of ethno-nationalist self-defense.

In the first half of this work, I investigate the motivations for this and various other stereotypes used by religious and political leaders in interwar Poland. Central in their rhetoric were perceptions of Jews as a menacing presence in Poland that could bring on the dissolution of the state. In Miechów, the stereotype of Jews as amoral led some Poles to believe that that the murdered Pole had to have been an innocent victim of Jewish criminality, turning this squabble between criminals into a racialized incident. This narrative caught on, inciting a mob of Poles who sought retribution against the Jewish community as a whole. The way in which a widely promoted stereotype produces violent emotions is another major element of Polish-Jewish relations that I will engage throughout this work. The nationalist solution to the idea that Jews weakened an already fragile Poland was to push Jews out of the country through boycotts of businesses, arguing that Poles had to economically defend themselves. I argue that the widespread

promotion of these boycotts normalized antisemitism and increased instances of anti-Jewish violence. Together, these two points uncover a dynamic of defensive ethno-nationalism. Polish nationalists, both on a political and localized level, felt that Jews threatened Poland and it was their duty to protect the nation by alerting the country of their menace and by pushing them out with economic isolation and even violence.

The first half of this work examines antisemitic rhetoric on a broader national level and pursues some of the ideological roots of antisemitism among Polish nationalists, and especially within the rightist National Democratic Party (NDP) or *Endecja*, which was one of four major political parties in interwar Poland. The NDP's biggest rival was the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) or *Sanacja*, which pushed for a multi-ethnic model of Poland and expressed more sympathy for minorities, including Jews. The Peasant Movement (PSL), defending the interests of Poland's large farming population, was another major party, but its weakness was in its split between right-wing wealthy land-owning farmers and radical leftist peasants. Finally, the right-leaning Christian Democrats, or *Chadecja*, sought to develop Polish society according to Catholic values.² Of these movements, the National Democrats most intensely pushed for an ethnically pure Poland with anxieties about Poland's stability as a nation as a central element motivating their antisemitic stance. In 1918, Poland had just been politically reborn, and immediately faced the challenges of being ethnically diverse and surrounded by more powerful nations. Before 1918, Poland had been divided between the German, Austrian, and Russian powers for over a century. As a result, the 1920s and 30s were a period of nation-building that led to political instability and border wars, such as the Polish-Soviet

² Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113-114.

war of 1920, which exacerbated perceptions that Poland was an unstable nation.

According to nationalist leaders, Poland could only survive if it was ethnically pure of corrupting elements, the most dangerous of which was Poland's large Jewish minority.

Moments of military tensions, like the Bolshevik invasion of Poland, and economic stresses, like the Great Depression, drove some of the successes of antisemitic perceptions.

The second chapter is a case study aiming to show the effects of the implementation of the rhetoric discussed in the first chapter, focusing on the activities of the National Democratic Party in three powiats: Siedlce, Sokołów Podlaski, and Węgrów.³ This area, also known as Podlasie, is located about thirty kilometers east of Warsaw and hosted a large Jewish population that was geographically, economically, religiously and socially distinct from ethnically Polish populations. In the interwar period all three powiats were primarily rural and the majority of Christian Poles worked in agriculture in the countryside surrounding each central town. Jewish populations, meanwhile, focused on industry and trade and settled within urban areas. Starting in around 1934, the NDP organized boycotts of Jewish businesses, blaming economic strife on Jewish control of the market. As the boycotts grew more intense, cases of vandalism of Jewish property increased. Although the violence never became as serious in as in Miechów, by the late 1930s, relations between Poles and Jews were tense. Together, these chapters intend to uncover at least part of an answer to the question of how some

³ A powiat is the equivalent of a county and is composed of a smattering of villages and a central major town which gives the powiat its name. A group of neighboring powiats make up a voivodeship, or województwo, which is essentially a province. The Siedlce, Węgrów, and Sokołów powiats were all part of the Lublin voivodeship until 1939. I will be referring to Sokołów Podlaski as just Sokołów.

nationalists justified antisemitism, and the impact of their rhetoric and campaigns on Polish and Jewish relations in areas where the two had coexisted for generations.

Because so much of this thesis examines the perceptions of nationalists, it is necessary to briefly define nationalism and the shape it took in Poland. One of the most important definitions of nationalism was coined by Benedict Anderson, who referred to the nation as a “limited and sovereign imagined political community.” Nations are, he argued, invented and constructed by the members of that nation and by definition they have clearly defined boundaries that exclude certain groups.⁴ Anderson’s concept is significant in understanding Poland, which maintained the idea of a nation even during a tripartite partition that lasted more than a century. As with Anderson, other authors who engage with the topic agree that nationalism is linked to modernity with the advent of widespread print media and that it grew in importance as standardized education became established in Europe.⁵ The rise of cultural nationalism in the nineteenth century gave power to claims for political sovereignty in places such as Poland, especially as folk traditions were invented or revived. Eric Hobsbawm emphasizes the artificiality of certain elements of national traditions, invented “to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior.”⁶ For better or for worse, national sentiments are a powerful weapon, which many political movements wield to achieve their ends.

The nationalism promoted by the National Democratic Party was rooted in Polish ethnic identity, Catholic religion, and the Polish language. Despite Poland’s history of

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 5-7.

⁵ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3; Anderson, 39; Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 158-159.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 1.

cosmopolitanism, Polish Nationalists like Roman Dmowski insisted that the Polish Nation was traditionally Catholic. One of the reason why these traits, rather than borders, define the Polish nation is because of Poland's history of partitions, when religious and linguistic similarities became the only element connecting Poles scattered behind the borders of various empires. Because of this strict definition of Polish identity, Polish nationalists excluded minorities who did not fit these criteria, particularly Jews who practiced a non-Christian religion and often lived in nonintegrated communities that spoke Yiddish.

Figure 1. Map of Siedlce, Sokołów, and Węgrów *powiats* in relation to Warsaw



Source: *Mapka Państwa Polskiego z podziałem na inspektoraty i O.K.* (1921). Polona.

In addition to the importance of nationalism to Polish history, it is nearly impossible to undertake a study about antisemitism in Poland without first setting out a

few careful words about the severity of Polish antisemitism. Not all Poles in the interwar period subscribed to ethno-nationalist ideals and many academics, members of clergy and, most prominently, socialists, countered nationalist rhetoric.⁷ Polish leftists imagined Poland following a multicultural model harkening back to sixteenth-century Poland, when it was ruled by the Jagiellon family.⁸ These figures often expressed that antisemitism was in fact divisive and harmful for the unity of Poland. One of the most notable of these leaders was Józef Piłsudski, the first Marshal of Poland and the head of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Though there is some historiographical debate regarding the extent to which Piłsudski improved life for Jews in Poland, it is undeniable that he did promote a multinational model and attempted to stymie antisemitism in official national policies.⁹ Furthermore, throughout the interwar period the PPS fought for equal rights for Jewish minorities.¹⁰ Piłsudski's personal impact is clear, considering that it was only after his death in May 1935 that the legislature began taking a more ethnically oppressive and

⁷ Perhaps one of the most famous critics was Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, see Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, *W kwestii Żydowskiej* (Warsaw: Czcionkami Drukarni Naukowej, 1913).; Other examples of published criticisms of antisemitic policies see Ryszard Ganszyniec, *Sprawa Numerus Clausus i Zasadnicze jej Znaczenie: Antysemityzm Akademicki Jako Objaw Antysemityzmu Społecznego* (Warsaw: Związek Akademickiej Młodzieży Zjednoczeniowej, 1925).; Ryszard Ganszyniec, "Ghetto Ławkowke" (lecture, Lwów University, Lwów, November 16, 1937).; Antoni Gronowicz, *Antysemityzm Rujnuje Moją Ojczyznę* (Lwów: Nakładem Dobrego Polaka, 1938).; For more on Polish interwar critics of antisemitism see Jerzy Jedliki, "Resisting the Wave: Intellectuals against Antisemitism in the Last Years of the 'Polish Kingdom'" in *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland*, ed. Robert Blobaum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 60-80.

⁸ Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 283.

⁹ Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 69 calls Piłsudski a "lesser evil" for the Jews because although he did oppose excessively antisemitic slogans, he also "took no steps to alter the state's basic attitude towards the Jews."; Meanwhile Natalia Aleksion, "Regards from My Shtetl: Polish Jews Write to Piłsudski, 1933-1935" *The Polish Review* 56, no. 1-2 (2011): 57-71 uses letters from Jews to Piłsudski to make a case that he was thought of as something of an advocate for the Jews of Poland.

¹⁰ Michał Śliwa, "The Jewish Problem in Polish Socialist Thought," in *Poles, Jews, Socialists: The Failure of an Ideal* ed. Antony Polonsky, Vol. 9. Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 27.

antisemitic direction.¹¹ Furthermore, documents produced by the PPS even after Piłsudski's death, indicate a continued opposition to the antisemitic stances of the National Democrats.¹²

To a certain extent, these efforts successfully slowed the advance of antisemitism in the legislature. Nevertheless, the ethno-nationalist and antisemitic stance grew in popularity and the late 1930s saw an increase in discriminatory laws targeting Jews in ways that were meant to motivate their emigration.¹³ Antisemitic slogans and ideology gripped Polish politics to the extent that Jewish communities from around the globe began to express concern. In 1936, the organizers of the Conference on Jewish Relations, upon hearing of the political victories of the National Democrats, requested that Abraham G. Duker, a Polish-born Jewish teacher and research librarian at the Graduate School of Jewish Social Work in New York, would provide "a succinct factual statement on the present conditions of the Jews in Poland."¹⁴ This report, based upon Polish and Jewish publications and the Polish Main Statistical Bureau, covers the economic, legal, and political status of Jews throughout the interwar period.¹⁵ Duker concludes his description of Poland's political situation with the claim that,

¹¹ Daniel Blatman, "The Bund in Poland, 1935-1939," in Polonsky, *Poles, Jews, Socialists*, 58.

¹² For an example of a pamphlet criticizing antisemitic campaigns and slogans of the National Democrats see Polska Partja Socjalistyczna. Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, *Czarna Księga Endencji* (Łódź: Drukarnia Ludowa w Łodzi, 1938), 25-31. This source even likens the leaders of Encencja to Nazis and accuses them of collaborating with Hitler.

¹³ Jerzy Tomaszewski, "The Civil Rights of Jews in Poland 1918-1939," in *Jews in Independent Poland, 1918-1939*, ed. Antony Polonsky et al. (Oxford, UK; Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 125-127.

¹⁴ Abraham Duker, "The Situation of the Jews in Poland," *Conference on Jewish Relations Newsletter* (April, 1936): 3-4, Cecil Green Library.; Abraham Duker would continue to become the editor of the journal *Jewish Social Studies* in 1952. For more on Duker, see Lloyd P. Gartner, "In Memoriam Abraham G. Duker 1907-1987," *Jewish Social Studies* 49, no. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1987): 189-194.

¹⁵ Duker, 1-2.

“The Extreme Right...can be considered the party of the future. The Endeks [the National Democrats] are united and have good leadership...They seem to attract the declassed, landless and unemployed elements with the same degree of success that Hitler did in Germany. Their number is increasing tremendously and their appeal reaches all classes.”¹⁶

Duker’s report suggests that nationalist rhetoric, with its promises of improving the lives of Christians at the expense of pushing Jews out of the economy, was gaining increasing popularity throughout Poland. Although Polish socialists, communists, and some “radical peasants,” continued to side with Jews, their efforts proved insufficient in the face of the rising popularity of ethno-nationalism which eventually became part of the political mainstream.¹⁷

It is important to realize that Poland is part of a greater pattern of European antisemitism in the twentieth century. Nearly every European country with a large Jewish minority such as Germany, Romania, and France had strains of right-wing nationalists that denigrated Jews in the interwar period. Many of the same forces drove political antisemitism in these areas, as in Poland. The economic stagnation that came with the Great Depression through the 1930s created tensions in all these nations. Judeo-Bolshevism and perceptions of Jews as political saboteurs and traitors were also prominent throughout Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁸ Just as in Poland, the late 1930s became a time of increased political and legal antisemitism throughout Europe. Antisemitism in Nazi Germany, for example, reached an extreme level after Nuremberg Laws were enacted in 1935, which actively labelled and restricted

¹⁶ Duker, 29-30.

¹⁷ Duker 29.

¹⁸ William Brustein, *Roots of Hate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Jews in society.¹⁹ At around the same time, French laws were also passed, restricting Jewish access to medical school and artisan work.²⁰ Indeed, Poland was not alone in viewing Jews as a threat but was part of a pan-European trend of countries attempting to limit Jewish participation in politics and the economy.

The pervasiveness of antisemitism in interwar Polish legislation, politics, and culture remains the subject of historiographic debate due to the complexity of this topic.²¹ The renowned Jewish historian of European Jewry and the Holocaust, Ezra Mendelsohn, noted that in the case of antisemitism and Poland, “more than one answer is possible. Indeed, more than one answer is necessary.”²² There were ways in which interwar Polish politics and culture were bad for Jews, however, there were also ways in which Poland proved a place where Jewish culture could exist and grow in relative peace.

With these nuances in mind, this thesis will focus less on the prevalence of antisemitism in Polish society and more on the impacts of those segments of the Polish population that *did* identify with antisemitism. How did antisemitic political and clerical leaders justify their fear and aversion to Jews? This thesis examines the historical and social forces that created these perceptions and how those perceptions went on to impact behavior. It is important to investigate the historical, social, economic, and political forces that encouraged antisemitism in Poland, because under certain circumstances, all peoples

¹⁹ Brustein, 141-142.

²⁰ Brustein, 203-204.

²¹ Works like David Cymet, “Polish State Antisemitism as a Major Factor Leading to the Holocaust,” *Journal of Genocide* 1, no. 2 (1999): 169-212 and Leo Cooper, *In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle* (New York: Palgrave, 2000) imply that Poland was moving in the same direction as Nazi Germany in terms of legally promoting eliminationalist antisemitic policies. Yet Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918-1955* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2000) and Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe* maintain that Polish interwar politics would never have become as destructive and oppressive as they did in Nazi Germany.

²² Ezra Mendelsohn, “Interwar Poland: good for the Jews or bad for the Jew?” in *The Jews in Poland*, ed. Chimen Abramsy, Maciej Jachimczyk, and Antony Polonksy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), 139.

are capable of absorbing and acting upon blind prejudice. Economic pressures and xenophobia are forces that continue to shape political outlooks and behavior around the world.

CHAPTER II

THE FOURTH INVADER: POLISH NATIONALISM AND JEWS

In 1933, on the fifteen-year anniversary of Polish independence, the magazine *Pod Pręgierz* published a political cartoon celebrating independent Poland. The cartoon depicts Poland personified as a towering woman. In her hands are broken shackles, representing the fact that Poland had achieved statehood after being partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Polish military heroes and intellectual leaders like Józef Piłsudski, Ignacy Paderewski, and Roman Dmowski surround her: all men who were deeply involved in rebuilding the Polish state. She stands upon three square stones that represent the three powers that had divided Poland in the eighteenth century. This is also a Biblical reference, alluding to a passage describing the stone left at the tomb of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. At her feet sits a caricature of a Jew holding a large sack of money. The text under the image explains, “When Poland was resurrected, three stones fell away: Russia, Germany, and Austria. However, the Jew remained. When will Poland celebrate the anniversary of independence from the fourth invader?”²³ The fourth invader in question was the Jewish people, a community making up nearly a tenth of the total population, and one that had lived in Poland for centuries.

This image exemplifies some major trends in nationalist and antisemitic discourse in interwar Poland. Even in the 1930s, Poland’s history of partition loomed large in the minds of various authors and thinkers. After all, not even a generation had passed since 1918, when Poland achieved independence from partitioning powers. As a result, many authors expressed the powerful emotions of humiliation due to political invasion and fear

²³ “15 Lat Temu,” *Pod Pręgierz* 33 (1933).

of a subsequent partition. Poland appeared fragile to them. The Christian imagery and presentation of the rebirth of Poland in terms of a Christ-like resurrection are likewise common themes in the way Polish authors portrayed independence. Indeed, Catholicism and Christian symbolism played prominent roles in nationalist ideology during this period. Finally, this image is representative of texts that routinely drew on the stereotypical representations of Jews as greedy, political, and social infiltrators. Even as Poles celebrated the joy of independence, they feared that they would lose this freedom because of threatening external and internal forces.

This chapter explores these themes of Polish antisemitic thought in the interwar period and the ways in which ethno-nationalist authors portrayed Jews, focusing on their arguments and emotions that justified antisemitism. Political cartoons, articles, magazines, pamphlets, and books, reveal that fear of the disintegration of the Polish state motivated much of the antisemitic sentiments within these documents. The rhetoric of the National Democratic Party (NDP), also referred to as *Endecja*, is central in this chapter. *Endecja* was one of the most influential political parties in interwar Poland and promoted a nationalistic and often anti-Jewish stance. Poland's history of political dissolution and fear of subsequent political disintegration haunted Polish nationalists. Sections of Poland's Catholic clergy also became widely involved in the NDP's nationalist and antisemitic campaign. In their eyes, Jews were the cause for declining morality in society, which in turn weakened the nation. For all the nationalist authors described in this chapter, Jews, in their cultural, religious, and political distinctiveness seemed to destabilize independent Poland. These were the forces that drove antisemitism in interwar Poland.



Figure 2. Front page of nationalist magazine, *Pod Pręgierz*. Article is titled, “Fifteen Years ago.” Source: 15 Lat Temu,” *Pod Pręgierz* r. 5, nr 33 (1933): 1.

This chapter begins by explaining the historical context of nationalist authors, who expressed anxieties about the political and diplomatic status of the Polish state. Knowing the history of the partitioning of Poland and its subsequent independence are key to understanding the mentality of political discourse in the twentieth century. The remaining sections explore common Jewish stereotypes found in works penned by some of the most prominent nationalist authors of this period. Some Poles felt that the distinctive nature of Jewish cultural identity and cohesion endangered Poland at a time of nation-building. The most common of these allegations was that Jews threatened the unity of the country through their ethnic distinctiveness or that they were amoral and corrupted other citizens. Nationalist discourse also blamed Jews for the economic stagnation and financial struggles of Polish Christians. Some authors went as far as to claim that Jews acted as a fourth partitioning power, intending to take over Poland from the inside and deliberately compromising its existence. Many figures on the political right also accused Jews of being revolutionary socialists or Bolshevik sympathizers. In all cases, these suspicions implied that Jews were not loyal to the Polish nation and in fact countered its progress. Finally, this chapter touches on clerical antisemitism, which justified its aversion to Jews with stereotypes of Jewish amorality and criminality.

The content of this study adds to the framework of Jews as an “other” found in Joanna Michlic’s *Poland’s Threatening Other*. Michlic looks beyond the rhetoric of the National Democratic party and examines the idea of Jews as a harmful “other” in a greater context of Polish history. She argues the idea has been a consistent theme in Polish nation-building since the nineteenth-century; for some ethno-nationalists, Jews

even came to signify the antithesis of Poles.²⁴ For the most part, this chapter reinforces Michlic's argument with more nationalist sources that exemplify the rhetoric of a Jewish "other." However, while *Poland's Threatening Other* focuses on the political and social function of the myth of Jews as an "other," this chapter concentrates specifically on how Poland's past of political partitions and interwar stresses of nation building fed into the antisemitism expressed by nationalist authors.²⁵

Poland's reemergence in 1918 began with a period of instability and anxiety. Diplomatic rebirth did not necessarily guarantee new land and territory and although after the Peace Conference in Paris, Poland existed on paper, in practice, the new state was surrounded by disputed frontiers and hostile powers.²⁶ Political and military crises, therefore, wracked the first few years of the Second Republic of Poland. In a 1921 article, "The Second Warning" (*Drugie Ostrzeżenie*) in *Przegląd Narodowy* (National Review), Stanisław Kozicki expresses some of these fears and paints a dire picture of Poland's diplomatic situation. He opens his article with a discussion of a military dispute in Northern Silesia, describing it as the second time that the existence of Poland was threatened in the span of two years, the first conflict being with the Soviet Union. He defines it as a second warning, indicating "that on the horizons gather political storm

²⁴ Joanna Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 3-5.

²⁵ Many scholars have taken this tact of examining the ways in which Jews have been presented as harmful and attributing it to some degree of political nervousness. See opening pages of Jerzy Jedlicki, "Resisting the Wave: Intellectuals against Antisemitism in the Last Years of the 'Polish Kingdom'" in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland*, ed. Robert Blobaum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 60-65. For an analysis of clergy expressing hostility to Jews due to fear of lowered status in a secularizing time see Konrad Sadkowski, "Clerical Nationalism and Antisemitism: Catholic Priests, Jews, and Orthodox Christians in the Lublin Region, 1918-1939," in Blobaum, 171-187; To see a study on how these fears played out in the ideology of the National Democrats see Olaf Bergmann, *Narodowa Demokracja a Żydzi 1918-1929* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2015).

²⁶ Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100-101.

clouds, that the specter of a fourth partition lurks nearby.”²⁷ Kozicki listed the hostile powers surrounding Poland. On one side, Germans, momentarily weakened, but swiftly rebuilding, were set on destroying Poland. On the other side, Soviet Russia, was ruled by anti-Polish Jewish Bolsheviks.²⁸ Meanwhile, former allies, like England, who had helped Poland achieve independence, no longer seemed to care for its future and refused to provide assistance during these territorial conflicts. Kozicki cynically describes the League of Nations as a political tool in the hands of powerful empires interested only in furthering their own interests.²⁹ How is it that just three years into the existence of the New Polish Republic, authors were already expressing such worry about its dissolution and pessimism regarding its success? To fully understand Stanisław Kozicki’s fears, it is necessary to dive into the turbulent history of Poland’s statehood.

The year 1918 marked when Poland became an independent country for the first time in 123 years, after years of territorial partitions. Although 1795 marks the exact year of the demise of an autonomous Poland, the beginning of the end commenced in 1652 with the introduction of the *liberum veto* into the legislative process. The *liberum veto* was a legal practice that allowed any one member of the *Sejm* to veto a piece of legislation and essentially shut down the session.³⁰ This resulted in a governmental shutdown as members of the *Sejm* vetoed nearly all legislation and most of the sessions in the years following 1652 ended with an indecisive stalemate.³¹ The legislative ineffectiveness caused by *liberum veto* paved the way for the weakening of the Polish

²⁷ Stanisław Kozicki, “Drugie Ostrzeżenie” *Przegląd Narodowy* 10, no. 3 (May-June 1921): 311.

²⁸ Kozicki, 315

²⁹ Kozicki, 317-319.

³⁰ The *Sejm* was Poland’s legislative body composed of nobility and ruled Poland alongside an elected king.

³¹ Dalibor Rohac “‘It Is by Unrule That Poland Stands’: Institutions and Political Thought in the Polish-Lithuanian Republic.” *The Independent Review* 13, no. 2 (2008): 213-214.

state in all spheres. Poland could not effectively levy taxes, organize a military, or manage foreign diplomacy. A series of wars only further weakened the state. Peter the Great took advantage of Poland's weakness and made it a Russian protectorate in 1733. In the course of the next sixty years, the Austrians, Prussians, and Russians divided Poland's territory into three parts, and Poland ceased to exist.³² Political conversation about an independent Poland reemerged during World War I, when Russia, Germany, and Austria tried to persuade Poles to fight for them, each promising to create a reborn Poland. The political discussion about an independent Poland grew even more serious in 1918 when Woodrow Wilson listed an independent Poland as one of the Fourteen Points that would establish a lasting peace in a post-war Europe.³³ By November 1918, Poland made a reappearance on European maps as an autonomous republic.

In many ways, the years of partition strengthened ethnic nationalism as Polish patriots sought to keep alive a sense of nationhood. Ideologues like Zygmunt Balicki and Roman Dmowski were involved in political movements like Liga Narodowa (National League), a predecessor of the National Democratic Party. The movement, which began in the late 1800s, was devoted to instilling a sense of Polish national identity among Poles who were divided between the annexed territories. In the beginning, it did this primarily through publications, however by the turn of the century, members of the movement increasingly became involved in formal party politics. In the Russian partition, for example, National Democrats had representatives in the Russian Duma after 1905.³⁴

³² Davies, 260-270.

³³ Davies, 95-96

³⁴ Bergmann, 11-14.

As part of this political and intellectual activity, Balicki and Dmowski sought to unite Poles by publishing articles, pamphlets, and books that encouraged Poles from all three partitioned areas to remain conscious of their national identity. In 1908, Balicki founded and edited a monthly magazine called *Przegląd Narodowy*, devoted to issues of Polish national identity.³⁵ *Przegląd Narodowy* tried to create a sense of national cohesion by reporting news about Poles from across the three partitioned regions. One article published in January 1908 gives a sense of the importance of Polish identity. The piece opens by stating that the Polish nation took many heavy blows and suffered tragedies over the previous year. The author, A. Sadzewicz, gloomily expresses that while everyone was wishing each other a prosperous new year, there was no hint of prosperity to be found for the nation.³⁶ Across the annexed territories, Poles faced partitioning powers trying to assimilate them. Sadzewicz provides examples of resistance to these attempts. He discusses Polish school children who participated in protests against Prussian authorities. For refusing to concede their religious and linguistic identities, the children suffered beatings at the hands of the “representatives of Prussian ‘justice.’” Sadzewicz praises the children for their sacrifice, asserting that they were helping create "moral capital" that strengthened the bonds of the nation.³⁷

In Russia, meanwhile, Poles faced Russification, a Tsarist policy devoted to forcibly assimilating populations under the rule of the Russian Empire. Part of the policy included forcing Poles to learn Russian and forbidding publications in the Polish language. Sadzewicz celebrates the stubbornness of the Polish spirit and reports that the

³⁵ Zygmunt Balicki, “Do Czytelników” *Przegląd Narodowy* 1, no. 1 (January 1908): 1-2.

³⁶ A. Sadzewicz, “Przegląd Spraw Polskich” *Przegląd Narodowy* 1, no. 1 (January 1908): 83-84.

³⁷ Sadzewicz, 86.

governmental organization in charge of this action had just gone bankrupt. He writes, "Russian bureaucracy seems to have learned nothing during these last few years of struggle...[but] if they thought that within just a few years, Polish nannies would be singing Russian lullabies, then these hopes must have dissipated for good today."³⁸ These examples show that while occupying powers may have attempted to erase elements of Polish national identity, these efforts often only strengthened the resolve of many Poles to retain their national identity. This refusal to concede to other cultures and the experience of forced assimilation would later haunt Polish nationalists as they encountered a growing and culturally distinct Jewish population.

Sadzewicz's article also makes mention of Jews, reporting that they functioned within their own political circles, sometimes siding with the partitioning powers in elections.³⁹ As a result, many Poles did not consider Polish Jews as potential allies in the movement for independence. On the contrary, Poles sometimes saw themselves as victims of political oppression and opposition from not only all the surrounding empires but also from Jewish communities. Nationalists under partition valued forms of resistance that reaffirmed what they considered Polish traits: Christian morality, refusal to give up the Polish language, and the maintenance of Polish cultural traditions. Years of partition and national struggle sowed the seeds of the anxiety and xenophobia that contributed to later antisemitism.

Given the years of political trauma experienced by Poles under partition, it is not surprising that some authors came out of this experience determined to keep the Polish state from any further political collapse. Poland would not be a victim again. Some

³⁸ Sadzewicz, 96.

³⁹ Sadzewicz, 95.

nationalists saw the history of Poland's failures as a lesson on the consequences of a weak internal government. In order to avoid another partition, the newly reborn Poland would have to be united, effective, and strong. The reborn state, however, faced challenges from the moment of independence. For example, the government struggled to reunite the nation because Poles had been divided between three different countries, legal systems, and political structures for 123 years. Poland, therefore was forced to rely on an abstract sense of national identity as a crucial component of state building. In terms of allies, Poland also felt abandoned, and most of Poland's closest neighboring countries resented the new state. After all, Poland represented the territorial losses of the Germans, Austrians, and Russians. A series of wars in the 1910s and early 1920s, in which Poland secured its borders, only worsened local foreign relations.⁴⁰ And so, Poland faced the twentieth century surrounded by hostile states, and with a population that had never been part of the same country.

This experience of partition is one of the factors that gave rise to an influential ethno-nationalist movement at the end of the nineteenth century in Poland. Some nationalists blamed the fall of the Polish commonwealth, in part, on its cosmopolitanism and ethnic diversity. By 1918, National Democracy held a powerful political and cultural position in Poland and antisemitic ethno-nationalism increasingly grew in popularity. One of the main trends in nationalist thought was that Jews posed a passive threat to the existence of Poland and their racial, cultural, and economic distinctiveness continued to threaten Poland in various ways.

⁴⁰ Davies, 101-106.

Some of the most influential ethno-nationalist arguments were rooted in the concept of Positivism. The nineteenth century yielded two dominant philosophies regarding Poland's national identity: Romanticism and Positivism. Romantics believed in cosmopolitanism and promoted the concept that behavior determined membership of a nation. Positivists, on the other hand, rejected this idea in favor of a more exclusive definition of nationality, one rooted in ethnic and cultural identity. In the eyes of Positivists, in order for any ethnic group to become part of Poland, it would have to assimilate to Polish religious, linguistic, and cultural standards.⁴¹ Since, according to Positivists, history consisted of a struggle of survival between nations, Poland could not afford to host multiple nations and for the sake of its own survival would have to remain ethnically exclusive.⁴²

Roman Dmowski, a major figure in the diplomatic process of Polish independence, one of the founders of the rightist National Democratic Party, and arguably one of the most important figures in Polish nationalism, was deeply influenced by Positivist ideas. In *Myśli Nowoczesnego Polaka* (Thoughts of a Modern Pole), originally published in 1902, Dmowski lays out his thoughts on what an independent Poland should look like and alludes to his opinion about why Poland had failed. At the forefront of his writing is the cynical viewpoint that when it came to international relations, there was no such thing as just action or morality; there was only power and weakness. "Everyday experience teaches us," he wrote, "that in this world there is increasingly less room for the weak and defenseless."⁴³ The Polish Commonwealth had

⁴¹ Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 161.

⁴² Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate*, 165.

⁴³ Roman Dmowski, *Myśli Nowoczesnego Polaka* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Zachodnie, 1934), 34-35.

failed, according to Dmowski, because of its cosmopolitanism. Jews had been allowed to succeed at the expense of Christian Poles, he asserted, making it weak as a nation.⁴⁴

Dmowski, in fact, penned a series of articles and books presenting Polish history as successful until Jews began to achieve an elevated status in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth due to their political collaboration with nobility. This began a dangerous turn in Poland's history. According to Dmowski, Jews constituted an irreconcilable other who polluted Poland's racial purity and weakened it as a state. Since Dmowski saw the political world as an endless struggle between nations where only the strong survived, an ethnic pollution was devastating for the survival of the country.⁴⁵ Poland, therefore, had been partitioned because it was one of the vulnerable nations, and in order for the Second Republic of Poland to survive, it would have to be one of the powerful, ruthless nations and not make past mistakes that made it susceptible to partition.

In addition to arguments dealing with racial purity, some authors posed other, seemingly more practical, reasons for why Jews constituted a harmful presence in Poland. Some authors, including many members of Catholic clergy, viewed Jews as morally corrupt criminals who weakened the nation. In 1938, Father Stanisław Trzeciak published a pamphlet titled *Pornografia Narzędziem Obcych Agentur* (Pornography: The Weapon of Foreign Agents) in order to convince his readers that the "Jewish question" was a matter of national security. The pamphlet ran in a weekly magazine titled *Jutro Pracy* (The Work of Tomorrow), a publication advertising itself as a voice fighting for a Poland belonging exclusively to Poles (*walczy o polske dla polaków*). Throughout this piece,

⁴⁴ Patrice Dabrowski, "Uses and Abuses of the Polish Past by Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski," *The Polish Review* 56, no. 1 (2011): 87.

⁴⁵ Grzegorz Krzywiec, "Wokół Genezy Polskiego Nacjonalizmu Integralnego. Przypadek Romana Dmowskiego," *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* 67 (2007): 67.

Trzeciak argues that Jewish production and publication of pornography corrupted Polish society and caused the dissolution of traditional family structures. He heavily implies that the immorality that Jews propagated could potentially threaten Poland's national unity and fortitude. In fact, he opens the piece by saying, "the strength of every nation is the vigor of its spirit," to stress from the beginning of his argument that a morally weak Poland was in danger of collapse.⁴⁶ In this article, therefore, the author intends to warn the Polish people about the menace of a nefarious Jewish population.

To reinforce his argument, Trzeciak lists historical examples of Jewish moral corruption leading to the collapse of nations. For example, he charges that Jewish publishers in Petersburg in the 1910s inundated the city with pornographic pictures and texts, which they legally sold. These demoralizing materials made it into the barracks of soldiers and weakened the moral resolve of military officers and soldiers, making the country ripe for the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. And now, nearly a century later, Trzeciak argues, Jews in Poland were doing the same thing by poisoning the spirit of the Polish nation and driving it to destruction. Trzeciak likens the Jews of Poland to an ailing limb and quotes a Biblical passage where Jesus Christ teaches that it is necessary to cut off ailing limbs to cure sickness.⁴⁷ In the same way, Poland needed to distance itself from Jews. Trzeciak chose to use this Biblical example also to provide a counterargument to critics of antisemitism who claimed that Christians should not be so ready to hate others. For Trzeciak, and many other Catholic nationalists, however, it was not a matter of

⁴⁶ Stanisław Trzeciak, *Pornografia Narzędziem Obcych Agentur* (Warsaw: Biblioteka "Jutra Pracy," 1938): 5.

⁴⁷ Trzeciak, 7-8.

hatred, but one of necessity. Jewish debauchery, in their eyes, was responsible for the corruption of the Polish nation, which would surely bring its downfall.

The root of these perceptions lies in misleading statistics that seemingly proved a disproportionately large Jewish involvement in the pornography industry and criminal activity. However, the numbers used by these authors were often either outdated or flawed. Statistics from the 1870s do show that over half of legally registered brothels in Warsaw were indeed owned by Jews, but these numbers quickly dropped in coming decades.⁴⁸ Yet, despite the drop in Jewish criminal involvement, the association of Jews with pornography and crime remained. It is also notable that while clergymen like Trzeciak and Hlond extensively criticized Jews for producing morally corrupting material, neither seem to acknowledge the guilt of the consumers of these products, many of whom were inevitably Christian. Authors like Trzeciak and Hlond, rather, presented Christians as the victims, rather than consumers, of Jewish pornography.

Trzeciak's article is also part of a wider pattern of Polish priests expressing the opinion that Jews were destructively amoral and an active threat to the Polish nation. In their eyes, Jewish religion lacked the moral teachings that Christians received. One example is a 1936 pastoral letter from August Cardinal Hlond, which expresses similar sentiments. Hlond encourages his readers to "avoid the harmful moral influence of Jews...and especially boycott the Jewish press and immoral Jewish publications."⁴⁹

Another notable example of clergy expressing worry about Jews having excessive

⁴⁸ Robert Blobaum, "Criminalizing the 'Other': Crime, Ethnicity, and Antisemitism in Early Twentieth-Century Poland," in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents*, 87-88.

⁴⁹ August Cardinal Hlond, *Na Straży Sumienia Narodu* (Ramsey, NJ: Don Bosco, 1951), 164-165, quoted in Peter Stachura, *Poland 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 2004), 97-98.

cultural influence is a 1938 book by Father Michał Morawski titled *Stanowisko Kościoła Wobec Niebezpieczeństwa Żydowskiego w Dawnej Polsce* (The Position of the Church Against the Jewish Threat in Former Poland). Morawski wrote this history in order to demonstrate the laws and actions that the church has historically undertaken in order to protect Christians from their demoralizing cultural and social influences. He implies that in the late 1930s, more than ever, the Polish nation needed this guidance to secure itself against Jewish forces. It was necessary to pursue a de-Judaization (*odżydzenie*) of the country.⁵⁰ All three of these sources illustrate the stance of more nationalistically minded Catholic clergy in Poland during this period and reveal this wider pattern of clerical involvement in nationalist authorship and why it expressed antisemitic views. By the 1930s, the majority of outspoken Catholic clergy described Jews as harmful to the state.⁵¹

Furthermore, it is unclear what priests considered as pornographic in comparison to what actually *was* published for a pornographic purpose. For example, in the article mentioned above, Trzeciak attacks Jewish medical journals for discussing inappropriate topics such as “sexual dysfunctions” (*zbożenia płciowe*).⁵² Without access to the actual medical article or even the name of the publication, it is impossible to tell whether the information therein was provided in an academic or a pornographic manner. It is possible that any public discussion of sex, be it for medical reasons or not, offended the sensibilities of Father Stanisław Trzeciak and authors like him.

⁵⁰ Michał Morawski, *Stanowisko Kościoła Wobec Niebezpieczeństwa Żydowskiego W Dawnej Polsce* (Włocławek: Drukarnia Diecezjalna we Włocławku, 1938), 3.

⁵¹ Brian Porter, “Antisemitism and the Search for a Catholic Identity,” in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents*, 206.

⁵² Trzeciak, 6.

What, then, is the cause of so much clerical antisemitism in Poland during this period? For one thing, the industrial revolution of the previous century created a new world that was swiftly modernizing, secularizing, and thus, threatening the old Catholic establishment. To preserve its status, the Church turned against the people they perceived as benefiting from, and driving, these secular forces changing society: Jews. Furthermore, Catholic clergy were also heavily involved with nationalist movements, which stressed the importance of Poland being an exclusively Catholic nation. Catholicism, they argued, united the Polish nation in a way that made it stronger and more cohesive. Conveniently for the Catholic clergy, this idea also elevated their status in society.⁵³

In addition to religious distinctiveness, economic pressures and competition also drove antisemitic ideas, particularly in the mid-1930s. Global economic depression resulted in mass unemployment for many Poles. Perceptions that Jews held some sort of economic dominance over Christians swiftly paved the way for economic boycotts, promoted by various political parties.⁵⁴ Immigration into cities from the countryside during this period meant a flooding of poor Christian farmers into Polish cities where many merchants and artisans were Jewish. As a result, it seemed to Poles, as they searched for jobs and sought to compete with already existing and established Jewish businesses and workshops, that Jews had pushed Christians out of the economy.⁵⁵

Żydzi w Polsce w ostatnim dziesięcioleciu (Jews in Poland in the last decade) by Józef Konczyński captures some of these concerns describing the plight of Christians

⁵³ Konrad Sadkowski, "Clerical Nationalism and Antisemitism: Catholic Priests, Jews, and Orthodox Christians in the Lublin Region, 1918-1939," in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents*, 172-185.

⁵⁴ Szymon Rudnicki, "Anti-Jewish Legislation in Interwar Poland," in *Antisemitism and its Opponents*, 158-159.

⁵⁵ Szymon Rudnicki, "Jews in Poland Between the Two World Wars," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 29, no. 3 (2011): 14-15.

trying to enter the market but encountering a Jewish monopoly instead. Because of generations of commerce, Jews already had the capital to control the market, leaving Poles, who had traditionally worked in agriculture, no chance to compete.⁵⁶ Therefore, Christian job-seekers were forced to take low-paying jobs from Jewish employers who, in the eyes of antisemites, did not hesitate to exploit their desperation. Konczyński calls for Poles to be loyal to their ethnicities in the market by supporting only Christian businesses while boycotting Jewish ones.⁵⁷ Jewish economic power, meanwhile, posed an even greater threat because it allowed them more opportunities in education and in administrative positions. If not for laws restricting Jewish access to some of these positions, Konczyński wrote, then Poles would end up having to assimilate to Jewish culture.⁵⁸ In the eyes of ethno-nationalists, Jews intruded on the racial, cultural, and economic well-being of the country. Their very existence in Poland caused it harm.

Alongside the belief that Jewish ethnic, religious, and cultural identities posed a threat to Polish existence, many authors also held the conviction that Jews presented a far more deliberate danger and that because of their leftist political leanings and non-Christian religion, they were incapable of sympathizing with, assimilating, or even being loyal to the Polish national project. The most extreme sorts of these accusations went so far as to call Jews a fourth partitioning power and express fear about a Jewish political takeover of the Polish state. Also common were association of Jews with socialism, which rightist nationalists distrusted and saw as a corrupt ideology.

⁵⁶ Józef Konczyński, *Żydzi w Polsce w ostatnim dziesięcioleciu w oświetleniu cyfr statystycznych* (Warsaw: Zakład Graficzny L. Wolnickiego, 1936), 14-15.

⁵⁷ Konczyński, 30.

⁵⁸ Konczyński, 23.

Many of Endecja's most prominent ideologues, including Stanisław Kozicki and Zygmunt Balicki distrusted the multinationalism associated with socialism. In *Egoizm narodowy wobec etyki* (National egoism and ethics) Balicki calls cosmopolitanism an idealistic cloak, masking the obligations that a member of a nation ought to have. There was no truth or good intention behind cosmopolitanism because the early twentieth century was a battle between nations.⁵⁹ Therefore the openness to multinational federalism expressed by Piłsudski, and many Jewish socialists, was suspect. Another argument which nationalists made for why a multinational Poland could not work was that the Jewish minority was too large and stubbornly distinct. Because Jews refused to assimilate and expressed no loyalty towards Poland, their presence in Poland could only ever weaken it.⁶⁰

Rightist ideologues also deemed socialists, particularly Jewish ones, inherently disloyal. An article in *Przegląd Narodowy*, a magazine associated with the National Democrats, explores this idea more fully. The author, writing under the pen name of Omen, makes the claim that ambition blinded socialists to the point that they disregarded the good of the country and the people for the sake of a political experiment or personal gain. Historical examples such as the French and Bolshevik revolutions, he argues, illuminate the grave consequences of losing sight of the people. In the same way, Jewish socialists, he notes, show themselves to be demoralizing forces in politics, practicing the

⁵⁹ Zygmunt Balicki, "Egoizm Narodowy Wobec Etyki," in *Religia Kościół Etyka w ideałach i koncepcjach prawicy polskiej: Narodowa Demokracja: Wybór tekstów z komentarzem autora*, ed. Bogumił Grott (Cracow: NOMOS, 1993), 78-79.

⁶⁰ Konczyński, 27.

hypocrisy of claiming to fight for the rights of the working classes, while actually working for their own profit.⁶¹

Closely related to the idea of Jews as socialists was the conception of Judeo-Bolshevism: the idea that Jews were more loyal to Soviet Bolshevism than to Poland. Indeed, it was common for nationalists to blame the Bolshevik revolution on Jews and many of the most prominent Soviet political leaders were, in fact, Jewish. Yet the percentage of Jews in Poland overall who identified as leftists and socialists was not actually high.⁶² The stereotype of Judeo-Bolshevism came to be one of the most harmful because it implied that most Jews in Poland had treasonous intentions. This perception first took hold of nationalist discourse in 1919, a period of influx of Jewish refugees fleeing the chaos of the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent Civil War in Russia. However, the National Democrats saw these migrants not as people escaping a conflict, but as agents with the mission of Judaizing (*zażydzenie*) cities, fomenting a revolution on Polish territory, and eventually uniting Poland with the Soviet Union.⁶³

The stereotype of Judeo-Bolshevism became particularly dangerous for Jews in the wake of the 1920 Soviet invasion of Poland. The conflict began in early 1919 when Józef Piłsudski marched on Ukraine in an attempt to expand the borders of Poland further east. However, the Red Army, working with the then independent Ukrainian communist republic, turned around Piłsudski's advance and marched on Warsaw, occupying eastern Poland.⁶⁴ Throughout the conflict, authors, such as the previously mentioned Reverend

⁶¹ Omen, "Groźne Metody," *Przegląd Narodowy* 10, nr. 6 (December 1921): 633.

⁶² Michlic, 92 estimates that 5-7% of Polish Jews were communists while Chodakiewicz, 23 puts the number even lower at 4,000 communists of a total population of three million.

⁶³ Przemysław Jarosław Jastrzębski, *Kwestia Żydowska w Publicystyce „Myśli Narodowej” w Latach 1921-1926* (Toruń: Centrum Edukacji Europejskiej, 2005), 62-65.

⁶⁴ Janusz Szczepański, *Wojna 1920 na Mazowszu I Podlasiu* (Warsaw, 1995), 16-17.

Stanisław Trzeciak, accused Jews of collaborating with Soviet forces over the course of the war due to their communist loyalties.⁶⁵ As a result of such allegations and widespread suspicions, a plague of violence directed at Jews broke out throughout territories that had been occupied by Soviets. The participants of the violence, often soldiers, justified it by claiming that it was retribution on the Jews who had shown allegiance to the Soviets either by not participating in the war or by helping Soviet troops.⁶⁶

In 1920, the violence described in the previous paragraph occurred in the powiat of Siedlce. Soviet occupation in August 1920 was short-lived and within several days the Red Army retreated, making way for the advance of Polish troops. The seeming liberation of this region, however, quickly turned into a period of violence for Jews throughout previously occupied territories as the advancing Polish Army immediately began to harass Jews and loot their homes and stores.⁶⁷ Witnesses in Siedlce reported that the same morning when Polish soldiers entered the region, they began to attack Jewish properties. One reported, “Within four days, they had robbed all the Jewish stores and homes...and raped a substantial number of Jewish women.”⁶⁸ During the next few weeks, it seemed that no Jew was safe from the rampaging army and collaborating local residents. In addition to robbery, soldiers also beat, harassed, and humiliated the Jewish population. Jewish witnesses recalled being rounded up by the soldiers and forced to chant, “Long live Poland, death to the rabbi.”⁶⁹ The Jews of Sokołów also did not escape

⁶⁵ Michlic, 90.

⁶⁶ Narodowy Klub Żydowski Posłów Sejmowych Przy Tymczasowej Żydowskiej Radzie Narodowej, *Inwazja Bolszewicka a Żydzi: Zbiór Dokumentów* Vol 1. (Warsaw: Drukarnia I. Hendlera, 1921), 7-10.

⁶⁷ Edward Kopówka, *The Jews in Siedlce 1850-1940* Trans. Dobrochna Fire (JewishGen, Inc.: New York, 2014), 64.; Szczepański, 107.

⁶⁸ Narodowy Klub Żydowski Posłów Sejmowych, *Inwazja Bolszewicka a Żydzi*, vol 1 (Drukarnia I Hendlera: Warsaw, 1921), 36, Cecil Green Library.

⁶⁹ Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 35-37.

abuse at the hands of these troops who stole money, clothing, and shoes and heavily beat the local Rabbi Morgenstern.⁷⁰

It is important to note that this violence was not directly sponsored by the Polish government. In fact, most military and cultural leaders, with the exception of some generals, opposed these actions. In an effort to quell the violence, the Bishop of Podlasie, Henryk Przeździecki and the city's *starosta powiatowy*, Edmund Koślacz published a letter to the public of Siedlce, urging them to cease their anti-Jewish demonstrations. Although some Jews had, indeed, collaborated with the Bolshevik invaders, a large sector of Siedlce's Jewish community had stood behind Poland throughout the conflict.⁷¹ Finally, some military authorities, like General Sosnowski severely punished any soldiers or officers participating in the chaotic looting during this period.⁷²

The perpetrators, therefore, consisted primarily of soldiers, their officers, and some local Poles acting on their own volition. Indeed, the Polish Army lacked discipline throughout this period, and it was relatively common for soldiers and officers to loot and disrupt the lives of the villages through which they passed.⁷³ Perhaps one of the reasons for the disobedience of the army was the fact that it was composed primarily of drafted peasantry who made up over 60% of Poland's total population. Over half of these farmers owned less than two hectares of land, which was barely enough to support their families and as a result they struggled to make ends meet. For the majority of these peasants, being drafted into the army meant leaving their farms untended since most could not

⁷⁰ Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 80-81.

⁷¹ Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 29-31.

⁷² Szczepański, 107.

⁷³ Szczepański, 129.

afford permanent farmhands.⁷⁴ Wincenty Witos, a leader of the peasant political party Piast, visiting a village in the summer of 1920 described their disgruntlement, stating that many lacked any sense of duty to the country, and expressed an unwillingness to enlist and even to pay taxes. Worse still, they were resentful towards wealthy elites and Jews who, in their eyes, should themselves go fight this war rather than enlisting peasants.⁷⁵

The individuals wreaking havoc on the Jews of Siedlce and its surrounding areas were primarily interested in monetary gain. Yet while economically motivated, the perpetrators justified actions by vilifying Jews. In their eyes, Jews presented a hostile and disloyal element within Poland. It is true that many Jews had been somewhat skeptical toward the Polish government during this period, due in part to some nationalist trends and antisemitic rhetoric expressed by ideologues like Roman Dmowski, and some expressed genuine excitement at the invasion.⁷⁶ However, it is interesting that this lack of enthusiasm for the war among the Jewish communities of Poland made them an irredeemably disloyal and untrustworthy element in the eyes of Polish nationalists, while draft-dodging and tax evasion among Polish peasants was reprehensible, but did not necessarily undermine their national loyalties. Furthermore, some Poles accused Jews, including those in Siedlce, of greeting the invading Red Army like liberators, showering them with supplies and displaying banners in their support.⁷⁷ Poles interpreted these actions as collaboration, which sparked anger and a sense of betrayal in the wake of the

⁷⁴ Szczepański, 117-118.; Juliusz Bardach, Bogusław Leśnodorski, and Michał Pietrzak, *Historia Ustroju i Prawa Polskiego*, 6th ed (Warsaw: Lexis Nexis, 2009), 506-509.

⁷⁵ Wincenty Witos, *Moje Wspomnienia*, vol 2. (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1964), 274.

⁷⁶ Szczepański, 38-39.

⁷⁷ Kopówka, 64-65; Szczepański, 226-227.

violent invasion of their homeland. Finally, the ever-pervasive stereotype of Judeo-Bolshevism, discussed in the previous chapter, painted all Jews as Soviet sympathizers.

Certain actions of the Polish government may have also inadvertently contributed to soldiers' suspicions of Jews. Influential nationalist politicians demanded that Jews be removed from the Polish army due to their questionable loyalties. General Sosnowski ordered for the arrests of about 1,000 Jewish soldiers to be removed from the army and interned in the town of Jabłonna.⁷⁸ Military administration also established quotas meant to ensure that the number of Jews involved in military administration would not exceed five percent.⁷⁹ These actions not only normalized the image of Jews as untrustworthy but also greatly reduced the number of Jews in the army. Both were devastating consequences that contributed to Polish soldiers feeling validated in their belief that Jews were not sufficiently contributing to the war effort due to their questionable political loyalties.

Perhaps most influential in creating this image of the Jews in Siedlce was a rumor that throughout the war, a Jewish militia, composed of Jews from Siedlce, actively sided with the Red Army. Upon hearing of this rumor, Wincenty Witos travelled to Siedlce. There, the Starosta Edward Koślacz informed him that "nearly all" of Siedlce's Jews had sided with Bolsheviks under occupation and collaborated with the Red Army by providing them with supplies and participated in harassing local Poles.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the occupying Soviet forces had established Revolutionary Committees in occupied towns, manning them with local Christian and Jewish communists. Yet despite the fact that

⁷⁸ Szczepański, 106.

⁷⁹ Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 5.

⁸⁰ Witos, 324-325.

Christians also collaborated with the Soviets, Jews were arrested in far greater numbers than Christians.⁸¹ Some Jewish witnesses also claimed that in the days following the Bolshevik retreat, local Christians sometimes used these accusations as a way of extorting money or settling old scores with disliked Jews.⁸² While some of the accused may have willfully collaborated with the Soviets, among those arrested were also Jews who had not necessarily interacted with the Red Army in any meaningful way.

In February 1922, for example, several Poles witnessed a group of Jewish youth talking to Bolshevik soldiers. The soldiers quickly retreated out of Siedlce and shortly thereafter the Polish army entered the city. The Polish witnesses accused these Jewish individuals of warning the Bolsheviks about the advance of the Polish army and helping them to flee the city. It is unclear what exactly happened, whether the Jewish teenagers were ideologically inspired to collaborate with the Soviet soldiers or if the accusations were unfounded. In the end, they were acquitted due to lack of evidence.⁸³ An example of a clearly helpless individual arrested for collaboration was a fifteen-year-old girl whom soldiers had forced to work as a typist.⁸⁴ It is telling that Józef Piłsudski, the head of state leading the defense of Poland, eventually intervened on behalf of many Jews accused of treason, freeing them from conviction.⁸⁵

The Club of Jewish Deputies (*Narodowy Klub Żydowski Posłów Sejmowych*), formed in 1918 to defend Jewish interest in the *Sejm*, also tried to intervene and sent representatives throughout Poland to investigate anti-Jewish violence in the wake of the

⁸¹ Kopówka, 64.

⁸² Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 22.

⁸³ Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach (hereafter APS), Sędzia Śledczy Sądu Okręgowego w Siedlcach, 1918-1939, Zesp 58, Sygn. 406, W sprawie z oskarżenia Mordki Gutowskiego i inn. art. 108 k.k.

⁸⁴ Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 81.

⁸⁵ Witos, 324.

Bolshevik War. Apolinary Hartglas, a Zionist journalist, lawyer, and deputy to the *Sejm*, wrote an extensive report on Siedlce based on interviews with local citizens. Reports that Jews had come out of their homes to greet the Red Army marching into Siedlce, Hartglas explained, were misinterpretations of many Jews coming into the street to simply stare at the advancing soldiers. Furthermore, though it is true that Jews were more willing to interact with the occupying forces, some even willfully selling supplies to them, the interactions soon degraded into the soldiers extorting money and goods from the merchants.⁸⁶ Yet Poles that witnessed these interactions interpreted them as acts of treason and collaboration.

Because of these experiences, the individuals committing this violence were blind to the fact that the vast majority of Jews were not collaborators and had their own reasons to fear the Soviets. Orthodox Jews, for example, feared that a Sovietization of their country would lead to an end of public religious life, as it had in the Soviet Union, with the rejection of religion and atheization of the government.⁸⁷ The Polish Army harassing rabbis and raiding synagogues on the suspicion of Bolshevik collaboration, therefore, made no sense. Furthermore, Zionists and any Jews who identified nationally as Jewish also feared Soviet control due to the communist rejection of nationalism and anything that promoted any nationality.⁸⁸ It was not in the interest of most of Poland's Jews, therefore, to support a Bolshevik victory. In fact, many Jewish political and cultural organizations around Poland encouraged Jews to volunteer to fight for Poland in this

⁸⁶ Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 19-20.

⁸⁷ Szczepański, 104.

⁸⁸ Narodowy Klub Żydowski, 13-14.

conflict. Wealthy members of the Jewish community also financially contributed to the war effort.⁸⁹

The real numbers of Jewish collaboration with the Bolsheviks is elusive.⁹⁰ What *can* be said for sure is that while only a fraction of Jews may have worked with the Red Army, all the Jews in Siedlce paid for their crimes. For the Poles looting homes, raping women, and beating men in Siedlce's Jewish community, it made no difference that only a few Jews had collaborated. They had allowed for the minority to represent the whole, justifying in their eyes these atrocities.

In addition to accusations of Jews collaborating with invading forces, another common antisemitic claim was that Jews intended to take over Poland themselves. Authors sometimes even called Jews the fourth partitioning power, which given Poland's history, held an additional level of distrust and anxiety. Stanisław Kozicki, for example wrote frequently about the Jewish question as not just a Polish problem, but one that spanned all of Europe. If Christians did not defend themselves, Kozicki wrote, Jews would achieve their goal of destroying the Christian values upon which Western civilization and culture were built. It was therefore necessary to fight these influences to protect Europe from these corrupting cultural and political influences.⁹¹ Kozicki argued that Jews were, in fact, Poland's biggest and most sinister threat for they would stop at nothing to rebuild a Jewish state and a strong Polish nation only stood in their way of

⁸⁹ Szczepański, 102-104.

⁹⁰ Szczepański, 231 concludes that Jews in Mazowsze mostly supported Poland throughout the conflict while Kopówka, 66 describes Jews as behaving passively throughout occupation, adopting a "wait-and-see" approach.

⁹¹ Bergmann, 332-333.

domination.⁹² The solution, according to Kozicki and likeminded antisemites, was to limit Jewish access to education and official positions.

Jewish nationalism and refusal to assimilate were two more aspects of the Jewish community that made some Poles nervous and resulted in the search for a solution to the Jewish Question. Some authors deemed any Jewish attempt to attain legal, civil, or political equality, as another step towards their ultimate domination of Polish, and indeed, Western culture. For example, Jewish attempts to make Yiddish a legally recognized language was mired in contention, in part due to its Germanic roots. The early 1920s were marked by territorial conflicts with Germany, so insisting on legal recognition of a language in which up to seventy percent of the words had Germanic roots seemed like linguistic treason.⁹³ Many thought that honoring Yiddish as a national language would also encourage nationally destructive Jewish separatism that in the long run would have to be resolved in order for Poland to survive as a nation. Political movements demanding equal rights for Jews were thus deemed as manifestations of Jews seeking to recreate another promised land within Poland, something that to ethno-nationalists seemed would be devastating to the future of the Polish nation.⁹⁴

In addition to concepts of Jews wanting to take over Poland due to political motivations, their religious identities were equally suspect as a factor of their identity that motivated them to dominate Poland in a spiritual sense by pushing out Catholic influences. The Reverend Józef Kruszyński, a Catholic biblical scholar, wrote in 1923 that there was no such thing as “Polish Jews, German Jews, English Jews,” or any other

⁹² Kozicki, 315-316.

⁹³ Józef Kruszyński, *Żargon Żydowski* (Włocławek: Durkarnia Diecezjalna we Włocławku, 1921), 36-37.

⁹⁴ Kruszyński, *Żargon Żydowski*, 48.; Stanisław Kobyliński, *Sprawa Polska i Kwestja Żydowska* (Poznań, 1924), 3.

Jews who identified with a country. “There are only Talmud Jews; Jews who are a discrete and tight-knit group, and inclined to dislike all gentiles.”⁹⁵ Kruszyński was an active voice of antisemitism in the early 1920s. He authored various books and gave lectures throughout Poland with the goal of publicly revealing the sinister nature of the Talmud, the Jewish holy book, which, according to him, taught Jews to fight against Christians.⁹⁶ Kruszyński was also deeply influenced by the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fabricated document recording the minutes from a nonexistent congress run by the global Jewish community. The document, with its provocative representation of Jews conniving against Europe’s conservative and non-Jewish population, terrified antisemites around Europe.⁹⁷ For Kruszyński, the *Protocols* justified and proved the validity of his campaign against Jews.⁹⁸ Kruszyński’s view was a popular one held by many nationalists who only saw Jews as inherently hostile to Christians because of their religion.

This allegation was certainly also present in some of the most prominent Catholic magazines of the period. *Pro Christo*, one of the most extreme of these publications, wrote about Jews as age-old enemies of Christianity, as evidenced by their complicity in the crucifixion of Christ.⁹⁹ Some authors even went as far as to say that God had cursed

⁹⁵ Józef Kruszyński “Rozwój” nr 13, March 31, 1923, quoted in Olaf Bergmann, *Narodowa Demokracja a Żydzi 1918-1929* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2016), 335.

⁹⁶ Anna Lysiak, “The Rev. Kruszyński and Polish Catholic Teachings about Jews and Judaism in Interwar Poland,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschilichte* 16, no. 1 (2003): 56.

⁹⁷ Stephen Eric Bronner, *A Rumor About The Jews: Reflections on Antisemitism and the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 200), 1-4.

⁹⁸ Lysiak, 69.

⁹⁹ Anna Landau Czajka, “The Image of the Jew in the Catholic Press during the Second Republic,” in *Jews in Independent Poland*, ed. Antony Polonsky et al., (Oxford, UK: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), 162.; Franciszek Adamski, “The Jewish Question in Polish Religious Periodicals in the Second Republic: The Case of the *Przegląd Katolicki*,” in Polonsky et al., *Jews in Independent Poland*, 133-135. Adamski’s analysis of the very popular Catholic magazine *Przegląd Katolicki* also briefly mentions the allegations made by Catholic Clergy that there was historical precedence to a deeply rooted Jewish hatred and hostility towards Christianity reaching back all the way to the crucifixion of Christ.

Jews for this, which is why Jews were exiles from their homeland.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the concept of Jews as a cursed and evil people, Catholic publications also published ideas directed against the Talmud, a text central of Jewish law and ethics. Many authors believed that Talmudic teachings allowed for criminality and justified hostility and mistreatment of goys (non-Jews).¹⁰¹ They felt no sympathy for Jews and occasionally advocated for their forced emigration. At worst, they considered Jews as cursed adversaries of the Christian tradition and discouraged any association with them, for fear of spiritual corruption.¹⁰²

The key to grasping the complex roots of prejudice is to understand the emotional forces that drove it. In the case of interwar Poland, the emotion in question was anxiety. Poland had just risen from the ashes of partition for the first time in generations into the midst of a hostile and isolated diplomatic environment. In order for the new state to establish its borders, it had to immediately enter a series of wars with neighboring powers. As a result, many Polish statesmen and nationalist ideologues tended to express caution, or downright cynicism when writing about Poland's future. For many nationalists, including Roman Dmowski, a foundational figure in the creation of the Second Republic of Poland, the new state had to be strong, united, and ethnically pure to weather these challenges. Jews, in their ethnic, religious, and economic distinctiveness posed a passive danger to Catholic Poland in the eyes of these authors. Nationalists also tended to agree that Jews actively opposed the Polish national project due, in part, to their religion, deemed as inherently hostile to Christian Poles. Rightist authors also often

¹⁰⁰ Landau-Czajka, 155-156

¹⁰¹ Landau-Czajka, 160.

¹⁰² Landau-Czajka, 156-157.

distrusted Jews because of the stereotype that Jews were leftists, socialists, and Bolsheviks. Finally, some authors spread the fear of a Jewish conspiracy that intended to take over the Polish government. In the eyes of Polish ethno-nationalists, at best, Jews were “spectators of...state-building efforts,” contributing nothing to the future of the nation and, in fact, weighing it down.¹⁰³ At worst, they believed, Jews navigated their existence in Poland with the ultimate intent of commandeering it. In either case, they hindered Poland’s progress in the development of a new strong state in the eyes of critics.

The vast majority of arguments posed by nationalist authors in this chapter are statistically false, irrationally emotional, and clouded by prejudice. However, that does not make the works of these individuals any less valuable from a historical perspective. Looking at Poland through the lens of interwar antisemitic authors allows for a better understanding of why Jews became an enemy in this particular place, to these particular people, and in this particular time. It is a way of digging into the ugly ideological roots of prejudice. In the following chapter, I will examine the effects of this rhetoric on relations between Poles and Jews in the context of economic boycotts which the NDP pursued in the 1930s.

¹⁰³ Jerzy Szczęsny Rogala, “O wprowadzenie kwestii żydowskiej na tory realne,” *Przegląd Katolicki* 21 (1939) quoted in Franciszek Adamski, “The Jewish Question in Polish Religious Periodicals in the Second Republic: The Case of the *Przegląd Katolicki*,” in Polonsky et al. *Jews in Independent Poland*, 142.

CHAPTER III

A WAR OF BROKEN WINDOWS: IMPACTS OF NATIONALIST RHETORIC

On an April evening in 1937, National Democratic leaders Czesław Grądzki and Józef Milik stood in a Sokołów theater and spoke to the 400 people gathered before them. Their message was clear: Jews were to blame for widespread unemployment and poverty in Poland. Jewish monopoly of trade was effectively keeping Poles from participating in business. Jews had also corrupted Polish intelligentsia, through their control of literature, education, and the media leading to the Judaization (*zazydzenie*) of all Polish cities, towns, and villages. Furthermore, they proclaimed, Poland found itself between two superpowers: Germany and Russia and as a result, it could not afford to carry on tolerating a hostile and foreign Jewish minority, who compromised the nation.

Their solution: a boycott. In order to free themselves of these influences, the speakers proclaimed, Poles would have to declare economic war on Jews and spurn all Jewish businesses and even cut off social ties with their Jewish neighbors. Poles who continued to buy from Jews were dead to the Polish nation and would have their names published in the obituaries of local papers. The National Democrats hoped that this effort would encourage Jewish emigration, answering the Jewish Question in Poland. They stipulated, however, that violent force was not an appropriate tool in this boycott. Crimes such as scaring Jewish customers away and knocking out windows in Jewish homes only delegitimized their movement.¹⁰⁴ In the following month, Jews throughout the countryside reported being terrorized by people knocking out their windows at night.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach (hereafter APS), Starostwo Powiatowe w Sokołowie Podlaskim 1920-1938 (hereafter SPSP), Zesp. 343, Sygn. 17, Miesięczne sprawozdania sytuacyjne, p. 11-12.

¹⁰⁵ APS, SPSP, Zesp. 343, Sygn. 17. p. 14.

By May, local officials were nervously referring to the violence in the countryside as “pogrom psychosis.”¹⁰⁶ Milik’s and Grądzki’s pleas for peaceful relations had proven ineffective and in the end, it was easier to incite hatred than to control it.

This describes one of many meetings, and its consequences, which the National Democratic Party conducted in the mid to late 1930s throughout the powiats of Siedlce, Węgrów, and Sokołów Podlaski. For generations, Poles and Jews in this region had lived alongside each other, divided, but economically codependent. Yet in 1930s, economic pressures and nationalist political rhetoric, encouraged a breakdown in these relations. The speeches of nationalist leaders, that while arguing for economic boycotts by spreading negative stereotypes of Jews, also stressed the need for peaceful actions, inadvertently created an atmosphere of tension and violence related to antisemitism as some members took the defense of their country into their own hands and began to terrorize Jewish families.

This chapter is a case study of Siedlce, Węgrów, and Sokołów Podlaski investigating the way in which the NDP played off existing tensions through their rhetoric of boycotts, which normalized othering and antisemitic violence. All three powiats had substantial Jewish minorities, residing primarily in the townships themselves, where up to half of the population was Jewish. Meanwhile, populations in the countryside were overwhelmingly Christian working as farmers in small villages dotting the countryside.¹⁰⁷ The rural and urban populations united during market days every week, when farmers visited the towns in order to sell crops or purchase manufactured or

¹⁰⁶ APS, Starostwo Powiatowe w Siedlcach 1920-1938 (hereafter SPS), Zesp. 342, Sygn 27, p. 50.

¹⁰⁷ Drugi Spis Powszechny, Woj. Lubelskie (1931), 3, 32, 71-72. Dorota Mączka, “Żydzi w powiecie siedleckim w okresie międzywojennym,” in *Żydzi na Poldasiu*, ed. Zofia Chyra-Rolicz, Renata Tarasiuk, and Edward Kopówka (Siedlce: Wydawnictwo Akademii Podlaskiej, 2010), 308.

crafted goods. Between 1934 and culminating in 1937, these economically motivated interactions became an ideological and economic battleground as Polish nationalists organized a series of boycotts on Jewish businesses.¹⁰⁸ In the wake of the boycotts came an upsurge in vandalism of Jewish property and other antisemitic acts.

Although relations between Poles and Jews during the 1920s remained distanced but peaceful, starting in the 1930s, they sharpened and the powiats of Siedlce, Węgrów, and Sokołów Podlaski became plagued with antisemitic crimes. This spike in crimes correlated with rhetoric of the local branch of the National Democratic Party (NDP), calling for economic boycotts on Jewish businesses.¹⁰⁹ The NDP's solution to economic pressures of the Great Depression and the Jewish Question was to push Jews out of the market, and so out of Poland, through boycotts. This is also the time period when a fascist breakoff of the NDP, the National Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo Radykalny*), also called *Falanga*, executed their own boycotts in 1934.¹¹⁰ However, it was not until late 1936 and 1937, once the National Democratic party took up organized boycotts in this region, that crimes, like knocking out windows in Jewish homes, became regular enough so as to frighten Jewish families into closing up shops and moving away. In this chapter, I argue that boycotts and accompanying rhetoric normalized anti-Jewish sentiments and actions, leading to the uptick in Polish crimes committed against Jews.

¹⁰⁸ Mariusz Bechta, *Narodwo Radykalni: Obrona I ofensywa narodowa na Podlasiu w latach 1918-1939* (Biała Podlaska: Biblioteczka Bialska, 2004), 161.

¹⁰⁹ The National Democratic Movement, also known as *Endecja*, changed names several times over the years, calling themselves People's National Union (*Związek Ludowo-Narodowy*) in 1919, it became known as National Front (*Stronictwo Narodowe*) after 1928. For the sake of clarity, I will be referring to this group as the National Democratic Party, or NDP. In 1934, a more radical faction of the National Democrats broke off to create the Radical Nationalist Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalni*). This party consisted of a considerably younger following than *Endecja* that was influenced by Nazi ideology.

¹¹⁰ Bechta, 158.

In order to get a sense of the activities of the local NDP branch, this research utilizes reports produced by the *Starostwa Powiatowe* of Siedlce, Sokołów, and Węgrów, an administrative office tasked with maintaining peace in the region and recording the activities of social and political movements. It was the duty of the *Starosta*, an appointed bureaucrat in charge of a *Starostwo*, to report these events to the *Wojewoda*, nominated by the president, who oversaw activities and maintained peace throughout his *Województwo*.¹¹¹ As part of his duties, the *Starosta* attended political gatherings where he recorded the agendas and speeches. These reports provide a rich chronicle of the activities of the most prominent political movements in the powiats. One of the drawbacks of the reports is that the Starostas were always Polish, limiting their access to information within Jewish communities and organizations, which often used Yiddish. In some cases, a Starosta who was unsympathetic to Jews may have also had limited access to Jewish activities and news, leading to gaps in the reports. However, in the end, the Starosta's primary duty in the powiat was to keep the peace, regardless of possible personal prejudices.

This chapter uses the powiats and towns of Siedlce, Węgrów, and Sokołów as case studies to analyze the nature of Jewish and Polish relations between 1920 and 1937. I chose to use three, rather than one powiat, to get a clearer picture of the broader regional situation. Using three sets of reports, written by multiple Starostas, helps lessen the impact of a biased or negligent Starosta, as it allows for a degree of cross-referencing. After all, the demographic composition, economies, religious makeups, and political movements in each powiat are comparable enough so that if there are gaps in the reports

¹¹¹ Bardach et al., 539-544.

of one powiat, another can take its place. Furthermore, the local branch of the NDP orchestrated boycotts throughout all three powiats, with some of the same major leaders making speeches and encouraging action throughout the whole region.

Many authors who have examined relations during this period, conclude that throughout Poland, although Jewish and Polish communities were often separate due to their economic, cultural, and religious differences, the two peoples lived alongside each other in relative peace throughout the interwar period.¹¹² One of the most prominent authors covering the history of Siedlce and the Podlasie region is Edward Kopówka, whose *Jews of Siedlce* provides an almost encyclopedic description of Jewish political movements and organizations in the city of Siedlce.¹¹³ However, while Kopówka provides a thorough history of Siedlce's Jewish community, he does not engage with the issue of relations between Jews and Poles. In the conclusion of his book, he emphasizes the need for a study that would further explore this topic.¹¹⁴ Authors producing studies of 1930s boycotts of Jewish businesses throughout the Podlasie region conclude that the boycotts were a result of fiscally stressed Christians trying to attain a foothold in an unfriendly market that was dominated by Jewish industries.¹¹⁵ And, indeed, my own findings have led to a similar conclusion. The struggles of middle-class Poles during the

¹¹² See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Massacre in Jedwabne: Before, During, and After* (East European Monographs, 2005), who devotes a chapter to explain interwar relations between Poles and Jews in Jedwabne and describes them as overall harmonious; Rosa Lehmann, *Symbiosis and Ambivalence: Poles and Jews in a Small Galician Town* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001) used primarily oral histories to describe the divisions in the village of Jaśliska, concluding that Poles and Jews existed in a state of cooperative symbiosis.; and Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997) focusing on the town of Brańsk and pointing out the distinct social barriers between Poles and Jews there.

¹¹³ Edward Kopówka, *Jews in Siedlce 1850-1945*, trans. Dobrochna Fire (New York: JewishGen, Inc., 2014).

¹¹⁴ Kopówka, 202.

¹¹⁵ Dorota, Mączka, "Żydzi w powiecie siedleckim w okresie międzywojennym" in *Żydzi na Podlasiu*, ed. Zofia Chyra-Rolicz et. al. (Siedlce: Wydawnictwo Akademii Podlaskiej, 2010), 312-313.; Bechta, 150.

Great Depression exacerbated feelings of their resentment and competition towards Jewish business owners, whom they perceived as more successful, a perception which the NDP encouraged.

Yet, no authors of the region have looked at the possible impacts of NDP's rhetoric on relations, as this study does. In order to highlight that there was a shift in relations in the 1930s, the first section will examine relations in the previous decade, highlighting elements of both cooperation and competition. Strikingly, during this period, violence in the form of vandalism is relatively rare. Next, I will show that in 1934, as speeches by NDP grew more antisemitic and calls for boycotts increased, all three powiats experienced an upsurge in ethnically motivated crimes. One of the factors that would ease the success of the DNP's antisemitic rhetoric is that Poles and Jews were regionally and socially divided. For generations, Poles and Jews had coexisted in a divided, but not necessarily hostile, environment. In Siedlce, for example, Jews had their own schools, political organizations, newspapers and even hospitals and relief societies that served exclusively Jews.¹¹⁶

Settling patterns impacted interactions since most Jews settled in urban areas, while the countryside was almost exclusively inhabited by Christians working in agricultural jobs.¹¹⁷ Figure 3 highlights these geographic and economic divisions. High percentages of population in the countryside makes clear that the populations in all three powiats dwelled primarily in the countryside and relied on agriculture. Strikingly, the population in the countryside was up to 90% Catholic and although the overall Jewish

¹¹⁶ In Edward Kopówka, *Jews in Siedlce*, provides detailed overview of all the specific social and political organizations run for and by the Jewish community.

¹¹⁷ Bechta, 22.

minority in each powiat was about 10-15%, the central cities of Siedlce, Sokołów, and Węgrów were up to 50% Jewish. These statistics show that the vast majority of farmers and peasants were ethnic Poles, while Jews worked primarily in trade and industry within an urban context. The peasants, residing far from the urban centers of each powiat, therefore, only really interacted with Jews in a commercial context, during market days. Sometimes the experiences were not pleasant if Jews charged too much for certain products or did not pay peasants enough for their crops.¹¹⁸ It is perhaps for this reason that Polish peasants came to associate Jews with wealth, despite the fact that many urban Jews also struggled financially. These geographic and economic divisions fostered tensions between Jews and Poles throughout the interwar period.

Figure 3. Demographic breakdown of Siedlce, Sokołów Podlaski, and Węgrów *powiats* in 1921 and 1931.

Powiat	Siedlce	Sokołów Podlaski	Węgrów
1921			
Population	133,189	75,985	80,684
Percentage in City	28%	10%	10%
Percentage in Countryside	72%	90%	90%
1931			
Population	151,411	83,949	88,788
Percentage in City	30%	12%	10%
Percentage in Countryside	70%	88%	90%
Roman Catholics	85.5%	89.2%	86.1%
Catholic Percentage of Countryside	94%	95%	94%
Jews	15%	10%	10%
Jewish Percentage of City	43%	51%	56%

Source: Drugi Spis Powszechny, Woj. Lubelskie (1931), 3, 31-32.

¹¹⁸ Stanisław Siekierski, *Etos Chłopski w świetle pamiętników* (Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy „Galicja” Fundacji Artystycznej ZMW, 1992), 130-131.; Arkadiusz Kołodziejczyk, “Mniejszość żydowska w programach i działalności polskiego ruchu ludowego,” in Chyra-Rolicz, et. al., 273.

In addition to economic, social competition was also ever present. One example of this is in 1926, when a cultural and professional Jewish organizations in Węgrów tried to take possession of a meeting hall located in a former monastery, where, up to that point, only Polish national and Catholic groups had met. The Jewish group argued that since the building was currently owned by the city of Węgrów, it was a public space available for all citizens and since Jews constituted the majority of Węgrów's population, the hall should be theirs to use. The local Christian population was appalled at this idea and the local priest fought back, arguing that the hall was legally, and by historical precedent, owned by the Roman Catholic parish.¹¹⁹ The *Starosta's* report never records the conclusion of this squabble, and it is unclear whether the Jewish group was fighting for the possession of the building or simply for permission to use it for meetings. In either case, this is an example of ongoing social competition between, on the one hand, Polish nationalists and Catholics, and on the other hand Jews.

Sometimes, however, Polish and Jewish communities managed to look past these divisions. For example, during a 1924 City Council election in Sokołów, Christians expressed worry that Jews constituted a majority in the city's population, and a democratic vote would yield a primarily Jewish council. The concern of the *Starosta*, and many other Christians was that this would give Jews excessive power in a *powiat* where they were an overall minority. Christian officials proposed a compromise, that of twenty-four members on the council only ten would be Jewish. The local Rabbi Morgensztern and many Orthodox Jews looked very favorably at such a compromise and in a few days

¹¹⁹ APS, Starostwo Powiatowe w Węgrowie 1919-1939 (hereafter SPW), Zesp. 344, Sygn. 5, p. 8, Sprawozdania sytuacyjne za 1926 rok.

Poles and Jews had successfully, and peacefully, created a city council.¹²⁰ Similarly, throughout the 1920s, Polish labor movements in Siedlce opened up discussions with Jewish organizations, with the hopes of creating coalitions between Polish and Jewish skilled workers.¹²¹

International programs of aid distribution following World War I provide a backdrop for an analysis of the complexity of Polish-Jewish cooperation in the interwar period. In 1919, William Grove travelled to Poland as a member of the American Relief Administration, which was working to provide food to the citizens of war-torn Poland in the wake of World War I. On this trip throughout Poland's major cities, Grove observed, that while disputes existed between Poles and Jews for economic reasons, they cooperated when it came to the efficient distribution of aid. "It was felt," he wrote in a 1940 account of his work, "that the effort to relieve a food shortage might bring out anew prejudices and possibly tragedies. Fortunately, these fears proved exaggerated due, quite largely, to the broad-minded way the leaders among both the Poles and Jews met the situation."¹²² Yet Grove also noted a hint that not all was well and that underlying tensions marred Polish and Jewish relations. For example, he recalls some, unnamed, Polish leaders who saw the aid mission as "pro-Jewish," which was of course false. "The empty stomach was our problem," Grove wrote, "and we did not care who owned it."¹²³ He also mentions hearing about pogroms, though he did not witness any himself. In

¹²⁰ APS, SPSP, Zesp. 343 Sygn. 4, p. 7, Sprawozdania sytuacyjne za rok 1924.

¹²¹ In 1924 Polish and Jewish cobblers discuss creating a coalition and participating in a strike together to improve working conditions, APS, SPS, Zesp. 342, Sygn. 7, p. 26, Miesięczne Sprawozdania sytuacyjne za okres styczeń-lipiec, wrzesień-listopad 1924r.; A 1926 movement tried to unite Polish and Jewish bakers, confectioners, and butchers APS, SPS, Zesp 342, Sygn. 9, p. 19, Miesięczne sprawozdania sytuacyjne za okres styczeń-grudzień 1926r.

¹²² William Grove, *War's Aftermath: Polish Relief in 1919* (New York: House of Field, Inc. 1940), 62.

¹²³ Grove, 64-65.

private correspondence from 1919, Grove was more open about the nature of these conflicts, describing the pogroms as fueled by Judeo-Bolshevism and noting that the Polish government responded to the violence with relative apathy.¹²⁴ Grove's experience further illustrates some of the existing divisions between Poles and Jews.

In addition to a long standing economic rift, another force that may have contributed to the separation between Poles and Jews was the experience of both groups under the Russian Empire in pre-independence Poland. Some scholarship suggests that Russian authorities encouraged pogroms in Poland during the late nineteenth century.¹²⁵ As a dominating power, it was in the interest of Tsarist Russia to encourage policies that would aggravate divisions between Poles and Jews lest the two unite in rebellion. On the other hand, it was also in the interest of the Empire to maintain peace throughout its territories. Due to the conspiratorial nature of this topic, these instigations would not have been documented, making the answer elusive.

Although outright violence in Podlasie before the 1930s was relatively rare, in the end Poles and Jews were distinctly divided culturally, socially, and economically. These divided circumstances serve as a social backdrop for conflict to come. On many levels, Poles and Jews were separate and saw each other as inherently different and separate in

¹²⁴ National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the US Grain Corporation, Bx 468 Warsaw Office, Fd Consulate Affairs, Grove to Hoover, 8 July 1919.

¹²⁵ Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism Poland, 1933-1939* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 22.; Michael Och, "Tsarist officialdom and anti-Jewish pogroms in Poland," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) also cites examples of scholars that have argued for Russian involvement in inciting pogroms. Och complicates this possibility with examples of Russian authorities trying to prevent inter-ethnic violence in Poland while at the same time citing examples of Russian troops failing to interfere in Pogroms.; Finally, Theodore Weeks, "Polish-Jewish Relations 1903-1914: The View from the Chancellery," *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 40, no 3/4 (September-December, 1998): 233-248 presents the Russian Empire more as a witness to growing Polish antisemitism, implementing some policies that may have inadvertently contributed to animosities.

all things. These circumstances would pave the way for more normalized othering and create fertile ground for the NDP's antisemitic rhetoric.

In the 1920s, rhetoric of the NDP in Siedlce, Sokołów, and Węgrów focused far less on antisemitic campaigns and more on criticizing their political opposition: the Sanacja government. But starting in the 1930s, members of the NDP began to express their antisemitism in a more vocal way. Part of this had to do with farmers struggling economically, as an economic downturn caused the price of manufactured goods to rise and the cost of crops to drop. Whereas before, the NDP blamed financial problems on Sanacja's weak economic policy, in the 1930s, it increasingly looked at Jewish economic dominance as the cause for the economic plight of Poles. In this period, the NDP took up to solve this problem through economic boycotts that would, ideally, push Jews out of Poland in a peaceful and legal way. The movement, however, made way for normalized antisemitic crimes throughout Podlasie.

The earliest appeals for boycotts in this region began in about 1934 with appeals for Poles to avoid Jewish-run services. Józef Milik, for example, urged the Poles of Węgrów to visit exclusively Polish doctors, lawyers, and dentists rather than Jewish ones. "Even if [that Pole] belongs to Sanacja and is hostile towards the Nationalist Movement," he proclaimed, "it is better to support a Pole, with whom we can eventually come to an understanding."¹²⁶ This quote also reveals something of the NDP mentality. This statement carries the implication that it was possible to eventually resolve conflicts with other Poles, even if they were leftists. But Jews, the NDP felt, were irreconcilably different and there was no hope of cooperation or mutual understanding.

¹²⁶ APS, SPW, Zesp 344 Sygn 13, p. 35-36, Sprawozdania sytuacyjne za rok 1934.

In the case of Siedlce, Sokołów, and Węgrów, 1936 marks the year when local branches began a more focused campaign against local Jews. During this period, the speeches of NDP members like Joseph Milik and Maria Holder-Eggerowa increasingly focused on painting Jews as economic competition and encouraging economic boycotts whereas in the 1920s, they focused more on criticizing Sanacja, their political opposition. Admittedly one of their critiques was that Sanacja had allowed itself to become controlled by Jewish forces, but they do not really focus their rhetoric explicitly on Jews until about 1933. In 1936, the National Democrats began to actively carry out a campaign trying to agitate its members into boycotting Jewish goods during meetings and by distributing posters and pamphlets that proclaimed the urgency of putting more Poles into a Jewish-led economy. This time period also coincides with increased violence directed against Jews. The timing of this upsurge in conflict between Poles and Jews suggests that the NDP's rhetoric and actions normalized antisemitism.

One element that greatly contributed to the animosity that nationalists felt towards Jews was their perception that Jews remained untouched by an economic depression that crippled hardworking Christian Poles. While it is true that the most successful Jewish business owners managed to maintain economic stability, the majority of Jews, who worked in industry jobs or peddled goods during market days struggled as much as the Poles. But in 1936, a nationalist monthly publication called *Przyjaciela Podlasia*, even more radically promoted the view that Jews were in fact benefitting from the economic struggles of Poles. "While Polish workers...succumb to hunger and poverty, their children dying of tuberculosis or typhus, the Jewry grows wealthier and buys our properties, houses, and stores. In one word, they are coming to control our economic

life.”¹²⁷ Despite these falsities spread by the National Democrats, this sort of rhetoric resonated with unemployed Poles throughout the region, who felt that Jews had pushed them out of a market and potential economic success.¹²⁸ This idea contributed to rhetoric encouraging economic boycotts on Jewish products to contribute to growth of a Christian rather than a Jewish economy.

Some supporters of the boycotts promoted the implication that anyone not participating in the boycotts was somehow betraying their Polish identities. Local Catholic authorities also participated in the boycotts in their own ways. Father Stanisław Gawin, for example, from the pulpit encouraged his congregation to fight Jews economically. He also publicly shamed the families that refused to participate in boycotting. Gawin brought a Jewish kippah to school and placed it on the head of any student, boy or girl, who had bought school supplies from a Jewish school. The local Jewish community protested this action, directing complaints directly to the school inspector.¹²⁹ This indicates that social pressures and the desire to conform could have been a factor motivating individuals to boycott Jewish goods.

Despite some of their aggressive methods in pressurizing fellow Poles to participate in the boycotts, the National Democrats urged the more radical, often younger, members to avoid violent or illegal conflict with Jews. This was, however, more out of political savviness than any humanitarian reasons. National Democratic leaders feared that if their members excessively disrupted peace, the government would dissolve their party. Indeed, they had good reason to fear this as it had already happened to the more

¹²⁷ Bechta, 154-155.

¹²⁸ APS, SPS, Zesp 342, Sygn. 27, p. 65.

¹²⁹ APS, SPW, Zesp 344. Sygn 16, p. 19, Miesięczne sprawozdania sytuacyjne za 1937 rok.

radical Obóz Wielkiej Polski (OWP), which due to its violent actions, led to the Sanacja-led government dissolving them in 1933.¹³⁰ In the eyes of these Endecja leaders, Jews wanted to provoke violence in order to achieve just that.¹³¹ Therefore party leaders urged their followers to execute the boycotts in a legal and peaceful manner.

But violence, nonetheless happened. One of the consequences of the economic boycotts was the general intensification of anti-Jewish sentiments throughout the countryside. As Poles boycotted Jewish stores they increasingly accepted nationalist rhetoric that Poland's economy was a battleground between the opposing forces of Christian Poles and Jews. These perceptions quickly began to normalize violence throughout the powiats of Siedlce, Węgrów, and Sokołów. Consequently, between the ONR boycotts of 1934 and NDP's boycotts in 1936, rates of crimes against Jews increased. From the countryside surrounding Siedlce came reports of peasants forcibly driving travelling Jewish peddlers out of villages and knocking out windows in Jewish homes and businesses.¹³² In the years preceding the boycotts, these sorts of crimes were relatively rare, and it was only in the mid-1930s, in the midst of nationalist movements waging economic wars on Jews, that antisemitic crimes began to be widespread.

One of the contexts where antisemitic struggles played out during this period was during weekly market days when Jewish salesmen set up stands in town squares in order to sell manufactured goods. In the town of Liw in Węgrów powiat, a group of National Democratic activists harassed Jewish stands on market day. Among their methods was forcefully preventing any customers from approaching Jewish stalls and even throwing

¹³⁰ Bechta, 98.

¹³¹ APS, SPW, Zesp 344, sygn 16, p. 60.; APS, SPSP, Zesp 343, Sygn 17, p. 20.

¹³² APS, SPS, Zesp 342, Sygn 27, p. 47.

rocks and attempting to demolish the Jewish stands. Although the local police intervened to prevent further violence, the Jewish peddlers who had experienced this harassment soon left town.¹³³ As the 1930s wore on, local police increasingly had to monitor market days to prevent further conflict.

The severity of these boycotts, and the social repercussions of nationalist rhetoric is perhaps most clearly visible in the reactions of its victims. Between the economic boycotts, antisemitic speeches of radical nationalists, and radical Polish youth knocking out their windows, by 1937 Jews feared the outbreak of a pogrom.¹³⁴ Jewish newspapers in Siedlce, reporting on crimes committed on Jews began to encourage self-defensive action, expressing hope that the situation would change eventually. “In honesty,” one newspaper published, “the Jewish situation in Poland is serious but not hopeless.”¹³⁵ Meanwhile, some Jewish organizations, in particular the leftist ones, sought to organize militias to protect Jews and their businesses.¹³⁶

In many ways, the 1930s and the period of boycotts proved successful for the National Democrats. In the first few months of the boycotts, Jewish businesses immediately began to feel pressure due to the lack of customers with the poorest Jews suffering the most. By spring of 1937, market days in all three powiats swiftly became devoid of Jewish stands and peddlers and some Jewish shopkeepers began to consider selling their businesses.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, in the places of those businesses, new Christian-owned businesses opened.¹³⁸ Jewish families began emigrating from some villages in the

¹³³ APS, SPW, Zesp 344, Sygn 15, p. 100-101.

¹³⁴ APS, SPS, Zesp 342, Sygn 27, p. 71.

¹³⁵ APS, SPS, Zesp 342, Sygn 27, p. 26.

¹³⁶ APS, SPW, Zesp 344, Sygn 16, p. 31.

¹³⁷ APS, SPSP, Zesp 343, Sygn 17, p.10-11, 14.

¹³⁸ APS, SPW, Zesp 344, Sygn 16, p. 9-10.

powiats, because of these economic pressures as well as in fear of increasing vandalism of Jewish homes in the countryside.¹³⁹

The relationship between Poles and Jews in Podlasie was complex and varied. For most of the interwar period, it was a relationship of collaboration and competition, one of peace and conflict. The divisions between Poles and Jews, and perhaps underlying antisemitic sentiments, had always been present. Yet, in calling for boycotts the NDP verbalized, solidified, and normalized antisemitism in a public sphere. Inadvertently, the effects of this rhetoric fostered an environment where some nationalists felt justified in harassing and terrifying Jewish families. It is difficult to know the long-term repercussions of the NDP policies because in 1939, the nature of these relations was permanently disrupted and put to the test as Nazi forces occupied Podlasie and began to systematically eliminate its Jewish population.

¹³⁹ APS, SPW, Zesp 344, Sygn 16, p. 31.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Sokołów, Siedlce, and Węgrów are three of hundreds of towns in Poland embedded in echoes of their Jewish past. However, when visiting them, it is sometimes hard to believe that there ever was a Jewish minority, despite the fact that nearly 50% of the population of each city was Jewish before the Holocaust. Nazis burned the synagogues during the occupation of World War II, and there is now little trace of the vibrant culture that once existed in the squares and streets of each city. This is just one of many reasons to pursue the story of this invisible community and to ask how such a thriving culture could disappear.

It was my intention, in this thesis, to investigate some of the roots of political antisemitism and the impact of antisemitic rhetoric on relations in the rural powiats of Sokołów Podlaski, Siedlce, and Węgrów. In both cases, anxiety for the safety of Polish interests fueled a defensive ethno-nationalism that encouraged antisemitism. Chapter One illustrated that that fear and national insecurity powered much of the antisemitic ideals expressed by nationalists and members of the National Democratic Party. Poland's political instability and precarious diplomatic situation throughout the interwar period all contributed to their feelings of anxiety. There is a historical precedent of Poland being partitioned and for some nationalists, Jews remained as a final invader. In their eyes the Polish state could only survive if it was ethnically homogenized because this would assure that all citizens would be loyal to the Polish cause. Jews came to symbolize an element of Polish society that actively threatened the fragile new state through economic domination, moral corruption, and political manipulation.

In the 1930s, the NDP sought to solve this issue by boycotting Jewish businesses and pushing them out of the market in the hope that it would encourage widespread Jewish emigration. The impact of the NDP's campaign for this economic warfare had a striking impact on the ground. In Siedlce, Sokołów Podlaski, and Węgrów, aggressive speeches deriding Jews and calling for boycotts had a dire effect and inspired an animated antisemitism. With the rising popularity of such rhetoric, nationalists throughout the countryside felt justified in pursuing violent acts that would encourage Jewish families to flee the area. In their eyes, these vandals were defending Polish interests against a Jewish economic monopoly. Within months of the first boycotts, vandalism of Jewish stores and homes began to plague the powiats. It is precisely this process of political rhetoric promoting violence that chapter two sought to demonstrate.

The dynamics in Siedlce, Węgrów, and Sokołów described in this thesis can provide a greater depth of understanding of the society that encountered Nazi occupation and the Holocaust. In fact, there are many sources describing these three powiats, and the way in which relations changed, or remained the same, starting in 1939. Interviews with Jews from this part of Poland, collected and preserved at the United States Holocaust Memorial recount relations with their Polish neighbors before and during Nazi occupation. Parallel to this are oral histories collected by the Sokołów Podlaski Public library that have been conducted with both Poles and Jews about their wartime experiences.¹⁴⁰ Memoirs and diaries can likewise serve as windows on perceptions in the context of the Holocaust in Podlasie. Aaron Elster and Marian Pietrzak, both children when the war broke out, recorded their experiences of the Sokołów Podlaski ghetto in

¹⁴⁰ In Polish, Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna im. K. I. Gałczyńskiego w Sokołowie Podlaskim.

memoirs. Pietrzak's recollection is based on the journals he kept throughout occupation, making it in some ways more reliable. Elster, meanwhile, managed to escape the ghetto, and a Polish family hid him in their attic, providing some insight into the forces that motivated Poles to help Jews.¹⁴¹ Edward Kopówka's *Dam im życie na wieki* tells more stories about Poles who risked their lives to save Jews in the regions surrounding Treblinka, including from the powiats which this work focused on.¹⁴² Finally, Samuel Willenberg's memoir recalling his 1943 escape from Treblinka expresses both sides of Polish reactions as some Poles gave him food and gave him directions for safe passage, while others would deliberately try to capture him in order to be paid by Nazis for his capture.

Finally, a source that can fill in Polish perspectives of Jews during the war is *Wieś Polska*, a series of personal recollections written by individuals from rural areas around Poland. In the late 1940s, a publishing company called Czytelnik organized a competition which asked Poles from various areas of the country to submit reports of their wartime experiences. In 1960s, Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota compiled these submissions and published them in a four-volume set. Each narrative is organized according to which voivodeship [the Polish equivalent of a county] the author is from, including the Lubelskie voivodeship where the powiats featured in this work are located. The experiences described by each contributor range from 1939 to 1948 and may contain a small crumb of how peasants felt about Jews throughout the war.¹⁴³ Jan Gross describes

¹⁴¹ Aaron Elster, *Ocalony z Zagłady: Wspomnienia chłopca z Sokółowa Podlaskiego* (Warsaw: Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, 2014).; Marian Pietrzak, *Sokolów Podlaski w Latach 1939-1943: Pamiętnik z czasów okupacji* (Sabnie: Poldruk, 1972).

¹⁴² Edward Kopówka, *Dam im imię na wieki: Polacy z okolic Trebłinki ratujący Żydów* (Oxford: Biblioteka Drohiczyńska, 2011).

¹⁴³ Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota, foreword to *Wieś Polska 1939-1948: Materiały Konkursowe*, ed. Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967), 5-34.

this source, marveling “at the complete openness of simple people who in 1948 sent to an official institution their recollections, which were so out of synch with the officially approved version of current events.”¹⁴⁴ Together these sources, coming from both Poles and Jews paint a mixed picture, complicating representations of Poles as wholly complicit in the Holocaust, yet not entirely dismissing the fact that some Poles expressed apathy and even hostility towards Jews during this chaotic period of history.

Historian Ezra Mendelsohn once wrote that “it is extremely difficult even for the most objective scholar to write about the Jews in interwar Poland without considering what happened in that country during the Nazi occupation.”¹⁴⁵ It is also insufficient to write about Poles and their reactions to the Holocaust without understanding relations before the war. By the late 1930s, the National Democratic Party had much support in their endeavors to push Jews out of the country, mostly through peaceful and economic means. What was, therefore, the reaction of local Poles when Nazi forces invaded, and rounded up Jewish populations into ghettos before transporting them to Treblinka? Understanding interwar relations can contextualize the motivations of the Poles who acted as bystanders, the Poles who risked their lives to help Jews, and the Poles who collaborated with Nazis.

More studies on Polish and Jewish relations before World War II are necessary given the disagreement regarding Polish complicity during the Holocaust. It is impossible to know what direction political antisemitism in Poland would have taken had Poland not been invaded in 1939; but knowing more about interwar perceptions allows for a greater

¹⁴⁴ Jan Gross, *The Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 244.

¹⁴⁵ Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1998), 44.

understanding of Polish reactions to the Holocaust, which is a lively topic in contemporary historiography and politics. At the heart of recent debates revolving around this topic is Jan Gross' *The Neighbors*, which challenges claims that Poles were in no way involved in the Holocaust. *The Neighbors* is, at its core, a social and cultural history that touches on the sentiments of Poles in Jedwabne in the years which led up to the massacre of the village's Jewry in July 1941. However Gross' primary focus is the day of the massacre and question of who was complicit in the murders and why they chose to participate in them. Gross labels this book as part of a new genre of Holocaust literature which "belabors the 'perpetrators-victims-bystanders axis.'" ¹⁴⁶ In other words, he intended to examine how individual decisions of each group resulted in the events that transpired that summer day in 1941. What makes Gross' study so controversial is his argument that Poles were solely responsible for the massacre in Jedwabne. Some scholars disagree with Gross on this point. A study by Jan Marek Chodakiewicz argues that Soviet occupation had an enormous impact on the relations between the Poles and Jews of Jedwabne. ¹⁴⁷ Whereas Gross claims that German participation in the massacre was "limited to their taking pictures," ¹⁴⁸ Chodakiewicz argues that Nazi occupiers played an enormous role in inciting the Poles to violence. To defend this statement, he cites an order given by the heads of SS units explicitly encouraging German occupiers to foment anti-Jewish violence. Chodakiewicz posits that Nazi authorities exacerbated preexistent ideas in Polish communities, of Jewish collaboration with communists and solidified their

¹⁴⁶ Gross, 11-12. Gross attributes this phrase, and indeed, this methodology to Raul Hilberg's *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders; The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992) which devotes a section to analyzing the motivations of each group and their roles in the Holocaust.

¹⁴⁷ Jan Marek Chodakiewicz, *Massacre in Jedwabne, Before, During, and After* (Boulder, CO: Columbia University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁸ Gross, 78.

image as Soviet collaborators and traitors.¹⁴⁹ Indeed he poses some fair questions of Jan Gross' argument regarding this topic. For example, if Poles acted on their own initiatives, as Gross argues, why did they wait until July 10th to carry out the massacre? If ideas of Judeo-Bolshevism and related outrage over Soviet occupation were the primary source of Polish rage for Jews, wouldn't they carry out this attack while the rage was still fresh on their minds, soon after the Soviets retreated out of Jedwabne?¹⁵⁰ Finally, Chodakiewicz accuses Gross of not having a full grasp of the sources available regarding this topic and he sets out to fill some of the gaps. Indeed, Chodakiewicz broaches some primary sources which, based on only a reading of Gross, the reader would not know existed. For example, while Gross sticks faithfully to a Jewish memorial book, produced by Rabbis and claiming that Poles were mostly responsible for the massacre, Chodakiewicz uncovers the other side of the coin in Christian witness accounts collected by a Catholic priest. These accounts claim that Nazis were mostly responsible.¹⁵¹ It is possible that both sides are misguided. Jewish witnesses misperceived the events at Jedwabne, and the Christian witnesses did not want to admit Polish complicity. The truth lies hidden somewhere in between.

But what started as a historiographical debate quickly became politicized. In the wake of Gross' *Neighbors*, the Polish government has accused Gross of libel for implying such a large level of Polish complicity in the murders of Jedwabne's Jewry. In early 2018, the Polish government pushed back even more, passing a bill that made the use of the term "Polish concentration camps" illegal and punished false accusations of any

¹⁴⁹ Chodakiewicz, 64-66.

¹⁵⁰ Chodakiewicz, 72.

¹⁵¹ Chodakiewicz, 19.

Polish complicity in Nazi atrocities during the Holocaust. That latter half of the law seems to be in almost direct response to Jan Gross. A clause in the law does specify that scholars are protected, however, in the world of academic debates, in particular controversial ones like Polish complicity in the Holocaust, the line between insufficient study and intentional falsification can be difficult to prove.¹⁵²

The topic of prejudice against perceived national outsiders is timeless and important to pursue. When I recently visited Poland, I noticed echoes in the discourse between suspicions, fears, and grievances directed against Jews in the interwar period and what was being said about Muslim refugees in the modern day. In both cases, there existed the expectation that in order for the groups to exist peacefully within the boundaries of Poland, they would have to assimilate and to agree to live by rules set by Western culture. In both cases there was the perception that Christendom itself was being attacked by these intruding groups of people. I realize, of course that it is flawed to draw too many direct parallels. For instance, a large difference is that while Jews formed a significant and historic minority in Poland in the interwar period, the Muslim community in Poland is much smaller and more recent. However, people act in a certain way when they encounter certain ideological, economic, and societal pressures and it is important to identify and learn more about the circumstances that have historically, and continue to, create inter-ethnic conflict. In Podlasie, economic factors of the Great Depression, cultural rifts between Poles and Jews, and fear of political disintegration all contributed to

¹⁵² To see some recent newspaper publications regarding this topic see Dwyer, Colin, "Poland Passes Bill Criminalizing Claims of Its Complicity in the Holocaust," *NPR.org*, February 1, 2018, accessed March 30, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/01/581896647/poland-passes-bill-criminalizing-claims-of-its-complicity-in-the-holocaust>.; "Poland's Senate passes controversial Holocaust bill," *BBC.com*, February 1, 2018, accessed March 30, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42898882>.

the creation of the National Democratic Party, which incited violence in the countryside with its rhetoric of othering.

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