

## ANALOGIES OF PRE-WAR ANTI-SEMITISM AND PRESENT-DAY HOMOPHOBIA IN POLAND

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### INTRODUCTION

Polish people often pride themselves with a long history of tolerance towards Jews. Poland in fact invited Jews to immigrate to the country in past centuries at times when the rest of Europe persecuted them.<sup>1</sup> By the early twentieth century the situation had changed. Anti-Semitism, which arguably reached its apex in 1930's, had become Poland's defining form of social exclusion (Tokarska-Bakir 2004). In this chapter I propose and illustrate that the mechanism and structure of anti-Semitism, based in the rise of nationalism, are currently being employed through the use of homophobia and heterosexism with the queer community as its target.

The similarities between homophobic and anti-Semitic discourse are organised in three broad categories here. Firstly, I look at the label of homosexuals and Jewish people as mentally or physically ill. Members of the stigmatized group are seen by those who exclude them as suffering from sickness that is either inherent to their nature or as a result of their habits and actions. Sexuality takes on particular salience in this manner as concepts such as sexual "respectability" and propriety gained weight during the rise of nationalism. Therefore, a particular stress is put on the "deviant" sexuality and sexual practices that are attributed to Jews and queers (whether or not they are true).

Secondly, victims of homophobia and anti-Semitism are treated as a threat to the nation. The supposed "illness" and "perverse sexuality" are not viewed as something self-contained or as a matter of concern to only the Jewish or homosexual community. Both communities are accused of deliberately attempting to fatally alter or destroy the nation and its institutions such as the government, family or the Church.

The final category of hate discourse is not necessarily confined to the exchange of words. Rather, the explicit and physical reactions to both communities are explored as a form of actualized discourse. Whether

<sup>1</sup> While the Crusades took place in Europe during the 13th Century, Jews fled to Poland due to its relative tolerance. This led to a situation where by the 16th Century eighty percent of the world's Jews lived in Poland (see Weiner 2006).

violent or not, the treatment of both Jews and queers in the past and as well as today is often explained away or excused by those in the religious and sexual majority. Though the messages from the majority community might often be contradictory (for example, the pressure from the majority to alternately conceal and disclose Jews and queers), together they contribute to an atmosphere of discrimination and hostility.

In this analysis I frame my study on the comparison primarily of pre-World War II anti-Semitism to current homophobia. To carry out my comparison, I analysed selected discussions and comments made by public figures on the topic of homosexuality and the movement for gay rights which occurred in the recent decades, concentrating on the years after 2000. These are then looked at in the light of anti-Semitic discourse which reached its apex in the first half of the 20th Century in Poland and throughout Europe. The material referred to here however is not a comprehensive overview of the public debate on the issue.

This is not to suggest that homophobia did not exist in the early 1900's nor that anti-Semitism has disappeared and been replaced by homophobia in Poland today. Homophobia, as noted below, was present during the rise of nationalism together with anti-Semitism. Similarly, Poland is far from free of anti-Semitism today and Jews living in Poland are still faced with its consequences.<sup>2</sup> However, the recent rise in queer visibility, contrasted to the low number of Jews in Poland,<sup>3</sup> has meant a rise in overt homophobia exposing its very stark and harrowing similarities to past (and present) anti-Semitism.

#### NATIONALISM'S ROLE

Nationalism, according to George L. Mosse, "is perhaps the most powerful and effective ideology of modern times" (Mosse 1985, 9). In his ground breaking book *Nationalism and Sexuality*, Mosse studies the in-depth relationship between *nationalism* and *respectability*. His work focuses primarily on sexuality and concludes that the concept of respectability developed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remain with us today. This force shaped the most important norms of society including "ideals of manliness . . . and their effect on the place

<sup>2</sup> A European Parliament resolution on the rise of racism and homophobia of 15 June 2006, which mentions Poland as a country with troubling occurrences of anti-Semitism, points to the current forms of anti-Semitism. See <[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/019-8898-165-06-24-902-20060608IPR08828-14-06-2006-2006-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/019-8898-165-06-24-902-20060608IPR08828-14-06-2006-2006-false/default_en.htm)> (19 June 2006).

<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon is often labelled "anti-Semitism without Jews," considering the official number of Jews being somewhere between five and ten thousand (see Cala 2006).

of women; and insiders who accept the norms, as compared to the outsiders, those considered abnormal or diseased” (Mosse 1985, 1). These norms also defined social and civic responsibility. Once responsibility is defined, those who failed to behave in such a way risk blame for often unrelated conflicts and problems. Those who stood apart from the norm were condemned. Homosexuals were at the forefront of this exclusion as they embodied the threat against sexual respectability.

Mosse also considers racism to have played a decisive role in this alliance between nationalism and respectability. Bourgeois respectability was supported by racism that he calls a “heightened nationalism” (Mosse 1985, 133). The links between racism and sexuality are direct and immediate according to Mosse. Racism brought to a climax nationalism’s tendencies towards complete domination and leaves little ability to negotiate the boundaries of inclusion in the nation. Zygmunt Bauman similarly writes “racism manifests the conviction that a certain category of human beings cannot be incorporated into the national order, whatever the efforts” (Bauman 1989, 65).

Matti Bunzl, in his book *Symptoms of Modernity*, applies Mosse’s analysis of nationalism in his study of anti-Semitism and homophobia in twentieth century Austria. Bunzl shows that Jews and queers became linked through a “normalising process that imagined modern collectives as ethnically homogeneous and inherently masculinist entities” (Bunzl 1999, 13). Both Jews and queers emerged in their modern form during this period of nationalism in the late nineteenth century. Jews were reconstructed using the relatively new concept of race, a concept in which racial differences were “no longer perceived as chance variations but as immutable; fixed in place” (Mosse 1985, 133). At the same time, calling upon Michel Foucault’s work, Bunzl maps a similar transformation of the constructed “homosexual” identity as being “predicated on the emergence of sexuality as an irreducible and constitutive aspect of self” (Bunzl 1999, 13). With these two groups newly identified, they were used as social signifiers to “demarcate the symbolic space of the nation” (Bunzl 1999, 14). By defining the “in group” it became clear who was part of the “out group.”

Poland, like Austria and Germany, was similarly involved in a nation-building process at turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The historical trajectories of Jews and queers that were influenced by the alliance of bourgeois respectability and nationalism spread across Europe and cut across all classes (Mosse 1985, 2). Therefore, the examples of past anti-Semitism below come not only from Poland but also from various European countries such as Germany.

## STIGMATISING JEWS AND QUEERS AS ILL

Both the Jewish and queer communities have been labelled as inherently abnormal in anti-Semitic and homophobic discourse. Sander Gilman harkens back to the Middle Ages of Europe when already Jews were marked as a symbolic “leper” and confined to prevent the transmission of diseases they may carry. Medical surveys in the late 1700’s continued to report that Jews in Eastern Europe were more diseased than others and were responsible for spreading specific diseases as syphilis and conjunctivitis (Gilman 1985, 151). Such sentiments encouraged a sense of paranoia amongst populations that fear epidemics of disease. Furthermore, these sentiments promoted an atmosphere that led to the confinement of Jews in urban ghettos.

The queer community, more specifically gay men, have similarly been the target of blame for disease and epidemic. This analogy of illness is particularly acute when one considers the prevalent association between gay men and the AIDS epidemic. To some degree, the concern of gay men being ill has served to justify ostracizing the community from society under the reasoning that promoting homosexuality would be akin to promoting the spread of disease. In a talk show aired on the main public television station in Poland, March 2006, Joanna Najfeld, described as a Catholic activist affiliated with the website [www.tolerancja.net](http://www.tolerancja.net), took part in discussion regarding the accusation that a queer organisation had distributed flyers on HIV prevention in high schools. Najfeld was quoted as saying “Why should the group most at risk of HIV be teaching others about prevention? That’s like criminals teaching about the criminal code.”<sup>4</sup> This comment went without critique from the host of the show. Due to such generalised opinions and based upon what many claim to be sound medical science, men who participate in homosexual activities have also been banned from donating blood in Poland, for instance.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond physical diseases attributed to the queer community and Jews, mental illness has also been used to discredit both groups. As the 19th century came to an end, the medical profession of Europe was not averse to using racist and homophobic discourse in their diagnosis of illness. Mosse refers to doctors who claimed that homosexuality was a symptom

<sup>4</sup> Mikołaj Lizut, “Gdzie postawi granic tolerancji w szkole?” (Where should the boundaries of tolerance be in school?), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <<http://serwis.gazeta.pl/kraj/1,34308,3242946.html>> (29 March 2006).

<sup>5</sup> The exclusion of homosexuals from donating blood is not unique to Poland however, as it occurs in various countries across Europe. Efforts to change the policy in Poland have not been successful. See *Homoseksualiści – grupą ryzyka!* (Homosexuals—High risk Group!), <[http://www.innastrona.pl/news\\_pokaz.phtml?nID=1819](http://www.innastrona.pl/news_pokaz.phtml?nID=1819)> (30 October 2003).

of modernization and that mental illness was common amongst homosexuals and parents of homosexuals. In the same vein, Jews were to harbour the specific disease of nervousness. Various other illnesses were linked to each other as Mosse notes that “the outsider must be totally diseased” (Mosse 1985, 136).

It is not rare that in Poland homosexuality itself is perceived as a mental sickness that can and should be cured despite the fact that the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of illnesses in 1992.<sup>6</sup> Gay pride marches are regularly assaulted by opponents who scream “Get treatment!” However, this sentiment is also found in teachings of the Catholic Church and its hierarchy as well as by certain sectors of the medical and psychiatric community. Katarzyna Bojarska, a Polish sexologist, notes that amongst the psychiatric profession it is not rare to find implicit and explicit homophobia. Even if therapists do not consider homosexuality a disease, “they often assume the superiority of heterosexuality and advocate for queers to change.”<sup>7</sup>

This therapeutic voice of homophobia is a basis for various support groups who work to heal homosexuals of their homosexuality. *Odwaga* (Courage) is one such organisation that operates under the Catholic teachings of “love the sinner, hate the sin” and seek to assist queers in becoming heterosexual. Their main goal is to “help those with homosexual tendencies to sustain purity and denounce the homosexual lifestyle.”<sup>8</sup> Similar mission statements can be found with *Pomocy2002* (Assistance2002), and *Pascha*. The League of Polish Families (LPR),<sup>9</sup> a coalition party in the current Polish government, has been reported to be in touch with *Odwaga*, considering that their mission is similar to the outlooks of LPR members.<sup>10</sup> Front-bench Member of Parliament from LPR and former Member of the European Parliament, Wojciech Wierzejski, has also been said to have suggested establishing “re-education camps” for homosexuals as a way of treating them,<sup>11</sup> a harrowing comment considering

<sup>6</sup> See <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality\\_and\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_and_psychology)> (10 July 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Katarzyna Bojarska, interviewed on 27 April 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See <<http://www.odwaga.oaza.org.pl/homepage.html>> (13 July 2006).

<sup>9</sup> The League of Polish Families is a Catholic-Nationalist right-wing party with approximately 8% support. Despite its relatively low support, it is in the ruling coalition and has members in key positions such as the Ministry of Education. See Jan Repa, “Polish Nationalism Resurgent,” *BBC News*, 2006, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4754079.stm>> (9 May 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Paweł P. Reszka, “Ja cię, synu, naprawię” (I’ll fix you, son), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <<http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/df/1,34467,3407056.html?as=9&ias=10>> (16 June 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Aleksandra Krzyżaniak-Gumowska, “O szwedzkim ustawodawstwie i warszawskim konflikcie o Paradę Równości” (On Swedish law and the Warsaw conflict over the

the implications of employing the notion of “camps” when referring to homosexuals in the context of post-World War II Poland.

In a curious form of logic, the advocacy of Jewish emancipation was said to be a manifestation of their mental illness and the “disease of equality.” It seemed ridiculous to some in the late 1700’s that Jews would aspire towards equality in society (Gilman 1985, 152). The desire for political equality was seen as a sign of insanity in Jews and was also treated as such by the French in the Third Republic (Gilman 1985, 153). Polish nationalists of the late 1930’s were similarly ready to expose supposedly Jewish organisations such as the Esperantists. In their fight against anti-Semitism, members of these organisations espoused “the ‘progressive’, ‘tolerant’, ‘democratic’ and ‘peaceful’ collaboration of all nations” for which they were blamed by nationalists for poisoning the youth (Landua-Czajka 1989, 197). By classifying these terms as insane and coming from the insane, it was less likely that opponents had to argue on the merits of the debate.

Many politicians in modern-day Poland seem to capitalise on similar notions of madness in their dismissal of movements towards equality. This can be heard amongst those who claim that traditional and moral Poland is being held hostage by a homosexual minority that controls European politics. In a sign that even the current government considers claims for “equality” as slightly unreasonable, the Ministry of Education made an attempt to change the title of a Council of Europe (CoE) programme called All Different—All Equal to All Different—All in Solidarity in early 2006. The change was explained by the Minister as an attempt to avoid confusing the programme with the Warsaw Equality Parade organised by the gay community as the term *equality* is used in both the CoE programme and the Parade name.<sup>12</sup> Members of the same party (Law and Justice, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*—PiS)<sup>13</sup> that attempted to alter the CoE programme title had banned the Equality Parade in Warsaw. In banning the parade, the message seemed to be that the party was not keen on having what they considered deviants walk the streets. Their reference to the marches as a reason to change the programme name makes it clear that they would not support a notion of “equality” that is advocated by the queer community.

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Equality Parade), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2005, <<http://miasta.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34889,2740386.html>> (31 May 2005).

<sup>12</sup> See “There is No Room for Equality in Poland,” <<http://alldifferent-allequal.info/node/28>> (10 February 2006).

<sup>13</sup> PiS is the ruling conservative right-wing party.

## THREAT TO THE NATION

One might be able to be convinced that merely being “sick”, “mentally ill” or “deviant” does not pose a threat to the nation per se. However, those characterised as such, namely the Jews and homosexuals, were and are not often looked upon as innocent beings plagued with these misfortunes. Instead, Jews and queers are frequently labelled as enemies of the state and active threats to the nation.

The 1930's were rife with the common stereotype of the Jews as a “state within a state,” implicitly treasonous to the nation and against Christianity. In reading Marcel Proust, Jonathan Freedman notes how both Jews and “sodomites” were perceived as having the ability of being communities within communities who “comprise a powerful, destabilising force which can counter the dominant culture” (Freedman 2001, 525). One right-wing publication boasted “[we] cannot allow the parasitic Jew to destroy the organism of the state from inside” (Landua-Czajka 1989, 179). Propaganda such as this was common and often made by those who were proud to be antisemites in their zeal to defend Poland from this internal enemy. Adam Ostolski comments that the term “homosexual lobby” is euphemistically used currently in Poland to label what is a common stereotype: all that is wrong can be blamed on a *conspiracy* of the “Jews, Masons, feminists or homosexuals” (Tomasik 2004, 72). Both the “Jewish conspiracy” and the “homosexual lobby” are made up of a “cosmopolitanism,” associated with modernism and decadence (Gilman 1985, 153–154).

The concept of an international homosexual lobby is a concept that is readily used in public discourse to discredit movements that attempt to deal with homophobia. A conservative, but by no means radical, weekly magazine *Ozon* recently dedicated an issue with the cover featuring a young heterosexual couple proudly proclaiming “We are homophobes.”<sup>14</sup> This is a strikingly similar sentiment to Landua-Czajka's quote from a radical right-wing nationalistic publication above in which they proudly proclaim to be antisemites. *Ozon's* lead article entitled “The Pink International in Action” warns readers that “The gay lobby has reached its goal. European Socialists and Liberals are forcing us by law to accept homosexual partnerships” (Michalik 2006). Readers are reminded in the article that this small minority is collaborating with international forces to make Poland do exactly what it does not want to do, simultaneously working from within and getting support from outside.

Similarly, queer organisations are blamed for attempting to disrupt and destabilise the government. When LPR party leader Roman Gi-

<sup>14</sup> See <[http://www.ozon.pl/a\\_tygodnikozon\\_2\\_14\\_1100\\_2006\\_4\\_1.html](http://www.ozon.pl/a_tygodnikozon_2_14_1100_2006_4_1.html)> (14 January 2006).

ertych was appointed Minister of Education in mid-2006, thousands of people, mostly students, took to the streets in protest across all regions of Poland. As a pretext to monitor and control queer organisations and in a strategic attempt to discredit the public protests, Giertych defended himself by claiming that it is the “left wing and homosexual organisations that are behind the attacks!”<sup>15</sup> Fellow LPR member Wierzejski similarly commented that activists from homosexual organisations “carry out unfounded attacks on the Polish government and its Ministers practically everyday.”<sup>16</sup> It is clear that with these proclamations the politicians are harking back to the paranoia of the enemy within, frequently used against Jews.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of *nation* in Poland has a specifically communal hue that therefore supports the subordination of one’s individuality and difference to the commonalities of the larger whole. As Tomasz Kitliński writes, “Communism and post-communism are linked through a chauvinism in which not the individual but rather the nation is the subject. The nation must reproduce and therefore heterosexuality and Polonization is required” (Kitliński 2004, 275). Anything that stands out significantly is therefore seen as an internal threat. As described by Mosse, the “abnormality” simply does not fit in the concept of the nation that those from LPR seek to promote—for neither the homosexual nor the Jew.

Yet another concern for those who seek to defend Poland against internal threats is the sanctity of the traditional Polish family. A heavy importance is placed on the family as the cornerstone of Polish society, and as a symbol of the nation. Any behaviour that is seen as anti-family can also be paramount to treason, or a deliberate attempt to destroy the nation. The sanctity of the family is discussed by many Polish academics, chief among them is Magdalena Środa, professor of philosophy and former Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men. Środa herself was deeply criticized and faced dismissal from her post when she commented on domestic abuse at an international conference.

<sup>15</sup> See “Szukają przeciwników Romana Giertycha” (They’re looking for Roman Giertych’s Opponents), *Rzeczpospolita*, <[http://www.rzeczpospolita.pl/gazeta/wydanie\\_060601/kraj/kraj\\_a\\_3.html](http://www.rzeczpospolita.pl/gazeta/wydanie_060601/kraj/kraj_a_3.html)> (1 June 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Joanna Jałowiec, “Przeciwnik Giertycha to gej. A gej to pedofil” (Opponents of Giertych are Gay. And Gays are Paedophiles), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <<http://serwis.gazeta.pl/kraj/1,34308,3347500.html>> (15 May 2006).

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that Roman Giertych is not unaware of these links to anti-Semitism. He is the grandson of Jędrzej Giertych who was active during the 1930’s in the Camp of Greater Poland Party (*Obóz Wielkiej Polski*), known for its anti-Semitism and nationalism, advocating economic boycotts against Jews for example. See <[http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C4%99drzej\\_Giertych](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C4%99drzej_Giertych)> (2 July 2006).

She stated that although the Catholic Church is not directly responsible for supporting domestic abuse, there is still a partial link between them. The responses to her comments by politicians and the media were stern, claiming her suggestion that the Church was implicated at all in such a matter was absurd. She was not terribly surprised by the reaction, saying, "In Poland, the family and not the individual is seen as the centre of value. That's why we often defend the family as an inherent good at the expense of defending women."<sup>18</sup> In this situation, it mattered less if women really were abused at home and how to tackle this issue. What mattered is that another symbol, the Catholic Church, was attacked and the family structure that is supported by the Church was threatened.

The need to protect family from homosexuals is a defining feature of Polish homophobia. Very few debates on issues concerning the gay community transpire without a mention by opponent of gay rights how these rights would negatively affect the family or children of Poland. This was evident in 1995 in debates during the drafting of the Polish Constitution on Article 32 that prohibits discrimination. The original version of Article 32 paragraph 2 included sexual orientation as one of the grounds upon which one could not be discriminated. This version was effectively blocked by protests from the Catholic Church, right-wing parties and the then-President Lech Wałęsa, who defended his decision by saying that the inclusion of such verbiage "would open up the door for a threat to the family and moral upbringing of children" (Leszkowicz 2004, 104).

The mental illness that was ascribed to Jews and queers outlined above was often associated with what the majority perceived was an exhibited sexual deviance. Sexual practices were not considered a private matter in which one engaged in the privacy of one's own home. Rather they were an issue of crucial public importance as their sexuality also endangered the healthy family life and children of the Polish nation. Jews were said to manifest their mental illness by engaging in marriage and sexual practices that violate basic human sexual taboos, chief among them was incest. Gilman explains that accusing Jews of such deviance "was a result both of the level of late nineteenth century science and of the desire for categories with which to define the explicit nature of the Other" (Gilman 1985, 157).

Blaming Jews for the demise of the family however was not as straightforward since Jewish family life was often greatly admired by even antisemites. Mosse suggests that the racism of early nineteenth century

<sup>18</sup> See "Pechowa Środa" (Unlucky Środa), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <<http://szukaj.gazeta.pl/archiwum/0,51943.html>>, (10 December 2004).

Europe blamed Jews for keeping their own family in tact “yet [their culture] was directed against the family life of others” (Mosse 1985, 142). The Jews for example were said to have an uncontrollable sexual drive that prompted them to prey on gentile women and were said to “convey women to houses of ill repute” (Landua-Czajka 1989, 183).

Furthermore Jews were believed to serve as a bad example for children and the rest of society. Landua-Czajka quotes a newspaper from 1930's Poland that laments “A young woman, showing parts of her naked body in the street, hair cut short, rouged face, dancing the Charleston.” The paper claims this debased woman was “a victim of Jewish influences” (Landua-Czajka 1989, 183). Jewish influences on culture were not the only threat to Polish children. Polish myths such as Jews kidnapping Polish children in order to get their blood needed for religious ceremonies served to demonize Jews. The power and danger of such a stereotype was most vividly enacted in a pogrom in the city of Kielce. In early July 1946, a rumour (later confirmed to be false) had started amongst citizens of Kielce that Jews had kidnapped a young Christian boy to attempt a ritual slaying. Word spread rapidly and by 4 July 1946 over forty Jews were killed in the pogrom (Szaynok 2006).

Antisemites believed that the behaviours of Jews could be explained by the fact that Jews followed their own moral code based on the Torah. This ethic was said to be based on a superiority over non-Jews and in fact encouraged them to “harm and injure the ‘goy’ [non-Jew] by any means they see fit” (Landua-Czajka 1989, 177). Their attempts to destroy Christian civilisation included promotion of pornography, divorce, abortion and they were even accused of inventing birth control to destroy the Aryan race (Ostolski 2005b, 7). Homosexuals currently fill this role but rather than following an ethic of the Torah, they are said to support what Pope John Paul II coined a “civilisation of death” that permeates their actions and those of the immoral West.<sup>19</sup>

Much like how incest was intentionally used to demonize Jews for partaking in one of the most taboo of sexual acts, (coupled with their proclivity towards preying on Polish children for religious purposes), paedophilia is used to demonize the gay community. Accusations of paedophilia are used most commonly with gay males who are seen as particularly dangerous for children. With no scientific evidence of a connection between paedophilia and homosexuality, those who officially make this connection are capitalising on an irrational yet strongly held fear amongst the general population.

<sup>19</sup> See “Zatrzymajmy dewiację” (Stop Deviance), *Nasz Dziennik*, <<http://www.naszdziennik.pl/index.php?typ=my&dat=20060104&id=my11.txt>> (4 January 2006).

A recent court case brought against politicians from the ruling PiS party Przemysław Alexandrowicz and Jacek Tomczak accused the politicians of utilising hate speech by likening homosexuals to, amongst other things, paedophiles. During the court case involving the PiS politicians, fellow members of the party such as Norbert Napieraj concluded that “many homosexual activists are also involved in promoting other sexualities such as paedophilia.”<sup>20</sup> These accusations are rarely disregarded by the mainstream. The ramifications of such prevalent speech in political discourse was evidenced recently when LPR Parliamentarian Wierzejski requested that the national public prosecutor instruct regional prosecutors to investigate links between homosexual organisations and paedophilia and other criminal activities nation-wide. Prosecutors are meant to establish how these organisation are funded and if they have any links to paedophilic activities regardless of the fact that no such incident has been reported.<sup>21</sup>

Another method to counter the Jewish threat from within and keep children safe in 1930’s Poland was the exclusion of Jews from various professions including the teaching profession (Ostolski 2005a, 16–17; Landua-Czajka 1989, 174). Although discrimination based on sexual orientation at the workplace is now explicitly banned by European Union law and implemented in domestic labour code, Representative Andrzej Fedorowicz from LPR proposed an amendment to Parliament in 2003 to ban those who openly admit to their homosexuality from becoming teachers.<sup>22</sup> Although it did not make it to vote, the proposed amendment underscores the fact that these sentiments are still common amongst party members.

#### REACTIONS TO JEWISH AND QUEER ACTIVITY

It is impossible to claim that there was or is a unified and coherent position towards Jews or queers in Poland. Even amongst right-wing political discourse there are often various and contradictory stances that espouse anti-Semitism and homophobia. These divergent opinions ensure

<sup>20</sup> Michał Kopiński, “Działacz PiS: Homoseksualiści promują pedofilię” (PiS Members: Homosexuals promote paedophilia), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <<http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,53600,3401129.html>> (7 June 2006).

<sup>21</sup> See “Wierzejski kazał prokuratorom szukać pedofilów” (Wierzejski Orders Prosecutors to Find Paedophiles), <[http://www.homoseksualizm.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=115&Itemid=42](http://www.homoseksualizm.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=115&Itemid=42)> (4 December 2006).

<sup>22</sup> See “Karta moralności” (Morality Law), Polish Teacher’s Union, <[http://www.znp.edu.pl/new\\_arch/artukul.php?id=81&rok=2003&PHPSESSID=91d5d39c574ca553204568386e8e9780](http://www.znp.edu.pl/new_arch/artukul.php?id=81&rok=2003&PHPSESSID=91d5d39c574ca553204568386e8e9780)> (21 August 2003).

that both the queer and Jewish communities will find it hard to “behave properly” without encouraging criticism and discrimination from the general Polish population.<sup>23</sup>

For Jews of pre-War Poland, the conspiracy theories mentioned above were meant to bring attention to all the undercover Jews out there that people “could not see” but should fear. According to the theory, Jews were an “omnipresent foe (an internal as well as an external one), an enemy with almost unlimited possibilities of action” (Landua-Czajka 1989, 173). The danger included their invisibility. In *Poznaj Żyda (Talmud i dusza żydowska)* (Recognise the Jew—The Talmud and the Jewish Spirit) published in 1936, the anonymous author instructs readers about Jews in order to fight them more effectively. Books such as these were widely distributed and remain available to this day. The presence of this literature coupled with the lists of those who people suspected were Jews (also available now on-line) gave a clear sign that if you were hiding, there was a good chance you would be discovered sooner or later.

At the same time there was a movement among the Polish intelligentsia during the inter-war era that advocated for Jewish assimilation. This “progressive attitude” towards Jews assumed it ideal if a person’s being Jewish became irrelevant. To mention whether one was Jewish would become offensive in certain social circles (Irwin-Zarecka 1989, 285). This “kinder” approach towards Jews was also present in Church doctrine. Although rabid antisemites could be found amongst the hierarchy, the official stance included respect for the person, no matter their immoral or unhealthy behaviour. This most often translated into a call for the conversion of Jews, if not forced emigration (Ostolski 2005a, 4). Certainly, the distinction between right-wing rhetoric that sought to expose the hidden Jew as opposed to the “progressive outlook” is clear. However both discourses served to encourage many Jews to be “Jewish at home, Polish in the street.”

Queers in Poland, like in most places, have long learned their lesson that it is best to keep one’s sexuality a secret. Though the signals from society are clear that homosexuals who are overt about their identity are for the most part not welcome in the public sphere, there still are contradictory messages that serve to ensure that keeping undercover is often not sufficient to living in a safe space.

Apart from the glaring number of homosexuals who chose to stay in the closet rather than reveal their identity, the reaction from society

<sup>23</sup>The concept of stigmatisation described by the seminal works of Ervin Goffman are used here. Most specifically his theory that the stigmatised individual must act as if his burden is not significant so that those of the majority can pretend as if there was no issue of discrimination, leading to a “phantom acceptance” (see Goffman 1963, 121).

when doing the opposite simply reaffirms the message that they are not accepted (Graff 2006). This is most vividly documented both in the public and media reaction to social awareness campaigns and equality parades organised by queer organisations. In 2003, the Campaign Against Homophobia launched a photo exhibit and billboard campaign that featured 30 pairs of lesbians and gay men holding hands entitled *Let Them See Us*. The title itself harks back to the reality that queers were not willing to be invisible any more. The dominant reaction from the media, as essayist and Gender Studies lecturer Agnieszka Graff summarizes it, was: “How dare they *impose* themselves on us, how dare they make themselves so *conspicuous*” (Graff 2006, 11).

Taking to the streets is another form of public display that was an issue for Jews in years past and is currently a legal challenge for queers in Poland. Ostolski mentions how even the mere sight of a Jew in a Warsaw park was enough to offend the public in one case of 1939 (Ostolski 2005b, 16). Presently, parades of equality are often seen as unnecessarily provocative by even those who do not consider themselves to be particularly homophobic and claim not to “mind” homosexuals as long as they are invisible to them. In recent years however, marches that have been organised by queer organisations in Warsaw, Krakow and Poznań have been met with violence and often banned by government officials. Reasons for banning such events almost always include, to some extent, protecting public morality and respecting Christian values (Gruszczyńska 2004, 144).

When violence befalls either Jews or queers who chose to be visible in the face of such attitudes, a common response to both groups often involves blaming the victim. Jews were accused of bringing anti-Semitism on themselves. Landau-Czajka quotes a nationalist newspaper from 1931 in which the essayist writes that anti-Jewish movement is an outcome of “the Jewish nation itself, in its clear refusal to be assimilated” (Landau-Czajka 1989, 179). Other nationalists of the time disagreed that employing force was a solution to the Jewish question, yet disturbing public order “did indicate a basically sound defensive reaction by the Polish nation” (Landau-Czajka 1989, 188). At the same time, the Catholic Church was known to abstain from taking a strong stance against anti-Jewish violence. According to Ostolski, when requested to denounce the pogroms and killings of Jews after the Second World War in Poland, many bishops refused, using the excuse that the Church denounces all forms of violence therefore has no need to specially denounce the violence against Jews (Ostolski 2005b, 16).

Although the violence that has met the queer community during equality parades and marches in recent years has in no way reached the lev-

els of the pogroms that the Jewish community suffered, opponents of the marches have become more physically aggressive in their protests using eggs, bottles, rocks and other objects to hurl at participants.<sup>24</sup> Ania Gruszczyńska describes the events in which the mayor of Krakow, in his begrudging approval of the 2004 March for Tolerance, also gave tacit approval to the violent reaction since the homosexuals were after all “forcing acceptance from society” (Gruszczyńska 2004, 145). Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek of Krakow also defended the citizens of his city by saying that the general society also has its rights and “if you irritate someone you shouldn’t be surprised that the fault lies on both sides” (Ostolski 2005a, 5).

As it was for Jews, it is often not enough that Polish queers simply stay out of the public eye and out of the streets. The Communist Party took advantage of the leverage *outing* has by carrying out the “Hiacynth” operation in the mid-1980’s.<sup>25</sup> Under various ruses, the Party officials entered schools, universities, and places of work to find homosexuals. The victims were forced to admit in writing to their “deviance” under the threat that otherwise their orientation would be exposed to their family and co-workers (Tomasik 2006).

A throw back to this Communist-era strategy was a suggestion in 2003 by members of the centre-right party Civil Platform (Platforma Obywatelska—PO) that candidates for European Parliament disclose their sexual orientation. This, they explained, would ward off any later attempts at blackmail. Being aware of the social circumstances and what the public’s reaction would be to such a declaration of one’s homosexual orientation by a candidate makes it clear that they had other intentions, capitalising on the stigmatization that exists in Poland (Leszkowicz 2004, 102).

Discrimination of Jews in the past and of queers today can be readily documented and observed. However, the prevalence of denial and the commonly held position that there is or was no problem (or that not only are Jews and gays equal, but sometimes *more* equal and have *more* rights) contribute to the difficulties in counteracting the discriminations. Even with glaring examples such as different legal status for Jews in the 1930’s, the media at that time explained that Jews should have a separate legal system to adapt to their mentality. They argued that laws for Jews should be “neither better nor worse, but different” (Landua-Czajka 1989, 179). And, according to the majority of articles in the right-wing Polish

<sup>24</sup> Adam Easton, “Clashes Erupt at Poland Gay March,” *BBC News*, 2006, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4956604.stm>> (28 April 2006).

<sup>25</sup> *Outing* refers to the public disclosure of an individual’s sexuality.

press during 2004, Poland is not and never was anti-Semitic (Kowalski and Tulli 2003, 490).

The “separate but equal” status of queers in Poland offers a very similar comparison, with many people explaining that this situation does in fact reflect equality. Debates around same-sex partnership are filled with examples of opponents claiming that there is no real discrimination involved.<sup>26</sup> In her first international visit, the newly appointed Foreign Minister was quick to state that in Poland homosexuals are not restricted in any way, and that the legal system is “open” to them, just like any minority.<sup>27</sup> Her statement was made despite evidence of the failure to provide full legal protection to queer people.<sup>28</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can observe that the anti-Semitism of years past has not yet been eradicated completely from Poland. However, its mechanisms have been used to stigmatise and discriminate against queers as queer visibility becomes more prevalent in Poland. The rise in nationalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries served to construct the modern identities of both Jews and queers. The process involved an inherent exclusion of both social groups as they embodied the characteristics that were eschewed by those who delineated the boundaries of the nation.

The chapter offered a partial summary of the similarities between the two forms of oppression. The forms that these two discriminations take have been divided into three parts here. First we could observe the framing of both Jews and queers as ill. The implications of this categorisation means among other things, calls for physical exclusion from society, attempts at conversion or therapy and a refusal to work towards social equality for Jews and queers.

The threat to the nation that Jews and queers pose was then examined. A clear and direct connection can be seen between the theories of a “Jewish conspiracy” and a “homosexual lobby,” both of which are thought of as intentionally aimed at destroy the nation, state and fam-

<sup>26</sup> See “Dziesięć mitów prawnych gejów i lesbijek” (Ten Legal Myths of Gays and Lesbians), *Rzeczpospolita*, <<http://arch.rzeczpospolita.pl/szukaj/archiwum.pl>> (31 December 2004).

<sup>27</sup> See “Poland to Maintain Current Foreign Policy,” <<http://polandpress.eu/>> (17 May 2006).

<sup>28</sup> The Campaign Against Homophobia maintains a website which refers to the various legal issues queer people face in Poland today, such as problems related to the lack of any form of registered same-sex partnership. See <<http://www.mojeprawa.info/>>.

ily. The vital role that family plays in the Polish nation-building process means that the categorisation of Jews and queers as a destructive force and particularly harmful for children is an extremely powerful tool. This results in prohibition of Jews and queers from certain professions, overt hate speech by public officials, limits in legal protections and even violent attacks such as pogroms.

An additional hurdle that Jews and queers had to overcome and still face is the reactions to their presence and visibility in society. On one hand they are expected to remain hidden while on the other efforts are taken to disclose them. When they become victims of attacks, a common reaction is to blame them for antagonising. Despite the evidence of inequality, a further challenge is the denial of discrimination by the majority.

The historical continuum of nationalism's tendency to exclude that which is not desired has used Jews in the past as its primary recipients for discrimination. Presently queers are serving as tangible targets for similar purposes in Poland. This then is the basis for a set of common lived experiences for Jewish and queer people in Poland.

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