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## **"Harassment after harassment": Forms of Antisemitic Violence (1967–1968) in the Light of Oral Histories**

**"H**ell persists. It's different in every family." With these words, Daniel Kac, a writer, poet, and *Folks-Shtime* journalist, summarizes the experiences of Polish Jews who faced the wave of antisemitism in 1967–68 in various ways (Kac, p. 1). This article's title includes a quotation from Kac's text as well, describing the lives of those who either left Poland or chose to remain. The article aims to shed light on the many forms of violence – harassment, discrimination, stigmatization, humiliation, intimidation, and theft – that affected various aspects of Polish Jews' life, forming the collective anti-Jewish violence during the so-called "anti-Zionist campaign." This violence came not only from state authorities' representatives, officials, subordinate structures' officers, or journalists but also from ordinary citizens, who acted without coercion. The article focuses on that voluntary, spontaneous violence.

The number of oral histories, interviews, and personal accounts has been growing in recent years. They offer critical insights into the repertoire of grassroots violence. This article

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draws primarily on two collections of interviews that scholars have not yet analyzed from the perspective of antisemitic violence. One collection is available at the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, an institution primarily known for testimonies from Holocaust survivors and witnesses, gathered since the 1990s. This enormous archive of oral histories contains about one hundred interviews with Polish Jews, who, recounting their postwar experiences, devote significant attention to what they endured in 1967–1968. The second collection includes over eighty interviews that Marcin Starnawski, Anna Zawadzka, and Piotr Forecki conducted as part of the research project entitled "Jews in Poland in the Aftermath of the 1967–1968 Antisemitic Campaign: Biographic Experience, Identity Changes, and Community Dynamics." Initiated in 2021 and still ongoing, the project focuses on individuals who chose not to emigrate from Poland. Our interviews serve as a basis for this article, with excerpts presented in the anonymized format. The article also uses personal accounts from published works and historical studies only to reconstruct the main themes in the narrative about antisemitic violence in 1967–1968, which dominate in Polish historiography.

## Historical narrative patterns

In historians' monographs studying events conventionally referred to as the Polish 1968 political crisis, the anti-Zionist campaign usually appears as a separate chapter, section, or otherwise distinct part of a book. Scholars typically treat this issue as a segment within a broad agenda of events, not only in terms of composition, granting it varying degrees of significance in depictions of this particular month in Polish history. Dariusz Stola's book, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967–1968* [The Polish Anti-Zionist Campaign of 1967–1968] (Stola, 2000), is an exception and focuses entirely on the campaign. Another example is Piotr Osęka's monograph centered on the March 1968 propaganda, entitled *Syjniści, inspiratorzy, wicherzyciele. Obraz wroga w propagandzie Marca 1968* [Zionists, Instigators, Agitators: The Image of the Enemy in the Propaganda of March 1968] (Osęka, 1999). Researchers have extensively examined the antisemitic propaganda in the media, especially in the press. Not only historians but also linguists (Głowiński, 1991), literary scholars (Leociak, 2008), and even art historians (Skalska, 2007) have explored this subject. Moreover, Hans-Christian Dahlmann's thorough and well-documented book on the topic, *Antisemitismus in Polen 1968* [Antisemitism in Poland of 1968], has already been translated into Polish (Dahlmann, 2018), while Anat Plocker's monograph, *The Expulsion of Jews from Communist Poland* (Plocker, 2022), awaits translation. The list

of scholarly articles and multi-author publications where Polish historians address the 1968 political crisis in Poland proves extensive, but these works vary in the attention they devote to the antisemitic campaign. The intention here is not to review the existing literature but to highlight a tendency in Polish historiography to overshadow the antisemitic campaign, which makes its scope harder to discern amidst other events in the broader category of "Faces of March 1968." The latter phrase served as the title for proceedings of a conference that the Bureau of Public Education at the Institute of National Remembrance organized for the thirty-fifth anniversary of the March 1968 events. Among the conference papers, only one concerns exclusively antisemitism (Rokicki & Stępień, 2004). Thus, what do Polish historians examining the 1968 political crisis in Poland tell us about antisemitic violence?

According to the dominating interpretation in Polish historiography, state authorities exploited antisemitism in 1967–68. Officials used it to play political games within the party, assign blame for communist crimes and university student strikes, expose critics of Poland in the West, and identify both internal and external enemies of the state. This repeated narrative of antisemitism as an instrument in the hands of communists leads to the conclusion that the state apparatus imposed it on society. Nevertheless, such a perspective neglects a crucial question: why did the then authorities choose antisemitism as their tool? What made them assume society's susceptibility to such a campaign? Some historians, such as Dariusz Stola, have noted that this campaign drew on the prewar antisemitic tradition; however, Stola emphasized that the campaign resembled Stalinist-era campaigns more and dropped the subject (Stola, 2000, p. 148).

Following the instrumental use of antisemitism in 1967–68, historians typically focus on its institutionalized forms. They examine how state officials, journalists who served the authorities, party members, and those working in institutions such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MSW), Security Office (UB), and Citizens' Militia (MO) were involved in directing and implementing the antisemitic campaign. Identifying perpetrators and putting them on the side of the system becomes visible both in studies of the nationwide antisemitic campaign and works describing the events of March 1968 in various cities and regions of Poland. "The authorities' deliberate actions, combined with measures taken by the Security Service (SB), created a genuine emigration psychosis among Polish Jews in Lower Silesia," writes Włodzimierz Suleja, the author of *Dolnośląski Marzec '68* [March 1968 in Lower Silesia] (Suleja, 2006, p. 266). In the opening of the chapter titled "Antisemitism" in his monograph *Marzec 1968 w Krakowie* [March 1968 in Krakow], Julian Kwiek observes as follows: "Launched in the press and employed as a tool

of political struggle, the campaign against Jews manifested especially within party ranks. Antisemitic slogans and verbal attacks on individuals of Jewish origin featured prominently at party meetings, gatherings, and mass assemblies" (Kwiek, 2008, p. 323).

Books and articles detailing the March events in various Polish cities and regions often reveal a tendency to downplay, or even disregard, the issue of antisemitism. For instance, Marek Andrzejewski, the author of the monograph *Marzec 1968 w Trójmieście* [March 1968 in Tricity], argues that before the anti-Zionist campaign, most students and workers "had not even known the terms 'antisemitism' or 'Zionist,'" and the campaign's impact on the youth and other Tricity residents "should not be overestimated" (Andrzejewski, 2008, pp. 188–189). Krzysztof Lesiakowski, the author of a publication about March 1968 in Łódź, refers to the ethnic purge in local workplaces, newspaper editorial offices, universities, and party organizations merely as "personnel changes." He mentions the emigration of Łódź's Jews only in two sentences (Rokicki & Stępień, 2004, p. 182). In his monograph entitled *"Taka jest prawda i innej prawdy nie ma". Poznań i Wielkopolska w marcu 1968 roku* ["That is the Truth and There Is No Other": Poznań and Greater Poland in March 1968], Stanisław Jankowiak notes that Professor Wiktor Jassem, an outstanding phonetician at Adam Mickiewicz University, lost his job due to his support for protesting students (Jankowiak, 2008, p. 199). However, Jankowiak omits the fact that Jassem's dismissal actually resulted from his refusal to read an antisemitic proclamation to students, a "request" obviously aimed to humiliate him because of his Jewish background. One of our interviewees shared the circumstances of this dismissal (Interview No. 75).

Polish historiography primarily illustrates the 1967–68 antisemitic violence through its use by the state and its subordinate institutions. Historians concentrate on antisemitic propaganda in the media, at party rallies and workplace meetings, and in the actions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Security Service, and Citizens' Militia employees. Key examples include the surveillance of Jewish individuals, their expulsion from the party, dismissals from different jobs, military purges, and, particularly, the creation of an atmosphere of fear that led to the emigration of several thousand Polish citizens. The Gdańsk Train Station in Warsaw became the symbol of this exodus, but the violence of the anti-Zionist campaign also gained symbolic representation in figures such as the authorities' representatives (Władysław Gomułka, Mieczysław Moczar), party propagandists (Tadeusz Walichnowski), and especially active journalists (Ryszard Gontarz, Tadeusz Kur). This violence also has its own iconography, which consists of well-known photographs from rallies where banners called for action against Zionists, demanding their deportation to Siam.

Historians have generally neglected Polish society's grassroots involvement in antisemitic violence. Indeed, certain authors point to individual cases but dismiss them as incidents or excesses, failing to recognize repetitive practices. They frequently emphasize that this violence did not entail physical force, bloodshed, or threats to life, arguing that it never transformed into a pogrom because "actual pogroms consisted of the mob's acts of physical aggression against Jews." Hence, in this context, we can possibly speak of a "symbolic or verbal" pogrom (Stola, 2000, pp. 149–150). Furthermore, Polish historians usually avoid addressing the issue of the level of society's support for the antisemitic campaign unleashed in 1967–1968. They sidestep the issue, offer evasive answers, and cite the lack of reliable research or credible sources. For example, as Jerzy Eisler argues, personal testimonies do not qualify as trustworthy as they paint a "fragmentary and highly subjective" picture (Eisler, 2006, p. 127). According to Eisler, such accounts can easily demonstrate both instances of "the so-called decent people joining the campaign and human acts of solidarity and support for those brutally attacked" (Eisler, 2006, p. 127). Ultimately, in Eisler's view, it proves impossible to determine which attitudes prevailed at the time; he states: "Perhaps the dominating reaction was the lack of any engagement – a peculiar state of neutrality and waiting" (Eisler, 2006, p. 127).

Dariusz Stola faces a similar question. For him, it seems difficult to determine how many Poles showed antisemitic attitudes during that period. Stola thinks that differing opinions in this respect "usually stem from personal experiences. The more generalized they are, the greater the concerns they raise. Archival documents do not provide a basis for definitive judgments on this matter" (Stola, 2000, p. 191). However, Stola expresses a judgment of his own, stating his belief that

individuals whose attitudes could be unequivocally identified constituted a minority – whether openly supporting or, conversely, demonstrating disgust at the anti-Jewish campaign through words or actions. Nonetheless, interpreting the mainly silent society would prove difficult and risky, as does any case of making an argument from silence. (Stola, 2000, pp. 191–192)

Discussions about Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust frequently reveal the idea that *szmalcownicy* (blackmailers of Jews at the time), Poles who murdered Jews during the Shoah, and the Righteous who aided them represented minority extremes while a passive society occupied the space in between. Evidently, this typology of attitudes seems broadly applicable.

In the context of antisemitic violence in March 1968, we should also note the current of Polish revisionist historians who treat the dominant narrative about the anti-Zionist campaign as a lie or false over-interpretation. Leszek Żebrowski serves as an example. In his essay "(Po)marcowe mistyfikacje" [(Post-)March Mystifications], he explicitly states that scholars artificially gave a racial character to the then conflict between different party factions. He argues that "the March events did not have a racial dimension" (Żebrowski, 2018, p. 198). Żebrowski develops his deliberations on the basis of the thesis that in 1968, "the scale of repression against non-Jewish citizens of the Polish People's Republic far exceeded that against those accused of Jewish origins" (Żebrowski, 2018, p. 199). In this ongoing competition over who suffered more, Żebrowski claims that harassment, job dismissals, imprisonment, etc. affected ethnic Poles much more severely than Jews. He emphasizes that scholars deliberately overstate the number of March emigrants and it was a privilege to leave Poland at the time. Many Polish people dreamed of passports but could not obtain them, feeling like "second- or third-class" citizens compared to the privileged Jews (Żebrowski, 2018, p. 210). This sentiment intensified due to the "fact" that those leaving Poland included "their former persecutors: workplace supervisors, party activists, and officers of the Security Office, Citizens' Militia, Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia (ORMO), judges, and prosecutors." In other words, the so-called *żydokomuna* (Jewish communists). For Żebrowski, disposing of *żydokomuna* from Poland constitutes "a partial, flawed decommunization that proved small in terms of numbers compared to the scale of the issue" (Żebrowski, 2018, p. 208).

However, leading Polish historians researching the March of 1968 have also written about the departure of individuals responsible for abuses under the communist system as a result of the antisemitic campaign. For example, the above-quoted Jerzy Eisler stresses that

one must not forget that among those emigrating at the time were several hundred people who committed various wrongdoings and sometimes even crimes during the Stalinist period, working in the security apparatus, military intelligence, the judiciary, propaganda departments, state administration, or the party. By leaving Poland after the March events, they avoided any legal liability for their actions in the future. (Eisler, 2006, p. 131)

Elsewhere in the same book, Eisler notes that determining the exact number of these people "proves challenging, as many emigrated as academics, journalists, state officials, artists, etc." (Eisler, 2006, p. 135). Nevertheless, the narrative about the emigration of *żydokomuna*

whose faults remained unaccounted for and unpunished unites many historians and journalists in Poland. How do they know this? Who are these “several hundred people”? Has anyone counted them or precisely indicated these “wrongdoings” and “crimes”? What acts qualify as such offenses? This area lacks thorough research, though reliable sources surely exist.

Moreover, this dominant framework for describing antisemitic violence appears in comprehensive monographs regarding twentieth-century Polish history, where March 1968 emerges as one event among many, for instance, in books by Andrzej Paczkowski (Paczkowski, 2005) and Andrzej Friszke (2003). We learn significantly more about the 1967–68 antisemitic violence from the rich collection of personal accounts, memoirs, diaries, interviews, and oral histories available in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews’ resources than from historians’ works. Marcin Starnawski (2016), a sociologist, asked March 1968 emigrants about the violence they experienced; they wrote about it in the *Plotkies* online magazine, among other places. These accounts vividly convey the then prevailing atmosphere of fear, which some describe as reminiscent of a pogrom (Forecki, 2019). They demonstrate a spectrum of anti-Jewish violence beyond the domain of the state and its apparatus. As many personal accounts attest, this violence had eager followers who acted on their own, within their immediate surroundings, and under the state-sanctioned antisemitism. The antisemitic campaign that raged in Poland involved the “privatization of instruments of coercion” (Kichelewski, 2021, p. 195), which led to violence experienced in various spheres of life.

## The private sphere

In the private sphere, Polish Jews faced violence in their own homes, not only through media propaganda or Władysław Gomułka’s painful, widely broadcast speeches. A recurring form of harassment included anonymous phone calls with threats and demands to leave Poland. Joanna Wiszniewicz’s interviewees received such calls, with the following messages: “It’s high time you left for Palestine” (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 430) or “Why are you still here? Why haven’t you gone to Israel yet?” (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 468). Our interviewees from several Polish cities told us about similar phone calls as well. For example, a Dzierżoniów resident recalled: “And the worst part was the calls. They literally never stopped.” When asked what the callers told her, she remembered them saying, “Are you still here? Fuck off!” (Interview No. 3). These calls were frequent in the family home of another interviewee from Legnica. Asked to recount them, she described how one caller asked about the length of the tele-

phone cord in her house, wondering if it was long enough for her father – a well-known social activist with an unmistakably Jewish name – to hang himself (Interview No. 46). A Warsaw resident shared similar experiences:

Someone would call. Back then, we had phone books, and it was easy to pick out a name: [PF's note: she gives a Jewish name]. I guess it just landed in someone's hands [laughter]. A man called once. I was the one who answered. I don't know whose calls my sister or my mother got, I don't remember. The man asked, "Does [PF's note: name], that filthy Jew, live here?" That was one call. Another one went like this: "I know your father. He was a kapo in the camp where I was a prisoner." I also remember my cousin picking up the phone to hear: "How long will you keep eating Polish bread?" I couldn't say whether these voices belonged to young or old men. But they were men. That I clearly remember. (Interview No. 37)

Generally, such phone calls took place in the evenings or at night. The callers probably used widely available phone books to select Jewish names; they usually remained anonymous, though not always. Janina Bauman remembered that amid the various anonymous calls that she and her husband received, one caller identified himself. "Get out of Poland, you dirty Jew," her husband heard from his acquaintance (Bauman, 2011, p. 159). Anonymous letters included similar content. For instance, Helena Najberg recalls notes such as "You've eaten enough Polish bread" or "Get out to Israel" (USC Shoah Foundation). One interviewee shared a photograph of such a letter addressed to her: "Jewess, run off to Golda Meir." Furthermore, this grass-roots violence within the private sphere of Jewish homes involved antisemitic messages on doors, together with drawings of Stars of David and gallows. A door to Anna Frajlich-Zajac's apartment bore the following inscription: "The Jewish scum lives here" (Grynberg, 2018, p. 293). In the staircase of the building where Nina Himmelstein's family lived, someone wrote: "A Jewish whore, apartment 6" (Grynberg, 2018, p. 83). Our interviewee from Góra Kalwaria said that somebody had smeared feces on the gate to her family's house (Interview No. 15). Nighttime intrusions also occurred, for instance the one at the home of Maria Bina Waserman-Szumanski, where loud pounding on the door and shouts of "Open up, I'm Dayan!" woke the household (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, p. 218). In Szczecin, someone blocked the entrance to Lila Szmerkowicz-Wysiński's family's apartment with a paving stone inscribed "Get out of here." The victim noted that the neighbors, with whom the family had a very close relationship, certainly were not to blame (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 468). On the other hand, Maria Grzebyk recalled neighbors harassing and abusing her. She also received phone

calls with threats in 1968. At a Women's League meeting, a neighbor told her, "I don't like you, Mrs. Grzebyk, because you're a Jew. Go to Israel or the mine." Another neighbor bothered Maria at home after the latter shortened a speech prepared for a Women's League official event planned for March 8. Suspecting that Mrs. Grzebyk had removed fragments about Israel from the speech, the woman tried to search Grzebyk's trash for evidence. Other neighbors began to ignore Maria entirely (USC Shoah Foundation). Michał Sobelman shared a different memory of a neighbor in Łódź who had concerns about the services of a well-known Jewish photographer in the area. She asked Sobelman in the hallway, "But is it proper for a Jew to take our First Communion pictures?" She then added, "You're one of us, even though your father is an Abbie" (Sobelman, 2023, p. 38).

We can consider reactions from close acquaintances, long-time friends, and colleagues as another form of violence in the private sphere. As reflected in personal accounts, these people's words caused particularly deep pain because they were unexpected and disappointing. As Hanka Blumsztajn's university friend remarked, "They write so many bad things about Jews. There must be something to it!" (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, p. 193). Bumping into Joanna Wiszniewicz's interviewee on the street, a high school acquaintance asked, "Do you think Jews will ever leave Poland? Will there finally be a day when they all go? Will I live to see it?" (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 358). A dorm roommate informed her Jewish friend that she did not like Jews because one had taken a cow from her grandfather (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 407). A long-time friend from elementary school ended her friendship with Marta Petruszewicz through a letter, stating that while she still loved her, "times like these" made their friendship impossible (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 319). A scouting companion cut off all ties with Maja Istner and began "crossing to the other side of the street" to avoid her (Torańska, 2008, p. 243). A bridge-playing group of friends excluded Krzysztof Kofler, who visited the home where they regularly met only to hear, "We can't partner with you anymore" (Torańska, 2008, p. 345).

Similar instances of verbal abuse from close circles abound. Nonetheless, despite humiliation and discrimination, victims sometimes understood, excused, or even justified their friends or colleagues, explaining their actions with the circumstances. An event described by Daniel Passent testifies to such forbearance. It took place when Passent was working in *Polityka's* [Politics] editorial team led by Mieczysław F. Rakowski:

I also had an interesting case once. It involved the last person anyone would suspect of something like this – my boss at *Polityka*, who employed many Jews. I remember

that there was a vacancy for deputy editor-in-chief at some point. At the staff meeting, the team discussed potential candidates, including me. And then, my boss and friend said that we needed to be aware that someone without party membership and of a certain origin – I remember him using these particular words – couldn't become deputy editor-in-chief at the time. He understood this, and so did I. I thought it was normal. (USC Shoah Foundation)

Passent referred to this as an experience of the "Jewish paragraph." Yet, his friend's and supervisor's decision seemed self-evident to him. Michał Chęciński's understanding attitude can serve as another example. Chęciński's colleague told him, "Michał, keep in mind that I'll need to spit on you a little because I'm your closest colleague." Chęciński replied, "Spit, Maciek, spit, I understand. Just please keep it reasonable and don't overdo it" (Osęka, 2008, p. 256). "It hurt, but I understood" – with these words, Renia (Rivka) Slomka-Ostaszewski described her reaction to her acquaintances' firm request not to participate in a university strike. They feared that if she got detained, authorities would say that "Zionists had organized the strike" (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, p. 178). The normalization of experienced violence and justification of stigmatization and exclusion in immediate environments represent a peculiar variant of Stockholm syndrome specific to the Polish 1968 political crisis. These incidents also reveal the powerful influence of propaganda, to which Polish colleagues evidently succumbed, becoming its executors, whether they wanted it or not.

Furthermore, the wave of antisemitism that started in 1967–68 swept away the private property of thousands of Polish Jews. This is not some unsophisticated metaphor. It means that those emigrating from Poland to all corners of the world had their material possessions disposed of by coercion, abandoned, and plundered. Interviews and personal accounts demonstrate the emigration-related sacking procedures and shed light on the common appropriation of Jewish property during that period. State authorities decided what citizens could take with them abroad, effectively robbing them. In particular, customs officials voluntarily participated in these practices. For instance, they stole Jurek Hirshberg's family's light meter (Grinzweig Jacobsson, 2022, p. 75) and the Potok family's duvet and tableware (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, p. 257). They also used an axe to smash a coffee table belonging to our interviewee's friends in search of diamonds (Interview No. 34). Moreover, customs agents expected bribes in exchange for turning a blind eye to items outside the scope of the official register or limits. Emigrants sometimes discovered that

certain things were missing from their baggage only after reaching their destinations; other times, they found their possessions damaged. Someone urinated on Grażyna Jezierska's encyclopedia and carved a Star of David into its pages (Dahlmann, 2018, p. 268).

As our interviews and other sources confirm, ordinary citizens also joined in the lootings, even before emigrants closed the door behind them. In doing so, people tried to acquire – for free or at absurdly low prices – the so-called *pożydki* (goods abandoned by Jews emigrating from Poland after March 1968). A fossil word from that time, this term occasionally surfaces in interviews and refers to the "post-Jewish property" of 1968, the estate left after the antisemitic campaign. It includes different material assets, everyday items, furniture, books, instruments, paintings, and such, sold at prices dictated not by the market's invisible hand but by emigrants' sense of urgency and fear, which others eagerly exploited. As a Wrocław resident recounted that period,

We had to clear out our apartment and sell the furniture. My closest friend from the dorm wanted to buy it, but when I told him the price – and I never ask as high prices from someone I know as I do from strangers – he and his wife said that I don't have to charge them that much because "all the Jews are leaving now anyway." (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 401)

Moreover, uninvited visitors showed up in Polish Jews' apartments, viewing them in anticipation of their availability. Alicja Mounk described one such visit (Dahlmann, 2018, p. 281), and one of our interviewees shared the following story:

Suddenly, the doorbell rings. This crone walks in, like straight out of a marketplace. She rushes through the whole apartment, saying, "This much for this, that much for that." How did she even know someone had filed papers to emigrate? And right away, she was appraising everything. (Interview No. 2)

Daniel Kac, a well-informed witness to the antisemitic campaign and one of its victims, writes about the actions of those waiting for "post-Jewish" apartments:

Hell persists. It's different in every family. Some are denied permission to leave because they're in mixed marriages; parents of a daughter married to a Pole refuse to emigrate without her. Some lost their jobs, can't find new ones, and still don't get permission to leave because ten or twelve years ago, they worked in places where state secrets applied. Others received their permits but must vacate their apartments within forty-eight hours since an impatient successor with connections expedited the deadline.

If they don't move out in time, their permits will get revoked. Harassment after harassment. Officials intentionally – and artificially – congest customs checkpoints. They work only a few days, using the stress and chaos to pressure emigrants into leaving even the most necessary items behind. (Kac, pp. 1–2)

Jerzy Eisler, one of the few Polish historians to address apartment takeovers, calls this issue a "shameful thing no one talks about." He concludes that many of the thousands of vacated apartments likely went to people who played key roles in the antisemitic campaign (Eisler, 2006, p. 135). The lack of any research in this regard obscures the history of these and other material assets taken from Polish Jews, which only confirms that it is truly a shameful matter.

## The public space

Polish Jews faced anonymous acts of violence from strangers also beyond the private sphere, in various public places, such as streets, means of transport, shops, bars, and even hospitals. These acts proved spontaneous and often occurred when someone suddenly identified a person as Jewish. One of our interviewees, who was fifteen years old in 1968, remembered being struck in the face by a man whom he encountered on a Warsaw street (Interview No. 34). In Łódź, on Piotrkowska Street, a young man harassed Regina Gerszonowicz and Raja Piekarcz, yelling after them, "I thought you were pretty girls, but you're just two lousy Jewesses" (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, p. 234). Furthermore, Regina Grol recalled walking down Marszałkowska Street with her mother:

One day at the time, I was walking with my mother down Marszałkowska Street. Suddenly, I noticed unambiguous looks directed at her. In English, you'd call it a dirty look because my mother's appearance left no doubt: dark complexion with Semitic features. In the eyes of passersby, I saw contempt, resentment, and even a bit of disgust. It was so disturbing that I instinctively took my mother's arm in a sudden act of solidarity. (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 382)

Gołda Tencer also remembers the fear of walking through the streets of Łódź. She mentions an assault on his brother when he ventured beyond their neighborhood (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, pp. 160–161). "I felt very unsafe on the streets," said Paweł Glikman (USC Shoah Foundation). Violence was common in public transportation as well. One of our interviewees described a friend who "didn't have the right look" and

somebody bothered him in a tram, asking, "Are there many of you left here?" (Interview No. 4). Julian Godlewski recalled overhearing antisemitic conversations in a train compartment – conversations full of "vicious aversion toward people," which he "had to listen to" while traveling frequently between Krakow and Warsaw during the anti-Zionist campaign (USC Shoah Foundation). A Warsaw resident expressed her concerns as follows: "Getting on a tram or bus, I would wonder what I'd do if someone looked at my face and called me a Jew. What would I do if I heard I didn't belong here and got singled out as an alien element?" (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 337). Halka Rubinsztein-Dunlop shared her experience: "They threw me off the tram. I was wearing a long black coat and a scarf. Someone shoved me, saying, 'Jews won't ride trams'" (Tuszyńska et al., 2018, p. 162).

Moreover, Polish Jews faced harassment or overheard antisemitic conversations in bars and restaurants. Anatol Arciuch described a fight in one such establishment after he responded to offensive comments from a customer who said to him, "Get out to Dayan" (USC Shoah Foundation). Another interviewee told us about a confrontation in a Łódź bar caused by antisemitic remarks, such as "Fuck, these Jews, kill them all" (Interview No. 10). Władek Poznański mentioned an incident in a Wałbrzych restaurant where a drunken patron became angry after a waitress served Poznański his lunch first: "What?! So now Jews get served first in Poland?" The militia officer seated at the next table did not react, which made the situation even more painful for Poznański (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 424). Henryk Grin, who stayed in a hospital in 1968, must have felt in a similar way when he had to listen to antisemitic conversations that showed him the meaning of the slogans "Jews to Madagascar" or "Get out to Israel" (Kąkiel & Bratkowska, 2018, p. 55).

According to these quoted accounts, people in public spaces identified Jews based primarily on physical appearance. Among those experiencing yet another outbreak of antisemitism after the war and the Holocaust, phrases such as "good looks" and "bad looks" resurfaced. One interviewee told us about her friend, who had thick black hair and "three kilograms" of black eyes, who feared walking the streets of Warsaw (Interview No. 58). The parents of another interviewee's sister did not try to prevent her from emigrating from Poland because, unlike her brother, she had very bad looks. Although she could have been mistaken for a Greek, Italian, or Armenian elsewhere, "it was clear on the streets of Warsaw" and "she might have been walking with an Israeli flag as well" (Interview No. 34). In a conversation with Andrzej Romanowski, Lucyna Tychowa recalled her worst experience from the antisemitic campaign: "Do you know what was the worst moment for me in March 1968?"

It was when my son left the house, and I suddenly thought, 'Does he look more Semitic with or without his glasses?'" (Romanowski & Tychowa, 2016, p. 193). Considering the atmosphere and identification regime on the streets and in public spaces at the time, her concern seems justified. Furthermore, as Anna Artwińska writes, the antisemitic campaign retraumatized Holocaust survivors in both psychological and linguistic dimension, providing them with ready-made models that allowed them to describe the revived persecutions (Artwińska, 2015, p. 196). In other words, phrases from the war, such as "Aryan papers," "hiding," "transports," "good looks" or "bad looks," returned to common usage. In Poland, rumors circulated about new camps supposedly being established and the train departing from Warsaw to Vienna, with Polish Jews onboard, bitterly called the "Express to Treblinka."

However, the workplace served as a particularly hostile space of public harassment and discrimination in 1967–68. Historians who analyze dismissals during the March events often focus on numbers and statistics, shedding light on how many people lost their jobs and where. Nevertheless, personal accounts and oral histories give us insight into the mechanisms of this form of violence that the dismissed or demoted Jews experienced. These sources reveal not only the human tragedies hidden in the maze of numbers but also the dynamics of violence. They clearly illustrate who participated in these practices and how colleagues reacted to the suffering of their Jewish coworkers. Many joined the witch hunt, indulging in antisemitic remarks, avoiding eye contact with their friends, ignoring greetings, and creating an atmosphere of terror and entrapment. This recurring theme appears in numerous accounts. These accounts also provide details about the later fate of those who faced the ethnic purge under the "Aryan paragraph." Victims often had difficulties finding new jobs, endured a worsening financial situation, experienced a deep sense of failure, and feared for their futures. For Jews who remained in Poland, searching for employment proved especially challenging due to their background. One example includes Maria Jarosz, who unsuccessfully looked for a job at numerous workplaces (USC Shoah Foundation). Another case is Henryk Trauman, fired in 1968 and unable to find work for several years. Eventually, he secured a position in Warsaw in a cooperative that employed translators, a workplace which, according to him, consisted of "educated Jewish linguists" who struggled to find jobs as well (USC Shoah Foundation).

Numerous testimonies demonstrate a certain repetitive form of humiliation precisely in workplaces. Jewish employees endured their colleagues' casual remarks or antisemitic tirades at party organizations' meetings. Many Jews faced demands to prepare or publicly deliver

speeches, or read other coworkers' statements condemning Israel, Zionists, and Zionism. Refusing to do so, Professor Wiktor Jassem lost his position at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. In Łódź, Bernard Broclawski refused to write an article criticizing Israel's aggression, which caused him troubles. He was eventually accused of supporting and protecting anti-state actions organized by Jews. Subsequently, his employer dismissed him – a fact publicized in *Dziennik Łódzki* [Łódź Daily] (USC Shoah Foundation). Julian Godlewski found himself in a similar situation. He resisted playing the role of a Jew denouncing "his own," which resulted in various unpleasant consequences (USC Shoah Foundation). In the steelworks near Katowice, a local secretary publicly selected Edmund Potok as the ideal candidate to condemn Israel. Potok's random absence at a party meeting spared him the humiliation (USHMM). Facing dismissal after refusing to criticize Israel, Ewa Solarz decided to stand up to her employer. At a party meeting when her fate was at stake and no one defended her, she directly confronted the party organization's secretary: "Comrade, you have a sister in the Vatican. Are you responsible for the Vatican policy? No. I'm not responsible for Israel's policy, either" (USC Shoah Foundation). Her employer still fired her.

In 1967–68, public spaces of harassment, stigmatization, and discrimination involved schools, where Jewish children experienced abuse at various stages of their education. Many accounts describe insults and humiliation from peers, both in schools and on the streets. Such incidents had also taken place earlier. It remains difficult to determine whether their intensity increased significantly between 1967 and 1968, but they undeniably occurred. For example, Czesława Budyńska's children suffered such abuse. Budyńska's daughter asked why others derogatorily called her a *Żydówka* (Jewess). The mother answered, "Because you're a very pretty girl" (USC Shoah Foundation). Having been taunted with the phrase "Jews to soap," Feliks Tych's son seemed "changed" after he returned home from school (Romanowski & Tychowa, 2016, p. 193). The children of Bolesław Sieradzki endured verbal abuse and physical violence at school after their father faced a show trial in Słupsk, a three-year prison sentence, expulsion from the party at a party meeting broadcast on national radio, and false rumors of being an Israeli intelligence agent with gold bars hidden under his floor. In an interview, Sieradzki said that at the time his wife and children experienced a "greater ordeal" than he did in prison (USC Shoah Foundation).

Nevertheless, school violence during that period extended beyond insults from peers. Jewish students also faced harassment and discrimination from teachers, who joined the witch hunt out of conformism or acted on their own prejudices. An interviewee from

Wałbrzych shared the story of her Polish teacher and tutor who gave her a failing grade in 1968, which prevented her from taking her *matura* final examination. The interviewee was convinced that this decision stemmed from her Jewish background rather than her shortcomings in the subject (Interview No. 8). A Warsaw resident recounted similar problems with his Polish teacher in an interview with Joanna Wiszniewicz:

School [...] turned into an unpleasant place. My Polish teacher, who used to give me straight A's, enjoyed talking with me, and would even stroll arm-in-arm with me down the hallway, now graded my essays as C's and began interpreting literature in a strange way. When she discussed Prus's increasingly negative attitude toward Jews, it sounded as though she approved of it. When she analyzed Holoubek's acting in the televised production of Kruczkowski's *Niemcy* [The Germans], where he played the antifascist Peters, she emphasized that he "played as a Jew," as if this antifascist man was a Jew. She made it sound very disdainful. (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 342)

School discrimination also took other forms. Janina Goldhar's daughter lost her role as student council president. She had been the only family member holding any "significant position" that Jews were generally denied during the antisemitic campaign. She stopped receiving invitations to and notices about meetings overnight, even though the school principal had previously treated her as "her favorite" (USC Shoah Foundation). Maja Istner told Teresa Torańska a similar story:

I was a scout leader in the elementary school at Narbutta Street. Suddenly, the teacher and scout team's supervisor told me that I shouldn't be a scout leader because others were better suited to raise our Polish children. By "others," she clearly meant Poles. It was incredibly painful and horrible for me. (Torańska, 2008, p. 243)

Not only individual teachers harassed students. Apparently, they did so of their own free will. After all, probably no one coerced the above-mentioned Polish teachers or the tutor in a Łódź middle school to act as they did. The latter warned the classmates of Karolina Frenkiel's nephew to avoid him because "his mother was Jewish" (USC Shoah Foundation). Even school children, just like adults at party meetings, participated in assemblies where speakers condemned Israel and Zionists, forcing students to listen to these denunciations. The story of Edmund Potok's son from Katowice shows how one's background sometimes blocked access to education altogether. Administrators denied him entry to a middle school, with the principal citing an "order" as the reason. When Potok's son retook the entrance examination, the admin-

istrators failed him in literature, and the examiner justified their decision with the "order" again. Only after Potok's wife intervened with the party secretary was her son admitted to a distant middle school, which required several bus rides from home (USHMM).

Similar examples of repression against school children abound. However, modern historiography, primarily focused on university students, usually overlooks them. In general, harassed university students included protest leaders, democratic opposition activists, or iconic figures of the nationwide movement, particularly in Warsaw. Nevertheless, even ordinary students unrelated to protests or opposition experienced discrimination in the higher education system due to their background. Jewish origin also hindered access to universities entirely. "What do you expect? That your Jewish daughter will get into the university?" a father heard from a rector when he tried to intervene on his daughter's behalf (Grinzweig Jacobsson, 2022, p. 70). Janusz Tencer managed to pass written examinations for the Faculty of Law at the University of Łódź, but the oral examination questions clearly aimed to disqualify him, making it obvious that "Jews were unwelcome" (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, p. 168). In Wrocław, one of Joanna Wiszniewicz's interviewees faced rejection from the law program because of her background (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 418), as did Barbara Walusiak's daughter, who was denied admission to the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw (USS Shoah Foundation).

As this article already mentioned, during the Polish 1968 political crisis, Jewish students endured antisemitic abuse – both verbal and non-verbal – from peers at universities and dormitories. Józef Dajczgewand recalled how "a dozen guys" jumped him in a dormitory hallway, and for a moment, he felt that he was on the verge of being lynched (Mieszczanek, 1989, p. 140). At the Gdańsk University of Technology, students placed an article in a display case slandering a fellow student's father as a Zionist. Unable to cope, the student decided to emigrate (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 449). Harassment also came from academic staff. Nehemia Nisenbaum, a first-year biology student at the University of Łódź in March 1968, described how "junior staff" made it clear that he had "no place" at the university and would never make academic progress (Przybyszewska-Ortonowska & Tencer, 2019, p. 227). A former Polish studies student recounted her experience defending her master's thesis at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań as follows:

My thesis defense felt strange. The committee chairman first asked whether I was a repatriate, when I had arrived in Poland, and whether I came from the Soviet Union. That opening left me so shaken I barely managed to defend my thesis! I couldn't even hear most of their questions. I just kept wondering if they were probing my background. (Wiszniewicz, 2008, p. 458)

Many personal accounts highlight that the harassment, humiliation, and discrimination experienced in various aspects of life – together with the prevailing atmosphere of fear, terror, and entrapment – sometimes led to serious health problems and even death. Helena Najberg's husband fell into a deep depression (USC Shoah Foundation). So did Joanna Jaszuńska-Kobielska's mother, who never regained her mental balance (Kąkiel & Bratkowska, 2018, p. 89). Kazimierz Zybert spent a year in a psychiatric hospital (USC Shoah Foundation). Paweł Glikman explains the death of Professor Michał Kalecki with the trauma of the antisemitic campaign (USC Shoah Foundation). Krystyna Siwek-Wilczyńska believes that the same happened to her father (USC Shoah Foundation). Joanna Kotowicz described how her father's dismissal from work resulted in a heart attack; she said: "That heart attack marked the beginning of his end" (USC Shoah Foundation). Similarly, our interviewee's father, who "was a member of the party and believed in it," died of a heart attack when party colleagues "suddenly started to destroy him for no reason whatsoever" (Interview No. 20). Interviews conducted by Joanna Wiszniewicz and Mikołaj Grynberg and other personal accounts provide many similar stories. Yet, scholars see March 1968 as a period without casualties since no one outright murdered Jews, and the antisemitic campaign's most significant consequences included mass emigration as well as party and workplace purges. However, no one has ever precisely calculated how many people suffered from health deterioration, died of heart attacks and strokes, committed suicide, or permanently lost their mental well-being as a result of the ubiquitous antisemitic violence. If scholars had conducted such research, they might have discovered that the history of this "dry pogrom" lacked an additional chapter documenting indirect deaths and lasting injuries. Nevertheless, all Polish Jews who experienced "social death" at the time must count among the antisemitic campaign's victims (Králová, 2015). They faced stigmatization, isolation, severed social ties, exclusion from the group of citizens, and ostracism in various spheres of life. The structures of Jewish life in Poland became destroyed through yet another forced emigration in postwar history.

The accounts presented in this article demonstrate that the 1967–68 antisemitic violence infiltrated many spheres of citizens' life. Not everyone experienced it equally across these spheres, but the abuse was surely omnipresent. In fact, repressions extended even to Jewish institutions in Poland, which the article does not address: branches of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), the Jewish Theater, the Jewish Historical Institute, the editorial team of *Folks-Shtime*. The *Jidisze Szriftn* literary magazine ceased publication precisely in 1968. Some methods of violence followed predictable patterns, and others create a map of isolated incidents. While many households received anonymous antisemitic phone calls, only one interviewee

reported feces being left at her gate. Regardless, all interviewees' families endured antisemitic violence, as did the families of USC Shoah Foundation's interlocutors. The 1967–68 antisemitism functioned as more than just a tool of state power. As the testimonies quoted and Hans-Christian Dahlmann's research emphasize, representatives of various social strata voluntarily participated in the harassment (Dahlmann, 2018, pp. 276–301). They invented new forms of the state-sanctioned violence, making its effects particularly devastating for its targets. This voluntary complicity not only widened but also fortified the area of violence initiated by the state apparatus. Oral histories and personal accounts show this issue very clearly. Including them in the narrative of 1968 in Poland could challenge the dominant paradigm. After all, the closing of *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) directed by Kazimierz Dejmek remains the textbook symbol of these events. Yet, as Grzegorz Niziołek notes, compared to what Polish Jews endured during that period, the above incident represented only "a minor historical episode" (Zadara, 2021, p. 164).

## Oral Histories

### USHMM (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Oral history interview with Edmund Potok, RG Number: RG-50.030.0538.

### USC Shoah Foundation / Visual History Archive

Anatol Arciuch, date: 6 February 1997, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Joanna Sobolewska-Pyz.  
Bernard Broclawski, date: 12 November 1991, place: San Francisco, interviewer: Lois Kernan.  
Czesława Budyńska, date: 4 November 1996, place: Stockholm, interviewer: Joanna Wróblewski.  
Karolina Frenkiel, date: 30 November 1997, place: Frederiksberg, interviewer: Marek Pelc.  
Paweł Glikman, date: 6 November 1997, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Irena Garwarska-Kowalik.  
Julian Godlewski, date: 8 April 1997, place: Cracow, interviewer: Henryka Zachariasz.  
Janina Goldhar, date: 4 January 1996, place: Tel Aviv, interviewer: Miriam Thau.  
Maria Grzebyk, date: 16 November 1995, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Joanna Wiszniewicz.  
Maria Jarosz, date: 29 November 1996, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Joanna Sobolewska-Pyz.  
Joanna Kotowicz, date: 7 October 1997, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Zofia Zaks.  
Helena Najberg, date: 2 January 1996, place: Toronto, interviewer: Anna Halber.  
Daniel Passent, date: 12 February 1997, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Zofia Zaks.

Bolesław Sieradzki, date: 22 March 1997, place: Słupsk, interviewer: Joanna Sobolewska-Pyz.

Krystyna Siwek-Wilczyńska, date: 25 May 1997, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Joanna Sobolewska-Pyz.

Ewa Solarz, date: 16 March 1997, place: Stockholm, interviewer: Joanna Wróblewski.

Henryk Trauman, date: 1 August 1996, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Joanna Sobolewska-Pyz.

Barbara Walusiak, date: 13 November 1966, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Zofia Zaks.

Kazimierz Zybert, date: 11 November 1966, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Zofia Zaks.

**Interviews conducted as part of the project entitled "Jews in Poland in the aftermath of the 1967–1968 antisemitic campaign: biographic experience, identity changes and community dynamics"**

Interview No. 2, date: 10 listopada 2021, place: Warsaw, interviewers: Piotr Forecki, Anna Zawadzka.

Interview No. 3, date: 23 November 2021, place: Dzierżoniów, interviewer: Marcin Starnawski.

Interview No. 4, date: 23 November 2021, place: Warsaw, interviewers: Piotr Forecki, Anna Zawadzka.

Interview No. 8, date: 1 December 2021, place: Wałbrzych, interviewer: Piotr Forecki.

Interview No. 10, date: 8 December 2021, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Piotr Forecki.

Interview No. 15, date: 17 December 2021, place: Góra Kalwaria, interviewers: Piotr Forecki, Anna Zawadzka.

Interview No. 20, date: 2 January 2022, place: Warsaw, interviewers: Piotr Forecki, Marcin Starnawski.

Interview No. 34, date: 7 March 2022, place: Warsaw, interviewers: Piotr Forecki, Marcin Starnawski.

Interview No. 37, date: 28 April 2022, place: Warsaw, interviewer: Marcin Starnawski, Anna Zawadzka.

Interview No. 46, date: 20 July 2022, place: Legnica, interviewers: Piotr Forecki, Marcin Starnawski.

Interview No. 58, date: 25 October 2022, place: Tel Aviv, interviewers: Piotr Forecki, Marcin Starnawski.

Interview No. 75, date: 20 June 2023, place: Halifax, interviewer: Piotr Forecki.

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## **"Harassment after harassment": Forms of Antisemitic Violence (1967–1968) in the Light of Oral Histories**

This article analyzes various forms of antisemitic violence experienced by Jews in Poland during the so-called anti-Zionist campaign of 1967–1968. State-sanctioned antisemitism at the time involved violence not only from state authorities' representatives, subordinate structures' officers, and journalists but also from ordinary citizens. Violence inflicted by these citizens constitutes the reflection's central focus. Oral histories and personal accounts offer insights into the repertoire of such acts. The article draws primarily on two collections of interviews. One consists of conversations available in the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, with around one hundred interviews with Polish Jews who describe their experiences during the antisemitic campaign. The second collection includes several dozen interviews conducted as part of the National Science Center, Poland research project entitled

"Jews in Poland in the Aftermath of the 1967–1968 Antisemitic Campaign: Biographic Experience, Identity Changes, and Community Dynamics."

**Keywords:**

anti-Zionist campaign; violence; Poland; oral histories; antisemitism; persecution of Jews

## **„Szykany za szykanami”. Formy przemocy antysemitkiej (1967–1968) w świetle historii mówionych**

Tematem artykułu są różne formy przemocy antysemitkiej, której Żydzi doświadczyli w Polsce podczas tzw. kampanii antysyjonistycznej w latach 1967–1968. W ramach zalegalizowanego wówczas antysemityzmu przemocą posługiwali się nie tylko przedstawiciele władz państwowych, funkcjonariusze podległych im struktur i dziennikarze, ale także zwykli obywatele. To właśnie przemoc z ich strony stanowi główny temat rozważań, a możliwość poznania jej repertuaru dają historie mówione i literatura dokumentu osobistego. Podstawę źródłową artykułu stanowią zwłaszcza dwie kolekcje wywiadów. Są to rozmowy dostępne w USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, wśród których znajduje się około stu wywiadów z polskimi Żydami opowiadającymi również o tym, co spotkało ich podczas kampanii antysemitkiej. Drugi zbiór stanowi natomiast kilkadziesiąt wywiadów przeprowadzonych podczas realizacji grantu NCN zatytułowanego „Społeczność żydowska w Polsce w następstwie kampanii antysemitkiej lat 1967–1968. Doświadczenia biograficzne, przemiany tożsamości i dynamika środowiskowa”.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

kampania antysyjonistyczna; przemoc; Polska; historie mówione; antysemityzm; prześladowanie Żydów

**Note:**

This is a translation of the original article entitled "„Szykany za szykanami”. Formy przemocy antysemitkiej (1967–1968) w świetle historii mówionych", which was published in *Adeptus*, issue 21, 2024.

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