DOI: 10.11649/a.3348
Article No.: 3348

Adeptus
nr 21/2024 r.

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Time and Field of Vision: Beginnings of a Comparative Perspective to Anti-Zionism in 1967–1968 and 2023–2024

My research on the long-term consequences of the 1967–1968 campaign for the Jewish community in Poland coincides with the 2023–2024 campaign, referred to as "anti-Zionist" without quotation marks yet. The antisemitic nature of what we know as the 1968 Polish political crisis – a brutal, violent campaign targeting Jews – seems obvious today. We can see it clearly when looking at 1967–1968 from a distance. But was it that obvious at the time? To what extent did the crisis participants and observers recognize what they were taking part in and witnessing? I ask these questions as I watch a wave of antisemitism sweeping across much of the world following October 7, 2023 (Becker et al., 2023, 2024; The Coalition to Counter Online Antisemitism, 2024; Freedman et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2023; Rose et al., 2023). On that day, Hamas attacked Israeli civilians, raping, abusing, humiliating, torturing, and murdering them, desecrating the bodies of the dead (*Mapping the Massacres*, n.d.), and kidnapping over two hundred people. Many hostages died in captivity, and almost hundred remain in their captors' hands (*Blue Ribbons*, n.d.). As a consequence, Israeli forces marched into Hamas-controlled Gaza, the territory where the attack had started and where Hamas had hidden the captives. The Israeli war with Hamas

The article was prepared and financed as part of the National Science Centre, Poland project entitled "Jews in Poland in the aftermath of the 1967–1968 antisemitic campaign: Biographic experience, identity changes and community dynamics", reg. no.: 2020/39/D/HS3/02028.
No competing interests have been declared.
Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences.

has continued for 15 months,[1] leading to Iran's, Lebanon's, and Yemen's miliary involvement against Israel. Simultaneously, a mass anti-Israeli ideological campaign is unfolding under the banner of anti-Zionism. While the campaign has a global character, my text will focus primarily on its manifestations in Europe and North America. Like March 1968, the scope of the destruction that this contemporary "anti-Zionism" will cause will only prove evident when we consider it from a temporal distance. Only then will we be able to assess the degree to which current events result from antisemitism and, in turn, how they generate and promote antisemitic ways of thinking, perceptions, and behavioral patterns.

Observing contemporary anti-Zionism at the moment of its unprecedented intensification has broadened my understanding of the March events with two reflections. First, perhaps it was the same back then: the targets of the top-down and grassroots violence, as well as traditions that this violence drew upon, did not seem clear up close, amidst the frenzy of events, media noise, community debates, and moral outrage with multiple vectors. Second, today, I better see how antisemitism operates in practice. People do not experience it as the feeling of aversion or hatred toward Jews. On the contrary, antisemitism allows people to think that they stand on the side of justice, goodness, and moral righteousness. In "An Open Letter to Anti-Zionists from a Veteran of the Left," Kathleen Hayes writes: "I know how good it feels to take what you believe is the side of oppressed against oppressor, and to anathematise those who challenge this worthy goal" (Hayes, 2022). Eve Garrard describes antisemitism in a similar way – as something that provides various pleasures, including the pleasure of moral righteousness. Garrard calls this the "satisfaction [of] […] moral purity, especially a purity which is readily visible to others, and can count as a ticket of entry to socially and politically desirable circles" (Garrard, 2013). If it did not provide a pleasant experience in a way, antisemitism would hardly gain such popularity. After all, no one wants to see themselves as a bad person. Numerous books have attempted to examine why people in the 1930s approved of violence against Jews, participated in it, observed it passively, accepted it, condoned it, or simply ignored it. Authors have tried to decipher how such cruelty and brutality could happen, pointing to dehumanization, desensitization, or undifferentiation. However, this is not how people felt about all of it. A consensus existed, including a moral one, that such actions served the greater good, namely, the elimination of evil. In the name of justice, fairness, and moral righteousness.

[1] As I'm editing this article, a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was announced, starting on Sunday, January 19, 2025.

A toolkit

Before exploring parallels, intersections, and convergences between the anti-Zionisms of 1967–1968 and 2023–2024, I must first present a methodological disclaimer. If someone says, "But I'm not an antisemite," do their words or actions not have the antisemitic power? Let me quote Kathleen Hayes once more:

> But – you will say and believe – you don't hate Jews. You've examined your heart and it doesn't contain the slightest trace of Jew-hatred. I believe you (most of you, anyway) when you say you don't harbour conscious antipathy to Jews; but that's really not the point. Antisemitism is stitched into the fabric of our society in ways that often go undetected – at least by the person in the grip of it. […] Antisemitism does not only come from anti-Semites. (Hayes, 2022)

The contemporary nature of antisemitism requires us to approach it as we have come to understand racism – as a systemic element in the organization of societies and the global order (Melamed, 2011). As David Hirsh puts it, people prefer to see antisemitism as a matter of individual mentality rather than as a social phenomenon. Still, "Antisemitism is an objective social phenomenon because it resides not only inside our heads but also in the cultural spaces in between our heads and in the relationships between consciousness, culture and material reality" (Hirsh, 2018, p. 25). One might reject the opinion that Jews control the world or use children's blood for matzah, or even recognize such ideas as nonsense, while still relying on antisemitic categories to interpret the world. We need tools to grasp these ways of thinking.

But such tools already exist. And they are great. Before the explosion of anti-Zionist discourse following October 7, researchers had deconstructed how numerous anti-Zionist slogans, arguments, and postulates embed various antisemitic patterns. Several points seem key in this respect: (1) Holocaust inversion – the representation of Jews not as Holocaust victims but as its perpetrators (against Palestinians) (Klaff, 2014). (2) The fantasy of Jewish hegemony – the belief that Jews manipulate public opinion in favor of Israel worldwide and coerce political, financial, and military support for Israel from other nations' leaders in an organized way (Diner, 1996, 2002; Holz & Haury, 2021; Markovits, 2007; Markovits & Gerstenfeld, 2004; Postone, 2006), particularly from the United States (Mead & Rosenberg, 2022).

(3) The "Livingstone Formulation"[2] (Hirsh, 2018, pp. 11–39) – minimizing and discrediting claims regarding antisemitism by arguing that such claims aim to silence all criticism of Israel (Arnold & Taylor, 2019). (4) Presenting anti-Jewish violence as a morally justified struggle against oppression (Stögner, 2020).

Here, Natan Sharansky's "3D Test" proves helpful as a tool to distinguish non-antisemitic criticism of Israel from criticism that serves as a vehicle for antisemitism (Sharansky, 2004). The first "D" stands for delegitimization of Israel, namely the conviction that this one state has no right to exist, unlike all other states founded on national projects. The second "D" refers to demonization of Israel, vividly exemplified by modern versions of the so-called blood libel, which manifest in constant assertions that Israel "murders (Palestinian) children" and suggestions – or outright claims – that it does so deliberately. The third "D" denotes double standards. Sina Arnold and Blair Taylor mention several types of double standards, for example the double standard of salience, where no other country's injustice, abuse, or crimes receive this much attention from activists as Israel does. Another is the double standard of state foundation, where anti-Zionists seem to overlook the fact that every state represents an artificial construct, not just Israel, and that most states today emerged from violence and displacement. Arnold and Taylor also identify the double standard of self-determination, where emphasis on Palestinians' historical suffering often coincides with stubborn silence about the historical reasons for Israel's creation, such as its religious and cultural ties to the region, European persecution of Jews, and the Holocaust (Arnold & Taylor, 2019, pp. 17–20). If anti-Zionist arguments rely on any of these three "D's," they stem from antisemitic prejudice.

Three paradoxes

The toolkit for examining anti-Zionist discourse is exceptionally well-stocked, and I have little to add. Thus, I will focus on aspects where antisemitism becomes more apparent when viewed from the perspective of the former Eastern Bloc, in a state whose recent history illustrates what happens when anti-Zionism forms part of official policy.

[2] Ken Livingstone, a British politician, served as Mayor of London from 2000 to 2008. In 2016, the Labour Party, of which Livingstone was a member, suspended his membership due to his remarks comparing Zionism and Nazism. Two years later, he resigned from the party. Livingstone also supported Jeremy Corbyn in his defense against allegations of anti-semitism. The allegations were confirmed, which ultimately led to Corbyn's expulsion from the Labour Party in 2024, after he had served as party leader from 2015 to 2020. For the investigation into antisemitism in the Labour Party, see the report by the British Equality and Human Rights Commission: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/investigation-into-antisemitism-in-the-labour-party.pdf.

Progressive reactions to the October 7 events and their consequences have revealed a series of paradoxes generated by the center–periphery dynamics. In the West, such reactions usually frame Israeli–Palestinian relations in the anticolonial discourse. Like postcolonial studies, this narrativization has its local variation and sub-history in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. However, today, Polish leftist circles do not reach further but duplicate the Western discourse (Inicjatywa Pracownicza, 2023; Jerska & Wielgosz, 2022; Progressive International, 2023; "Sprzeciw pracownic_ków kultury wobec czystek etnicznych i strategii kolonialnych Izraela [LIST]", 2021; Wielgosz & Makarowicz, 2023). Motivated by the constant Eastern inferiority complex reinforced in the Cold War, these groups reproduce the anticolonial discourse of the American, British, or German left in a peculiar act of self-colonization. This complex creates an assimilationist aspiration to end the stigma of Eastern Europe perceived as something worse, more stupid, less attractive, and less relevant than Old Europe or the mythical America.

The above complex has some merit. And this is where the second paradox begins. In a truly colonial spirit, those who trace manifestations of Israeli colonialism act as though American Jews' experience – even if wrongly defined or narrated in a monolithic manner – represents Jewishness around the world. Meanwhile, the current situation of Jews in the United States does not exhaust the subject of the situation of Jews in general.[3] Racialization mechanisms differ depending on regional specificities and the local history of racism. Not all Jews live in the United States or Israel, and not everything that concerns Israel happens between Washington and Jerusalem. Going beyond thinking in imperial categories would require abandoning the assumption that Jews' lives, histories, and safety outside North America have a lesser significance.

Danny Trom said that on October 7, Israelis experienced the condition of diaspora. They once again became Jews whose safety cannot be guaranteed (Trom & Spencer, 2024). When Israel endured an attack that structurally resembled the pogroms against Jews in twentieth-century Poland, I thought mainly about the individuals whom I interviewed as part of the research project discussed in this issue of *Adeptus*. For most of them, Israel constitutes a key point of reference, even though they do not live there. They believe that it is a country like no other. They do not take pride in it. It does not provide them with a sense of

[3] Even though accurate in the United States, the claim that Jews are white (Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006; Schraub, 2019) does not match Poland where "recognizing the Jew" seems a peculiar national sport, which brought particularly rich results during the Holocaust. Until recently, people could buy the *Poznaj Żyda* [Get to Know the Jew] brochure at every kiosk (Bubel, n.d.; JS, 2001).

national identity. It serves as their safety card, allowing them to feel that if another wave of antisemitic violence occurs in Poland, they will find refuge in Israel. Finally, Israel functions as the home of their family and friends, forced to leave Poland because of antisemitism. Their beloved ones did not want to go, but the Polish state gave them no choice. Political scientists primarily reflect on how October 7, 2023 will affect Israel's fate. From a sociological perspective, an equally important question is how these dramatic events will shape Jewish communities beyond Israel and their relationship with this country. Indeed, we need to remember that Hamas's violence – its planned spectacle and the abundance of its cultural references, including to the Holocaust – breached both Israel's ontological security and the ontological security of the diaspora, in at least equal measure.

In simple terms, by using the anticolonial discourse in relation to Israel, the Western left wing discursively and ideologically colonizes Eastern European Jews, perceiving their history, present, and future as an insignificant supplement to the falsely universalized narrative of its own story. Meanwhile, the left in the former Eastern Bloc has internalized this false universalism to such an extent that, in an act of self-colonization, it repeats anticolonial clichés while underestimating the context to which it still belongs. These two paradoxes showcase a third one. Although many of those who reproduce the anticolonial tale in Poland understand this only vaguely, in the contemporary leftist narrative about Israel, Hernán Cortés-like colonizers are no one else but Jews from Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and Ukraine. People who escaped to Palestine, first, from pogroms, then, from interwar antisemitism, later, from the Holocaust, and finally, from living among the graves of their loved ones. With each year, interwar Poland became increasingly unbearable for Jews. Young ones tried to make their ways out of constant antisemitic humiliation and violence (Krzywicki, 2009; Rudnicki, 2008), managing to do so in the HeChalutz movement, among other things (Kijek, 2020; Oppenheim, 1989). However, Polish young leftists know little about the hell that interwar Poland put its national minorities through. After all, the left in Poland grew up with manuals glorifying this "golden age" abundant in cultural achievements and harmonious social relations, supported by a nostalgic tale in which "priests and rabbis walked arm in arm" (Żukowski & Janicka, 2016). Educational programs, museums, monuments, commemorations, and numerous popular science publications promote this official narrative of Poland's historical politics, which does not omit the left. Nowadays, young leftists blindly identify as patriots, believe that concepts such as "pride of being Polish" are neutral and natural, and wave Polish flags at organized demonstrations. Once typical of

leftist sensitivity, the suspiciousness toward dominant historical narratives now belongs to the past (Zawadzka, 2013, 2017, 2023, pp. 275–283) (Zawadzka, 2013, 2017, 2023, pp. 275–283).

"Jews, go back to Poland"

Ben Cohen distinguishes between "bierkeller" antisemitism and "bistro" antisemitism. While "bierkeller" refers to overt, vulgar, violent, and drastic antisemitism, "bistro" represents the antisemitism of "gentle and good people" (Mazowiecki, 1960) – a kind, refined, and cultured one (Cohen, 2014). In David Hirsh's view, contemporary antisemitism is "bistro," partly because it no longer involves manifesting force against Jews by wearing swastikas or swinging baseball bats. Today's antisemitism mainly takes the form of narratives about Jews as oppressors, which enable the identification with the oppressed (Hirsh, 2018, p. 5). Currently, the image of Jews as tormentors of the weak stems from defining them as colonizers who once brutally invaded Palestinian territory to maintain a bloody regime there even today. Analyzing anti-Zionist discourse as early as 2015, Alan Johnson stated: "that which the demonological Jew once was, demonological Israel now is: uniquely malevolent, full of blood lust, all-controlling, the hidden hand, tricksy, always acting in bad faith, the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world, uniquely deserving of punishment" (Johnson, 2015).

Before the war, the Jewish "overstepping" became a popular motif in Polish antisemitic discourse: Jews forgot that they were guests in Poland and acted as if they owned the place; they needed a reminder of who the true host was. This conviction proves evident in a prewar antisemitic caricature that presents Jews at a gate leading to Polish national symbols. In the caricature, the Jews replace the sign "Republic of Poland" with one reading "Judeopoland" (Konstantynow, 2013). Today, we hear that Jews are guests in the Middle East and they do not deserve that land. They feel at home there, but they should not. Benjamin Wexler writes about the argument that Canadian anti-Zionists make against Canadian Jews:

> References to Jews as colonists long predate Zionism. During the French Revolution, politicians and pamphleteers warned that granting Jews equality would transform Alsace into a "colonie des juifs." Lorenzo Veracini – a leading scholar of settler colonial studies – argues that "vampire stories are inherently settler colonial stories…vampires, after all, are pale and exotic beings that empty the land and are obsessed about owning it [sic]." Not coincidentally, the vampire – unholy, avaricious, immortal, atavistic, parasitic, mystical, blood-drinking, lustful, "pale and exotic" – approximates a clear set of antisemitic typologies.

> So does the common notion of Israel as a fundamentally artificial society, appropriative rather than productive, international rather than rooted, a vampire among nations.
> It is not surprising, given the instability of these categories, that some in the academy now talk about Canadian Jews as a specific class of settler. At Concordia University, pro-Palestine students chanted "colonizer!" at pro-Israel students (most born and raised in Montreal). At McGill, pro-Israel counter-demonstrators were met with the chant: "Settlers, settlers, go back home". Where is home? (Wexler, 2024)

Attributing vampire characteristics to Jews found its reflection in comparisons to bedbugs, lice, and other worms, not only in Nazi propaganda but also in prewar Polish press (Konstantynow, 2013). These comparisons depicted Jews as bloodsuckers and non-Jews as victims of Jews' insatiable appetite. In this approach, removing Jews from Poland, Germany, Europe, etc. appeared as exterminating parasites, a matter of survival, and a necessary defense against an alleged invasion.

"Jews, go back to Poland!" shouted students recently on the Columbia University campus (Howidy, 2024; Marzouk, 2024). They probably addressed Israeli Jews rather than New York Jews, though the latter heard it as well because they share the same campus. This slogan echoes Yael Bartana's trilogy entitled *And Europe Will Be Stunned*.[4] In the trilogy, Bartana envisions a fictitious history of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland. A call for Jews to return to Poland and the construction of a kibbutz in Warsaw, in a manner similar to early *ḥalutzim* settlement in Palestine, constitutes the founding act of this social initiative. The image of the past which shows two warring and disconnected groups corresponds to the image of the present. Bartana depicts Poland and Israel as symmetrical states: symmetrical in guilt, denial of that guilt, and the need for redemption. Both emerged from the harm of others: Poland – from the harm of Jews, Israel – from the harm of Palestinians. "Come back, and we and you will finally stop being the chosen nations, chosen for suffering, receiving wounds, and inflicting wounds," roars from the platform the fictitious leader of the fictitious Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland. Jews' return to Poland would offer a remedy for the sins of both nations: Poles would redeem their aversion toward Jews, and Jews would leave Palestinians alone.

Among other things, the fierce antiracism of students shouting "Jews, go back to Poland" in the name of a "free Palestine" fuels their attitudes. They firmly believe that Jews

[4] The trilogy consists of three videos: *Nightmares* (*Mary Koszmary*) (Bartana, 2007), *Wall and Tower* (*Mur i Wieża*) (Bartana, 2009), and *Assassination* (*Zamach*) (Bartana, 2011) directed by Yael Bartana.

who came from Poland to lay the foundations of the Israeli statehood embody colonial racism. Meanwhile, even superficial knowledge of Eastern European history would allow Columbia students to see that the framework of whiteness does not adequately describe Jewish refugees from Poland. During the Holocaust in Poland, survival "on the Aryan side" posed the greatest difficulty. Jews who escaped from ghettos often returned as ghettos felt safer than the outside. Not because of Germans but because of Poles who could easily recognize the so-called "bad looks." Erving Goffman notes that concealed stigmas differ from those unconcealable ones (Goffman, 2007). They generate other forms of violence, especially acts of unmasking. But is this the condition of whiteness? As Ari Shavit puts it, "We have been the ultimate other of white Europe for 1,500 years. We never knew where we'll sleep next year. We will never know what will happen to us. And then we became white Europe's ultimate victim. So we ran away from white Europe" (Shavit & Klein, 2024).

Explaining the uniqueness of antisemitism compared to other forms of racism, Karin Stögner argues that it largely consists in portraying Jews as extremely smart and intelligent (Stögner, 2020). Unlike racism against Black people or the Roma, antisemitism not only depicts Jews as more stupid, lazier, less civilized, or less capable. It also emphasizes that Jews are so cunning that they have managed to take control of the world and secretly manipulate it to their advantage. A very important feature of antisemitim stems from this inconsistency: a fantasy of Jewish hegemonic power that allows one to present antisemitic attitudes as a fight against oppression. By persistently labeling Israel as colonial headquarters of white imperialism, anti-Zionists "can present themselves as the champions of the weak against the strong, of the colonised against the supposedly imperialist colonisers, of wholly innocent Palestinian victims against bloody and heartless Jewish oppressors" (Garrard, 2013).

Three appropriations

The phrase "Holocaust of the Palestinians" provides a special example of a conviction about Jewish culpability. This conviction draws on what Lesley Klaff calls "the Holocaust inversion" that involves "an inversion of reality (the Israelis are cast as the 'new' Nazis and the Palestinians as the 'new' Jews), and an inversion of morality (the Holocaust is presented as a moral lesson for, or even a moral indictment of 'the Jews')" (Klaff, 2014). The concept of "Holocaust distortion" sometimes refers to this manipulative discursive method as well (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, n.d.).

The appropriation of the Holocaust to describe the harm of non-Jews, or even harm caused by Jews, is hardly new in Poland. In the framework of contemporary discourse in Poland, we can identify three types of such appropriations, which I will discuss shortly. I intentionally use the term "appropriation" rather than "distortion" because I have a kind of plunder in mind. A process in which this phenomenon's weight, scale, and uniqueness get captured, while its original meaning becomes irrelevant, manipulated to serve the plunderer's interests. Furthermore, the appropriation category highlights the aspect of majority–minority relations, which proves key for grasping why the Holocaust's symbolic power is at stake here. Viet Thanh Nguyen writes that the key to understanding what cultural appropriation is (and is not) and why it matters, lies not in the fact that traditions are transferred across cultures but in the social context in which this exchange is happening (Cooper, 2017; *What I hear when you say: Viewing guide: Cultural appropriation*, n.d.). George Lipsitz emphasizes that cultural appropriation happens only within an asymmetrical dominance–subordination relationship. He defines cultural appropriation as the adaptation of an element taken from a minority culture without respect for its cultural meaning or significance or with the purpose of exploiting the culture for economic or social gain (*What I hear when you say: Viewing guide: Cultural appropriation*, n.d.). In the case of the Holocaust, we must also include its symbolic exploitation. As a cultural element, the Holocaust has a paradoxical nature: it is universal because it constitutes a breakthrough moment in human history. However, it is also particular as it reflects a unique individual and collective experience of Jews – and only Jews – who faced planned and total extermination only because of their background. Precisely this uniqueness becomes the object of desire and, then, plunder. As a result, Jews are dispossessed of their experience and the categories developed to describe this experience.

I use the notion of appropriation for one more purpose: to expose another incoherence in contemporary emancipatory discourse in the West. In this discourse, the concept of cultural appropriation has been developed and stabilized several years ago. It aimed to highlight how the exploitation of ethnic, national, religious, sexual, and class minorities has both an economic and cultural character, with the latter increasingly related to material profit. Resistance against such exploitation has become a touchstone for leftist sensitivity to harm and injustice. Still, in the same leftist environments, the Holocaust's cultural appropriation not only goes unnoticed but also finds practical applications when the Holocaust serves as a set of categories to describe the situation of Palestinians.

The Holocaust's first appropriation concerns the ideology behind Polish historical politics, including school curricula, museums, monuments, commemorations, ceremonies, expert and popular science literature, cultural production, and the political programs of almost all parties. This ideology involves equating Nazism with communism (Katz, 2017; Shafir, 2002; Subotić, 2019). It constitutes a form of negationism because it develops as follows: supposedly, communists caused Poles harm no less than Nazis did with regard to Jews. This understanding is sometimes referred to as "the Polocaust" (*Wprost*, 2018), "the Holocaust of Poles" (L. Pietrzak, n.d.; Szumański, 2020), or "the forgotten Holocaust" (Lukas, 2012) to stress that the Jewish Holocaust has become common knowledge, simultaneously covering Polish suffering, which is still waiting for international recognition.

The second appropriation relates to the "Holocaustization" of the Polish war experience, practiced consistently since the 1940s. This phenomenon occurs by applying categories that describe Jews' experiences during the Holocaust to talk about Poles' experiences in the same period. Cases of appropriation, for instance phrases "the biological destruction of the Polish nation" (Turlejska, 1952) or "the biological annihilation of the nation" (Bieńkowski, 1948) and depictions of Auschwitz as a site of Polish martyrdom (Tych, 1999), aim to show Poles' harm in a way that denies the unique nature of Jews' harm. Polish and Jewish experiences differed drastically during the Second World War in Poland. Moreover, Jews' fate frequently depended on Poles at the time. Precisely because of these groups' different statuses, Poles had – and often exercised – power over Jews. Therefore, in this appropriation, concealing Polish culpability is at stake, namely Poland's participation in the Holocaust.

The third appropriation consists in describing Israel's politics as "the Holocaust of the Palestinians" (info@nop.org.pl, 2021; OKO.press, 2021a, 2021b). In Poland, both the left and far-right wings engage in this practice (info@nop.org.pl, 2021; OKO.press, 2021b). Calling Israeli abuses and war crimes "genocide" forms part of this discursive strategy (Jędral, 2023; J. Pietrzak, 2023; Polański, 2023). On August 8, 2024, Elżbieta Magenheim photographed graffiti on a Warsaw overpass reading: "Srebrenica, Bucha, Gaza" (Magenheim, 2024). Slogans such as "Stop the Gaza genocide" and "Stop genocide" abound at manifestations organized across Poland against the Israeli military intervention in Gaza (Solidarnie z Palestyną, 2024b, 2024d, 2024e; Viva Palestyna, 2024b, 2024c). There, we can also see banners that equal Israel with the Third Reich and Israel's current prime minister with Hitler (Solidarnie z Palestyną, 2024c). The website of a Polish organization, Viva Palestyna, greets its visitors with the following text: "Gaza: The Second Auschwitz" (Viva Palestyna, n.d.). On June 4, 2024, during

a pro-Palestinian demonstration at the gate of the University of Warsaw, protesters held a "Gaza is a ghetto" banner (Solidarnie z Palestyną, 2024a). The location provides context for this slogan: during the war, over 500,000 Jews were imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto, of which only a handful survived.

The adoption of the Holocaust discourse to describe the Middle East events functions as a global phenomenon. However, depending on the region, stakes of this appropriation vary. In Poland, the so-called Palestinian cause becomes instrumentalized in a local conflict: pro-Palestinian discourse serves as a handy tool in competitive victimhood. All three appropriations of the Holocaust draw on a compulsive and unmet need to recognize Poles as victims – at least equal to Jewish victims – and to draw the same attention. The third appropriation, "the Holocaust of the Palestinians," ties to antisemitic prejudice regarding a specific Jewish nature in a special way: the nature of dominators who present themselves as victims to morally blackmail others. This belief leads to, for example, the persecutory stereotype of *żydokomuna* ("Jewish Bolshevism") whose influence remains strong in Poland. Palestine is to prove that we can finally see past events differently: that Jews are not necessarily victims, that they are in fact perpetrators, as they were in the communist period, causing Poles harm.

Choruses

> To justify Israeli ruling circles' aggressive politics and their serving imperialism, Zionist propaganda attempts to convince global public opinion that Israel fights for its survival. […] Whereas Zionists accuse those who criticize Israel's hostile policies of antisemitism. […] Zionists agitate anyone they can to settle in Israel, simultaneously inciting nationalism and religious fanaticism among the rest of the Jewish communities dispersed worldwide and obligating them to offer comprehensive help to Israel. […] The help that Zionist instigators call for is in fact the help for Israeli expansionism supported by imperialist forces. (J. U., 1968)

The above quotation reads like an excerpt from one of today's appeals in which intellectuals and activists around the world denounce Israel ("Declaration of Conscience and Concern of Global Intellectuals on Gaza Genocide," 2024; "List otwarty do rektora UJ w sprawie Palestyny," 2024; Global Health Activist Groups, 2024; Palestine Solidarity Groups, 2024; *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, 2023; Hill & Orakwue, 2023). However, it is actually

a fragment of a Polish newspaper article dated March 15, 1968. Right after the Six-Day War, Poland launched an antisemitic campaign under the banner of "anti-Zionism," with universities as places where this narrative could flourish in a particularly spectacular way. In 1968, several Jewish professors lost their jobs, Jews were removed from student lists, and universities did not admit candidates of Jewish origin. In 2024, at campuses witnessing those events, students began protests and occupations with anti-Zionist flags. Their banners and posters demanded the annihilation of the state of Israel ("From the river to the sea") (Ambasada Państwa Palestyny w Warszawie, 2024), glorified Islamist groups' anti-Jewish violence ("IntifadUJ" [Call for an intifada at the Jagiellonian University], "Academic intifada" (Akademia dla Palestyny, 2024; Pitala, 2024), and referred to the antisemitic cliché of Jewish money ("The rector counts his cash while children are murdered") (Radical Focus – Activist Photography, 2024). In Poland, this stereotype becomes evident in numerous images of the "Jew with a coin," widely available in Polish souvenir kiosks (Lehrer, 2014). The protesting students required that university rectors publicly condemn Israel, end any cooperation with Israeli institutions, and join the BDS movement[5] (UW z Palestyną, 2024). I was struck by the fact that students from the University of Warsaw, the Jagiellonian University, and the University of Wrocław united on a Facebook page "Akademia dla Palestyny" [Academic Community for Palestine], where they posted denunciatory posts and appeals, disclosing the names of Israeli organizations with which their universities collaborated. As if there was some dark secret behind these collaborations. A conspiracy in need of investigation: one where Israel uses Polish universities and obligates their rectors to remain silent, while students demand that the rectors refuse to obey Israel.

Mistrust of Jews, together with various rationalizations for it, form a substantial part of the antisemitic tradition. The Jew who speaks in a way that neither lies nor tells the truth remains a recurring figure in antisemitic jokes: he maneuvers, schemes, manipulates, and deviously chooses his words. The Polish language contains slang expressions for scamming, skimping, that derive from the word *Żyd* (Jew): *ożydzić*, *żydzić*. Contemporary anti-Zionism benefits from this cultural resource. The fact that students do not know the history of antisemitism does not mean that the history of antisemitism fails to speak through them. Right after October 7, 2023 people claimed that Israelis exaggerated the harm they suffered, that they were overreacting or, at best, expressing their collective post-Holocaust neurosis. Judith

[5] Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions is a social and political movement that calls for the academic, cultural, and economic boycott of Israel, among other things (*BDS Movement*, n.d.).

Butler questioned reports of sexual violence against Israeli women and girls (Illouz, 2024). Western feminists have frequently analyzed how women's reports of rape are downplayed and belittled; however, they responded to accounts of rapes on Jewish women with far-reaching skepticism, mistrust, and demands for "evidence" (Nelson, 2024; Horowitz, 2023). Empathy or basic imagination does not include Israel because, as a Jewish state, it remains surrounded by distrust. Antisemitic stereotypes frame Israelis as a manipulative nation. Whether intentionally or not, anti-Zionists adopt these stereotypes, and that is why it is so easy for them to foster distrust of Israel.

In 1968, besides universities, the then ruling Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza) became a site of particularly brutal antisemitism. At both the central and local levels, Jewish party members underwent interrogations. Jews were forced to self-criticize and denounce Israel at party meetings. Party committees meticulously analyzed Jewish comrades' past, finding proof of pro-Zionist tendencies and disloyalty to the party and socialism. The authorities expelled Jews from the party, demoted them, or removed them from important positions. This practice often affected distinguished communist activists who had started their activities before the war, when these were illegal in Poland (H. Grynberg, 2018; M. Grynberg, 2018; Leszczyński, 1996; Nalewajko-Kulikov, 2009; Naszkowska, 2019; Smolar, 2021; Wiszniewicz, 2008). After October 7, 2023, Razem, a left-wing party represented in the Polish parliament, took an unequivocally pro-Palestinian position. A statement issued by Razem on October 30, 2023 reads as follows:

> The terrorist attack of October 7 did not take place in a political void. *Israel has occupied Palestinian territories for fifty-six years* [original emphasis]. The state adopts a policy of apartheid, denying Palestinians fundamental rights, carrying out mass displacements, and performing daily acts of violence, which have intensified in the last year, in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. (Partia Razem, 2023)

When South Africa brought a genocide charge against Israel before the International Court of Justice, Razem called on the Polish government to support South Africa in this case (Partia Razem, 2024). When Anna Maria Żukowska, a leftist coalition MP, showed solidarity with Hamas's victims, outraged voters released the following statement requesting that New Left (Nowa Lewica) submit a motion against Żukowska to the Party Court:

> We demand Anna Maria Żukowska's removal from the Nowa Lewica party because we consider other measures too mild. […] We know that this measure is the ultimate

> and the strictest one, but for us, it seems adequate for the actions of Mrs. Żukowska, who shows no reflection despite numerous warnings from her own electorate and goes on further to justify genocide against the Palestinian civilian population.

More than seven thousand people have signed the statement so far (Od-Nowa Lewicy Akcja Elektoratu, 2024).

Credibility test

It might seem that David Hirsh's "Livingstone Formulation" is a relatively new manipulation tactic: anti-Zionists claim that accusations of antisemitism are made in bad faith to silence critics of Israel. Sina Arnold and Blair Taylor call this discursive maneuver "derailing."

> Instead of discussing antisemitism, activists often immediately redirect to its cynical use to justify Israeli policy and silence its critics. In [our] research interviews with left activists, conversations were repeatedly redirected from discussing antisemitism to accusations of antisemitism, and its alleged abuse. (Arnold, 2015) […] If conversations about Islamophobia were repeatedly redirected to talk only about the problem of Islamist terrorism, this would be rightly denounced as derailing a discussion of racism. (Arnold & Taylor, 2019, p. 13)

In Poland, this argument was already in use in 1968, only twenty years after the Holocaust and postwar pogroms. "Those who criticize Israel's aggressive politics face Zionists' defamatory accusations of antisemitism," writes the author of the March press article quoted above. Already then, Jews could not articulate their experiences of antisemitism. Such articulations were diagnosed as either cynical victim-playing or an emotional disorder. The diagnosis constituted a form of paternalistic violence: this person has experienced trauma, so they deserve our sympathy, but we cannot trust their view of the situation. Already at the beginning of the 1960s, Jewish writers who described Polish antisemitism in their works faced similar treatment (Zawadzka, 2018). The Holocaust became a tool for silencing Jews and depriving their voices of legitimacy. Also today, the Holocaust serves as an argument against Jews: the demonic figure of cynicism and manipulation has replaced the paternalistic figure of trauma. According to David Hirsh,

> The *Livingstone Formulation* does not simply accuse people who raise the issue of antisemitism of being wrong; it accuses them of being wrong on purpose […] – not

> an honest mistake, but a secret, common plan to try to de-legitimize criticism [of Israel] by means of the instrumental use of a charge of antisemitism. (Hirsh, 2018, pp. 28–29)

By providing numerous examples of British politicians adopting the "Livingstone Formula," Hirsh notes that its use generates the "idea that raising the issue of antisemitism is a dirtier trick than antisemitism" (Hirsh, 2018, p. 27).

The "Livingstone Formulation" saw its local version in Poland. In her text titled "Instrumentalizacja Zagłady i antypalestyński rasizm" [The Instrumentalization of the Holocaust and Anti-Palestinian Racism], Monika Bobako opposes the "constant labeling of those who criticize Israeli government actions as antisemitic." Still, she gives no examples (Bobako, 2024). Subsequently, Bobako proposes to treat Holocaust and antisemitism researchers' attitude toward the so-called Palestinian question as a touchstone for their credibility and academic integrity. Bobako does not specify the attitude necessary to pass this test, but the article suggests that it should at least involve the following aspects: (1) recognizing Israel as a criminal state; (2) rejecting the IHRA's definition of antisemitism; and (3) joining the BDS movement. Bobako does not define the test's upper limits. What if someone uses and approves of the phrase "from the river to the sea," whose implementation would lead to Israel's annihilation? What if they call Israeli actions in Gaza "genocide," equating Zionism with Nazism and enforcing the perception of Israel as a state similar to the Third Reich? Would they be discredited as a reliable researcher in Bobako's view? The text provides no answer, as Bobako calls for testing only those who do not criticize Israel's instrumentalization of the Holocaust. Bobako fails to mention the same instrumentalization within the pro-Palestinian movement, for example by the abovementioned appropriation of the Holocaust. Meanwhile, according to Bobako, the lack of anti-Zionist declarations among Holocaust researchers undermines the "cognitive, ethical, and political coherence of research on antisemitism." In other words, is someone is not an anti-Zionist, we should consider their research on Polish antisemitism and Poles' involvement in the Holocaust illegitimate. In Bobako's opinion, recognizing Jews' harm – whether historical or the one suffered on October 7 – does not serve as any test, neither for antisemitism researchers nor for critics of Israel.

In Bobako's text, the motif of a test takes on another dimension. The starting point for her considerations is Pankaj Mishra's article entitled "The Shoah After Gaza" (Mishra, 2024). Following Mishra's argument in an uncritical fashion, Bobako writes: "nowadays, Israel no longer functions as a depositary of the Holocaust's moral legacy. Instead, those who express

solidarity with Palestinians and demand justice and equal rights for them are guardians of the Holocaust's universalist potential." Bobako's article ends with the following conclusion:

> the war in Gaza represents a certain test for the intellectual, ethical, and political credibility of Polish research and discussions about the Holocaust and antisemitism. Without facing the "Palestinian question" in a reliable manner and realizing the tragedy of Palestinians, including its current version, the normative deposit in Holocaust and antisemitism studies will prove difficult to sustain. (Bobako, 2024)

Thus, "the Holocaust's legacy" and "the normative deposit" in Holocaust studies become a kind of trophy that one must fight for and earn. Bobako's test serves as a touchstone for whether one has fought hard enough for it. This construct constitutes a variation on an older one: that the Holocaust was a lesson in humanitarianism, also, or perhaps especially, for Jews, whose actions toward Palestinians prove that they have not learned it. That they have failed – as if history, which they experienced with extraordinary brutality, uniquely obligated them to do something and required something from them, while the world watched to see if they would comply with this requirement. In "The Holocaust as Moral Instruction? Holocaust Survival and Memory in Zionism and Anti-Zionism," Daniel Randall references slogans from recent anti-Zionist demonstrations, for example "My grandparents didn't survive the Holocaust for Israel to commit genocide in Gaza" (Randall, 2023). Randall comments on them as follows:

> Their Holocaust-survivor grandparents, the placard-makers seem to tell us, survived for some higher moral purpose – unlike, presumably, Zionist Holocaust survivors who failed to sublimate their own experiences of genocide, and whose survival can therefore be seen as in some sense "wasted" on them. Would the placard-makers have perhaps preferred for the Allied armies, on liberating the Nazi death camps, to have said to the Jewish inmates: "We'll allow you to leave as long as you promise neither you nor any of your descendants will ever do anything oppressive"? (Randall, 2023)

In Bobako's text, Jews' moral obligation stemming from the Holocaust – if this was done to them, they must now prove that they, as the best people in the world, really did not deserve it – transforms into Holocaust researchers' obligation. Bobako writes: "However, acknowledging these studies' social and historical significance also has another side: the expectation that they meet the highest standards of cognitive fairness and moral perceptiveness" (Bobako, 2024). As Stéphane Bou puts it, "to accuse Israel of

using the Holocaust for ideological purposes is also to use the memory of the Holocaust for ideological purposes" (Bou & Bruttmann, 2024). Ideologically, Bobako aims to force antisemitism researchers to denounce Israel, just like Jews were forced to do so in 1968.

Conclusion

Like other cultural phenomena, particularly those with a long history, contemporary antisemitism does not – and will probably not – consist of new elements only. Self-referentially, literally or subversively, in a more or less conscious way, it refers to its past embodiments, relies on quotations, mixes old and current elements, and thus generates new content. It will repeat its own history as a tragedy, farce, and caricature. Due to Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023, antisemitic variations created by time have recently formed a legible sequence: 1967–1968 and 2023–2024. Listening to the noise of events, as well as reports and comments regarding them, we can hear the choruses that the history sings to itself. They allow us to see antisemitism as a cultural pattern that operates thanks to a dialectical entanglement of continuity and change. To some extent, antisemitism resembles capitalism: its long and persistent existence owes much to the unique plasticity, flexibility, and agility of its structure, which adjusts to various circumstances like fluid in a container.

Therefore, what are the intense moments, such as 1968 or 2023, in the context of the above cultural pattern? They serve as a certain provoked or seized opportunity. They give majority groups the chance to once again foretell the story about themselves, especially parts that constantly require validation, as there are too many testimonies to their fictitious nature. Like 1967–1968, the years 2023–2024 see a dramatic intensification of emotional investment, both individual and collective, in the so-called Jewish question, or, more precisely, in the representation of Jews as oppressors. Where does this engagement come from? The situation's temperature reflects the stake's temperature. Essentially, my thesis proves banal: it is about feeling relief, shedding the historical weight of responsibility for antisemitism and its consequences, and having the right to antisemitism while maintaining a positive opinion of oneself. From this perspective, antisemitism becomes a moral choice again, which legitimizes violence against Jews in the past and at present, and, above all, the symbolic violence of historical politics. Recognizing Jews as perpetrators supports the thesis that Jews "exaggerate" the Holocaust: they play the victim to hide their own culpability. If they are doing it today, they were probably doing it back then as well. As Eve Garrard puts it, "It's very hard for

Europe to forgive the Jews for the Holocaust, and seeing Jews as hateful makes life easier – people needn't worry about whether they're treating Jews quite fairly if they believe them to be lying, bloodthirsty and oppressive" (Garrard, 2013).

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Time and Field of Vision: Beginnings of a Comparative Perspective to Anti-Zionism in 1967–1968 and 2023–2024

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israeli civilians. Since then, a campaign against Israel has been sweeping through much of the world. The campaign's discursive leitmotifs – anti-Zionism, anticolonialism, and anti-imperialism – make Poland's 1967–1968 antisemitic campaign with similar slogans an adequate comparative context. How does knowledge of the so-called 1968 Polish political crisis help understand the current tensions surrounding Israel? What social mechanisms and dynamics of antisemitism does this comparison demonstrate? Where does individuals' and communities' huge emotional investment in representing Jews as perpetrators stem from?

Keywords:

antisemitism; anti-Zionism; October 7, 2023; March 1968

Czas i pole widzenia. Antysyjonizm 1967–1968 i 2023–2024: początki perspektywy porównawczej

7 października 2023 roku Hamas bezprecedensowo zaatakował izraelskich cywili. Od tego czasu przez niemal cały świat przetacza się kampania przeciwko Izraelowi. Ze względu na dyskursywne motywy przewodnie tej kampanii – antysyjonizm, antykolonializm, antyimperializm – adekwatny kontekst porównawczy dla niej stanowi polska kampania antysemicka z lat 1967–1968, która przebiegała pod analogicznymi hasłami. W jaki sposób wiedza o tzw. Marcu pomaga zrozumieć aktualne napięcie wokół Izraela? Jakie mechanizmy społeczne i jaką dynamikę antysemityzmu unaocznia takie porównanie? Z czego wynika tak ogromna inwestycja emocjonalna jednostek i wspólnot w budowanie obrazu Żydów jako sprawców?

Słowa kluczowe:

antysemityzm; antysyjonizm; 7 października 2023; Marzec 1968

Note:
This is a translation of the original article entitled “Czas i pole widzenia. Antysyjonizm 1967–1968 i 2023–2024: początki perspektywy porównawczej”, which was published in *Adeptus*, issue 21, 2024.

Citation:
Zawadzka, A. (2024). Time and field of vision: Beginnings of a comparative perspective to anti-Zionism in 1967–1968 and 2023–2024 (Grupa Mowa, Trans.). *Adeptus*, *2024*(21), Article 3348. https://doi.org/10.11649/a.3348

Publication History:
Received: 2024-08-19; Accepted: 2024-10-07; Published: 2025-03-31