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## Europeans in-Between

Klein, Lars ; Tamcke, Martin

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# **Young Jews from the Old Continent. Europe as a catalyst for identity reconciliation amongst Polish-Jewish youth**

*Daniel Barrio Ferro*

## **1 Introduction**

Permanent Jewish settlement in Europe dates back to the first century of the Common Era, when Roman legions crushed the rebellion in the old kingdom of Judea, destroying their temple and making survivors flee from their ancestral lands. Over the course of two millennia, members of that original Diaspora settled all along the Old Continent, reaching a population of circa 9 million by the first quarter of the 20th century.

Historically, however, the Jewish people have always lived in the margins of mainstream European society. Moreover, the atrocious anti-Semitic policies enforced during the course of the Second World War almost succeeded in wiping out their presence. Yet despite all the pain and destruction, the Jewish presence miraculously survived: at the closing of the last century there were approximately 1.5 million Jews in Europe, with the largest communities living in France and the United Kingdom.

The extremely complex and multilayered Jewish experience in Europe has proved a very fertile ground for the field of identity studies. My aim in this paper is to examine a particular community within today's plural and democratic Europe. I will analyse in which ways Jewish, Polish and European identities interact and influence each other amongst the young members of Jewish organizations in Poland, paying close attention to the nature, extent and effect of their identification with

today's Europe. Could the way in which they construct their relation to Europe say something about Europe's role as a cultural and civilizational idea within our contemporary socio-cultural paradigm?

## 2 The Wandering Jew becomes liquid

There has never been a simple answer to the question "Who is a Jew?" and "What does it mean to be a Jew?", to the extent that some argue that it is that very questioning in itself which unites the Jewish world.<sup>1</sup> Far from unilineal, Jewish identity is "more akin to a multiplexed phenomenon moving in a variety of historical as well as structural directions. To discuss the Jewish condition is to examine religiosity, nationality and culture all at once as well as one at a time."<sup>2</sup> Religion is considered more and more to be something belonging to the individual sphere, something private and in that way not necessarily connected with social identity. As such, it has been displaced by an emphasis on Jewish culture or ethnicity. Also, the external history of social and political emancipation of the Jews in Europe had the important consequence that "outsider definitions of Jewish identity came to be accepted by many Jews as part of their own system of self-definition."<sup>3</sup>

This was the logic behind the movements towards assimilation which greatly diminished the impact of the national elements —at least outside of the Zionist circles or amongst today's Israeli nationals. Some Jews thought that by concentrating on the cultural-ethnic aspect, they would be able both to join the general society, and "resolve in a new way the old conflict between universalist and particularist orientations of their heritage."<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that the pre-modern understanding of the Jewish people as a national group received its final blow after David Ben Gurion's query in 1958 to the "Jewish sages in Israel and abroad" regarding the registration of the "religion" and "nationhood" of Jewish children of mixed marriages in which the mother was not Jewish. The multiplicity of answers received offered no doubt that consensus in such identification was not possible anymore.<sup>5</sup>

Jewish tradition invented the concept of the Diaspora, yet it seems to have ignored the new developments in the concept, which today refers to the "processes of multi-locationality across geographical cultural and psychic boundaries."<sup>6</sup> American Jews, for example, continue to think of their own condition as unique and exceptional and therefore incompatible with other Diasporas, such as those created

<sup>1</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, *Explorations in Jewish Historical Experience. The Civilizational Dimension* (Lieden: Brill, 2004), 275.

<sup>2</sup> Irving Louis Horowitz, "Minimalism or Maximalism: Jewish Survival at the Millennium," in *Jewish Survival: The Identity problem at the close of the twentieth century*, ed. Ernest Krausz and Gitta Tulea (London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, *Explorations in Jewish Historical Experience*, 271.

<sup>5</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, *Jewish Identities. Fifty Intellectuals answer Ben Gurion* (Lieden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 191.

by the waves of migration which accompanied the decolonization processes.<sup>7</sup> If, as Tölölyan says, “Diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment,”<sup>8</sup> perhaps it would not be such a wild guess to assume that they would also prove fertile in the study of transculturality.

## 2.1 The sandals of Hermes

In his 1999 paper Wolfgang Welsch defines transculturality in negative terms, as a concept that covers those aspects that the existing conceptualizations of single culture, interculturality and multiculturalism are failing to address. He argues that the general characterization of cultures today is hybridization: “For every culture, all other cultures have tendentially come to be inner-content or satellites. [...] Henceforward there is no longer anything absolutely foreign. Everything is within reach. Accordingly, there is no longer anything exclusively ‘own’ either.” Thus transculturality represents a compromise between universalist and particularist trends. The concept is “not one of isolation and of conflict, but one of entanglement, intermixing and commonness. It promotes not separation, but exchange and interaction.” Diaspora communities, and amongst them the Jewish community, would certainly give insights into this new cultural conceptualization.

In 2004 Yuri Slezkine made the bold statement that “the Modern Age is the Jewish Age.” He indicated how “some of the oldest Jewish specialities [...] have become the most fundamental of all modern pursuits.” He introduced the concept of the “Mercurian” as epitome of modernity, a term he located “on the antipodes” of Nietzsche’s dialectics between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Identifying Jewishness with Hermes/Mercury, the classical god of commerce and information exchange, he integrated modernity’s breach with the past within the idea of a distinct “Jewish contribution to civilization.” As Zygmunt Bauman noted, “by accident of history, it so happened that the Jewish experience had a special significance for understanding the logic of modern culture.” According to Slezkine, modernity was simply everybody else catching up. The sort of suspended situation which became more or less universal within modernity, in which “nothing is given; everything must be made,” was not unknown to the European Jews facing the choice between the discourses of assimilation, Socialism, Zionism, religion, or secularism.

Today we are being told that we have indeed gone beyond, entering what Bauman calls the liquid modernity or postmodern paradigm. The concept of transculturality was tailored to address this reality in which “all communities are postulated; projects rather than realities, something that comes after, not before the individual choice.”

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<sup>7</sup>Sandra Lustig, and Ian Levenson, eds., *Turning the Kaleidoscope. Perspectives on European Jewry* (New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 63.

<sup>8</sup>Khachig Tölölyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others: In lieu of a Preface,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1 (1991), 4.

## 2.1 The Jews of the new Europe

According to Daria Pinto, “to speak of the new Jewish Europe is to speak about a future-oriented concept based on European and Jewish belonging [...] in a continent defined by democratic pluralism.” Now, if Jewish identity is multiplexed, the same could be said about European identity. Being European has an intrinsically ambivalent component, as one actively belongs to the wider construct of “Europe”, yet the concept itself always stands for something more than particular identifications such as nationality, language or folklore, thus including at the same time “We and the Other.” In fact, some authors see in the idea of a cultural unity in Europe something that is “both socially naïve and politically dangerous.” As Michael Wintle argues, “there is no single European civilization or culture, but there are shared experiences.” Drawing on this shared ambivalence, Hannah Arendt concluded that “the position and functions of the Jewish people in Europe predestined them to become ‘good Europeans’ par excellence.” Even before the formulation of the European ideal, the Jewish people “were European, something that could be said of no other group.”

Integral to Pinto’s optimistic observations about European Jewry is her concept of the Jewish space. This is both a physical and a cultural space. On the one hand we find the physical heritage present within Europe, in the form of museums, synagogues, cemeteries, and Jewish quarters. On the other hand, it comprises arts festivals, cultural events, publications, conferences and study programs devoted to Judaism and Jewry. It is a diverse and growing sphere of interest in which the vast majority of its actors are not Jewish nor do they have a direct personal connection with the Jewish community themselves. Just from the demographical point of view, it is clear that the Jewish space cannot belong exclusively to the Jewish people. Yet the reality of non-Jews performing within that space and participating in a very real revival of interest in Jewish life also poses important questions on the motivation of these “Virtual Jews.” Any discussion on the interplay of European and Jewish identities will necessarily have to make reference to the Jewish space.

## 3 Today’s Polin

Polin was the name given in Yiddish to most of the lands that today belong to Poland. Traditional Jewish folklore states that the name originally meant “Here I stay”, reportedly referring to the relative peace and security that Jewish people found in those lands, in contrast with the general wave of expulsions that they suffered throughout history in other parts of the continent. Centuries of coexistence made the figure of the Jew a fixture of Polish folklore, while the Jews considered themselves to be Polish subjects. These assimilationists felt Polish in the way that they had been born and bred there, but there was also a deeper shared cultural heritage. As poet Julian Tuwim said in 1944, “I am a Pole, because that’s how I like it.” [Jestem Polakiem, bo mi się tak podoba.]

### 3.1 World's greatest cemetery

Yet while Tuwim asserted his deep identification with Polish society, the twentieth century had already unravelled the horrors that in the eyes of several of the survivors would make Jews and Poles “the two saddest nations on earth.” But whereas Poland survived, the impression about its Jewish population is rather one of finality. The widespread opinion among Jews is that Poland is “the world's largest Jewish graveyard.” Polish Jewry tends to be envisioned as that branch of American Jewry who had its origins both in pre-war and post-war emigration from Poland. Only scarcely it is portrayed part of Poland's multicultural, multiethnic heritage.

It is not difficult to imagine some of the reasons why this is so. Poland was indeed the main scenario of the Shoah, and several cases of post war anti-Semitic violence (particularly the 1946 pogrom in Kielce) made some Jewish people affirm that anti-Semitism was an inherent feature of Polish identity. By telling their children that “the Poles were worse than the Germans,” they were in fact erasing centuries of common history.

### 3.2 Generation 68

Yet some of the surviving Jewish population in Poland decided to stay in their country of origin. Overall numbers are difficult to calculate, but taking as an example the records kept by the Jewish community of Wrocław, Lower Silesia, in 1948 the region had a Jewish population of 100 000. After 1968, that number had decreased to a mere 400.

In March 1968, in the aftermath of the 1967 Israeli-Arab war, the communist government unleashed a campaign of purges aimed at cleansing Polish society of upsetting “Zionist” elements. The streets of Warsaw were taken by workers and students bearing billboards reading “Syjoniści do Syjamu” [Zionists to Siam]. Both Jewish people and people of Jewish ancestry, particularly members of the intelligentsia, were forced to leave their jobs and pushed to abandon the country. Many of those expelled were assimilated Jews, Party members even. Already during the Soviet occupation, assimilated Jews had been accused by populist sectors of being Communist agents trying to infiltrate Polish national society.

But again, not all Jewish people left Poland in 1968. If they weren't already fully assimilated, the tiny number of remaining Jews understood that assuming one's Jewish identity meant exposing oneself to hostility and rejection.

### 3.3 Twenty years of Jewish renaissance

How many Jews are there in Poland today, then? Two generations have passed since the events of 1968, and the answer depends to a great degree on who is asking whom. Only 1231 people reported their ethnicity as Jewish in the 2003 Polish

census, a number which contrasts with the approximately 8,000 members of different Jewish religious congregations and the estimated 25,000-30,000 members of cultural associations. Moreover, the number of people of Jewish origin in Poland has been estimated to be at least half a million.<sup>9</sup>

However small, these numbers have only become possible after the general aperture of Polish society following 1989, thanks to the sustained efforts of individuals of both Jewish and gentile origin who struggled to preserve Jewish presence in Poland. The seventies had seen the creation of the Underground Warsaw Jewish Flying University,<sup>10</sup> through which the sons of Holocaust survivors tried to explore the traditions that their parents rejected. One of its leaders, Konstanty Gebert, was committed to his vision of “rescuing Atlantis”<sup>11</sup>, despite being confronted by survivors of the Warsaw ghetto uprising who considered his self-made and often contradictory Jewishness as “a fraud, a literary fiction.”<sup>12</sup>

In Krakow, a group of non-Jews started a Festival of Jewish Culture in 1988 around the historic Jewish quarter of Kazimierz. It would grow to become the biggest Jewish Culture event in Europe, drawing over 15 000 persons in recent editions.<sup>13</sup> Kazimierz became the quintessential Jewish space, a real, living phenomenon, even though not “authentically Jewish” according to traditional definitions of “Jews,” “Jewish,” or “Judaism.”<sup>14</sup> This growing interest and acceptance also meant that young Poles began to learn from their grandparents that they had hitherto unknown Jewish origins, and started to investigate those roots.

A major turning point came in 2008, when His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales fixed a *mezuzah* — a box containing a fragment of the *torah* which traditionally marks and protects Jewish dwellings — to the door of the newly built Jewish Community Centre in Kazimierz. Touched by the stories of the Holocaust survivors he had met during an official visit to Krakow some years ago, Prince Charles set out to procure funding for a project that started from his personal initiative.<sup>15</sup> The leader of the JCC, Jonathan Ornstein, has stated both his interest in showing that Jewish life in Krakow can be colourful and inclusive, but also his preoccupation with strengthening the community:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Shana Penn, *The Fall of the Wall and the Rebirth of Jewish Life in Poland: 1989–2009* (San Francisco: Taube Foundation for Jewish life and Culture, 2010), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Konstanty Gebert, “Jewish Identities in Poland: New, Old, and Imaginary,” 164.

<sup>11</sup> Konstanty Gebert, “Ratownicy Atlantydy,” *Midrasz* 15/16 (1998), 17-22.

<sup>12</sup> Konstanty Gebert, “Jewish Identities in Poland: New, Old, and Imaginary,” 165.

<sup>13</sup> Shana Penn, *The Fall of the Wall and the Rebirth of Jewish Life in Poland: 1989–2009* (San Francisco: Taube Foundation for Jewish life and Culture, 2010), 63.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Ellen Gruber, “Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 99, no.4 (2009), 429.

<sup>15</sup> BBC News, “Prince opens Krakow Jewish Centre,” *BBC News UK*, 29 April 2008 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/7372522.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7372522.stm) (accessed 30 November 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Ornstein, “Why Kraków?” Speech presented at the 2010 TEDx conference in Warsaw, 3 May 2010 <http://tedxwarsaw.com/past-events/tedxwarsaw-2010/speakers2010/jonathan-ornstein/> (accessed 7 May 2011).

You have some fake Jewish-style restaurants, and I would love those to be restaurants run by Jews, to be kosher restaurants and actually be realistic. I think that's a way off, [but] we're moving in that direction. These days in Poland the fact that you can call a restaurant a Jewish restaurant and that brings people in, is in itself a positive thing.

#### 4 Looking for the star of David under the Polish eagle

The object of my study, that which would be “separated from common knowledge and subjective perceptions by the procedures of analysis,”<sup>17</sup> was already selected. Given the complex and highly nuanced subject matter, I decided to settle for a qualitative analysis in which I would endeavour to extract theory from data. In order to do so, I set myself to collect data from two main sources, participant observation and a series of personal interviews with members of the community established around Krakow’s Jewish Community Centre. Once the data was collected, I contrasted it with the reviewed literature and the interpretative framework of symbolic interactionism as applied to the study of identity, and thus proceeded to extract my conclusions.

The backbone of the Jewish community in Poland is the *Związek Gmin Wyznaniowych Żydowskich*, literally “Union of Jewish Religious Communities.” The association was established in 1993 and has branches in several major Polish cities, with particularly strong communities in Warsaw, Wrocław, Łódź and Krakow. The community in Krakow, being orthodox, has strict restrictions not only on who is considered a member, but also on who is considered a Jew. The median age of the *gmina*’s members in 2000 was 70 years old.<sup>18</sup> These particular numbers have not changed much in the last ten years, despite the involvement of Rabbi Boaz Pash in the preparation of several formal conversions.<sup>19</sup>

Since I did not want to limit my study to the members of any particular religious denomination, I turned to the place that since its opening in 2008 has become the main hub of Jewish life in Krakow, the Jewish Community Centre on 24 Miodowa street.<sup>20</sup> As stated on their webpage, the JCC was designed as an open meeting place for the whole Jewish community in Krakow, and it is the only Jewish institution in Krakow that includes a youth organization: the JCC Student Club. Although there is a National Organization of Jewish Youth in Poland (*ŻOOM - Żydowska Ogólnopolska Organizacja Młodzieżowa*, taking after the earlier PUSŻ or *Polska Unia Studentów Żydowskich*),<sup>21</sup> it is based in Warsaw, and during the time of

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'Entretien Compréhensif* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 19.

<sup>18</sup> Edyta Gawron, “To, co ocalone... Żydowski Kraków - Dawniej i obecnie,” *Alma Mater* 109 (2008), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Shana Penn, *The Fall of the Wall and the Rebirth of Jewish Life in Poland: 1989–2009* (San Francisco: Taube Foundation for Jewish life and Culture, 2010), 24.

<sup>20</sup> www.jcckrakow.pl (accessed 10 May 2011).

<sup>21</sup> www.zoom.edu.pl (accessed 10 May 2011).



my research they had only started to make contacts with the community in Krakow.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the JCC Student Club collaborated in many of its activities with the cultural organization Czulent, created in the mid 1990's as a forum for third-generation post-war Polish Jews in Krakow.<sup>23</sup> It was clear then where I should go to collect my data.

The first tool of data collection that I employed was a classic example of participant observation: during four months, from November 2010 to February 2011 I attended services at the Remuh synagogue, joined the community in their Shabbat dinners held at the JCC and took part in the candle lighting during their Hanukkah celebrations. Since the JCC acts as a hub for all aspects of Jewish life in Kraków, I could also benefit from lectures given by Rabbis Pash and Segal, and film screenings organized both by the Jewish Community Centre and the Czulent student group.

Throughout the course of those activities, I organized a series of interviews with some of the members. I decided to conduct my research on members of the JCC Student Club, and only those that identified themselves as Jewish. This was a really important decision, since taking any other criteria in consideration apart from self-identification (such as the precepts from the *halakhab* or Jewish law) would not possibly contain the diversity inherent in contemporary Polish Jewish life.

My sample was a random group of eight persons of both sexes, with ages ranging from 20 to 28 years. One of my methodological concerns was reaching each individual personally, rather than relying on the recommendation of a leader of the organization that could in that way influence and bias the results. The interviews ranged from 38 to 54 minutes of duration, and were both recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes.

Since my analytical approach was qualitative rather than quantitative, I settled for conducted semi-structured interviews, following in the works of French sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann. Contrary to the formalized and limited set of questions of a structured interview, a semi-structured interview contemplates the inclusion of new questions during the actual interview, brought up as a consequence of what the interviewee says. Even though it still works within the framework of a series of pre-determined themes, a semi-structured interview allows for a relation between interviewer and interviewee that is closer to that of a normal conversation (*entretien*), therefore allowing the interpretation of information such as emotional and empathic nuances.<sup>24</sup>

Elaborating my research questionnaire, I was influenced by Sheldon Stryker's structural version of Harold Blumer's symbolic interactionism framework, as ap-

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<sup>22</sup> Shana Penn, *The Fall of the Wall and the Rebirth of Jewish Life in Poland: 1989–2009* (San Francisco: Taube Foundation for Jewish life and Culture, 2010), 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Also [www.czulent.home.pl](http://www.czulent.home.pl) (accessed 10 May 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'Entretien Compréhensif* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 77.

plied to the study of identity by P.J. Burke and J.E. Stets. For these authors social actions are based on the meaning that those actions have to the social actors, and these meanings can be derived from their social interaction. The concept of identity itself is defined as an “internalized positional designation for each of the different positions or roles the person holds in the society.”<sup>25</sup>

I was interested in exploring the *personal* and *social* identities of my sample group, in order to see the relation between their Jewish, Polish and European identities. I wanted not only to test how they considered themselves as represented by any of these identities, but also to explore in which ways their ways of giving meaning to their identities related to each other. As for measures, I focused on *Salience* (the likelihood of an identity being invoked across situations), *Prominence* (how important is that identity to the self) and *Commitment* (the cost associated with not playing out an identity).<sup>26</sup> I wanted to see to what extent they identified as European, Polish and Jewish, keeping in mind that those labels did not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive. In order to do so, I decided to ask about their activities within their community, their relations towards other communities, and their opinions on a series of topics that could involve their identities, such as voting in the European parliamentary elections, contacting Jewish organizations abroad or the organization of Jewish activities by non-Jews.

## 5 What I found

The names of the eight interviewees were Maria, Alicja, Agata, Daniela, Mateusz B., Mateusz Z., Piotr and Marcin. As stated, all of them were members of the JCC Student Club. Their answers to the first of the questions of the interview were very similar in all cases. All of them first defined themselves as “young Poles,” with the exception of Piotr, who from the very beginning introduced himself as “a Jew.” This is telling, because he and Maria were the only members of the group who considered themselves as observant religious Jews. Later in the interview, Piotr showed his worries that to date there was only one Kosher shop in Krakow, attended by the Chabad-Lubovitch group. Maria expressed regret that the district of Kazimierz, which she considered to be “our ghetto... in a positive sense, that is, our place” could not provide the community with *eruv*, a special religious delimitation of private and public space by means of special cords, which enables orthodox Jews to enforce the Talmudic prohibition of carrying objects in public spaces during the Shabbat by effectively extending their private space.<sup>27</sup> The rest of the group admitted to be non-believers, but with the exception of Alicja all of them regularly attended the Shabbat dinner offered at the JCC. Mateusz Z., who happened to be Halakhally Jewish, having a Jewish mother, admitted that he sometimes attended

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<sup>25</sup> P.J. Burke and J.E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (New York: Verso, 2009), 25.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-230.

<sup>27</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism*, 398.

synagogue services to ensure that the necessary *minyan* (quorum of ten men)<sup>28</sup> was achieved. These answers were enough to conclude that what it means to be a Jew in Poland goes far beyond the ideas of a Jewish person living in Poland, or a Polish citizen of the Jewish faith. However, it cannot be said that any of those identities were prominent. Polishness seems to be an important part of the Polish-Jewish ethnic identity.<sup>29</sup>

With the exception of Maria and Mateusz Z., the interviewees had become aware of their Jewish roots during their teenage years, being informed either by their parents (Mateusz B., Alicja) or by their grandparents. The process of exploration that ensued eventually led them first to Czulent and then to the JCC student group. Again, with the exception of Alicja, all of the interviewees were originally from Krakow. Born and bred in Poznań, Alicja had moved to Krakow just after the opening of the JCC “to be closer to the community.” Maria explicitly considered Kazimierz “our place,” and both Mateusz B. and Z. stated that they had refused offers to relocate to other places for the sake of keeping ties with their group. For example, Mateusz Z. was the only interviewee that had considered migration to Israel, but he had eventually declined. This strong identification, however, did not translate into a widespread identity salience.

Maria criticised herself and her peers, stating that their activities did not go beyond a particular sphere of action, stating that they were “afraid of going to another bar to see if the same beer tasted the same”. Of all the male members only Mateusz Z. donned the kippa or Jewish skullcap outside of the JCC or other Jewish premises. Nevertheless, their identity salience was strong enough for Agata, Piotr and Mateusz B. to have decided to pursue Jewish studies at the Jagiellonian University.

With regards to ties to other Jewish groups, all of the interviewees had travelled to Israel on at least one occasion, and in the case of Maria, Agata and Mateusz B they had also visited the U.S. to stay with Jewish relatives. As said, all of them had returned to Krakow. Interestingly, the interviewees were aware of activities being carried out by the Jewish community in other parts of Poland, but only Mateusz Z., Maria and Alicja admitted having real contact with them. In the case of Mateusz B. and Agata, they stated that they did not need to go to other communities, as they already had what they needed in Krakow. Interestingly, they were also the two interviewees who admitted not performing “Jewish things” in their private spaces (such as lighting Hanukkah candles or celebrating other festivals at home). Nevertheless, all of the interviewees participated in the Jewish Culture Festival and showed interested in the history and traditions of Krakow’s Jewry.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>29</sup> Michal Bilewicz, and Adrian Wójcik, “Does Identification predict Community involvement? Exploring consequences of Social Identification among the Jewish minority in Poland” in *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 20 (2009), 72.

From these insights, the majority of the interviewees fitted the concept that Marius Gudonis<sup>30</sup> has called a symbolic or cultural Jewish identity in the context of Polish Jewry. These would be those individuals for whom Jewish identity is a goal in itself, and for whom any activity that results in a feeling of Jewishness is acceptable no matter how minimal. However, their interest in all things Jewish, especially Jewish history, language, and traditions, seemed to coincided with a dimension that Marcin Starnawski calls “Rooted” Jewishness [*Żydowskość “zakorzeniona”*], which he contrasts with a “Cosmopolitan” Jewishness [*Żydowskość “kosmopolityczna”*] where the members of the community consider themselves in relation to their contacts with other countries and with other Jewish communities, seeing themselves as members of an inclusive and not spatially-bound community.

Despite their “rootedness”, there were indications that “cosmopolitanism” was also present in the interviewees. Albeit not participating in their actions, they were aware of activities carried out by other Jews in Poland, even though they could not specifically point at the institutions. Apart from Marcin, all of the interviewees had spent some time living abroad, and most of them had tried to contact the Jewish communities there. In the case of Mateusz Z., it was “the first thing” he did when reaching a new place.

When faced with questions regarding Europe, the interviewees generally resorted to their Polish identity. None of the interviewees had ever voted in the European parliamentary elections, and they contrasted the situation “here in Poland” with other countries in Europe. Asked about European culture, all of them stated that there were definitely common cultural traits throughout Europe. Mateusz B. pointed at high culture elements, and Alicja mentioned work ethics and democratic values. Mateusz Z. included a Jewish element in European culture even before a question about it was raised, considering the works of Dutch Sephardic philosopher Baruch Spinoza as an essential fragment of European culture. Asked whether they saw a connection between European and Jewish culture, all interviewees answered positively, generally pointing out the idea of “Judeo-Christian values.”

Europe surfaced again when dealing with questions that explicitly addressed the relation between Polishness and Jewishness. Asked about the question stated in one of the posters hung at the walls of the JCC, “Is it possible to be Polish and Jewish at the same time?”, not only did the interviewees answer positively, but they also referred to Europe as a factor in helping them reach that conclusion. Maria repeatedly mentioned that “things are better now ... maybe because of Europe.” Alicja, Mateusz B and Mateusz Z also referred to the wider European context when dealing with that issue: seeing how other communities were flourishing in other parts of the continent, and considering that they also belonged to Europe

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<sup>30</sup> Marius Gudonis, “Particularizing the Universal: New Polish Jewish Identities and a New Framework of Analysis,” in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*, ed. Zvi Gitelman, Barry Kosmin and András Kovács (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2002), 243-262.

(even though their activities remained rooted in the local) helped them reconcile both sides.

## 6 Concluding Thoughts

In its May 2011 issue the Polish magazine for women *Pani* included a four-page feature on young and successful Polish Jews. Michal Piróg is one of them. A dancer by training, Mr. Piróg is one of the most recognisable gay celebrities in Poland, having co-hosted several Polish reality shows. He confesses how the discovery of his mother's family Jewish roots at age 19 did not come as a shock to him, as he "already considered himself European, a citizen of the world."<sup>31</sup> This may well increasingly become the trend for third-generation post-war Polish Jews.

The young Polish Jews featured in this study imagine themselves as Europeans and this allows them to reach a compromise between their Jewish and Polish identities. Each of the interviewees roots his compromise in his specialized context and caters for his particular needs within contemporary pluralist society.<sup>32</sup> The existence of a more inclusive European identity re-contextualizes the old tensions between Polishness and Jewinshness and actually overrides them. If people can successfully be Jewish in other parts of Europe, why wouldn't Polish Jews do just as well? This European identity serves as well to bring new light to the particularities of their history, and enables them to fully function in the society in new ways, acknowledging their origins but not necessarily considering them as integral or determinative. Rather, it is seen as yet another element of who they are.

What do these insights tell us about the role of Europe as a space of transcultural existence? As we have seen, the concept of Europe has proven to be useful for young Polish Jews wishing to balance and play out their seemingly contradictory identities. Despite "emancipated" characters as Michal Piróg, young Polish Jews that are committed to their communities or associations still function on the paradigm of Polish-Jewish polarity. Thus, the reflexions on European integration serve the purpose of adding yet more arguments in favour of their transcultural status. In the particular case of young Polish Jews, it is the conceptualization of Europe as an open and pluralistic space what makes positive-integrative transculturality possible.

<sup>31</sup> Monika Gluska-Bagan, "Między nami," *Pani*, May 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Marius Gudonis, "Particularizing the Universal: New Polish Jewish Identities and a New Framework of Analysis," 259.

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