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Jewish elites on the eve of the Great War (1914–1918). Some remarks on continuity and change, contexts and dilemmas. An assessment of the war and its consequences

Introduction

Just as any nation/society, the Jewish nation has always valued and respected its elites¹ – political, religious, cultural, artistic, intellectual and that in power. Elite serves not just as a distinguishing mark or a bond in a nation/society/community. It is also a component and, at the same time, a proof/sign of identity and awareness. It is the elite that may create the conditions for the shaping of attitudes and conduct influence the strategies for choice or behaviour or, eventually, be a signpost and, simultaneously, a paradigm for diverse groups or milieus. The elite is an instructor and often

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¹ The authors do not delve deep into the term itself treating it in the same way as sociologists, historians and intellectuals and apply the definition that can be found in encyclopaedias and lexicons: elite in this interpretation is a category of people who occupy higher or the highest positions in the social hierarchy. This means that usually elites may, to some extent, influence society, have an impact on it or shape its attitudes and in this way influence, e.g., the authorities and those who are in opposition to them. The authors do not get involved into the dispute between sociologists on whether elite may be defined as a social group. They are rather inclined to consider as an elite the group of people who are educated and considered important in various fields and areas of everyday as well as festive and religious life, and who, as early as in the 18th century, were referred to as the 'good of special quality' in appreciation of their status and influence [see: Sztumski 1987: 57; Burton, Gunther, Higley 1995: 18; Sokół, Żmigrodzki 2002: 455; Sztumski 2003: 9].

becomes an integrating factor due to the shaping of awareness and identity, e.g. in case of a threat. It may contribute to the strengthening of internal bonds and, through this, the consolidation of society's ability to defend itself against external or internal threats. Unfortunately, because of various reasons and motives, the elite or its part may sometimes condone what is universally considered evil (Bolshevism, Stalinism, fascism, Nazism, etc.). This, however, is not the dominant or typical characteristic of the elite as a whole.

Being an elite member may be a difficult challenge and, at the same time, a mission with an aim to integrate, educate or evaluate the community and point out to its mistakes and errors. This is why elites provide guidance in the many phases of the processes of self-determination, awareness and survival as well as existence as a nation/society.

This text is a reflection on the Jewish elites of the late 19th and the turn of the 20th century not just in the historical perspective the other [Sieradzan 2007: 10–16], the Wondering Jew [Gathmann, Paul 2009: 106], important as it is, but above all from the perspective of two crucial consequences of that era: the interwar period and, first and foremost, the Holocaust. Here, a reference is made to the French Annales School and its concept of *longue durée* – continuity and change [more in: Braudel 1999; Kula 2000] as developed by Braudel.

At the same time, a broader general reflection is offered. The period under scrutiny is the turn of the 20th century and the interwar period in Europe along with its components, such as fascism, Nazism, the Nuremberg Laws and Bolshevism/communism, including the aspect of the 'Jewish communist conspiracy', or totalitarianism in a broader sense. But above all, it is the Holocaust, the greatest destruction in the history of Jews which took place as a product and consequence of an international policy of superpowers. This perception of the historical process is a result of the authors' belief that, from the perspective of continuity and change, the interwar period is the last moment of 'fullness and versatility' of the Jewish community while the Holocaust would destroy three generations of Jews interrupting continuity in many places and, through this, the possibility of change. Reconstruction will be traumatically difficult, abundant in drama, despair or even tragedies. It will also involve growing hatred towards perpetrators as well as those who were indifferent to the suffering of the Jewish nation. Additionally, there will be a tragedy of memory and post-memory – the memory passed on to the next generations. Memory and post-memory are treated here, to some extent, in a uniform way where post-memory is the memory passed on in a different way and using different methods, both from the organized perspective (education) and the individual one – family memory, micro memory, etc. Politics of memory, which is often analysed interchangeably with historical memory, is a separate concept. The latter is treated as propaganda that has nothing to do with science or solid and verified knowledge of the subject [Chrobaczyński 2015: 13].

The category of elites is analysed considering two time frames – present and future. Special attention is given to the earlier period defined by the turning point of the year 1918. The authors would like to emphasise the processes of adaptation, assimilation and adjustment taking into consideration the context of changes that

occurred in the second half of the 19th century with regard to the nation state, nationalism, racism and Semitism/antisemitism as compared to the Enlightenment and its political, social and cultural consequences. The research problem is perceived from the perspective of continuity and change in the historical process. Its consequence, in the authors' opinion, was the power of life and survival during the Holocaust, not its absence, which is often underlined in relevant literature or memoirs and reports, e.g. 'Jews went to their death like sheep to the slaughter', or by the early-Israeli hiding of the tragedy of the Holocaust. The thesis of the 'Holocaust' power of survival, whose sources are sought in, above all, the history of Jews and Jewishness in the 19th and 20th centuries, is the major point of reference here. It also means that the sources of this awareness and identity, this power/imperative must have been anchored in the period preceding the Holocaust. The Holocaust just reinforced and 'turned into practice' this internal Jewish imperative of life and survival despite its tragic consequences. One of the most recent proofs that make it possible to view the internal Jewish social process in this way, through the dramatic experiences of life and death, might be two excellent volumes published by the research team headed by Professor Barbara Engelking [see: Engelking, Grabowski 2018; Tokarska-Bakir 2018].

In the authors' opinion, the connector, along with national or religious (Judaism) links – the language, culture, identity and awareness – was Jewish elites. Shaped at the turn of the 20th century and the early interwar period, they played an important role in internal Jewish history. These generations are singled out here as they lived in the interwar period and then during the Holocaust, which, consequently, deprived them of the greatest value – their lives. These elites, often diverse and even conflicted, were present in various spheres of activity there and then, including the space of national identity. An additional and equally important element, which is seen as a distinguishing feature, was the absence of the Jewish state. Obviously, the situation was different than in partitioned 19th-century Poland but from the internal Jewish perspective it was complex and significant at the same time. The state provides the law and empowers its people, defends the community (a nation), shapes citizenship, determines affiliation and provides security. The state is also a guarantor of territorial independence as it has borders that should be guarded and defended. Therefore, it is emphasised here that the Jewish diaspora had no state not only as a form of society's political organisation (the sphere of political thought) but also as a guarantor of the values provided by the state in an emotional sense. This absence of the Jewish state naturally polarised the diaspora because the emphasis was on the adjustment to the functioning in various state organisms. Assimilation that occurred was a result of the policy of nation states formation in the late 19th and early 20th century. As there was no Jewish state during the Holocaust, Jews could only count, to a greater or lesser extent, on the states in which they worked and lived. Antisemitism, which was dominant in many of them, did not offer safety during the most difficult period, i.e. the Holocaust. The antisemitism of the earlier period, 'reinforced' with the Nazi factor and, to some extent, the cliché of Jewish communism (hostility) undoubtedly emboldened the occupying forces and polarised the attitudes among members of the occupied nations, also towards Jews and Jewishness (Judaism). It was an important

component in the process of the consolidation of the hostility and hatred towards Jews, Jewishness and Judaism. It was conducive to the Holocaust.

Statistically, the most important component of these processes and phenomena in the interwar period in Europe, visible and acute for the Jewish community, was Poland with the largest community of Jews living in Europe. Pursuant to the premise adopted for this context of the analysis, both the state and the overwhelming majority of Polish society, including the Catholic Church [more in: Leociak 2018], did not speak up for/defend Jews in the interwar period regardless of the fact that Jews remained, in the legal sense, citizens of the Polish state, equal to those of Polish nationality.

This equality was theoretical only. In fact, it was inequality whose consequence/result was exclusion or hostility. For the majority of Jews, Poland remained the country in which Jews could function/live/exist. Emotionally, however, they felt alien or as if they were guests.² Interwar Poland was a country in which both the structures of the state, the Church and the majority of its members, which made a significant proportion of citizens, actively supported antisemitism and the persecution of Jews, including numerous and often brutal pogroms, *numerous clausus, numerus nullus*, etc. This is why Jewish elites had to and did play, as much as they could and were able to, the key role of the aforementioned signpost and the nation-building and state-building factor. Obviously, they represented a variety of approaches and views. Nevertheless, the average Jew would value the opinion of a representative of religious, political or cultural Jewish elites. It may thus be accepted that, to some extent, Jewish elites replaced the state for the diaspora in the most difficult period of the Jewish history. After the Holocaust, this ersatz of the state and statehood represented by Jewish elites undeniably became one of the fundamental factors contributing to the creation and development of the state of Israel in May 1948.

The erudite point of reference for this analysis is the state of research – which is extensive and controversial – as well as primary sources – memoirs, reports, journals and journalism [more in: Hen 1991; Jagodzińska 2008; Chrobaczyńska-Plucińska 2011, 2015; Gold 2011; Cała 2012; Celnikier 2014; Domagalska 2015]. As the authors claim that Poland occupied a special place for the Jewish diaspora (after the USA, the second country in the world in terms of Jewish settlement) on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War (the Holocaust), the analysis is primarily based on Polish literature and includes some fundamental works written in foreign (i.e. not Polish) languages.

Jewish Elites role on European Civilisation

The starting point proposed in this article is the Age of Enlightenment, in which, similarly to prior periods, Jewish as well as European elites played an important role. The Enlightenment – next to the earlier period of Renaissance – serves not just as

² The issue has been covered in numerous positions of the relevant literature on the subject and, above all, in many Jewish memoirs and accounts. Also, see the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute – Jewish accounts and memories.

a turning point in European culture but also places emphasis on continuity. The bourgeoisie was taking over power, both politically and systemically, pushing the aristocracy and gentry aside. This can be seen not only from the perspective of rationalism, empiricism, sensualism, encyclopaedists, but above all as a consequence of changes occurring in science, culture, mentality and identity. An important causative factor, next to the turning point of the year 1789, is the Napoleonic Wars. It was Napoléon Bonaparte who, along with the drums of war, brought the ideas of the French Revolution to Europe. Their perception and acceptance differed from country to country. But following Napoléon's defeat and after the 'Dancing Congress' of Vienna, many of these revolutionary, radical changes remained across Europe, although they were adopted and preserved to varying degrees. This continuity emphasised here played an important role in the processes of the 19th century, in particular its second half.

In terms of their major ideas, the Enlightenment and the post-Enlightenment period remained the factors that definitely transformed Europe, which was visible in particular in the 19th century. The turning point or the distinctive feature was the post-Enlightenment advancement of ideology. The political discussion went beyond the narrow circles of researchers, politicians or aristocracy and began to increasingly permeate the middle social strata [Smoleński 1901: 26]. It became more accessible, also thanks to the arising of the press and modern journalism. Along with the development of education, which was to become a passport to an individual's prosperity in life, the importance of reason and rational analysis was exposed. Superstition was rejected, and so was religion as faith and a belief in a dogma. The 18th century was increasingly more inclined towards secularisation. Next to all this, as emphasised particularly by researchers of history of political and social thought [more in: Hazard 1972; Klimowicz 2012; Miklaszewska, Tomaszewska 2015], contradictions appeared in culture itself. The Age of Enlightenment was also a period of active creation of new institutions, societies and associations in which more and more representatives of various social milieus could be active in a variety of fields. Many new social groups were formed after the French Revolution as a response to the demands of fast-developing capitalism. This phenomenon applied, above all, to the countries of Western Europe, but in the 19th century it also appeared as a model in the part of Europe identified with absolutism of the Age of Enlightenment. In this way, public administration employees, military staff, teachers, whose rank was rising with the development and expansion of education, in particular in cities, were becoming not only a professional factor, but a socio-economic and often cultural one, too. Jewish communities were also engaged in all this. Writers and scientists were active. Paris discussion clubs served as a model for almost the entire continent. French was the language of international elites. Women were becoming increasingly active, which was an undeniable novelty. It was evident, in particular, in the sphere of culture. The developing elites were becoming an important element of Europe's history and the coming change. These groups were actively collaborating with the bourgeoisie. From the perspective of the essence and consequences of the French Revolution, especially its social or political factors, it was a characteristic and relatively sustainable phenomenon. This is where the lives of European elites, including Jewish, were becoming linked to the new bourgeois-capitalist

quality. The Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment preferred urbanity, thus referring to the essence of the Enlightenment, which for Western Europe remained the culture of the bourgeoisie created by the urban middle class in its conflict with feudalism. What can be seen here is an ideological similarity and, above all, continuity in terms of thinking, reflection and affiliation with the intellectual elite.

This is why Emmanuel Kant could see, on the one hand, that these processes and phenomena encroached upon old influences and monopolies, which in a not insignificant measure were those of the Church, and, in conclusion, defined the essence/sense of the Enlightenment as 'man's leaving his self-caused immaturity' – which he understood as man's inability to use his own reason [Kant 1966: 164]. Elsewhere, he added, also on the basis of the same observations, 'the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me' [Kant 2002: 158], opening a Pandora's box in the dispute between the warring supporters of natural and man-made laws [more in: Opałek, Wróblewski 1954; Styczeń 1968; Tokarczyk 1988; Dybowski 1991]. This dispute, as can be easily noticed, is still a heated one and alive in some European countries. All this shaped the foundations of modern Europe in the 18th century and then in the 1800s. This intellectual movement of the Enlightenment might have started even earlier. From the perspective of the singular and exceptional Jewish intellectual Benedict de Spinoza [more in: Nadler 2002] and his excellent attempt, after Grotius, at the secularisation and rationalisation of the political doctrine, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* of 1670, it opened a space for changes. It was especially manifest in the 19th century. 'In between' there was obviously the French Revolution of 1789, including *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* above all – the most important or one of the most important documents in the history of modern citizens of the world. Regardless of whether it was accepted by the traditional 'guardian of souls', the Declaration became undoubtedly the key benchmark for true democracy and liberal thinking. Napoléon Bonaparte, too, spread its ideas across Europe against the will of the Church and its continuously shrinking influence.

These factors created the fundamental characteristics of the era's ideological climate – no so much the Enlightenment anymore but, above all, post-Enlightenment. They had an impact on the second half of the 19th century. The Age of Enlightenment referred to ideology, primarily in social life. It was also important for Jewish elites, mainly in the context of the free socio-political debate. This is the key to the understanding of Europe and its consecutive stages of development, which was not a disaster despite all odds. There were cataclysms in Europe, but there was also an interesting paradigm of change and transformation within the continent, which managed to involve non-Europeans into its wars.

In this political, ideological and social space, there were also Jewish talents that could be employed. The group includes the aforementioned Baruch Spinoza as well as many others, already assimilated Jews. Moreover, these talents could flourish next to other eminent Europeans as the preference for science and education in the Jewish community has always determined its unity and uniformity as well as has been both a challenge and an obligation. The Jewish nation is one of the most educated, obviously within the limits allowed by, e.g. Judaism. Education is an important

determining factor in this environment, hence science and culture could find solid foundations there when extensive opportunities for development arose. This sphere also included ideology and politics, which often polarised this group, just like many others. But even then both were an important indicator and a complement to Jewish development or revival (Haskala) becoming also a more common, often revolutionary (e.g. Charles Marx), carrier of ideology. These are important assets, external – derived from Europe, the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment – and internal, of the diverse Jewish diaspora whose contribution to the achievements of Europe in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries was increasing.

The analysis of this context requires a formulation of a broader premise. Already at that time, Jewish elites were an important component of the great European potential and culture-building process. The dispute concerning ideological and social foundations remained at its core. This dispute was particularly visible in the ideological conflict with the Church. In this clash, Jewish elites drew both on their European character and historical experience and thorough observation of internal transformations and conflicts within capitalism and, additionally, the internal Jewish conditions and possibilities. Above all, they drew on their own, courageous way of exercising the freedom of thought. It is also an important turning point for the universalism of science and culture, both in Europe and across the world. Jewishness and Europeanness in the modern universalism of the Enlightenment would blend into one – achievement and progress, preserving as much as possible and necessary the Jewish identity, the Jewish spirit, the Jewish history and sometimes religion, too. Obviously, there was the Jewish tradition there. This is in line with the famous quote from David Hume who claimed that 'Obscurity is painful to the mind' [Hume 2005: 60; Heller 2009: 10], and so the mind should harness obscurity.

Thus, the opening of the mouldy European door to free thought and courage in thinking in the Age of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment was an important aspect of the understanding of the following stages acted out already in the 19th and 20th centuries. In all of them, Jewish elites were part of the mainstream in terms of presence and activity leaving the legacy of important achievements, records and texts. If we want to fully comprehend all the processes that occurred then, whose consequences can be also seen today, what must be articulated and, most of all, valued is the components of the change, also from the internal Jewish perspective. The French Annales School's perspective of *longue durée* is a reasonable and near-perfect tool in that regard. The 19th century, in particular its second half, brought a robust industrial overturn and a robust evolution of capitalism to the part of Europe in question. As a consequence, there was a social evolution, too. The derivatives included disproportions in terms of the development of individual European regions and, naturally, socio-economic as well as political and ideological conflicts. These were the conditions in which modern Europe consolidated its status. What was characteristic for it was the long-lasting power system and, even more, socially unfair development leading to open conflicts. The part of Europe resistant to change, in particular Russia, Prussia and Austria, also consolidated its status, including the Jewish minority living there. These two speeds of 19th-century Europe were also important for the Polish

internal context marked by the absence of a state, with Poles living in three different state organisms, as well as destruction, uprisings and post-uprising processes and decentralisation. As a consequence, there were developmental contrasts between individual regions of Europe at that time. They became an important characteristic of the developmental and social-mental dispute/conflict, which – consequently – was also one related to culture, including science and the political system or worldview. There was also evolution in agriculture and demographic growth while the economy evolved towards monopolies, the concentration of money and industrial and financial oligarchy.

In this European space of modernity and poverty of the working class and peasants, there was also the Jewish diaspora. The discrepancies were as enormous as in the rest of Europe. The essence of European transformations, also those of the Jewish community, was rooted between the growing wealth of some, who remained a minority, and poverty, including the poverty of Jews, which was characteristic for the vast majority. This phenomenon is considered a typical one, in particular against the backdrop of greater European changes. Thanks to their historical experience, Jews might have found it easier to place themselves in modern economic space, such as production, trade and money as well as, which is important and typical, the spheres of science, education and culture. Jewishness was, to a great extent, identified with urbanity and the bourgeoisie. It was important, e.g. in the context of partitioned peasant and small-town Poland, which was also somehow typical. The uniformity of the economy and society as well as culture and science in the community of European Jews was becoming more and more visible, especially in some strong urban centres, such as Vienna, Paris or Prague in Central Europe. This, in turn, created important foundations for the next stage linked with the European period of ideas and ideologies in which Jewish communities proved to be very active. Obviously, it was not a *constans* yet the consequences of the dynamic development on the one hand and poverty, resistance or even a revolt (Yiddish *revekh?*) on the other became the indicator or sometimes the interpretation of actions, attitudes and activity in the Jewish community, similarly to the dynamically changing European context. Obviously, they were also signs of conflicts and disputes, often brutal. It was a minority that was becoming wealthier, including the Jewish minority, at the cost of the majority. As a result, there were drastic divisions and diverse views. An important consequence arising from and conditioned by these disputes was the birth of new ideas, primarily socialism and nationalism. One can hardly overlook the high amplitude, e.g. between Byron and Balzac, through Marx, Engels, all the way to Lenin, in the European culture of that time. An excellent researcher of this subject, Jacob Burckhardt, has aptly noted that the state and the Church are conservative forces, only culture is a creative force [more in: Kuderowicz 1973; Burckhardt 1991].

This could already be felt in the post-Enlightenment era, which was under the strong influence of the spirit of the Enlightenment, and then within the space of Romanticism, Positivism and, eventually, symbolism, modernism, Art Nouveau and expressionism. Without delving deeper into the subject, it should be remembered in the context of these considerations that it was in this space where the 'Concert

of Europe³, colonies, colonialism and, above all, the Great War – the stigma of Europe – were born. The last mentioned is an exceptional European turning point, defined by some as ‘Europe’s suicide’ [more in: Chwalba 2014], maybe not the most fortunate phrase.

Before men in uniforms became engaged in bloody fights on European fields, there was another turning point in the conflict between European states – the climate of ideological imperialism, nationalism and a *contre* to them hailed by socialism. Jewish elites must have seen these changes. They not only saw them, but actively participated in them. This ‘event’ as well as European events experienced directly by millions, such as the dramatic transformation of the agricultural society into the industrial one, arising and unavoidable conflicts, the aforementioned demographic explosion, robust urbanisation, inventions and discoveries, trade in goods and cash, the constantly expanding market and export of capital as well as economic expansion and the policy of protectionism and colonialism reversed the trends observed until then and mobilised the forces directed towards the state. It was the time of the rising, even missionary and totemic (symbols), cult of the state and the cult of the nation. These phenomena turned out to be an exceptionally dangerous mixture considering nations and states, not a specific nation or a specific state.

For the Jewish community of Europe, both its elites and poor Jews, it was among the worst and the most dangerous phenomena. The absence of a Jewish state was an enormously negative fact against the backdrop of raging nationalisms and strengthening nation states of Europe which were inevitably heading for a serious conflict. The negative capital related to the absence of a Polish state was of completely different nature as here the distinguishing factor was geography. Poles, at least partially, were able to determine their geographic space (the Polish state). Better or worse, they could do it in a more or less precise way but Jews were not able to do it in the ‘here and now’ of the Europe of that time. The prospect of their own state would reach a completely different geographic destination, which generated an existential dilemma – to go or not to go to Palestine. This destination was rather uncertain and definitely different from, e.g. the dream about America. Jews from fast-developing Western Europe contaminated with the Dreyfus affair and its consequences had other preoccupations.

Thus, in individual states, Jews, who were better or worse, positioned in the economic, social, political, cultural and ideological space, often after dramatic experiences, faced serious dilemmas – those of support, awareness, loyalty and, eventually, nation/nationality/community and patriotism, the category which was emphasised so strongly by nationalism. Inside this dispute/these disputes about the nation and the state, there also appeared, strongly supported by economic and social conflicts,

³ It is a deliberate reference to the concept of a ‘quadripartite agreement’ (the ‘Concert of Europe’) posited in the end of November 1815 by the United Kingdom, Russia, Austria (Austria-Hungary since 1867) and Prussia (Germany since 1871), which were later joined by France and Italy. The Concert of Europe ended with the end of the ‘concert of the great European powers’ – the outbreak of the Great War between hostile parties of a different composition – the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente [more in: King 2009].

another *contre* – socialist ideas which were definitely a part of the workers' movement, an important link in the socio-political and ideological conflict arising in capitalism. It was a stable foundation of the undeniable career of the socialist thought in Europe at that time. The Jewish community took an active part in it, often even leaving an indelible mark on it. A thorough scrutiny of, e.g. *The Communist Manifesto*, the works of Marx and Engels, the Paris Commune, the rise of socialist and social-democratic parties (including in North America) or the First and Second Socialist Internationals, shows that the impetus of new ideas, which were challenges at the same time, produced interesting effects, both collective and individual [Koestler 2009: 94–97]. They can be primarily seen in the system of political doctrines of that time which revealed the expansion of the political discourse, intense political activity of various social and professional groups as well as national groups, including Jews. This is undeniably a distinguishing quality, an asset as well as an important effect – the formation of modern societies, especially in the context of the fundamental conflict – capitalism or socialism. Even the Papacy had to do something about this dilemma [*Rerum Novarum...* 1971: 147–166].

For the Jewish community, the circumstances could be different and not always favourable. On the one hand, their political and social activity offered a chance of participation. This helped to shape Jewish political milieus and many representatives of Jewish elites took part in intellectual processes and the development of science, politics and culture along with industry, trade and money. In the background, there were poor Jews, often involved into and preparing for a revolt (the aforementioned *revekh*), who kept reminding others of themselves and were within an arm's reach, especially in cities and industrial centres. They also continued to mobilise forces and resources and create structures that usually led to a strike/revolt/revolution. Along with these phenomena, an important challenge was the state which nationalism elevated to an almost theological rank, i.e. the nation state not only as a political organisation of society, not only a guarantor and value, but above all as a national community, with nationality precisely and 'scientifically' defined. Supported by the racist doctrine, it became a dangerous combination, especially harmful for the community of European Jews. The aforementioned Dreyfuss affair is not only a hint, but a solid proof. It is also a tool that may be easily used in many other situations. Antisemitism, always present in the European space, was gaining yet another 'argument' ('proof') and the possibility to prove itself. In this way, it weakened Jewish Semitism socially by constraining it exclusively to the internal Jewish environment, which was narrow rather than broad or spectacular because Semitism and antisemitism do not make *iunctim* but asymmetry – static, mental or even qualitative. Geography complemented all this. Semitism meant a state outside of Europe, antisemitism meant Europe.

Semitism and the Jewish state was a temptation, not only for Jews. In the authors' opinion it might have been even more attractive for declared European racists and nationalists who wanted to push Jews out of Europe than for Jews themselves, for whom the historical character of the Land of Israel (Palestine) was obviously important, but their collective and individual colonisation of Europe that lasted over many centuries also had its advantages and assets. At that time, America was definitely a more

attractive and certain destination for migration as those who had started their new lives there were sending positive signals. Some kind of continuity can be seen between the Land of Israel in that period, i.e. removing Jews from Europe, and later interwar ideas of sending Jews off to, e.g. Madagascar, something conceived primarily by the representatives of the Polish political 'thought'.

Considering all this as well as the internal Jewish dilemmas and some specific attitudes and strategies for the future, one might formulate the view that the major Jewish idea in the approaches and strategies for the possible future action was assimilation and identification with European states after all. For Jews, Europe was a reference point for their existence. This is confirmed by later and scarce migration of European Jews to Palestine in the interwar period despite robust propaganda and support expressed by many European governments. Europe in the first place, followed by America, were seen by Jews as providing better and richer prospects for the future. They were not necessarily safer *via* antisemitism, often animal-like, expressed by some Europeans. This is an important context of this analysis, which had its consequences/effects for the turning point of 1918, the interwar period, the Second World War and the German occupation (1939–1945). In the authors' opinion, this kind of thinking and Jewish strategies of behaviour/choice changed as late as in 1945. Erec Israel, however, was still not the only destination, which is confirmed by the post-war Jewish story of the 'seventh million' [Segev 2012: 164–193].

Marxism had a completely different strategy to colonise political, social and national space of that period. It was becoming a guarantee and alternative mainly in social space as regards the division of the wealth generated. It also focused on the national platform but the emphasis was on other issues. The Marxist phrase 'A spectre is haunting Europe...' indicated the need to build a different kind of a state, a socialist one, as an award/compensation for the poor ones and the excluded ones. It was somehow like the Christian 'kingdom of heaven' but it signified a state with an important Marxist message – the need to develop a new entity on a larger scale than the state, a union of socialist states in Europe. This latter idea, especially for Jews, seemed to be a much safer one. It guaranteed cohesion, presence and safety – national and personal – which went along with the convictions of the majority of Jews who planned to continue to live in Europe, rather than in Erec Israel. This confirms that being European was a part of the identity not just of the Jewish elites of that time but also ordinary Jews who were rational, not ideological/nationalistic in their thinking – both rich and poor. The idea of Semitism was losing out to rational thinking and rational choice from the perspective of Jewish social history. It was also losing out to the historical and European rootedness of Jews. The Marxist context also meant the Jewish community made a cultural choice that was European in its contents, ideas and languages, and, as a consequence, assimilation could not be avoided. For Jews and non-Jews fascinated with Marxism, the dilemma that remained was the issue of religion – viewed as 'opium' from the Marxist perspective. And it was not really so important to define the essence of dialectical materialism, historical materialism or political economy. What mattered more was the interpretation of the idea and the essence of the state and society and, as a result, the law, too, in a Marxist way. The state

and the law were perceived as historical phenomena resulting from a specific stage of social, not national, development which were the instruments of control of one class over other classes. Thus, the nature of the revolution was not to be national or giving preference to the nation, but rather universal, social or, using Marxist language, between classes. That was before the vulgarisation of Marxism by, primarily, Vladimir Lenin, who was not a Marxist or philosopher but a professional revolutionary/practitioner of revolution [Lenin 1948: 136–154]. The factor of positivism and legal positivism coexisted well with this ideological current, primarily that of Herbert Spencer [more in: Spencer 1886; Kasprzyk 1961; Górecki 2013]. For poor Jews, shaped and spat out in increasingly greater numbers by backward, almost criminal capitalism of the turn of the 20th century, Marxism seemed to be almost the aforementioned award, just like in the Middle Ages the award for Christians was to accept their position and place on earth with the prospect of the 'kingdom of God' after death. There was not only an element of faith but also of the activity of a part of Jewish elites in this new thinking about capitalism and its inevitable 'spectre-like' fall. This Marxist ideological activity also undermined liberalism and, above all, the relationship between liberalism and socialism. It signified an ideological gap which was actively occupied by social Darwinism, racism and nationalism. It was already a serious threat for European Jews then. Moreover, it also meant that the exclusion, ghettoization, settling national scores, disputes and danger as well as pogroms that had been in place since the Middle Ages would consolidate. Also, the old conflict between Catholicism (Christianity) and Judaism following one of the oldest controversies – 'Jews killed Jesus' – would still be alive. The fact that both he and his mother were also Jews bore no major significance. This view has survived until today and is still popular in some circles.

As a consequence of all these processes and phenomena, before the Great War, which was approaching Europe at full speed, one fact was undeniable, i.e. the Jews *en masse* would still usually remain 'the other' in Europe regardless of whether he or she often felt German, French or, in a broader sense, European. For example, in the German army many soldiers and officers who were awarded medals on the fronts of the First World War were of Jewish origin. Nevertheless, the problem of otherness was there. It was present in many circles and applied to both poor and rich Jews, even to those who were referred to as converts. The symmetry would remain in place, e.g. between the numbers of Jews living in Polish territory (Kingdom) and in the German state on the eve of the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. It will also be visible after 1918, in the new European post-war reality.

Racism and nationalism, or *de facto* racists and nationalists, knew better and actively confirmed that this tension and enmity could always be maintained in society. It was unimportant that anthropologically racism had been known much earlier, but only then, in the conditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, racism was raised to the rank of a political and social doctrine, above all thanks to the development of sociology as a scientific discipline. It also acquired the *casus* of being 'scientific'. This turning point signified not just a conflict of ideas but also something that will be called 'hateful enmity'. For the Jewish community of Europe, rich and poor Jews with better or worse education who occupied various positions in European communities,

also for the Jewish elite of European or greater dimension, racism and nationalism were becoming the principal, almost fundamental enemy. It was not just an enemy in terms of ideological dispute but one of social and mobilising nature because it attracted sizeable social and national groups that united against Jews/Jewishness. It was easy and even desirable in some social segments and it helped to eliminate competition. Finding and creating an enemy and hostility has always remained an important instrument and a tool, often spectacular, which did not require thinking but facilitated integration. It was easy to launch and had a disciplining effect; it employed sophisticated propaganda tools, language and manipulation. An ideological babble about a nation, including a 'chosen nation' may easily uncover the deposits of hatred, hostility and crime even today, after such drastic experiences of Europeans as the Second World War and the hecatomb of the Holocaust.

The 19th century competition for almost everything elevated the state and its nation as a selective guarantor, and thereby others were becoming enemies. Because of imprudence, many religious and practicing Catholics as well as representatives of the educated classes who seemed to be rational quite easily bought into hatred towards Jews *in gremio* and Jews only. By acquiescing too much, nation states also enabled such activity. From this perspective, the absence of the Jewish state seems to be a serious flaw and a defect which was noticed by the elite. Its representatives had diverse views on the problem as it was not an easy one, just like the idea of antisemitism itself. To some extent, the consequence was well-preserved anti-Jewishness/anti-Judaism/antisemitism as a foundation, strategy, way of thinking and activity, often active. Zionism or the idea of creating a Jewish state based on it, emphasised at that time, was unable to oppose this anti-wave. The second half of the 19th century, however, became a crucial period for this idea, which was implemented as late as May 1948 by Theodor Herzl. It became an integrating factor, a point of reference, a value in itself, although definitely premature and perceived by Jewish milieus in a variety of ways.

Little changed as regards the aforementioned hatred against Jews although many important events took place 'in between'. Surviving until today, it has recently been on a dangerous rise in Europe. The myth and the active hostile approach towards each and every Jew were quite easily becoming then – and become now – a tool, often supported by theology, such as the Dreyfuss affair – the first laboratory of the kind. It is amazing, indeed. No other nation has experienced anything similar, moreover – none experiences it now. It is quite easy for ethnocentrism, nationalism and chauvinism to find not just a supporter or recipient but also an active enemy who is often ruthless and hateful, uses deceit and such clichés/stereotypes as the ones from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or the 'international Jewish conspiracy' targeting a Jew as a Jew, an almost universal enemy, omnipresent and omnipotent, just like in the 'conspiracy' mentioned above.

The paradox is that, also today, one may become and be a racist and nationalist without any intellectual contact with, unknown to most, the names of its creators and co-creators, such as A. Gobineau (*An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*), G. Vacher de Lapouge (*The Aryan: His Social Role*), H.S. Chamberlain (*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*), F. Nietzsche and their followers in the 'science', 'arts',

'politics and ideology' of nationalism and racism [more in: Kuderowicz 1990; Frenzel 1994; Sylwestrzak 2002]. It is amazing how little was needed back then and, unfortunately, is also today, to achieve this level of hostility towards other races or, essentially, mankind. The human race is the fundamental criterion that should be used, also in active implementation. Back then and today in public space, we do not identify with the testimony given by Albert Einstein, a Jew of international calibre, who, when asked about his race in an American personal questionnaire (racist), gave an apt answer: 'human'.

Also the doctrine of the Catholic Church (the unproductive 'You shall love thy neighbour...') was unable to oppose this anti-Jewish activity in a variety of fields in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Protestant churches or the Orthodox Church (autocephalous) were unable to do it, either. Observing or even fighting Judaism and Jewishness, European churches stood against Jews, Jewishness and Judaism at that time. The countries, in which Jews lived, worked, paid taxes and were formally citizens with full rights did not defend them. And Jews themselves, in general, were often standing at the crossroads of attitudes and choices, polarising inside the diaspora and, just like others, looking at the inevitable. Quoting Adam Mickiewicz 'for the war of nations we beg you, Lord'. It must be noted here that the poet, interestingly, was not asking for the war of states, but the war of nations. The war in question was becoming more and more visible on the horizon of Europe's history of that period.

Conclusions

The authors are fully aware that in such a short text they have touched upon the most general issues only, ones they found the most important. It is a conscious choice, a personal one, which is a consequence of the authors' studies and outlook on the historical process, political and social thought, the ideas and ideology of that period, together with their contexts, diversity and discourse, as well as interpretation complications and the employment of some components of history (a historical process) in current politics, propaganda or ideology.

The Great War that broke out in the summer of 1914 mobilised millions who were blessed in God's name. This is what all armies did, and standing on the tribunes next to those who made decisions and sent their nations to war (!) were high-rank preachers invoking God. Millions of uniformed men (mostly) of a certain age were allowed to kill one another senselessly. Bloody battlefields were full of representatives of nations such as the French, Russians, Germans, but also Jews, including European Jews and, as of 1917 – some of the best American soldiers. It was a diverse group, as already mentioned. Many of them died, many were crippled – these are huge quantities counted in millions. People who supported different ideas – socialists, liberals, racists and nationalists – were also fighting against one another and at the crucial moment of 1917 they were joined by the Bolsheviks and Leninists.

On the eve of the Great War and also during it, i.e. during its suicide as postulated by an eminent historian, Europe, including the Europe of Jews living in the diaspora, revealed a great rift between the poles of wealth and poverty, also Jewish,

and indicated, to a lesser or greater extent, a new phenomenon – the United States. It was confirmed by a multitude of ideas and movements as well as a multitude of conflicts. It exposed racism and nationalism, hateful enmity towards ‘others’ even if they were ‘ours’ because they could provide historical papers to prove their right to be present in the state and within the nation/community (Jews). It also showed new ‘tempting’ doctrines, new people, ideologues and scientists as well as creators of culture, many of them with Jewish roots. Given all this, one important distinguishing feature concerning Polish territory should be noted here. As a result of the Russian policy, many Jews from the East (Litvaks) were accepted here, which made it the only land in Europe with such a large Jewish population – statistically, economically, socially, politically and ideologically as well as in terms of their culture, religion, language and customs. This is an exceptionally important occurrence preceding the interwar period and the Second World War. Polish territory and later the Republic of Poland in 1918–1939 became a place where European Jews settled in great numbers. Obviously, they had been present there since the 10th century, part of the history of the country, society, culture, landscape, development as well as poverty. They made an important social aspect of modern (or rather, becoming modern) Polish society/nation [Łepkowski 2003: 74–89].

This is another important context of the turn of the 20th century which opened up a new era, an important component of the post-suicidal fall of Europe (1918) – new states, new/old territories and, in consequence, new challenges and conflicts and, finally, wars. This was a special new/old quality of 1918 and the subsequent years. On the one hand, there was the ‘closing’ of certain processes and stages of development and, on the other, a new ‘opening’ – the interwar, wartime and post-war periods [Judt 2008: 269–274]. Special emphasis is placed here on this turning point because the Second-World-War issue of the Holocaust as a phenomenon will also be a consequence of all these processes that were discussed above. This is also an important context of continuity and change (‘Annales’) that has already been mentioned.

The Great War considerably accelerated the transformation process for political and social systems. It ‘opened up’ the era of the communist/totalitarian revolution with an important participation of Jewish communists/Bolsheviks, too. It ‘defined’ three great problems, also in the perspective of the future – the revolution, the national issue (ruling and oppressed nations) and the conflict around the nature of power. Also, the ‘new’ Central and Eastern Europe appeared, significantly conflicted and in dire need of transformation from the war economy to the peace economy. The consequences included great deposits of human dissatisfaction, doubt, uncertainty as well as disillusionment, above all with regard to the democratic system. In this situation, it was easy to contest the democratic system, especially that there was an exceptional temptation next to it – Lenin’s Russia where it was claimed that ‘even a cook can become a minister’. Lenin formulated an important factor and symbol in the European perspective. He created solid foundations for new social, political and systemic movements, also to meet the hopes of the poor ones who were neglected by capitalism. They ‘needed’ new ideas, too, and the states and nations, or their authorities/leaders, at the same time expected not only better everyday life but de facto a new

international system. Along with hope, this was to be another earthly award for the destitute and excluded.

Therefore, considering the future which was to arrive after the period analysed here and understanding the causes and effects as well as the characteristics of the process of *longue durée*, the authors of this paper would like to underline that one of the strong post-finales of the Great War in the interwar period of 1918–1939 was, on the one hand, fascism/Nazism and, on the other, Bolshevism/communism. The losses were suffered by liberal democracy, which at the same time opened the perspective for the Second World War and, for Jews – the Holocaust. Murdering three generations of Jews during the Second World War (1939–1945) only because they were born Jewish as well as a reflection on the new concept of 'Jewish communist conspiracy' cannot be understood without an overview of the period analysed here. It was the second vital factor, in our opinion. Against this backdrop of transformation and re-evaluation, there is also a place for Jewish elites of that time, active in different fields. The Holocaust would put an end to this European activity of Jews and their presence, an important one, in European history. What would remain, along with some Jewish survivors, is Mordechai Ben David's Am yisrael chai (עם ישראל חי) and its national implementation as of May 1948 – the state of Israel. It is being continued.

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Jewish elites on the eve of the Great War (1914–1918). Some remarks on continuity and change, contexts and dilemmas. An assessment of the war and its consequences

Abstract

The authors indicate what, in their opinion, were the important phenomena of the 19th and the turn of the 20th century from the perspective of the Jewish elites of that time. They refer to the consequences of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment in both the historical process and political and social thought, including radical and revolutionary trends. They demonstrate that two aspects, i.e. the emphasis on nation states in 19th-century Europe and the absence of a state for the Jewish diaspora, are important in the consideration of the events of the time as well as those after 1918. This applies to the interwar period when fascism/Nazism and Bolshevism/

communism were, to varying degrees, a threat to Jews as Jews. The showdown included the Nuremberg Laws and the Holocaust on the one hand and, on the other, the 'Jewish communist conspiracy' – an omnipresent concept accompanying antisemitism in anti-Jewish attitudes of the general public and an important axis, along with racism and nationalism, which does not lend itself well to comparisons. The article is a reflection on two research themes: a historical one – the historical process from the perspective of *longue durée* as used by the Annales School – and one related to political science: the history of political thought.

Keywords: elite, Great War, history of political thought, Jew-Jews, Jewishness, Judaism, Renaissance

