

“When the refugees are gone, they’ll come after
us”

Experiences with Anti-Semitism in Central
Europe after 1945

The Youth of Europe Against Anti-Semitism

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Introduction

In 1949, Theodor W. Adorno asked himself and humanity whether one could still write a poem after Auschwitz, thus stating that the delusional and destructive ideology of anti-Semitism that had led to mass extermination had transformed the European culture and society in a permanent manner: It had become morally impossible not to have Auschwitz in mind when thinking about the self-conception of a society or nation and about the way that individuals position themselves towards it. A widely held belief, especially in Germany, where a reappraisal of the past has always been a central and contentious issue, is that anti-Semitism has been discredited and banned from democratic discourse - however, common experience shows that anti-Semitism persists or even increases, an observation that seems to unmask the much-talked of lessons of history as fruitless. From the writings of Adorno and others, and from the fact that the threat of anti-Semitism in Europe persists, one could pose the question of how it is possible to be an anti-Semite after Auschwitz - a question that was essential in the project that led to this book, which assembles interviews with Jews and experts on Jewish history as well as professionals dealing with anti-Semitism in Central Europe - namely, Germany, Latvia and Poland - after 1945.

The Youth of Europe Against Anti-Semitism

We, the collectors of the interviews, are a group of 29 people: High school and university students, apprentices, language teachers and a historian from Aachen, Berlin, Nuremberg, Munich, Riga and Zamość. Peter Zinke, a historian based in Nuremberg, had the initial idea for the project. A few years ago, he had visited Riga and witnessed what he considered to be a fascist demonstration: The March of Veterans of the Latvian Legion, which takes place in Riga each 16th of March.

Back in Nuremberg, he became concerned with anti-Semitic views among his friends, whom he had thought to hold an antifascist and open-minded worldview. Alarmed by these experiences, Mr. Zinke developed the idea for a project that should investigate how anti-Semitism had continued to manifest itself since 1945. He began looking for companions.

Shortly before, Mr. Zinke had finished two oral history projects, gathering the life stories of Holocaust Survivors together with high school students and teachers from Sderot (Israel), Nuremberg and Zamość. He convinced some of the participants of these projects to sign up for the new one, specifically nine high school students from Nuremberg, who had finished school by that time, as well as Agnieszka Smalej, a high school teacher from Zamość. Together with Beata

Chmura, the head teacher of her high school, Mrs. Smalej persuaded nine pupils to take part in the project. Mr. Zinke also wrote to several Latvian institutions about his project idea. This way, he got in touch with Karina Barkane, Executive Director of the Centre for Judaic Studies at University of Latvia. Mrs. Barkane called on university students from Riga to apply for the project. From among the applicants, she eventually selected eight.

Thus the group was complete, comprising in alphabetical order the following people: Aleksandra Adamska, Karīna Barkane, Lingita Lina Bopulu, Gabriel Czajka, Janis Dobkevičs, Janis Dreimanis, Magdalena Freckmann, Davids Gurevičs, Lea Himmel, Cathy Hu, Eliza Koprowska, Emilia Kościk, Kamil Kwarcianny, Zuzanna Makiel, Edgaars Poga, Johannes Probst, Jonas Röder, Annika Schmidt, Rafael Schütz, Agnieszka Smalej, Anastasija Smirnova, Dagmara Sokołowska, Patrycja Szala, Vilmaris Vincans, Myrjam Willberg, Michael Winter, Aleksandra Wodyk, and Peter Zinke.

Together, we applied to the European Union for a grant under Programme Erasmus+ Key Action Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices Action Strategic Partnerships Action Type Strategic Partnerships for Youth/Transnational Youth Initiatives Grant Agreement Number 2016-1-DE04-KA205-013927. We were awarded a grant of up to 54,975€ for a project duration of three years from June 2016 to June 2019.

Some participants only took part in the first project activities, but most stayed on until the official end of the project on June 7, 2019. We all learned a lot about Jewish life in Central Europe and about the histories of the towns and countries we come from. Apart from the 60 interviews that we conducted, we visited Jewish schools, synagogues, and cemeteries, and various museums and memorial sites, such as the Memorials of the concentration and death camps in Auschwitz, Bełżec and Majdanek.

Subject of Research in our Project

The leading question for our project was how anti-Semitism developed after the Second World War in each of the aforementioned countries. For this reason, most of the interviews were centred around the connection between history, politics and anti-Semitism: In what ways is anti-Semitism connected to feelings of national collective guilt and responsibility with regards to the history of the Holocaust, but also to the feeling of being the victim in this historical process? How do the specific roles of the three countries in the Second World War as well as their political development after the War influence the forms that anti-Semitism takes? Can anti-Semitism be combated through raising awareness of history?

When we refer to the term anti-Semitism, we are aware of the fact that a broad variety of theoretical approaches towards this phenomenon exists, and that its definition is highly contested. The question of which definition one adheres has far-reaching implications when it comes to investigating the origins

of anti-Semitism or the prospects to overcome it. We don't mean to provide a comprehensive overview on or even a positioning in this debate, but we'd like to at least state that we see anti-Semitism as a system of thinking following its own rationale and, in line with Haury (2002, cf. Beyer 2015: 576-582), as a mindset that boasts the following principles: personification of abstract global processes such as capitalism or modernity, Manichaeism - i.e., the dichotomous divide of the world into "good" and "evil", with "the Jews" functioning as a projection surface and representation of all evil - and the construction of homogeneous groups, with Jews being constructed either as "the other" or as a non-group undermining existing group distinctions. These principles operate both on a social or collective and on an individual, psychological level (Ibid.).

As hinted at in our research questions, we were interested in comparing different countries in order to study the connection between the historical development of a country and the expressions of anti-Semitism that can be found there. We believe that the negotiation of a national self-image is at the core of this connection, and that each of the three countries boasts some specifics in the way its national self-images refer to the Holocaust. In the following section, we will, by no means in comprehensive manner, shortly outline these specifics:

In Latvia, being under the control of and suffering from a foreign power is an experience that essentially determines the national collective memory. According to the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia the state condemns both Nazi and Communist regimes. However, the Soviet occupation of 1940, that involved massive deportations of Latvians to Siberia, is often referred to as the major national grievance; against this backdrop, the Nazi invasion is 1941 is perceived as a "lesser evil" or even as a liberation. Consequently, Jewish suffering tends to be marginalised, and the issue of Latvian collaboration or bystander inaction tends to be downplayed. The development of a democratic political culture from 1990 onwards has always involved debates on the question of which historical narrative should be privileged over others, resulting in a reluctance or unwillingness to acknowledge the historical suffering of and the present-day discrimination against ethnic groups other than the ethnic Latvians (Misco 2015).

Political and public trends in Latvia substantially depend on problem of perception of the events of the Second World War. As such, in June 2019 the liberal party "Development/For!" (*Attīstībai/Par*) intended to submit a law to Saeima on compensation to the Latvian Jewish community for the property lost during the Soviet and the Nazi occupations of amount of 40 million euro.¹ This initiative invoked ambivalent reaction of the society and caused a new surge in anti-Semitism; particularly, the Jewish community was misrepresented in regard of its board's connection with political and financial organisations.² In result, under pressure from society, the party was forced to retract its proposal.³ Analogically, the topic of the collaboration of Latvian people during the Nazi

¹ *Baltic News Network*, June 12th, 2019

² *Pietiek*, June 16th, 2019

³ *Baltic News Network*, June 21st, 2019

occupation and complicity of certain personalities in the Holocaust is sorely viewed in Latvia. The role of a prominent war pilot Herberts Cukurs, who was killed by Israeli intelligence Mossad in mid 1960s, is still ambivalently evaluated. The Jewish community is blamed for intentional defamation of Cukurs and falsification of facts of his biography. Moreover, in the beginning of June 2019, in spite of objection of the Jewish community, the Office of Prosecutor General decided to dismiss the criminal proceedings against Cukurs, since no evidence had been submitted or collected.⁴ In addition, it is regularly claimed that during the Second World War Cukurs saved several Jews.⁵

In the political constellation sketched above, little attention is being paid to anti-Semitism in public discourse. Findings from Europe-wide surveys show that both the Jewish and the general Latvian population don't perceive anti-Semitism as a major problem in their country: Out of 200 people of Jewish origin that participated in a 2018 study by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)⁶, only 12% considered anti-Semitism to be very or fairly big problem in Latvia, and 77% thought that it had stayed the same in the last five years before the survey. 6% had experienced some form of anti-Semitic harassment in that time, and 8% reported that this had happened to a family member or close friend (FRA 2018: 79). As for the general Latvian society, the Special Eurobarometer 484 that was carried out in December 2018 and investigates research questions similar to those of the FRA study⁷ finds that 14% of the study participants think of anti-Semitism as a very or fairly big problem, and 55% percent are in the sentiment that it stayed the same over the past five years. 64% percent of the respondents think that people in Latvia are not well informed about the history, customs and practices of Latvian Jews, while 30% think that peo-

⁴*Public Broadcasting of Latvia*, February 14th, 2019

⁵Gabre (2019); Neiburgs (2019)

⁶The 2018 online survey "Experiences and perceptions of anti-Semitism - second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU" conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights (FRA) seeks to provide EU-wide data on present levels of anti-Semitism in order to assess to which extent EU member states are fulfilling their obligation to combat anti-Semitism. Therefore, it "analyses data from the responses of 16,395 self-identified Jewish people (aged 16 or over) in 12 EU Member States – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. These Member States are home to over 96% of the EU's estimated Jewish population" (FRA 2018: 7). As response rates in Latvia were low, recruitment methodology and data collection were adapted in order to reach more respondents. This limits the possibility to compare the results from Latvia with those from the other countries. The size of the Latvian sample was n=200, in Germany n=1,233 and in Poland n=422).

⁷The special Eurobarometer 484, a survey which was carried out in December 2018 in 28 member countries of the European Union based on a request by the European Commission, is comprised of the following research interests: (1) To what extent do Europeans think of anti-Semitism as a problem in their country, and how do they assess its recent development? (2) What are the levels of knowledge of and education about anti-Semitism? This also relates to the awareness of means to combat anti-Semitism, and to adequate Holocaust education. (3) How do "conflicts in the Middle East" and the shift of focus influence the way European Jews are perceived in the EU? Methodology: 27,643 people were surveyed, about 1,000 in each country (Germany: n=1,526, Poland: n=1,011, Latvia: n=1,002). A multi-stage random sample was drawn based on regional administrative units. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the participant's home.

ple are well informed and 6% say that they don't know (European Commission 2019). While these data, giving an indication of the perception of anti-Semitism in Latvian society, boast values much lower than in Poland and Germany, the Anti-Defamation League's Global 100 Survey on anti-Semitism of 2015⁸ finds that agreement with anti-Semitic statements in Latvia is in fact stronger than in Germany, and while anti-Semitic conspiracy thinking is stronger in Poland than in Latvia⁹, some of the statements that represent anti-Semitism as an inter-group-conflict are met with about the same agreement in Latvia as in Poland¹⁰. These data certainly must be interpreted with caution; in any case they seem to imply that the significantly lower level of problematization of anti-Semitism in Latvia does not directly correspond to lower levels of anti-Semitic thinking in the Latvian society.

The European Union against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published its fifth report on Latvia, that discusses recent manifestations of anti-Semitism in Latvia, both in public life and in state practice, on March 5th, 2019. It states that the Jewish community reported on five cases of vandalism and desecration at the Jewish cemetery in Riga in 2016, and Latvian public media reported on four cases of vandalism at the cemetery in Rezekne in 2017 (ECRI 2019: 19). The Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia reports on 10 incidents of hate speech against Jews that have been prosecuted in the period from October 2012 until March 2018.

In Germany, more than 70 years after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism remains an everyday phenomenon. In the process of dealing with the German past, open expressions of anti-Semitism have become tabooed in mainstream public discourse. However, the ideology continues to fulfil the function of a socially and psychologically relieving interpretation of the world, and it gets reinforced by attempts to reject the collective guilt arising out of history. The tabooing has led to a transformation of anti-Semitism, namely through a shift towards a discourse on Israel loaded with anti-Semitic contents that meets broad acceptance in Germany. At the same time, open expressions of anti-Semitism with "tra-

⁸Note that there are some methodological difficulties with this survey. For the purpose of this introduction, it is especially problematic that the survey only asks whether respondents think that a certain statement is "probably true", not giving them the opportunity to answer in a more nuanced way. Nevertheless, the size of the randomly drawn samples (n=500) makes it possible to at least mark some general tendencies within the population.

⁹The survey includes six statements that can be seen as representations of anti-Semitism as conspiracy thinking. The statements Jews have too much power in the business world (Latvia: 51%, Poland: 52%, Germany: 28%) and Jews have too much power in international financial markets (Latvia: 47%, Poland: 51%, Germany 29%) are those of which the largest share of the study's participants thinks that they are "probably true", while the sentence Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars meets least approval (Latvia: 12%, Poland: 14%, Germany: 9%)

¹⁰*Jews are more loyal to Israel than to [Germany/Poland/Latvia]*: 49% approval in Germany, 50% in Poland, 56% in Latvia; *Jews think they are better than other people* – Germany 16%, Poland 30%, Latvia 39%; *People hate Jews because of the way Jews behave* – Germany 30%, Poland 34%, Latvia 21%. As for anti-Semitism related to history politics, 51% of Germans, 60% of Poles and 61% of Latvians participating in the survey thought that the statement *Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust* was "probably true".

ditional" contents are being condemned, which allows to depict anti-Semitism as a marginal and extremist political phenomenon (Busch et al. 2015: 1-3). However, recently, increases in anti-Semitic "everyday" harassment and in anti-Semitic acts of violence can be observed: The police crime statistics, which are published annually and report on all offences with a clearly anti-Semitic background that legal procedures have been initiated against, list 1,799 anti-Semitic crimes (such as harassment and vandalism) and 69 anti-Semitic acts of violence. Both numbers exceed the numbers of the last ten years. The large majority of crimes is committed with a right-wing ideological background, however, the numbers of offences based on a left-wing, religious or "foreign" political background have increased just as well.

In the FRA study, 85% of the respondents from Germany thought of anti-Semitism as a very or fairly big problem. Anti-Semitism on the internet, on the streets or in public places and in the media were assessed to be the most problematic manifestations of anti-Semitism. The study shows that manifestations of anti-Semitism can severely affect the feeling of security of Jewish people: 29% (in Poland, by comparison, 32%) of respondents witnessed other Jewish people being verbally or physically attacked in the last twelve months before the survey. 41% (59% in Poland) were worried about being harassed or insulted, 25% (47%) about being physically attacked. 30% (36%) reported the frequent or permanent avoidance of wearing, carrying or displaying in public things that could identify them as Jewish, with security fears being the most frequently reported reason for this avoidance. 74% (91%) thought that the government was not combating anti-Semitism effectively.

64% of the respondents of the Special Eurobarometer 484 thought of anti-Semitism as a very or fairly big problem, 61% thought that it has increased during the past five years. 74% percent of the respondents think that people in Germany are not well informed about the history, customs and practices of German Jews, while 22% think that people are well informed and 4% say that they don't know.

As a means of grappling with its past and specifically with the Nazi and Soviet occupations, attempts have been made in Polish collective consciousness to restore the national configuration of the Interwar Period that signifies stability and autonomy, a process that involved the revival of social institutions such as the Catholic Church and the family. A part of this restoration process was the tendency to avoid the analysis of the younger past, a tendency that sometimes results in a rejection of any responsibility for the wrongs that occurred during the Holocaust (Grudzinska-Gross 2014: 664-666). This avoidance discourse, as Katrin Stoll, one of the historians that we interviewed, phrases it, has become a breeding ground for anti-Semitism. For sections of the Polish political spectrum, it has become a core ideology that tends to intertwine with conspiracy thinking and other ideologies such as an anti-EU or anti-cosmopolitan resentment (Zuk 2017: 84-85).

Like in Germany, 85% of the respondents of the FRA study thought that anti-Semitism as a very or fairly big problem in Poland. The manifestations of anti-

Semitism that most respondents thought of as a problem were anti-Semitism on the internet, in the media and in political life. Respondents were shown eight selected possibly anti-Semitic statements¹¹ and were asked whether they had heard or seen these being made by non-Jewish people. Out of these, most Polish respondents were confronted with the statement Jews have too much power in Poland (70% - in Germany, by comparison, 42%), Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes (67%, Germany 45%) and Israelis behave "like Nazis" towards the Palestinians (63% in Poland and Germany). 41% of the Polish respondents of the Special Eurobarometer 484 thought of anti-Semitism as a very or fairly big problem, 18% thought that it has increased during the past five years, while another 18% thought it had decreased, 23% thought it had stayed the same and 41% said that they don't know. 51% percent of the respondents think that people in Poland are not well informed about the history, customs and practices of Polish Jews, while 39% think that people are well informed and 10% say that they don't know.

According to the Hate Crime Reporting by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Polish police authorities reported on 78 anti-Semitic hate crimes (including physical attacks, vandalism and verbal harassment) that police investigations had been initiated on in 2017. This number was lower than in 2016 (103 crimes reported on), but significantly higher than in previous years.

Method and Selection of our Interviews

We made no attempt to select a representative sample of interviewees. Instead, we tried to talk with people of as diverse backgrounds and perspectives as possible. We spoke with Jews about their personal experiences with anti-Semitism, both youth and nonagenarian Holocaust Survivors, laypeople as well as clerics. We interviewed scientists from a variety of disciplines, historians, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers. We listened to a police officer combating politically motivated crime, an educator dispelling stereotypes about Jews already held by small children, a volunteer preserving the Jewish heritage of his town that is no longer home to any Jews, to a German-Israeli restaurant owner, to a representative of the Human Rights Office in Nuremberg, and even to German witnesses of the Holocaust holding anti-Semitic views, we conversed with priests, politicians, and publicists. The places where we met our interview partners were Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, Fürth, Forchheim, Ingolstadt, Kraków, Lublin, Nuremberg, Riga, Tel Aviv, Trier, Warsaw, and Zamość. Unless stated differently, all interviews were conducted face-to-face by a part of our group (minimum two people).

¹¹ Respondents were also asked whether they would consider a person voicing one of these statements to be anti-Semitic. The answers given are not itemised by country in the report. For each of the statements listed here, more than 85% of all respondents said that they probably or definitely would.

As diverse as their backgrounds and professions of our interviewees were their conceptions of anti-Semitism. In line with what the interviewees considered as anti-Semitism, they regarded different approaches to be effective in the combat of anti-Semitism: Some thought that you need to convince people that anti-Semitism is a false projection and inner necessity of modern capitalist society, and that only critical thinking could lift these projections. Others thought that anti-Semitic stereotypes would primarily result from a lack of education and thus disappear if only everybody got to know Jewish people and see that their personalities are as individual as everyone else's. Some had completely resigned themselves. Many were engaged in different activities against anti-Semitism. They directed their efforts at children and youth, for example, or tried to gain political influence, yet others wanted to reach people of all walks of life. Some were only concerned about violence directed against Jews, while others were also worried about all discursive expressions of anti-Semitism, therefore reporting any anti-Semitic post on social media to the platform operators.

On this Publication

With publishing some of the interviews we conducted, we intend to present a variety of concepts and views on anti-Semitism. This juxtaposition of different perspectives is not complete in any sense. As the interviews don't directly refer to each other, it is not necessary to read them in any specific order.

The interviews should be seen as individual narrations that are not representative for any roles, groups or attributes the interviewees are associated with (e.g. nationality, religion, profession, biographical aspects), even if their statements are naturally influenced by these affiliations.

The interviews are truncated and grammatically aligned with more common written language. We tried to edit the texts as little as possible and noted all major amendments that were necessary.

Even though we don't raise a scientific claim as we didn't follow a specific method when collecting and evaluating the data, the publication can be of scientific use, e.g. for systematisation, further theory formation or exemplary illustration of sociological and historiographical concepts related to anti-Semitism. In any case, we hope that the interviews facilitate it for our readers to enhance their understanding of anti-Semitism in its connection with Central European societies and that it will encourage reflection processes, just as it did for us.

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank all interviewees for sharing their life stories and expertise with us. We were amazed by their openness and by the amount of time that they devoted to answer our question. Also, we'd like to express our gratitude

to the Erasmus+ fund making this project possible and to all people who have, via their tax payments, financed this project.

Contact Details

If you would like to learn more about the project or wish to get access to the original transcripts or any further material that we have collected during our journeys, feel free to write to *youth_against_antisemitism@gmail.com*. We will be delighted to hear about any project or persons that benefits from our work, and we are also interested in suggestions of collaborating on further processing of the material.

THE INTERVIEWS

Poldek (Leopold Yehuda Maimon)

Leopold Yehuda Maimon, called Poldek, was born in Kraków in 1924. He went to a Hebrew elementary school and later to a Zionist grammar school. After the German invasion in 1939, he joined an underground organisation in the Kraków Ghetto, one of whose activities was an attack on a café visited primarily by Wehrmacht officers. At the age of 18, Poldek was deported to Auschwitz, where he also became a part of the underground resistance. Together with four other inmates, he managed to escape during the death march in 1945.

After the liberation through the War, he joined the secret Jewish revenge group Nakam, of whose deeds he is no longer convinced today. He emigrated to Palestine illegally in 1946 and was involved in an Aliyah organisation together with this wife Aviva. Today, he lives in an Elderly's home in Ramat Gan in the outskirts of Tel Aviv, many of whose residents are German-speaking Survivors. The interview with him took place there on September 20th, 2016.

Poldek: Urodziłem się w Krakowie w 1924 roku i miałem starszego brata. Chodziłem do hebrajskiego gimnazjum. To było normalne gimnazjum, takie jak wszystkie. Matura w naszym gimnazjum miała pełne prawa, była jak matura każdego gimnazjum, nie było żadnych kontroli państwowych – mieliśmy pełne prawa.

Jakie ma Pan pierwsze wspomnienia, takie najciekawsze, najpiękniejsze, może wspomnienia właśnie z gimnazjum, ze szkoły?

Poldek: Ja mam tylko piękne, to była wspinała szkoła. Wczoraj do mnie dzwonili z Krakowa, że postawili pomnik jednemu z naszych nauczycieli, który uczył mnie, był wzorem dla nauczycieli, w ogóle na świecie. To profesor Ferdhord, uczył języka polskiego. Pisał książki jako Jan Las i był wykładowcą na uniwersytecie. Byłem strasznie zdziwiony jak się dowiedziałem, że on miał tylko 34 lata, gdy zaczął nas uczyć. Myśmy myśleli, że miał sześćdziesiąt, siedemdziesiąt lat. Jak wchodził do klasy, to była taka cisza, że można było usłyszeć muchę. I nigdy nie podnosił głosu, ale miał taki wpływ na uczniów i jego słuchać było tak ciekawie, że nikt się nie odważył zrobić czegoś, co by mu przeszkadzało

Czy jeśli chodzi o język polski, lubił Pan ten język tylko ze względu na nauczyciela, czy miał Pan jakieś zamiłowania humanistyczne, skłonności?

Poldek: Ja się już wychowywałem w języku polskim, w kulturze polskiej. Wszystko, co czytałem, wszystkie książki były głównie w języku polskim.

Pana polszczyzna jest piękna. Jeśli tyle lat Pan pamięta tak dobrze

język polski, to tylko pogratulować. Fantastycznie, że miał Pan takich nauczycieli.

Poldek: Tak. Z wielką miłością wspominam moich nauczycieli – wszystkich, nawet takich, którym przeszkadzałem. Szkoła dała nam wszystko. Bez szkoły nie dało się żyć. Do pół do pierwszej żeśmy się uczyli, a po obiedzie była świetlica i można było uprawiać sport np. ping-pong, można było po dworcu grać w piłkę, był harcerski ruch dozwolony i ja też brałem w nim udział. Ruch harcerski z kierunkiem syjonistycznym, ale głównie to wszystko, co harcerzy cechuje, to te same podstawowe wartości. Ja byłem syjonistą, zawsze, od 10 roku życia w tym ruchu harcerskim. Był on w szkole jedynym dozwolonym przez szkołę ruchem młodzieżowym.

Czy wszyscy uczniowie byli do niego przekonani, czy w jakiś sposób byli skłaniani by przyjąć takie podejście?

Poldek: Nie, byliśmy przekonani, to wszystko było dobrowolne, nie było żadnego musu, żeby ktoś brał w tym udział.

Jak Pan wspomina kontakty z młodzieżą z innych szkół, z rówieśnikami, którzy nie byli syjonistami, którzy nie podzielali Pana poglądów i poglądów Pana kolegów ze szkoły?

Poldek: Ja nie miałem żadnych kontaktów, ja w ogóle ich nie znałem, ja byłem za młody, żeby znać, miałem piętnaście lat, jak wojna wybuchła. Przebywałem głównie w szkole, tam się też tańczyło i śpiewało.

A czy to była szkoła z internatem czy normalnie wracał Pan po lekcjach do domu?

Poldek: Tak, normalnie od ósmej do wpół do drugiej, a później się chodziło po świetlicach, ale to było nieobowiązkowe. Szkoła miała własną kolonię, własny budynek, mieliśmy W-F na kolonii, na wakacjach. W zimie się jeździło do Zakopanego.

A gdzie w Krakowie Pan mieszkał?

Poldek: Na ulicy Grzegorzewskich, w pierwszym rogu. Dzisiaj tam się zmieniło, tramwaj jest i to wszystko... za moich czasów nie było tramwajów, za moich czasów tam była polana i boisko, ale dzisiaj tam jest bardzo zamieszkała dzielnica.

Czy Pana trudności zaczęły się, kiedy wybuchła wojna?

Poldek: Wtedy wszystko się całkiem zmieniło. Musieliśmy się przystosować, jeszcze mieszkaliśmy w swoim mieszkaniu do 1941 roku, bo getto powstało w marcu 1941 roku. To było jeszcze w Krakowie, część ludzi uciekła na wschód,

gdzieś tam do Rosji, ale większość została. A myśmy się spotykali, mimo zakazów, młodzież jest młodzieżą i zakazy są zakazami, więc spotykaliśmy się dalej i życie jakoś mijало, jeszcze nie było tak źle, jeszcze nie było tych obozów zagłady. One się zaczęły z końcem 1941 roku. Wtedy Kraków i Polska zostały podzielone na mocy paktu. Część poszła do Rosji, część do Niemiec, a część została środkiem kraju. Została środkowa Polska, a Kraków został stolicą tego kraju.

Jakie trudności zaczęły się dla rodziny po 1941 roku? Jak pan to wspomina, z czym to było związane? Czy z jakąś działalnością Polaków, oczywiście poza okupantem?

Poldek: Trudności były szczególnie ze strony getta, był w sumie jeden pokój w niedużym mieszkaniu, między dwoma rodzinami... Życie się zmieniło, nie było głodu. Wydzielano jedzenie. Można było żyć normalnie, nie tak jak to miało miejsce w Warszawie. W Krakowie nie było trupów na ulicy. Kraków był czysty. My się spotykaliśmy przy bloku. Ja pracowałem. Nie było głodu, głód się zaczął, jak byłem we więzieniu. Ale było ciężko, sprzedawało się, co się miało. Były kontakty z ludnością polską i sprzedawało się rzeczy i w ten sposób jakoś rodzinę utrzymywało. Pracowałem, ojciec pracował, brat pracował. Trochę żeśmy zarabiali. Jakoś się żyło. Zacząłem pracować już w 1941 roku. Musiałem, bo były łapanki. Musiałeś pracować, żeby mieć legitymację pracowniczą. Wtedy mogłeś dalej pracować. Dla mnie w życiu trudności się zaczęły właściwie w 1942 roku.

Na czym polegał największy ucisk w getcie? Co Państwo odczuwali oprócz tej izolacji, piętna?

Poldek: Prześladowanie było w momencie, kiedy Niemcy weszli. Co tydzień wychodziło jedno rozporządzenie, np. trzeba było nosić opaskę, że się jest Żydem, nie można było jeździć. Było wiele publicznych łapanek Żydów. Łapano człowieka i musiał iść do pracy, wracał dopiero po dwóch, trzech dniach. Z każdym tygodniem było gorzej. Obelgi były bardzo trudne. Niemcy mieli bardzo wyszykowany proces psychiczny.

Próbowali zniszczyć Żydów psychicznie?

Poldek: Tak, dla nich, kto znęcał się nad nami psychicznie, bardzo dobrze pracował. Myślę, że obelgi były jeszcze gorsze niż sama śmierć. Bo jak śmierć, to człowiek od razu umiera, a obelgi były stale, Niemcy mogli robić, co chcieli, nie było żadnego sądu. Oni czuli, że wszyscy Niemcy są nadludźmi. Dzisiaj chce się to trochę zamydlić, ale wtenczas wszyscy tak czuli; widać to na filmach, na których Hitler mówił i wszyscy patrzyli na niego jak na Boga i wszystko, co powiedział, było święte.

Niestety, miał charyzmę, prawda? Złą, negatywną...

Poldek: No tak! Miał kolosalną charyzmę. On już wiedział, jak mówić do Niemców.

Niemcy byli nad, a Żydzi byli gdzieś poniżej, a czy naród żydowski odczuwał to, że Polacy byli bliżej w stronę Żydów?

Poldek: Ciężko powiedzieć, to są rzeczy niebadane. Większość Polaków była antyniemiecka, bo Polacy widzieli w Niemcach wroga. To trzeba wiedzieć. Niemcy byli wrogiem Polaków i Polacy o tym wiedzieli. Ta piosenka, Rota polska, „Nie będzie Niemiec pluł nam w twarz”, była w sercach Polaków, ale w stosunku do Żydów niestety Polacy dzielili się na kilka rodzajów. Byli tacy, którzy wydawali Żydów – to była mniejszość – wydawali Żydów za jedzenie albo pieniądze, inni wydawali Żydów z radością, bo byli antysemitami.

Czy duży był procent ludzi, którzy wydawali Żydów dla jakiejś satysfakcji, wyższości?

Poldek: Nie powiedziałbym, że było ich dużo. Te rzeczy są jeszcze niebadane. Ale po wojnie Polacy, którzy pomagali Żydom, bali się swoich sąsiadów, że jak się sąsiad dowie, że on pomagał Żydowi... Polak miał karę śmierci za pomoc Żydowi, nie można o tym zapominać.

I wielu ludzi na świecie dzisiaj zapomina, że tylko w Polsce ta kara śmierci obowiązywała, tylko Polacy ginęli za to, że pomagali Żydom.

Poldek: Tego nie można zapomnieć, ale też było dużo Polaków, którzy z nienawiścią do Żydów podchodzili, bo mieli z tego korzyści materialne, np. żydowskie domy, które zostały opróżnione przez Niemców. W Polsce był bardzo silny antysemityzm według mnie, kierowany przez Kościół.

Czy chodziło też o to, że Żydom często lepiej się powodziło? Byli zaradniejsi?

Poldek: Nie, to nieprawda. Żydzi byli bardzo biedni. To są tylko opowiadania. Znam Żydów sprzed wojny, bo mój ojciec jeździł po tych miasteczkach, był przedstawicielem rozmaitych firm i na wakacjach z nim jeździłem. Żydzi byli bardzo biedni. Byli też bardzo bogaci, było ich od pięciu do dziesięciu procent, ale zamożnych było jeszcze od piętnastu do dwudziestu pięciu procent. Można powiedzieć, że było 25% Żydów, którzy byli od zamożnych w górę. Siedemdziesiąt pięć procent to byli Żydzi jak z opowiadań żydowskich, widziałem to na własne oczy. Jeśli Żyd był krawcem, to takim, który robił łaty.

Wspomniał Pan, że to z Kościoła wyszły pierwsze sygnały antysemityzmu. Jak Pan to rozumie?

Poldek: Kościół miał bardzo wielki wpływ na ludność polską, która była bardzo religijna. Nie można pominąć problemu analfabetyzmu w Polsce.

Także w dużych miastach? W Krakowie?

Poldek: Wszędzie. I księża to wykorzystywali. I wiadomość, że Żydzi zabili Jezusa, miała bardzo duży wpływ na mentalność rolników. I rolnik polski też był bardzo biedny. Biedota w Polsce była kolosalna.

Czy spotykał się Pan z tym, że chociaż Kościół w jakiś sposób, bezpośredni lub pośredni, nawoływał do antysemityzmu, to Polacy będąc katolikami pomagali Żydom?

Poldek: Kardynał Sapieha pomagał Żydom. Nie można powiedzieć, że wszyscy. Ja mówię o Kościele na wsiach, bo właśnie ludzie niewykształceni, analfabeci żyli z tego, co usłyszeli w niedzielę w kościele, co ksiądz proboszcz powiedział, było święte.

Ale i wśród tych nie oświeconych, rolników, chłopów, byli tacy, którzy pomagali ryzykując życie, prawda?

Poldek: Wszędzie byli. Ja sam miałem podczas wojny przyjaciół Polaków. Nie można mówić, że sto procent ludności była antyżydowska. Ale jeśli, mówimy o atmosferze, to była ona antyżydowska.

Proszę powiedzieć o początkach buntu w getcie?

Poldek: Myśmý zrobili pierwszy wypad w Europie, nie tylko w Polsce, nie tylko w Krakowie. Pierwszy wypad na Niemców na większą skalę zorganizowała żydowska młodzież w Krakowie 22 grudnia 1932 roku. Byli w kontakcie z Armią Ludową, ale była to czysto żydowska grupa i to zrobiliśmy dwa dni przed Wigilią – pierwszy napad na tę kawiarnię, gdzie byli przed świętami wyżsi oficerowie niemieccy i gestapo. To zrobili Żydzi, ani jednego Polaka tam nie było, tylko napisane na tablicy, że byli Polacy.

Jaka była pana rola w tej grupie?

Poldek: Mieliśmy w kilku miejscach ludzi. Było bardzo ciężko dostać miejsce zamieszkania dla Żyda, bo Żydowi groziła kara śmierci. Podczas tej akcji byłem szefem, byłem odpowiedzialny za tę grupę, która wyszła z miejsca na główny napad. Na główny napad wyszli z miejsca, gdzie kiedyś był szpital żydowski. To było 22 grudnia. To była główna kawiarnia cyganerii naprzeciwko teatru. Rzuciliśmy flaszki Mołotowa, pełno tam było wyższych oficerów. Część zawiesiła flagi polskie na budynkach administracyjnych, część rozlepiła ulotki, żeby zachęcić Polaków, by zaczęli się bronić, zachęcić do działania. Później zapaliliśmy ogień na ulicach, żeby straż pożarna jechała, żeby był bałagan.

Jak duża była ta grupa?

Poldek: Siedemdziesięciu ludzi.

W jakim wieku? Czy tylko młodzi ludzie?

Poldek: Ja byłem najmłodszy. Ja miałem wtedy osiemnaście lat, inni mieli osiemnaście, dwadzieścia lat.

Jak zapatrywali się na te działania Polacy? Rówieśnicy? Młodzi ludzie? Czy współpracowali? Czy w jakiś sposób pomagali?

Poldek: Tak. W Polsce były trzy grupy podziemne. Jedna była Gwardia Ludowa, która była pod nadzorem partii komunistycznej, jedna była nacjonalna narodowa, ona mordowała Żydów, nie przyjmowała Żydów, a kto był w AK albo tacy, co mieli papiery jako Polacy, to tam zgodzili się ich przyjąć, ale z zasady nie przyjmowali Żydów. A Gwardia Ludowa była bardziej była skłonna i ona pomagała, współpracowaliśmy.

Jak wygląda codzienne życie w getcie, kiedy zaczął się już bunt młodych ludzi? Jakie akcje podejmowaliście? Z jaką częstotliwością?

Poldek: Byliśmy grupą trzydziesto trzy osobową. Kiedy dowiedzieliśmy się, że mordują Żydów masowo i nie ma właściwie żadnych szans przeżycia, to było bardzo ciężko przeprowadzić wśród inteligencji żydowskiej. Bo żydowska inteligencja w Krakowie była właściwie kulturalnie połączona z kulturą niemiecką. Kraków był pod zaborem austrowęgierskim, wszystko było niemieckie. Językiem był niemiecki, mój ojciec i matka mówili bardzo dobrze po niemiecku. Było bardzo ciężko zrozumieć, że tak kulturalny naród jak Niemcy, który wydał wielkich pisarzy, wielkich uczonych, wielkich kompozytorów, będzie mordował ludzi, tylko dlatego, że mają inną wiarę, trudno było w to uwierzyć. Bo to było naprawdę nie do wiary. Myśmy szukali drogi jak uciec z Polski, żeby wyjechać do Palestyny, bo ta grupa to byli ludzie wychowani w ruchu syjonistycznym. A to się nie udało, bo tak ściśle było wszystko zamknięte. Niemcy byli bardzo dobrze zorganizowani, pod tym względem niestety nie można było wyjść z siatek niemieckich. Przyszły wiadomości z Wilna, że było bardzo mało ludzi. W Krakowie za dużo nie było. W Krakowie było tak dwadzieścia tysięcy Żydów w getcie. Na początku 1942 roku nie było poczty, wiadomości przechodziły przez dziewczęta, które były kurierami. Te grupy syjonistyczne były we wszystkich krajach, bo ruch syjonistyczny był bardzo rozległy przed wojną. Główny ruch syjonistyczny był w Polsce. Tam była kultura żydowska, młodzież żydowska, przyjeżdżała tutaj budować kraj, głównie ludzie z Polski budowali ten kraj. Z początkiem 1942 roku dowiedzieliśmy się, że mordują Żydów masowo. Wtedy rozpoczęły się te rozmowy między nami, co powinna młodzież zrobić, czy dać się zamordować bez żadnego oporu, czy stawiać opór. Bardzo łatwo postanowić, że się stawia opór, ale myśmy byli wszyscy studentami, z bronią nie mieliśmy nic wspólnego. Nie było rewolweru, nie było młotka nawet. W końcu przystaliśmy do współpracy z Gwardią Ludową, ona nas przyjęła, pod ich kierunkiem mieliśmy współpracować jako organizacja podziemna. I to polegało na tym,

że trzeba było zorganizować jakiś wypadek mały na fabryki gdzieś, gdzie były mundury niemieckie. A raz na kolej, która szła na wschód. Pierwszy rewolwer zdobyliśmy tak, że wyszło nas trzech ludzi na plac otoczony plantami, pod wieczór, było ciemno, napadli na policjanta niemieckiego, z siekierą, zabili go i to był pierwszy rewolwer, jaki zdobyliśmy. Także to były kolosalne trudności budować grupę podziemną, bez pieniędzy, bez poparcia ludności.

I bez przygotowania wojkowego.

Poldek: Byliśmy gotowi do działania. I teraz była ta trudność, że musieliśmy wyjąć ludzi z getta. Po pierwsze zaczęliśmy być znani. I to było po dwóch wysiedleniach dziewięciu i pół tysiąca Żydów do Bełżca, gdzie był obóz zagłady. Dwóm ludziom się udało zbiec stamtąd. Wiedzieliśmy, że nie mamy dużo czasu, że nas w końcu złapią. Niemcy byli bardzo dobrze zorganizowani i przy pomocy donosicieli. Byli też wśród Żydów donosiciele, Niemcy zorganizowali grupę donosicieli żydowskich, którym za pomoc przyrzekali lepsze warunki, ale nie było donosicieli polskich. Także wiedzieliśmy, że nie mamy dużych możliwości przeżycia, nasz czas jest bardzo krótki, że musimy działać szybko. 22 grudnia był ten wielki wypad. Wzięliśmy sześćdziesiąt osób, była tam jeszcze jedna grupa żydowska, tzw. „Iskra”, która była całkowicie pod dowództwem komunistycznym, liczyła też jakieś sześćdziesiąt osób. I razem wykonaliśmy pierwszy napad na Niemców, pierwszy w całej Europie na skalę, można powiedzieć, międzynarodową.

I jak się zakończył?

Poldek: Zakończył się tragicznie. Grupa mieszkała głównie w baraku na ul. Skawińskich i stamtąd wyszliśmy na to działanie. Ja mieszkałem poza gettem u jakiejś pani, która nie wiedziała, że jestem Żydem, bo miałem polskie papiery, fałszywe, ale polskie. Nie wiem jak się to stało, ale po tym, po tej akcji na cyganerie, oni przyszli do tego baraku. Były dwie wersje tej historii. Jedna, że jeden z tych trzech, który rzucił granatem na tę kawiarnię, nie był Krakowianinem i swoim zachowaniem zwrócił uwagę i poszli za nim i on nie wiedząc o tym zaprowadził ich do baraku. Według drugiej wersji wśród nas znalazło się przypadkowo dwóch ludzi z obcych szeregów, którzy zostali zaaresztowani z początkiem grudnia i zostali zwolnieni pod warunkiem, że będą donosicielami. I oni donieśli. Nie wiem, co jest prawdą, w każdym razie widziałem, że wszystkich, którzy tam byli, zaaresztowano. Potem robiliśmy jeszcze jeden napad. Getto zostało zlikwidowane 13 marca 1943 roku i potrzebowaliśmy pieniędzy. Byłem jednym z trzech, którzy dokonali napadu pieniężnego na jakąś rodzinę w Bochni. Napad się udał, ale mnie złapali i spędziłem miesiąc w celi śmierci na Montelupich, a później w Auschwitz dwadzieścia dwa miesiące. I tam też byłem w takiej grupie bojowej, bo w Auschwitz też była grupa podziemna.

A czy w podziemiu w Krakowie, jeszcze w czasach getta, zanim trafił Pan do Auschwitz, spotkał Pan jakieś przejawy antysemityzmu ze

strony Polaków?

Poldek: Tam nam pomagali, znaczy mieli pomagać więcej, ale można powiedzieć pomagali częściowo, nie dali nam odczuć, że my jesteśmy już straceni, że można nas zamordować.

Co bardziej Panu utkwilo w czasach wypadów, działań: czy pomoc Polaków czy niechęć i np. donosy, czy jakieś przejawy antysemityzmu?

Poldek: Osobiście spotykałem się z Polakami, którzy pomagali. Miałem szczęście, bo przez długi okres miałem wygląd nie tak żydowski, można powiedzieć, mówiłem po polsku dosyć dobrze i miałem włosy jaśniejsze, więc nie byłem podobny do Żyda. Miałem kontakt z Polakami, którzy pomagali, miałem przyjaciela. Spotykałem dobrych ludzi, trochę też złych, ale głównie dobrych ludzi tam w Auschwitz.

Jak w Auschwitz doszło do tych działań, w których brał Pan udział? Czy Pan był ich inicjatorem?

Poldek: Nie, tam nie było inicjatorów, to wszyscy podjęli. Dostaliśmy wiadomość, że będą chcieli zlikwidować obóz w momencie, gdy Niemcy będą musieli go opuścić. Myśmy zbierali broń i przygotowywali różne sposoby obrony na chwilę, gdy będą chcieli zlikwidować ten obóz. Wyszliśmy z założenia, że jak się będziemy bronić, to uratuje się więcej osób, niż gdy nie będziemy się bronić wcale. Myśleliśmy, że gdy dojdzie likwidowania obozu i będą chcieli nas zabić Niemcy, nie będą mieli dużo czasu, więc gdy będziemy walczyć, to część się uratuje, część zabiją, ale więcej nas się uratuje niż gdyby wszystkich zabili. Obóz był kierowany przez więźniów i była tam walka między trzema grupami, była grupa więźniów niemieckich, była grupa Polaków z AK i była grupa żydowska. Między tymi trzema grupami była walka o miejsca, które były ważne w obozie, od których zależało życie ludzi, na przykład kto był kapo. Grupą, która rządziła, właśnie byli Niemcy, skazani głównie za morderstwa, za większe kradzieże. Druga grupa, polska, miała lepsze warunki niż Żydzi, nie mordowali ich masowo, to byli ludzie, których aresztowano i mieli możliwości dostawiania później paczek i utrzymywania kontaktów z rodzinami. To im dawało możliwość przeżycia, bo każda kromka chleba była na wagę życia lub śmierci. I była grupa żydowska, która nie miała żadnych możliwości przeżycia, jedynie trzy, cztery miesiące w Oświęcimiu, jak się nie paliło papierosów, bo jak się paliło papierosy, sprzedawało chleb za papierosy, to życie się jeszcze skracało. Jeśli ktoś miał jakiś specjalny, dobry zawód, Niemcy go potrzebowali, miał szansę przeżyć. Tam gdzie ja byłem przysyłany do Auschwitz, to tam budowano miejsca, gdzie produkowana była benzyna syntetyczna.

Z przejawami jakich zachowań ze strony Polaków się Pan spotykał w Auschwitz? A czy Polacy-współwięźniowie w jakiś sposób pomagali lub szkodzili Żydom?

Poldek: Ja mam bardzo dobre wspomnienia. Byli Polacy lepsi, byli gorsi, głównie byli antyżydowscy.

I czym to się przejawiało, wiadomo, walczyli pewnie o swój kawałek chleba, ale czy donosili?

Poldek: Polakom nie brakowało chleba, bo Polacy dostawali paczki, dlatego mogli przeżyć. Wśród Polaków nie było też selekcji. W Auschwitz co miesiąc była selekcja, kto miał, a kto nie miał pójść do krematorium. Żydzi mieli nie dostawać żadnej pomocy i w takich warunkach mogli przeżyć dłużej ci, którzy byli posyłani do roboty przy budowie, dostawali wtedy jedzenie.

Bo byli potrzebni?

Poldek: Tak, tak byli potrzebni, więc dostawali trochę więcej jedzenia.

To w takim razie, jaki mieli polscy więźniowie interes w tym, żeby przeszkadzać Żydom?

Poldek: Żaden, tak po prostu było. Niestety ludzie nie kochają się tak bardzo, jak jeden jest słabszy, to silniejszy go wykorzystuje.

Jaką pracę wykonywał Pan w Auschwitz?

Poldek: A, roboty głupie, bo przyszedłem tam z wyrokiem, więc byłem w karnej grupie przez pierwsze parę tygodni. Dostałem podwójne zapalenie płuc i opłucnej, znalazłem się w szpitalu i właściwie esesman mnie zanotował na następny dzień do krematorium. Wiedząc o tym, że jestem ostatnim z tych, którzy zrobili ten napad na cyganerię, powiedziałem, że tam w celi śmierci było nas wielu, ale oni zostali zastrzeleni na Montelupich. I myślałem, że jestem ostatni z tych i że nazajutrz idę do pieca. A kręcił się tam jakiś człowiek, bo to w szpitalu się chodziło bez numerów, więc nie było widać czy się jest Żydem, czy Polakiem, czy Niemcem. Ale on bardzo ładnie się zachowywał wśród więźniów, w obozie w Auschwitz nie tak było przyjęte. Poprosiłem go, żeby przysiadł obok mnie, bo chcę mu coś opowiedzieć, w końcu miał taką dobrą pracę, to przeżyje może ten obóz. I przyszedł, usiadł, zacząłem mu opowiadać i okazało się, że on był z tej samej organizacji co ja, i że był 10 lat starszy, był farmaceutą, złapali go, jak przechodził przez granicę, chciał uciec do Palestyny. Jak się dowiedział, kim jestem, poszedł do szefa tej podziemnej grupy, bo się okazało, że jestem może najmłodszym więźniem politycznym w Auschwitz. Ten człowiek miał wielki wpływ. Kazał lekarzom zniszczyć moją kartę chorobową, w której było napisane, że na drugi dzień miałem iść do pieca i zapisał mnie jako nowego chorego i tak mnie uratowali.

Ja się Pan wydostał z obozu?

Poldek: Uciekłem podczas marszu śmierci z grupą, w której nas zaaresztowano

razem. Bardzo chcieliśmy uciec i postanowiliśmy, chociaż nie było możliwości uciec z Auschwitz. Wiedzieliśmy, co nas czeka, jeśli spróbujemy. Jedyna możliwość była prawie nielogiczna, ale była. Uciekliśmy drugiego dnia marszu, udało nam się. To było dwudziestego stycznia czterdziestego piątego roku.

Co się z Panem działo po tym, jak udało się Panu uciec z Auschwitz?

Poldek: Mieliśmy znowu wielkie szczęście. Uciekliśmy w nocy i szliśmy piechotą, nie więcej niż sześćdziesiąt kilometrów od Auschwitz. I przyszedł do nas jakiś żołnierz niemiecki, byłem pewien, że chciał nas zabić. A powiedział do mnie po polsku, nie wiem, dlaczego akurat do mnie, że musimy się tu gdzieś schować, bo tu niedaleko jest front, a tam całe SS i nas na pewno złapią. I znikł. A niedaleko była jakaś wioska, gdzie jeszcze byli Polacy. I około północy poszliśmy do wioski i zaczęliśmy pukać od okna do okna. Ale kto we wsi w nocy otworzy drzwi, kiedy niedaleko front? Aż słyszę z jednego domu, w którym przebywała siedemnastoletnia panienka, ja miałem wtedy dwadzieścia jeden. Poprosiłem ją, żeby powiedziała, że jej narzeczony uciekł z obozu pracy i szuka schronienia. Ona spojrzała i wpuściła nas do domu, a tam była jej mamusia, starsza pani i dała nam zezwolenie, żebyśmy tam weszli.

Czy był Pan wtedy w obozowym ubraniu?

Poldek: Tak, ja tak byłem ubrany, bo nie miałem nic innego do ubrania.

I oni się nie bali Pana przyjąć? Uciekiniera z Auschwitz?

Poldek: Oni nie wiedzieli, co to jest. W obozie myśmy się przygotowali do tej ucieczki, mieliśmy czarne płaszcze z czerwonym pasem, byliśmy długo więźniami, przeszliśmy wszystkie progi, mieliśmy kontakty, to i jakąś dobrą koszulę, dobre buty udało się zdobyć.

A od kogo? Skąd te kontakty, skąd te rzeczy? Od Niemców, czy od Polaków, od Żydów?

Poldek: Nie, to więźniowie, którzy pracowali. Ta grupa nazywała się Kanada. Dlaczego Kanada, nie wiem, ale nawet jak się było więźniem, to się miało wszystkie kontakty, bez tego nie można było przeżyć. A to właśnie dzięki podziemiu miałem rozmaite chody, jak się to mówi. Przechowali nas siedem dni i po siedmiu dniach przyszli Rosjanie i poszliśmy do Krakowa na piechotę, przeszliśmy koło Auschwitz i w moje urodziny wszedłem do Krakowa.

Ale prezent!

Poldek: Tak.

Czy potem spotkał się Pan jeszcze z rodziną?

Poldek: Nie. Moja mamusia została zamordowana w obozie. Przechodziła

przez plac, gdzie się odbywały apele i dowódca obozu Skarżysko badał, czy dobrze celuje... I zastrzelił ją. A ojca wysłali do obozu w Bełżcu.

Tam nikt nie przeżył...

Poldek: Dwóch.

A co z bratem?

Poldek: Z bratem spotkałem się później, dostałem wiadomość w 1946 roku, że brat jest w obozie w Niemczech i pojechałem tam. Byłem już w innej grupie, grupie, która brała zemstę na Niemców. Pracowaliśmy, byłem w Paryżu, w Czechosłowacji, miałem tam zadanie, to był obóz więźniów SS i myśmy tam posmarowali chleb arsenikiem, który miał zabić tych esesmanów.

**A w Krakowie gdzie Pan znalazł miejsce po powrocie z Auschwitz?
Jak się toczyło dalej Pana życie?**

Poldek: Przyjechałem do Krakowa 1949 roku z zamiarem jak najszybszego wyjazdu z powrotem do Palestyny. Byłem syjonistą i chciałem jak najszybciej wyjechać. Spotkałem się z człowiekiem z Warszawy, który pomagał Żydom wyjechać do Bukaresztu, a stamtąd mieliśmy nadzieję wyjechać do Palestyny.

I od razu się udało?

Poldek: Nie.

A jak wyglądała ta droga?

Poldek: Zostałem jeszcze rok w Europie, bo byłem wtedy w grupie dokonującej zemsty na Niemcach.

Na czym polegała ta zemsta, Pana działania?

Poldek: Były różne, moim głównym zadaniem było robienie pieniędzy. Byłem od tego, bo myśleli, że ja się na tym znam. To był obóz Niemców, w którym były wyrabiane szylingi fałszowane, bardzo dobrze, bo to wyrabiało państwo niemieckie, szylingi niemieckie, które miały gospodarstwa niemieckie zniszczyć w ten sposób. To się działo zaraz po wojnie. Te szylingi były bardzo tanie, a we Włoszech, gdzie o tym nie wiadomo, można było sprzedawać drogo, więc myśmy kupowali to w Niemczech, sprzedawali i za te pieniądze utrzymywaliśmy tę grupę.

Jak spekulanci dawniej w Polsce.

Poldek: Tak, tak spekulanci, ja byłem wielkim spekulantem.

Jak długo Pan tak pracował?

Poldek: W lipcu 1946 roku przypłynąłem nielegalnym okrętem do Izraela.

Czy ma Pan jeszcze jakieś wspomnienia, jeśli chodzi o Polaków? Pozytywne, negatywne? W tym ostatnim okresie, kiedy wyszedł Pan z Auschwitz, jakie wtedy było nastawienie Polaków do byłych więźniów Auschwitz?

Poldek: Postanowiłem w Polsce nie zostać, mimo że miałem kolosalną pomoc ze związku partyzanckiego. Raz mnie przyjęli do związku partyzanckiego i dostałem legitymację partyzanta i otworzyli mi drogę na studia, wszystko chcieli mi dać, chcieli mi dać stopień kapitana, chcieli mi naprawdę pomóc, ale jak ja przyszedłem do Krakowa, to pierwsze, co usłyszałem od tego stróża, gdzieśmy mieszkali „To tyle Żydów was zostało?”

Jak Pan myśli, dlaczego cały czas było takie samo nastawienie do Żydów, pomimo że Żydzi tyle przeszli, mimo że Polacy mieli poczucie, że to, co działo się w Auschwitz, było bestialstwem, bo przecież Polaków to też dotyczyło?

Poldek: Nie mogę na to odpowiedzieć, tak, to dla mnie niezrozumiałe. Nienawiść do Żydów była ogromna po wojnie. Kielce były, Rabka, niebezpieczeństwem było jeździć po Polsce dla Żyda. A to nie było kierowane przez państwo, to nie było zorganizowane przez nikogo, to były pojedyncze grupy, ludzie sami zabijali ludzi. Wiemy, co się działo w Polsce po wojnie, dlaczego się to działo, jest dla mnie największą zagadką, nie potrafię jej rozwiązać, niestety.

Niestety, dla nas też jest to ciągle zagadką, bo nie wszyscy Polacy teraz się z tym identyfikują.

Poldek: Jestem wiązany z kulturą polską, ja się nie wstydzę tego, że byłem w Polsce wychowywany, mam wiele sentymentów do Polski, kocham Kraków, ale z wielkim bólem to mówię, że takie wypadki niestety miały miejsce po wojnie i tego nie można zrozumieć.

Ten ból nosi Pan w sobie jakby w imieniu narodu. A czy po przyjeździe do Izraela utrzymywał Pan jakieś kontakty z Polską? Czy wracał Pan do Polski?

Poldek: Tak, byłem w Polsce, byłem zaprzyjaźniony z rodziną, która uratowała członka naszej organizacji, przychodziłem tam do nich, mieszkali w Prokocimiu, był tam syn w naszym wieku, my byliśmy bardzo zaprzyjaźnieni.

Odwiedzał Pan Kraków i dom, w którym Pan mieszkał?

Poldek: Do domu mnie nie chcieli wpuścić, nie chcieli mi otworzyć drzwi.

Dużo razy był Pan w Polsce?

Poldek: Tak, robiliśmy film o Krakowie, o tej grupie, w ten sposób spotykaliśmy się. Żydzi, różni Żydzi, szczególnie ci starzy, ale też inni mają wiele pretensji do Polski, do ludności polskiej i to jest dosyć zrozumiałe. To trzeba zrozumieć. Mimo, że Polacy nie byli z Niemcami, byli przeciwko Niemcom, ale zachowanie Polski, narodu polskiego nie było... dość to cięższy temat...

My, Polacy cierpimy teraz z tego powodu, bo często te głosy, że jesteśmy antysemitami, że byliśmy antysemitami, są głośniejsze niż te, że pomagaliśmy. Przecież ogromna część Polaków jest wśród Sprawiedliwych Wśród Narodów Świata.

Poldek: Tak, to się należy Polsce.

A przecież inne narody, na przykład Holendrzy, też wydawali Żydów... My po prostu cierpimy, że na naszych terenach było Auschwitz, były obozy.

Poldek: No, nie, nie tylko. Żydzi europejscy byli głównie w Polsce, trzy i pół miliona Żydów było w Polsce, a w Holandii ilu było Żydów? Trzysta tysięcy? Pięćset tysięcy? Żydzi jako grupa byli w większości w Polsce. Teraz nie ma już tylu Żydów w Polsce, w Krakowie jest osiemdziesięciu ludzi zapisanych jako Żydzi, wcześniej było sześćdziesiąt pięć tysięcy.

A czy myśli Pan, że takie zachowanie wobec Żydów to jest cecha narodu polskiego? Czy gdyby padło na jakikolwiek inny naród, na przykład Czechów, Węgrów, Włochów i na ich terenie byłyby obozy koncentracyjne, obozy śmierci, czy zachowywaliby się podobnie? Czy to tkwiło w mentalności Polaków?

Poldek: Nie, przecież antysemityzm jest na całym świecie, tak nie można powiedzieć, tylko zmiana była w Niemczech taka, że potrafili zmienić kierunek. To bardzo dziwne dla mnie, niezrozumiałe, bo właściwie główna nienawiść powinna być między Żydami a Niemcami. A tak nie jest, Niemcy są dzisiaj największymi przyjaciółmi z Izraelem.

A Polacy może nie są wrogiem, ale jest niechęć, prawda?

Poldek: Polakami są relacje lepsze, gorsze, międzynarodowe są w porządku, nie ma problemów. Można porównać Polskę z Niemcami, Niemcy są największą siłą w Europie, pomagali nam bardzo.

Jakub (Yaakov ??)

*Yaakov (Jakub) (*1926) was born in a Polish town Frampol. Together with his family he spent three years (1939-1941) in the ghetto Biłgoraj in Poland. Frequently he used to get out of the ghetto to get some food and unfortunately got caught. He thought his days were numbered, but the German who caught him agreed to let him live in his house. Yaakov escaped to Russia in 1941 and later to Palestine. During his life, he learned and did many different jobs, and he speaks six languages. Today, he lives in an Elderly's home in in Ramat Gan in the outskirts of Tel Aviv, Israel, many of whose residents are German-speaking Survivors. The interview took place in Tel Aviv on September 21st, 2016.*

Jakub: Urodziłem się we Frampolu w tysiąc dziewięćset dwudziestym ósmym roku. Rozpocząć opowiadać o tym co przeszedłem?

Tak, bardzo prosimy.

Jakub: Później w trzydziestym dziewiątym roku przed nowym rokiem zaczęła się wojna Niemiec z Polską i przyleciały do nas samoloty i ja je słyszałem, miałem dziesięć lat i my zdążyliśmy uciec z domu, ja i ojciec, i matka, i siostra i brat, a jeszcze jeden brat widział jak zrzucają bomby i on został zabity, mój starszy brat. My uciekliśmy i we Frampolu, zaraz za miastem jest taka góra, i tam myśmy się schowali, może ze dwie godziny żeśmy tam siedzieli i ustał szum bomb. Poszliśmy zobaczyć co się tam dzieje w mieście. We Frampolu nic nie zostało, rozbili całe miasto, zostały tylko szkoła, synagoga. Szkoła, gdzie ja się uczyłem i kościół. Niemcy zostawili to dlatego, że jak oni wyjdą, żeby mieli gdzie mieszkać, myśmy przyszli i zobaczyli, że nic nie ma, nie wiemy co mamy robić, wszyscy co zostali, nie zdążyli uciec, wszystkich zabili.

Mógłby Pan opowiedzieć więcej o swoim dzieciństwie? Szkole?

Jakub: Dobrze. Ja długo się nie uczyłem, skończyłem dwie klasy we Frampolu, wybuchła wojna i już się więcej nie uczyłem. Jak rozbili nam miasto, nie było gdzie szukać jedzenia i miejsca do spania. Mój ojciec szedł, on znał tych co mieszkali za miastem. Chodziliśmy tu i tam, by trochę zjeść. Tak się kręciliśmy. Raz poszedłem do sadu, poszukać jabłek, co spadają i jeść. Poszedłem do jednej chałupy, jedni mleko noszą, inni mięso. Nie mieliśmy gdzie iść, liczyliśmy, że może w mieście coś zorganizują. Poszliśmy do miasta, do szkoły, trochę tu, trochę tam, gdzie ostały się jeszcze domy. Niemcy byli tam we Frampolu i wzięli nas do Biłgoraja. Biłgoraj to większe miasto niż u nas. Tam była granica z Rosją, tam jeździły pociągi. Myśmy tak w mieście żyli trochę. Rozdzielili nas w mieszkaniach, stworzyli obóz. Jeść dawali - trochę zupy i chleba. Ludzie umierali z głodu. Mnie widział Niemiec jeden, był naczelnikiem obozu, taki Hans, i powiedział do mnie „idź pracować”. No co zrobić, poszedłem do niego i

ja tam był w jednym pokoju. Ciężko.

Jak zniszczyli Frampol, jak Pan tam z tatą, po tych wioskach chodziliście, to Polacy pomagali?

Jakub: Dali jeść.

Czyli nie byli wrogo nastawieni, pomagali?

Jakub: Dali nam jeść, ale nie pomagali więcej. Bali się Niemców, za ukrywanie Żyda mogli ich zabić. My tam żyliśmy w tym obozie w Biłgoraju, żyłem tam trzy lata. Pracowaliśmy, ludzie dorośli byli brani do pracy. Zbierali kamienie i wywozili do Niemiec. Ja u tego Niemca.

Czy kiedy był pan w Biłgoraju, to Polacy utrzymywali kontakt z Żydami, pomagali?

Jakub: Pomagali.

Potem co się z państwem stało?

Jakub: Byłem trzy lata w getcie - my tam żyliśmy, więcej już złota nie było. Trzeba było kraść. Ja w nocy poszedłem, wiedziałem kiedy Niemiec śpi, przekradłem się przez druty i poszedłem do wioski. Raz poszedłem, było bardzo ciemno, wszedłem w siano i do jedzenia nic nie znalazłem. To było chyba w tysiąc dziewięćset czterdziestym pierwszym roku, zima była ciężka. Wyszła Ukrainka, bo usłyszała szum. Wlałem w to siano. Ona wyszła, patrzy i poznała, że ktoś rozrzucił siano. Wzięła widły i zaczęła widłami mnie kuć. Mam jeszcze dziury na nogach. Ona mnie dźgała, krzyknęła Antek złapałam Żyda. Ciężko.

Ja tam pracowałem u tego Niemca i pomagałem mu. Jak on spał to ja już znałem drogi, by przechodzić. Było ciężko to robić. Jak wyszedłem z tego siana, ledwo uciekłem. Ona zawołała tego Antka, żeby pojechał do miasta po Niemca. W tym mieście nie było Niemców. Oni w niewielu się bali wejść. Partyzanci, bandyci. On wziął wóz i pojechał po Niemca, żeby mnie zabrać. To trwało jakieś pół godziny. Przyjechał Niemiec. No i on mówił do Polaka, zobaczył na mnie i mówi do mnie „uciekaj”. Ja uciekłem. Matka z ojcem stali w oknie całą noc, nie spali. Ciężko. Ja przybiegłem do domu, matka płakała. Nie chcieliśmy tak dalej żyć. Uciekliśmy do Rosji. Był nieopodał pociąg. Wykradliśmy się i pojechaliśmy pociągiem. Rozpoczęła się wojna Niemiec z Rosją. Wszedłem do pociągu. Jechaliśmy dwie niedziele. Przyszedł jakiś ruski oficer i spytał: „czy wiecie dokąd jedziecie? Wy jedziecie do Rosji”. Dał takie dokumenty i podpisał, zapytał o obywatelstwo. Powiedział, że pojedziemy na Sybir. Nie było widać słońca, same lasy. Dał siekierę. Jedni rąbali. Rzeka tam była. My tam byliśmy, jedna rodzina z Warszawy i inne. Pracowaliśmy tam i było ciężko. Rodzina z Warszawy miała dzieci, które powinny się uczyć. Ja chodziłem za ojcem i przyglądałem się. Przyszedł oficer rano i spytał, dlaczego nie idziemy

do pracy. Nie dostaniecie jedzenia. To mówi ten z Warszawy, mądry człowiek. Jak człowiek chory to wszyscy siedzą i pracują. Widzieli, że nie damy rady to wysłali nas do miasta. Ojca nie dali do wojska, bo on był zmiennik rodziny. Nie chciał przyjąć obywatelstwa. Pracowaliśmy w tym mieście, w fabryce. Miałem tam polskiego kolegę. Szedł z roboty, ktoś miał pół chleba. Powiedział, że musi to zabrać. Wzięli go, mnie puścili do domu. Musiałem umieć kraść, ktoś mnie zawołał: „pójdź do matki, żeby dała coś jeść, bo zabierają mnie daleko”. Ona nie miała co dać. Ojciec był szewcem. Dawali jakąś kapustę, żeby można było przeżyć. Jakoś przeżyliśmy. Miałem też nieprzyjemne sytuacje. Opowiadałem jak wracaliśmy z Uralu, oni nas podpuszczali, że bliżej do Polski. Posłali nas na Ukrainę. Kradliśmy tam. Przyszedł nowy rok, mówił, trzeba jakieś mięso, kury. Kradliśmy kury. On kradł ja trzymałem furtkę. Kiedy on tam wszedł to kury narobiły szumu. Obudził właściciela. W Polsce organizowano nowy rząd. To nie wszystko, my tam pracowaliśmy w tej Rosji, to było ciężkie życie. Jeszcze gorsze niż w obozie. Tam jeszcze mogłem kraść jedzenie. Raz mnie pojmał. Takie to było życie. Kiedy zaczynam wspominać, to budzi strach. Do dzisiaj jeszcze jestem chory.

Myśmy przyjechali w czterdziestym szóstym roku na Dolny Śląsk, i ja tam zacząłem pracować, poszedłem do kopalni, szkoły nie było, uczyć się nie było czasu to poszedłem, żeby pomóc ojcu pracować do kopalni, no i tam pracowałem, zrobili mnie ze stachanowca, wybrali mnie i robiłem sto dwadzieścia procent i poszedłem do kibucy. Kibuc, też nie wiedzie, co to kibuc?

Nie.

Jakub: Nie, Kibuc to taki, że ludzie żyją razem i jedzą wszystko razem. I byłem tam w kibucu i przyjechali z Izraela uczyć nas, przygotowywać, bo to miał powstać Izrael w czterdziestym ósmym roku, mieli przygotować nas, my byliśmy młodzi jeszcze. Kiedy mieliśmy jechać do Izraela, przeszliśmy granicę do Czecho-Słowacji i nie przepuścili nas. Wróciliśmy. No, a że kibuc się rozleciał i pracowałem w kopalni i dziesięć lat tam jeszcze byłem, to jest na Dolnym Śląsku. W końcu przyjechaliśmy do Izraela, znaczy nie dali nam wyjechać, aż się zamienił rząd, Gomułka doszedł do władzy i pozwolił, ja jeszcze jeździłem do Warszawy i ja tam byłem delegatem, bo pracowałem, byłem jedynym Żydem, który pracował w kopalni. Tak to było i przyjechaliśmy tutaj, tutaj szukałem i nie było pracy, jeśli nie spodobało im się to odsyłali nas do domu, ciężko było tak, jedzenia też nie było, bo to dawali na kartki, ciężko było, aż nas zaprosili, tam miasto było tu niedaleko z Jordanii i przychodzili ci Beduini i Arabowie i kupowali, co mogli od nas i to poszło do wojska do Bismaragu, jak Bismarag był to było pogranicze i tam byłem z nimi i pracowaliśmy, a potem pracowałem z nimi na budowie trzydzieści lat, potem wyszedłem na pensję, ja miałem już pięćdziesiąt dwa lata, byłem chory, to poszedłem jeszcze pracować, do szpitala, pracowałem tam na Bitahom, pilnowałem tam żeby nie rozrabiali nam pracownicy, to było strasznie, tam i dzisiaj jest niewesoło, co zrobić, no ja myślę, że powinni to zakończyć, „to twoje to moje i do widzenia”. Tu byli Anglicy, Turcy byli, ale nie było gospodarstwa Palestyny. Ci Arabowie stąd,

stamtąd, z Jordanii, z Libanu, to byli ci co teraz żądają gospodarstwa, dajcie im gospodarstwo, niech będzie pokój, kto przeszedł wojnę, ten wie co to jest wojna.

A jak wrócił Pan do Polski wtedy z Rosji, to Polacy zachowywali się w porządku czy byli wrogo nastawieni?

Jakub: No jak myśmy do Polski przyjechali, to moja żona i matka jej, i dwie siostry się uratowały w Warszawie w getcie. W bunkrach siedzieli całą wojnę i ona nawet miała papiery polskie, bo ona była taka inna z wyglądu, jak na Żydówkę, a Żydów od razu mówili Niemcy żeby zabijać.

Pani: Słuchaj można mówić jeszcze lata o tym co myśmy przeżyli, nawet lata, ja nie mówię jeden rok nie dwa lata, w jeden dzień nie można opowiedzieć, co to znaczy.

Jakub: Tę historię, co ja opowiadam to nawet dzieci ze szkoły przychodzą wysłuchać, co raz to przychodzą delegacje, różne np. z wojska, ja przeszedłem ciężką drogę, ja nawet miałem kolegów w Polsce, po wojnie jeszcze żyłem dziesięć lat w Wałbrzychu, i co ja chciałem kończyć z wami te... Żona miała matkę i dwie siostry co uratowały się w bunkrze tam w Warszawie, było powstanie warszawskie i w czterdziestym szóstym roku myśmy wyszli po wojnie, minął jakiś rok, już przeszło, to napadli na nich studenci, jacyś tam mordercy, pogromy organizowali w Kielcach. I zabili wszystkich, a moja żona poszła wtedy do kina i uratowała się, wtedy poginęło wielu Żydów, to było już po wojnie, pogrom w Kielcach. No i jak ja się ożeniłem, jeszcze żyliśmy razem pięćdziesiąt lat.

Utrzymuje Pan jakieś kontakty z Polską, ma Pan jakichś znajomych, przyjaciół?

Jakub: Oni z każdego miasta prawie są, no i ja bym pojechał, ale ja jeszcze ani razu nie leciałem samolotem.

Może warto jeszcze spróbować, a utrzymuje Pan jakieś kontakty z kimś z Polski?

Jakub: Z Polski tutaj byli nieraz, Polacy z Warszawy robili film, wszystko nagrywali, chodziliśmy nad morze razem, u mnie byliśmy w mieszkaniu. Żyliśmy jak dobrzy koledzy, kiedy wyjeżdżali to myśmy się całowali, płakałem.

A chciałby Pan pojechać do Polski?

Jakub: A polskiego miałem kolegę - Staszek, miałem dużo kolegów, ale to już minęło tyle lat, to ja tutaj w czterdziestym piątym/szóstym roku przyjechałem, to już sześćdziesiąt, ponad sześćdziesiąt lat. Ale jak była moja żona, to myśmy rozmawiali w domu po polsku, a potem były pogromy, a Polska jest mi jeszcze winna, ponieważ ja dziesięć lat pracowałem w kopalni po wojnie i ja byłem

stachanowcem pracy i posłali mnie do Warszawy, z Bierutem siedziałem, mam tam fotografie, gdzieś w domu leżą i tam kiedy odkryli pomnik warszawskiego getta na Warszawie, to ja miałem zrobione zdjęcie koło pomnika, jak tylko odkryli. Były delegacje z Ameryki, chcieli mnie zabrać do Ameryki, ale ja nie lubiłem tak jeździć, mówią, że Izraelczycy lubią jeździć po świecie, ja tutaj siedzę i nie ruszam się stąd.

Możecie się o wszystko zapytać, ja wam wszystko odpowiem. Ja mam odpowiedzi na różne pytania, jak się mnie pyta to ja zaczynam wspominać.

Jakie jest Pana wspomnienie ogółem o Polakach?

Jakub: Jakie wspomnienie ja wam nie powiem, są różni ludzie na świecie, dobrzy i niedobrzy. Czasem się zdarzy pośród tysiąca ludzi, jeden co będzie świnia, tak to nie mam złych, oni dawali nam jedzenie, ja wam opowiadałem, że myśmy szli z jednej wioski do drugiej i dawali nam jedzenie.

A w ilu językach Pan mówi?

Jakub: Polski, żydowski, ruski, jidisz, niemiecki i arabski trochę znam. Ja żyłem tutaj i kiedy zacząłem pracować na budowie, sporo ciężkiej pracy było, nie było tych maszyn, nosiliśmy różne bloki, no i potem ja już poszedłem na kurs i uczyłem się trochę, ze trzy lata i wyszedłem jako majster. Ja teraz nawet jeżdżę pomagać ludziom, którzy nie wiedzą co robić na budowach, jeździłem uczyć ich. Ja żyłem, pracowałem i mam dom swój, i od kiedy żona umarła mieszkam sam już dwanaście lat. Jak żona umarła, ciężko było samemu w domu, więc przyszedłem tutaj i tutaj nie jest źle.

Będąc tutaj mówi Pan często po polsku?

Jakub: Tutaj też rozmawiam po polsku, dlaczego nie? Mam się kogo bać?

Nie, bo na przykład wczoraj byliśmy u takiego Pana, który na co dzień nie mówi po polsku, bo po prostu nie ma okazji.

Jakub: Aha nie ma z kim rozmawiać, ja też nie miałem z kim tu rozmawiać, z żoną ja rozmawiałem w domu po polsku, ona była Żydówką, ale wychowaną w Warszawie, więc tylko po polsku rozmawiała i po żydowsku, trochę. Ja w domu zawsze i syn mój też rozmawiał po polsku. Mam syna, żyje w Natanie, mam 4 wnuków i 8 prawnuków.

Miriam Linyal

*Miriam Linyal (*1922) was born in Poland, in a village near Poznań. In 1942 she was transported to the ghetto in Łódź, from there she was taken to a work camp where she was carrying rocks. She returned to the Łódź ghetto and in 1944 she was sent to Auschwitz. All her family died there. After liberating the camp, she worked in a factory in Germany, later she came back to Poland. After a short time, she emigrated illegally to Palestine. Today, she lives in an Elderly's home in Ramat Gan in the outskirts of Tel Aviv, many of whose residents are German-speaking Survivors. The interview took place in thereon September 21st, 2016.*

Jak się pani nazywa, gdzie pani mieszkała, jak się pani urodziła?

Miriam: Ja mieszkalam w Koźminku. To jest obok Kalisza, niedaleko Poznania. Ja już wszystko wiem, mapa jest na stole.

Zaraz po wojnie wyjechałam z Kalisza, także po wojnie byłam w Kaliszu. Oprócz tego już byłam dwa razy w Polsce. Byłam w Oświęcimiu, myślałam: a nuż jeszcze kogoś spotkam.

Czy Pani się urodziła w Kaliszu?

Miriam: Nie. Ja się urodziłam w Koźminku, to jest osiemnaście kilometrów od Kalisza.

Proszę nam powiedzieć coś o swojej rodzinie, o początkach, o pierwszych wspomnieniach.

Miriam: Ładne życie, nie można powiedzieć. Było bardzo ładne, spokojne życie. Nikt nie patrzył na innych. Byliśmy zadowoleni, chodziło się do szkoły. Życie było bardzo przyjemne. Dopóki nie wybuchła wojna, było bardzo przyjemne życie.

Miała pani rodzeństwo?

Miriam: Tak, siedmioro, ja byłam najstarsza w domu. Czworko zginęło, a my we troje przyjechaliśmy tutaj do Izraela.

Powiedziała Pani, że ma Pani przyjemne wspomnienia. Proszę powiedzieć troszkę o swojej młodości, o dzieciństwie.

Miriam: O młodości, ja nie wiem. Pytają się, ale ja nie wiem, co mam powiedzieć.

O szkole?

Miriam: Mieszkaliśmy razem z rodzicami. Chodziło się do szkoły, było tam dużo kolegów. Byli Polacy, byli... W ogóle nie czuło się, że to małe miasteczko. Byliśmy bardzo zadowoleni, dopóki nie wybuchła wojna.

Co wtedy się stało? Jakie jest pani pierwsze wspomnienie?

Miriam: Co się wtedy stało, ojoj... Nie wiem, co wy wiecie, ale...

To znaczy wiemy dużo z filmów, z historii, ale chcielibyśmy...

Miriam: Ale co chcecie wiedzieć, jak Niemcy weszli, co zaczęli robić? Była katastrofa. Wybuchła wojna pierwszego sierpnia, tak?

Pierwszego września.

Miriam: Trzeci był już u nas Niemcy. To było drogie. Niemcy weszli, byli w drodze do Warszawy. Tej samej nocy zabili już pierwszego Żyda. I zaczęło się od tego dnia, od momentu wkroczenia Niemców. Szukali, czego szukać i co z nami zrobić. Dzień po dniu było coraz gorzej. Nie było jedzenia. Wszyscy się bali. Rozumiem dlaczego. Obawiam się, że jest wojna. Ale zabrano nas do pracy i codziennie coś innego.

Czyli nie zabrano Was do jednego miejsca, by pracować, tylko codziennie jakieś inne działania?

Miriam: Nie, na początku codziennie do innej pracy. Jak była praca, z której można było mieć zadowolenie, to byliśmy zadowoleni, ale nie było takiej pracy. Szukali tylko, co z nami robić złego. Ja nie wiem co wy wiecie od początku. Co wy wiecie, co było? Cała historia zaczyna się od tego pierwszego dnia, co Niemcy weszli do... do... do Polski. Zaczęło się na początku „Jude” żółte. Słyszałyście pewnie.

Żółte oznaczenia?

Miriam: To było „Jude” na żółtym tle i zabrali nas do pracy. Jak była jakaś praca w polu, to było w porządku, ale zabierali nas do jakiejś pracy, której w ogóle się nie potrzebowało. Mimo tego zabrali, pracowało się, wychodziło się z domu, bało się wyjść, ale jednak chodziło się do domu, do szkoły się nie chodziło. Życie się zaczęło i tak skończyło się nasze życie. I tak myśmy byli w domu, żyło się w strachu. Żyło się w bardzo niedobrej sytuacji, bo jeden dzień nie był podobny do drugiego dnia. Jedna godzina nie była podobna do drugiej godziny.

A proszę powiedzieć czy w tej miejscowości, z której Pani pochodzi, mieszkało dużo żydowskiej ludności?

Miriam: To znaczy, myśmy byli w domu aż do czterdziestego roku. W czterdziestym roku posłali nas do.. do Warsz. . . , do Łodzi. Łódź była pełna. Już było getto w Łodzi, nie było miejsca dla nas. Zaprowadzili nas z powrotem z Łodzi do Koźminka. W czterdziestym roku otworzyli getto. Myśmy nawet nie wiedzieli, co to znaczy getto. I byliśmy w Koźminku dwa lata, od czterdziestego do czterdziestego drugiego roku. Dzień w dzień coś innego, dzień w dzień wysyłali nas do innej pracy. Na przykład jednego dnia prosili listę dzieci od jedenastu lat do czternastu. Wśród tych dzieci także był mój brat. Zabrali ich do Niemiec do pracy i wiem o tym, że on zginął w Oświęcimiu. Możecie sobie wyobrazić dziecko, jedenastoletnie dziecko bierze się do pracy? Do jakiej pracy to dziecko było przyzwyczajone? Chodziło się, jakbyśmy byli na innym świecie. Zabrali też za małe dzieci. Nie mogą pracować w getcie, nie ma pracy dla nich w getcie. Zamordowali ich gazem, to też wiemy dokładnie, gdzie to było i wiemy, w którym kierunku.

A jak wyglądały warunki w getcie? Bo wiemy, że one różniły się od siebie.

Miriam: Słuchaj. Już trzy matki nie miały dzieci, już dzieci nie miały rodziców. Życie było ze strachem. Przypadkowo ja jeszcze dostałam dobrą pracę jako... no... jako... No chwileczkę, przypomnę... Są słowa, czy ja już zapomniałam? Już lata temu wyjechałam z Polski. Pracowałam na żandarmerii, czyściłam. Przypadkowo i to była najlepsza robota, dlaczego?, bo czasami jak oddałam wiadro i skończyłam pracę, to kobiety dawały nam kawałek chleba jeść. To była bardzo dobra praca. I tak się pracowało dzień w dzień. Dzień w dzień. . . napady, dzień w dzień szukali Żydów, dzień w dzień wyjść nie wolno. Jedzenie tylko co oni dają, nie można więcej jeść dzień w dzień. Jak się wstało jakiegoś dnia, byliśmy pewni, że aż do wieczora będzie coś, ale co nie było wiadomo. Zabrali dzieci, które miały dwa czy trzy latka, nie wiedziało się dokąd. Do dzisiejszego dnia nie wiemy, gdzie zginęli. Dzień w dzień przez dwa lata żaden dzień nie był podobny do drugiego dnia.

Ile miała wtedy Pani lat?

Miriam: Jak wojna wybuchła, miałam szesnaście i pół. Dwa lata później była zgroza. Były płacze, były krzyki dzieci. Nic nie pomogło, to, co chcieli, robili z nami. Nie wolno było wyjść z getta. Było strasznie, strasznie. Ja całą moją historię w ciągu tylu lat w pół godziny mogę skończyć i mogę skończyć na przyszły rok... I siedziałyśmy w getcie, w tym getcie przez dwa lata do czterdziestego drugiego roku. Dzień dzisiejszy podobny do drugiego dnia. I później wysłali nas z powrotem do getta łódzkiego. Wówczas już było miejsce, bo w łódzkim getcie bardzo dużo ludzi umarło. Nie było nic do jedzenia. Do pracy się chodziło. Praca to nie była najgorsza rzecz, ale zamordować dzień w dzień kogoś innego. Z rana mam rodziców, a wieczorem już nie mam albo z rana matka miała jeszcze to dziecko, a wieczorem już tego dziecka też nie było. Nie wiadomo, dokąd ich wysłali, nie wiadomo, co z nimi zrobili, ale... jak się

zna historię, wie się co tam było, to wiadomo, że zginęli w jakimś... obozie. Wszyscy zginęli w Oświęcimiu. Najwięcej ludzi zginęło w Oświęcimiu. Myśmy nawet nie wiedzieli, że jest Oświęcim. Bo jak ja przyjechałam do Oświęcimia, jeszcze mamy czas do Oświęcimia, do czterdziestego czwartego roku, to nie jest tak powiedziane. Ja widziałam, jak jest napisane, że tu jest Oświęcim. Ja wiedziałam, że jest Oświęcim, wiedziałam, że jest takie miasto na mapie. Ale nie wiedziałam, że jest taka zagłada. Coś okropnego. Nie ma człowieka, co może opowiedzieć, czym była chwila jedna w Oświęcimiu. Nie ma... Historia jest naprawdę znana, ale opowiedzieć jest bardzo, bardzo ciężko. W łódzkim getcie każdy pracował przy innej pracy. Ja na początku pracowałam w kuchni. Później zabrali mnie do... pracowałam... myśmy szyli buty dla żołnierzy niemieckich. Ja nie wiem, jak wam powiedzieć. Możemy w jednym słowie wszystko skończyć.

A czy do getta w Łodzi dostała się cała pani rodzina?

Miriam: Ja przyjechałam do getta łódzkiego z rodziną. Moja cała rodzina zginęła, cała rodzina zginęła. My troje żeśmy, z siedmioro, my troje żeśmy zostali przy życiu. A moja mamusia była z rodziną, co było trzynaście osób, trzynaście sióstr i bracia. Jedna siostra została przy życiu, a jej dzieci też zginęły.

A proszę powiedzieć, czy kiedy byli państwo w getcie, czy doświadczali państwo... , mieli państwo kontakty z polską ludnością?

Miriam: W ogóle się nie było w kontakcie, w ogóle nie było kontaktu. Myśmy w getcie nie mieli żadnego kontaktu. Nie wolno wyjść z getta, nie wolno wejść do getta. Życie się nasze skończyło z tym. Nikt z nas nie wiedział jak długo, co będzie, ale jednak to było. Było strasznie. To jest historia, co jeszcze lata, lata będziecie się uczyć i nie wiadomo, co jeszcze można z tego wynieść.

Każda... Czasy były te same, ale każda historia jest inna, prawda? Każdy miał swoje własne przeżycia.

Miriam: Każdy przeżył okropnie, to jest nie normalne przejście. Mam rodziców i tu zabierają w jednej chwili i nie wiadomo dokąd? Wiedziało się, że jeżeli zabierają... Moja mama miała czterdzieści lat, mój tatuś miał czterdzieści lat. Co to jest czterdzieści lat w życiu? Nic, ale wszystko zginęło, niczego nie ma... Do kogo mieć pretensje?

A czy Państwo w getcie stawiali jakiś opór, buntowali się, czy pokornie przyjmowali los, jaki zgotowali okupanci?

Miriam: A co mieliśmy robić? Nie wolno nam wyjść, my nic nie mamy do mówienia. Nie ma gazety, nie ma niczego. Z rana jak wstaniesz... raz na miesiąc dostajesz jedzenie, chleb raz na tydzień. Są ludzie, co nie mogą czekać z tym chlebem cały tydzień, jedli pierwszego dnia albo drugiego. Okropnie było. Życie było okropne, ale starało się być zadowolonym. Chodziło się do pracy,

wracało się do pracy, siedziało się z rodzicami, płakało się razem, śmiało się razem. Życie szło, nie wiadomo było, jak długo to jeszcze potrwa, ale jednak było życie i to się jednego dnia także skończyło. . .

Kiedy zostali Państwo przewiezieni do Auschwitz? Czy to bezpośrednio z łódzkiego getta przewieźli Państwa do Oświęcimia?

Miriam: Oświęcimia...

Kiedy to było? W którym roku?

Miriam: W czterdziestym czwartym roku. Myśmy w ogóle nie wiedzieli, co to znaczy Oświęcim. Nie wiedziało się, że istnieje Oświęcim, ale... to było w czterdziestym czwartym roku. Rosjanie się już... Słyszało się, że Rosjanie nadchodzą, ale nie wiedziało się dokładnie. Były różne wersje, może Rosjanie jeszcze wejdą, może zostaniemy przy życiu. Każdy myślał o tym, co chciał.

Miał nadzieję...

Miriam: Tak. W ogóle się nie wiedziało, że jest Auschwitz. W ogóle się nie wiedziało, że jest taka rzecz. Gdzie my mamy jechać? To nie była droga, taka normalna, jak żeście weszli do pociągu i żeście przyjechali. Myśmy także weszli do pociągu, ale to jest... ale nie wiedziało się, dokąd oni nas wiozą. To jest zgroza. Auschwitz nie ma człowieka, nie ma malarza, nie ma, nie wiem kogo, żeby mógł wyobrazić wam, co to znaczy chwila w Oświęcimie. Nie ma tego. W ogóle się nie wie, że jest Oświęcim. W ogóle się nie wie, że jest taka zagłada, w ogóle się nie widziało, dokąd wzięli nasze dzieci. W pierwszej chwili małe dzieci zostały bez rodziców, co to znaczy? Tu mam mamę, tu mam ojca. Mężczyźni oddzielnie, kobiety oddzielnie. Nikt nie wiedział, co się z nimi dzieje... Zagłada. Nawet zagłada nie była normalna. To jest trochę... bardzo ciężko, ale jednak ja wam powiem, że to jest.. Nie wiem, jak to wytłumaczyć. Nie ma człowieka, co by mógł wyobrazić chwilę w Oświęcimie, nie ma. Nie w książkach, w niczym nie można opowiedzieć, co było w Oświęcimie. Nawet w jednej chwili, co tam było.

Czy od razu w Oświęcimiu zostali państwo rozdzieleni jako rodzina?

Miriam: Tak. Ojca, mężczyźni byli oddzielnie i kobiety oddzielnie. Tatuś trzymał... Jedenaście lat miał brat... Jedenaście lat miał brat. Nawet „Shalom” się nie mówiło, nie wiedziało się, co się tu dzieje. Myśmy nie wiedzieli, że istnieje taka rzecz.

Jak Państwo w tych okropnych warunkach organizowali sobie życie, żeby przetrwać?

Miriam: W jaki sposób? W jaki sposób? Przecież nie można wyjść, nie można samemu pójść. My nie wiemy tutaj, jaka zagłada tam jest. Ja mówię... jak

wybrałam te cztery lata i mówiłam jakby było tylko dziesięć minut... U nas to nie było „klali” albo oddzielnie. Zamordowali wszystkich. Rodziny pękły, nie ma już rodzin. Nie ma matki, nie ma ojca, żeby ci położył rękę na... i powiedzieć „jutro będzie lepiej”. Nikogo nie ma już. Gdzie są, nikt nie wie. Ja nie wiedziałam, że istnieje Auschwitz, ja nie wiedziałam, co to słowo Auschwitz. Ja wiedziałam, że jest miasto na mapie i nazywa się Oświęcim. Ale więcej nie wiedziałam.

Jak długo Pani tam była, w obozie?

Miriam: Kilka tygodni, kilka miesięcy. Później nas posłali znowu do pracy.

Dokąd?

Miriam: W Sudetach. Ja byłam pięć i pół roku, pięć i pół roku. Od pierwszej chwili do ostatniej chwili, jak się skończyła wojna.

W jakiej miejscowości?

Miriam: Proszę? Nie, nie wszystko w Niemczech. Myśmy skończyli w Sudetach, w Niemczech. Pracowało się bardzo ciężko. Jak młode dziewczynki, może byłam waszym wieku. Nie wiem dokładnie, ale może od trzeciej nad ranem, czasami do dwunastej w nocy.

Chciałabym żebyśmy kontynuowały Pani opowiadanie. Opowiadała Pani o Auschwitz.

Miriam: Nie „Pani”, ja nazywam się Miriam. Przyjechałyśmy do Oświęcimia. Słuchaj, w pięć minut ja opowiedziałam cztery lata, cztery lata. Ty wiesz, co to znaczy? Ja w łódzkim getcie oparzyłam się jak pracowałam w kuchni. Upadłam i kocioł, sześćdziesiąt litrów zupy, wszystko było na mnie. Byłam spalona, i zabrali mnie do szpitala. Leżałam kilka tygodni w szpitalu. Wyszłam i żyję, i żyję! Wszędzie było, przeszło i żyje się, ale była zgroza, także w łódzkim getcie. Ale później to już była zagłada. O tym człowiek w ogóle nie może sobie wyobrazić, co było w Oświęcimie. Ja, co ja tu przeszłam. Nie wierzę, że można to przejść i jeszcze żyć i być człowiekiem. W tej samej chwili, co się przyjechało, mężczyźni oddzielnie, kobiety oddzielnie. Widziałam ojca z daleka, „Szalom” nawet nie powiedziałam, bo nie było można dojść. Matka trzymała jedno dziecko przy ręce. Siostra poleciała do niej, żeby być z nią razem, żeby ktoś mógł pomóc matce... Nie udało się, ona została z dzieckiem, z cór... , no, siostrą, co miała pięć lat. Więcej myśmy nie widzieli mamy... Zabrali nas, obcięli nam włosy we wszystkich miejscach. Jeden nie poznał drugiego. Chodziło się, patrzyło się na twarze. Jak patrzyłam na swoją siostrę i nie mogłam, nie mogłam w żaden sposób, poznać, czy to jest moja siostra. Wyglądało się jak małpy. Wiesz, w owym czasie kobiety, dziewczynki się wstydziły chodzić bez... bez ubrania i bez włosów ze wszystkich stron. Nie wiedziało się, gdzie kłaść ręce, nie wiedziało się, z kim, z kim mówić, kto ty jesteś i ty nie wiedziałas, kto

ja jestem. Tak nas zostawili kilka godzin. Później zabrali nas. Ty wiesz, co to znaczy „sauna”? Zabrali nas do sauny. Myśmy, nikt z nas nie wiedział, co to jest sauna. Myśmy myśleli, że to są ostatnie chwile naszego życia. Krzyki „Szma Israel”. To jest modlitwa nasza. Nie wiemy, gdzie jesteśmy. Ja nie wiem, kto mnie trzyma przy rękach, to była moja siostra. Wyglądało się naprawdę jak małpy. Jeszcze nigdy nikt nie opowiadał, co było w Oświęcimiu. Nie ma tego człowieka, że może opisać pięć minut w Oświęcimie. Myśmy strasznie płakali, nie wiedziało się, co to jest zagłada. Myślało się, że matkę wysłano do innej pracy, tośmy płakali, co mama robi. Mama była chora i już nie mogła chodzić na nogach. Kto jej pomoże? Co to będzie? Ty nie wiesz, gdzie jesteś, ty nie wiesz, co się z tobą dzieje. Ty już nie jesteś ty! Godziny łąziło się. Zabrali nam te buty, wszystko zabrało, niczego nie ma. I w saunie jak to szli do sauny... Myśmy nie wiedzieli, co to jest sauna. Widocznie weszło się na te schody, które były bardzo gorące, to wszystkie dziewczyny za jednym razem zaczęły „Szma Israel”, to jest nasza modlitwa na... Myślało się, że to są ostatnie chwile naszego życia, za każdym razem myślało się, że to jest ostatnia. My nawet nie wiemy, że jest... , że palą tam... ciała. Myśmy nic nie wiedzieli o Oświęcimiu, dlatego się nie wiedziało, co się z nami dzieje. Godziny szły za godzinami. Dali nam tylko duże... buty. Nikt nie mógł nosić je, bo były za duże. Trzymało się w rękach, ja dostałam spódnice, która była kilka numerów za duża dla minie. Nie wiedziałam, co mam trzymać, może mi spaść, a jak spadnie, to zaraz wszystko. To ręka leży już na ciele i dostajesz... i biją. Godzinę trwało, dopóty nas wysłali do baraków, ale na podłodze myśmy nie mieli pryczy, tylko na podłodze taki kawałek. Pięcioro, były trzy siostry i dwie kuzynki, żeśmy leżeli na podłodze kilka dni. Nie wiedziało się nawet, co to jest, gdzie my jesteśmy. Cały czas nas liczyli. Dwa razy dziennie wzięli nas do ubikacji, a ubikacje byli, przecież widziałas, jak tam jest. Tak się chodziło, wszystko za zegarkiem. Zegarka nie było, ale wszystko było w tym czasie to, w tym czasie to, w tym czasie to. Była groza, trudno to sobie wyobrazić... Byłyśmy kilka... kilka tygodni.

Pani była w grupie, w której byli tylko Żydzi, prawda? Powiedziano nam, że były trzy grupy. Byli Niemcy, którzy byli za jakieś przestępstwa skazani, Polacy i Żydzi. W Oświęcimiu, trzy jakby części obozu.

Miriam: A ja nie wiem, ja nie pamiętam, w którym roku.

W każdym razie, tam gdzie Pani była, byli tylko Żydzi, czy byli też Polacy razem z wami?

Miriam: Nie nie, ... polskie.. z łódzkiego getta żeśmy pojechali do Oświęcimia.

Ale tylko ludność Żydowska, czy Polacy też?

Miriam: Nie, nie, nie nie było Polaków, z getta żeśmy pojechali.

A czy w obozie Państwo kontaktowaliście się, nie było możliwości spotkania?

Miriam: Nie, skąd! Nawet z siostrą nie mogłam mówić, nawet z siostrą nie mogłam mówić, to było okropne, okropne. Nie można było komu powiedzieć, że ciężko nam.

Jak długo była...?

Miriam: Kilka tygodni, ja dokładnie nie wiem. Oświęcim to jest bez daty.

Kalendarza nie było, prawda?

Miriam: Oj, nic nie było. Nie było rąk, nie było nóg, nie było niczego. Wiesz jak małpy, jakby były drzewa, to bym powiedziała, że to są prawdziwe małpy. Nie ma określenia do tego, nie ma żadnego określenia.

Kiedy Pani wydostała się z obozu? Kiedy go Pani opuściła?

Miriam: W tym samym dniu. U nas się skończyła wojna, w tym samym dniu, kiedy się skończyła wojna. Myśmy byli w getcie, potem żeśmy byli w obozie, bardzo ciężko myśmy pracowali nad ranem.

Gdzie to było?

Miriam: W Sudetach, tam po stronie niemieckiej. Pracowało się we „Flax” fabryce, była tam bardzo ładna dziewczyna niemiecka. Nie mamy do kogo mówić słowa, nie wolno wymówić słowa, a jak chciało się pójść do ubikacji, nie mogłaś sama pójść.

(ucięte nagranie)

A w Oświęcimie to nawet nie było nic do jedzenia. W Oświęcimie żeśmy dostali... że się nic nie jadło. (ucięte nagranie). Wychowanie miało, ale talerzy nie dali nam, tylko garnek bez niczego. Dostała jeden taki garnek i tak musiało się pić zupę. Wyobraź sobie, w Niemczech i taka rzecz. Ja idę przed siostrą i się boję więcej jeść, bo jeśli to należy do twojej siostry albo do kogoś innego.

...żeby nie zabrakło?

Miriam: Słuchaj, taka zgroza z jedzeniem, nie masz pojęcia. Bała się zjeść, może kartofel będzie wewnątrz, a ten kartofel trzeba podzielić na pięć. Więc dzień w Oświęcimie nie można opowiedzieć, ile by nie było cierpliwości, nie można opowiedzieć, co to jest Oświęcim.

A proszę powiedzieć z Sudetów z Niemiec wróciła Pani do Polski czy...?

Miriam: Nie, wróciło się do Polski, Rosjanie weszli, to zaczęli znowu z kobietami... Po kilku tygodniach to żeśmy... Polacy zabrali nas do Polski i wróciło się do Polski. Wróciło się do Polski, do Łodzi. Wyjechało się z Łodzi, to i wróciło się. Dokąd masz pójść? Przecież nie jestem łodzianką, a nawet łodzianki, to ktoś już mieszka w moim domu, przecież nie wiesz kto. Nasze życie było...

tylko na ziemi się leżało, na stacji kolejowej. Ty przecież wiesz, że w Polsce pada jeszcze deszcz, ale kogo to obchodzi. Ale byliśmy szczęśliwi, że dostawaliśmy kawałek chleba do jedzenia i to było... Nie można sobie wyobrazić, co to jest kawałek chleba. Dostawało się, ile chcesz chleba i to było to wszystkie nasze życie. Czekano się, dokąd pójść, gdzie nocować, co to będzie? W naszej grupie była jakaś dziewczynka, co wyszła na ulicę i spotkała siostrę, która była w innym obozie. Uciecha! Siostra miała kolegę, który się zaczął z nami zobowiązywać. I słyszałam, że w jakimś miejscu na Północnej jest mieszkanie puste. Deszcz padał i spadł do nas. Ten dach trzeba było zreperować. A kto to robi? Nie ma kogo, kto to robi. Nie ma forsy, nie ma niczego. I tak się zaczęło to życie. Słyszałam, że ciotka moja żyje, tak. To była z rodziny... moja mama była z rodziny z trzynastu dzieci. Wyobraź sobie, że tylko ciotka jedna, jedyna została przy życiu. Miała dwoje dzieci. Jedną córkę spotkałam w Oświęcimie, ale ona zginęła tam. To wszystko, całe rodziny, całe rodziny zginęły tam.

A czy w Łodzi, po powrocie do Łodzi dostaliście jakąś pomoc od Polaków? Czy w jakiś, jakikolwiek sposób Polacy pomagali wam w Łodzi?

Miriam: Nie, nikt nam nie pomógł.

Dlaczego?

Miriam: Ja nie wiem, do kogo mamy pójść, nikt się nami nie interesował.

Czy wtedy groziła jeszcze jakaś... kara za pomoc?

Miriam: Rosjanie jeszcze byli tam, nikt się nami nie interesował. Szłam do miasta, szukałam, co można zrobić, szuka się pracy. Trzeba jeść kawałek chleba, nie? Spotkałam kolegę, co pracowałam z nim w kuchni. On mnie nie poznał, my byliśmy bez włosów i bez... Suknie jeszcze były z numerem. Wyglądało się jak małpy. On powiedział, że przed wojną mieli fabrykę pończoch i rodzice oddali to Polakom, znaczy się, jak ktoś przeżyje, to mu oddadzą. I Polacy mu oddali tę fabrykę i dał mi do pracowania, że mogę przyjść i pracować u niego. No i jak już zaczęłam pracować, to już mogłam pojechać, bo ciotka mieszkała w Kaliszu, to już mogłam pojechać do ciotki. Ja i moje dwie siostry żeśmy pojechałyśmy do ciotki. Uciecha! Uciecha i płacz. Myślała, że jej córka żyje, miała piętnaście lat. Piękna dziewczyna, jak marzenie. Ja ją spotkałam także w Oświęcimie... , nie syn, nie córka, nie mąż. Tuliło się do ciotki, myślałyśmy, że to jest matka. Nie można opowiadać takich rzeczy i takich rzeczy się nie uczy, ale to było okropne.

No właśnie, my nie możemy takich rzeczy przeczytać w książkach, jedyne co to...

Miriam: Ja jakbym tego nie przeszła i jak bym czytała książkę z jakiegoś obozu, to ja bym nie uwierzyła, że to może być.

Dlatego tak ważne, że my możemy się z Państwem spotkać, że możemy wysłuchać opowieści.

Miriam: No, ja nie wiem, nie może być, nie ma słów. Brakuje mi słowa, brakuje mi łzy. Łzy szły cały czas, cały czas się płakało. Pracowało się w płaczu, wszystko było w płaczu.

Czy dużo... dużo Żydów wróciło do Łodzi?

Miriam: Bardzo mało, bardzo. Znaczy, ja nie wiem, co znaczy dużo. Myśmy byli tysiące, ale ile wróciło? Jak ci powiedziałam, trzynaście siostr miała moja matka i no, jak się to nazywa..., braci. Nikt ci nie został, ty wiesz, to jest cała rodzina, ile potomstwa to jest. To było w każdej rodzinie to samo. Nie było jednej rodziny całej.

Jak długo zostaliście w Łodzi?

Miriam: W Łodzi niedługo, niedługo, wyjechało się z Łodzi zaraz.

Dokąd? Do Izraela?

Miriam: Ja przyjechałam do Izraela... Ja z siostrą żeśmy przyjecha... To tak, że Polacy nas po drodze złapali, siedziało się we więzieniu. Nie tak szybko było. No i później żeśmy postanowili, że nie ma dla nas miejsca i wyjeżdżamy do Izraelu. Do Izraelu już można było przyjechać. Nielegalnie. Myśmy przyjechały nielegalnie, ale to jest nie ważne. Każdy z nas chciał tylko, żebyśmy mieli swój własny kraj.

Ktoś wam pomagał?

Miriam: Były, były pomoce z tym... z wyjściem to już były pomoce. No, była organizacja, wszystko przez organizacje. Każdy postanowił, że tu musi być państwo dla nas. Jesteśmy jak, no nawet nie wiem, jak to powiedzieć. Małpy to nie wyglądały lepiej od nas, wyglądały lepiej od nas. No i zaczęło się to życie tu w kraju. Było bardzo ciężkie życie. Tu wojny się zaczęły, przecież nie..., nie..., nie miało się państwa. Dopiero teraz powstało państwo, ale byliśmy szczęśliwi, że będzie kraj.

Czy utrzymywaliście jakieś kontakty z Polską? Czy ktoś...

Miriam: Ja już byłam. Ja już byłam dwa, trzy razy, wyjechałam do Oświęcimia.

Ale tuż po przyjeździe do Izraela czy jakieś kontakty..?

Miriam: Nie! Oni interesowali się nami. Zupełnie! Każdy tylko marzył, żeby był nasz kraj. Dosyć, dosyć! Dosyć się wydarzyło na tym całym świecie. Bez grosza, bez pracy. Pracowało się bardzo ciężko, ale każdy z nas był zadowolony, będziemy mieli państwo.

Czyli nie traktowała Pani wtedy Polski jako kraju którego.. nie miała Pani pozytywnego nastawienia do Polski?

Miriam: Dwa razy pojechałem do Polski. Kiedyś z dziećmi chciałem, żeby zobaczyli Oświęcim. Byłem w Warszawie, byłem w Krakowie, byłem w różnych miejscach. Rozmawiałem z naszym burmistrzem, ale nie był zbyt zainteresowany, ale nie wiem, może tak powinno być. Nie jestem zły ... Ale nie mówię nic złego o Polsce. Na początku bardzo tęskniłem za Polską. Urodziłem się tutaj w Polsce, miałem rodziców, miałem siostry. Na wesele nie było nic.

To niesamowite, że Pani to mówi z uśmiechem, kiedy tyle złego w Polsce też Panią spotkało, bo na przykład te obozy, prawda?

Miriam: Nie, nic złego, ja nie mówię na Polskę.

To znaczy to było w Polsce, nie z rąk Polaków, ale w Polsce.

Miriam: Nieee, słuchaj... Wrócili z Rosji.. Jeszcze było... Rosjanie... Jak wrócili z Rosji, Polacy jeszcze w Kielsku (w Kielcach?) zabili Żydów, co wrócili z Rosji. Jedź do Kielska (do Kielc) to zobaczysz, że jest tablica. Tak, ja byłam, widziałam, że tu leżą ci, którzy przeszli wojnę i ich zabili... bo są Żydami. Jak pojedziesz do Kielska (do Kielc) to zobaczysz, że jest tablica na tym domu. Ale jednak ja tęskniłam strasznie za Polską, nie wiem, na początku ja tęskniłam.

Czyli jednak te dobre wspomnienia zostały Pani bardziej.

Miriam: Słuchaj, ja nie odczuwałam nic złego. Było mi dobrze. Pojechałam do naszego miasteczka. Przeszłam kilka razy przed naszym domem. Dom był zamknięty. Nasz dom... Nie mogłam wejść i zobaczyć co się tam dzieje.

Dlaczego?

Miriam: Co? Ja nie wiem. Nie weszłam, nie widziałam nic.

Ale nie mogła Pani, czy Pani nie chciała?

Miriam: Ja nie wiem. Może jak bym poszła do gminy, to by mi otworzyli, ale nie mogłam...

A tam nikt nie mieszkał?

Miriam: Aaa, niee. Teraz mieszkają, teraz ja wiem. A jedna rzecz, co mi się nie podobało w Polsce, to ja powiedziałam do burmistrza Koźminku, że jedną rzecz nie mogę zrozumieć.. Że wsadzili Polaków do Synagogi.

A co się w tej Synagodze teraz znajduje?

Miriam: Synagoga to jest najświętsza rzecz, nie? I teraz tam Polacy mieszkają!

W Synagodze.

Aha, dom mają po prostu.

Miriam: Nie, nie, nie. Ja się burmistrza powiedziała „W jak sposób? Nie wstydzić się, wsadzić tu tyle...” Przecież każdy coś zostawił, jakiś majątek w domu. Tego do dzisiejszego dnia nie mogę zapomnieć. Ja burmistrza dobrze znam i przyjeżdżają czasami, ja ich wtedy przyjmuję i wszystko dobrze, ale uraz mam tylko do tego.

Czyli jednak ważną świętość...

Miriam: Ale słuchaj, co możesz zrobić? Jeśli toczy się wojna, wszystko jest odwrócone, wręcz przeciwnie.

Cieszę się, że mimo wszystko, mimo tak trudnej przeszłości ma Pani uśmiech na twarzy, kiedy Pani mówi o Polsce. Bo my pracujemy nad projektem, który...

Miriam: To jest życie. To jest historia życia, nie?

A proszę powiedzieć czy więcej dobra czy więcej zła doświadczyła Pani od Polaków?

Miriam: Ja nie wiem. Ja pamiętam wszystko dobre, ja nie pamiętam złe. Myśmy żyli bardzo dobrze z Polakami. Nasi sąsiedzi to byli Polacy. Myśmy żyli bardzo dobrze, dopóty wojna nie wybuchła, później to zupełnie coś innego. Po wojnie także byłam kilka razy, było wszystko w porządku.

A w czasie wojny Polacy nie pomagali Żydom?

Miriam: Nie mogli, nie mogli, nie można tego wymagać. Niemcy nie pozwolili. Nie.

A czy zdarzały się takie sytuacje, że ktoś pomimo to ryzykował życie i pomagał Państwu? Czy ktoś mimo tego, że było zagrożenie życia, pomagał wam?

Miriam: Nie, nie, nie. Ale ja nie mam pretensji. Wszystko mi się podoba, dobrze.

Cieszę się, że ma...

Miriam: Ja nie mam pretensji. Mam pretensje tylko do Niemców, a do nikogo więcej nie mam. Antysemityzm zawsze był i zostanie jeszcze. Tak mi się zdaje.

A czy Pani ma pomysł skąd on się wziął w Polsce? Bo często się mówi, że Polacy są antysemitami.

Miriam: Nie wiem, nie mogę tego powiedzieć. Nasi sąsiedzi byli Polakami, żyliśmy bardzo dobrze. Chodziłem do polskiej szkoły, uczyłem się z polskimi kobietami i mieszkalem z nimi bardzo dobrze. Nie mogę tego powiedzieć. Jeden taki jest, drugi taki jest i podczas wojny wszystko się odwraca i nikogo nie winię.

A getto to też nie był Polski pomysł, prawda? Więc to nie Polacy zgotowali getta.

Miriam: Nie, nie. To Niemcy, Niemcy. Nee, oni się też bali. Było zupełnie inne życie, nic nie można było zrobić. Do getta nie mogli wejść, z getta nie można było wyjść. Getto jest getto, zamknięte. Nie ma słów, ale to jest wojna. Przeszło i żeby więcej nie było takich wojen.

Może chce Pani odpocząć?

Miriam: Ja wiem? Nee, ja wczoraj byłem w szpitalu. Dopiero wyszłam ze szpitala wczoraj po południu. To jestem trochę jeszcze osłabiona jeszcze, kie. Ale widzisz, jednak postanowiłam, że będę mówiła i mówię.

Bardzo się cieszę.

Miriam: Jakby nie one [*o osobie, która przerwała wywiad*], to ja bym mogła mówić cały czas. Ja nie chcę, ja mówię, że wszystko jest w porządku cały czas.

David Geballe

*David Geballe (*1981) grew up in Hamburg. At the age of 16, he began to work as a youth leader with Jewish youth. He studied in Berlin, New York and Jerusalem, in 2006 he received the rabbinic dignity. Since 2011 he has worked as a rabbi in Germany, first in Munich and then in Fürth, where he was in charge of the Israelite religious community at the time of the interview. In addition to the rabbinical activity, he was involved among others in the Jewish fraternity of students (Jüdischer Studentenverbund Franken) and the board of the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation (Gesellschaft für christlich-jüdische Zusammenarbeit). Since September 2017, he is in charge of the Jewish Community of Duisburg-Mülheim / Ruhr-Oberhausen as Chief Rabbi. The interview took place in Fürth in 2016, it was conducted in German.*

Könnten Sie sich zu Beginn kurz vorstellen?

David Geballe: Mein Name ist David Geballe, geboren bin ich im fernen Hamburg, bin jetzt seit nicht ganz sechs Jahren Rabbiner hier in der Gemeinde und habe dementsprechend viel Kontakt mit den Gemeindemitgliedern, aber auch mit den anderen Gemeinden hier in der Umgebung, und dadurch auch einen relativ guten Einblick, wie diese momentan stehen.

Wie sieht dieser Einblick denn aus?

David Geballe: Dass es seit der Syrienkrise schwieriger geworden ist, dadurch, dass die hunderttausende Leute mit einem muslimischen Erziehungshintergrund, die nach Deutschland gekommen sind, von klein an durch die Eltern und Medien in den arabischsprachigen Ländern nicht gerade zu Judenliebe erzogen worden sind und ein ganz anderes Bild haben, was Juden oder Nicht-Muslime angeht. In den letzten vier Jahren sind, nach meiner Erfahrung und nach dem was man hört, die allermeisten Probleme aus diesem Klientel. Das soll nicht heißen, dass es unter Deutschen oder anderen Europäern keinen Antisemitismus gibt oder gegeben hat – den gibt es leider immer noch, aber der wird heutzutage als „Israelkritik“ verkleidet oder damit gerechtfertigt, dass man „so etwas unter Freunden ja noch sagen darf“. Muslimisch geprägter Antisemitismus ist oftmals noch direkter Antisemitismus oder teilweise noch Antijudaismus – was es in Europa in dieser Form und Ausprägung seit 150 Jahren nicht mehr gibt. Aber Antisemitismus bleibt Antisemitismus, egal, wie er sich verkleidet.

Gibt es mehrere Formen des Antisemitismus? Welche würden Sie da aufführen?

David Geballe: Es gibt die drei Schulmeinungsansätze, angefangen vom Antijudaismus, der sich gegen die Religion selbst richtet und vor 150 bis 200 Jahren

zum reinen Antisemitismus weiterentwickelt hat. Dieser wurde nicht primär auf die Religion, sondern auf das Volk bezogen. Nach dem Sechstagekrieg 1967 wurde das dann schleichend zu einem Antizionismus oder Antiisraelismus, bei dem die Israelis nicht mehr als Opfer des zweiten Weltkriegs, sondern als Täter angesehen wurden und damit das Feindbild waren. Das ist die Entwicklung der letzten Jahrzehnte.

Und glauben Sie, dass sich das in allen gesellschaftlichen Gruppen in Deutschland gleich entwickelt hat, oder gab es da Unterschiede? Sie haben ja zum Beispiel den muslimischen Hintergrund angesprochen.

David Geballe: Klar, man kann die verschiedenen Gruppen kaum miteinander vergleichen. Jemand, der in einem muslimisch geprägten Land aufwächst, wo im Fernsehen offiziell Kinderserien laufen, in denen Juden als Nichtmenschen dargestellt werden - wenn dieses Kind einmal erwachsen wird, hat es gar nicht die freie Wahl, Juden nicht zu hassen. Es ist so in diese Person und ihre Psyche eingebaut, dass es schon wirklich einen sehr besonderen Menschen braucht, um diese Kette zu durchbrechen.

Meinen Sie, das kommt vor?

David Geballe: Es gibt durchaus ein paar berühmte Beispiele. Zum Beispiel den Sohn von einem der Hamas-Führer, der diese Kette durchbrochen hat. Der tritt auch auf, um diese Meinung nach draußen zu bringen¹. Dann gibt es auch in Deutschland einen, ich glaube er ist Historiker. Auf jeden Fall gibt es ein paar Leute, die diese Kette durchbrechen, das sind leider die Ausnahmen und nicht die Regel. Ich würde jetzt auch nicht unterstellen, dass automatisch jeder Muslim ein Antisemit sei, um Gottes Willen. Aber es sind bestimmte Vorurteile, die vor und insbesondere nach 1967 durch diese Kultur geprägt wurden, mit den "drei Neins" gegen Israel, kein Frieden, keine Anerkennung, keine Verhandlungen. Das hat sich zu einem politisch geprägten Antisemitismus entwickelt.

Und abgesehen von den Leuten, die aus muslimisch geprägten Ländern kommen - wie hat sich das nach Ihrer Einschätzung in Deutschland nach dem Krieg entwickelt?

David Geballe: Es gab hier in Fürth und auch anderswo Fälle, in denen man auch nach dem Krieg Leute mit dem offiziellen Persilschein angepöbelt hat. Der Persilschein war auf dem Papier und nicht in den Köpfen der Leute. Vorstände der jüdischen Gemeinde durften sich dann Dinge anhören wie "Schade, dass wir dich nicht auch noch bekommen haben" und so etwas. Klar, das gab es immer nach dem Krieg, durch die ganze Geschichte durch, teilweise auch in der Justiz, weil die hohen Beamten irgendwo herkommen mussten. Es war so, dass Altbeamte mit übernommen wurden, die auch in der Nazizeit eine nicht unwichtige Rolle gespielt haben.

Glauben Sie, dass diese Übernahmen tatsächlich notwendig waren?

David Geballe: Klar ist, dass Anfang der Fünfziger einfach Polizisten, Richter und sowas gebraucht wurden. In der DDR war das anders, weil dort Leute aus der Sowjetunion hingeschickt und eingesetzt wurden. Inzwischen gibt es historische Nachforschungen, laut denen auch dort nicht alle Beamten und Parteifunktionäre während der Nazizeit eine wirklich weiße Weste hatten. Aber es war in beiden Deutschlands eigentlich so, dass Leute mit übernommen wurden. Mussten sie, mussten sie nicht? Hinterher ist man immer klüger, aber bei manchen stellt sich die Frage, hätten die wirklich in so eine wichtige Position kommen sollen oder nicht?

Diese Anpöbelungen gegen Vorstände der jüdischen Gemeinde, war das in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit oder zieht sich das bis heute hin?

David Geballe: In den Fünfziger und Sechziger Jahren gab es das alles, teilweise auch heute noch. Natürlich sind die ganzen Altnazis inzwischen nicht mehr in der Lage, so zu pöbeln. Wenn sie noch am Leben sind, sind sie in Alters- oder Pflegeheimen. Aber es vergeht keine Woche, in der jüdische Gemeinden in Deutschland nicht mit Drohbriefen – sowohl mit als auch ohne Namen – angeschrieben werden, die teilweise sehr deutlich bestimmte Gesetze brechen und nicht wirklich angenehm zu lesen sind. Zum Beispiel, als die sogenannte Beschneidungsdebatte war, war es sehr, sehr schlimm, da haben Leute mit hohem Bildungsgrad – Doktoren, Rechtsanwälte, teilweise auch Lehrer und Direktoren an Schulen – Briefe geschrieben die unterhalb jeder Gürtellinie sind. Diese Leute hatten auch keine Probleme, ihre Namen, Adressen und Titel in voller Gänze auf ihre Briefe zu schreiben. Nicht so wie früher, wo so etwas anonym und aus Zeitungsschnipseln gemacht war, das ist inzwischen selten geworden. Heute ist es so, dass die meisten Briefe anfangen mit "Unter Freunden wird man das ja wohl noch mal sagen dürfen..." oder „Das sagen wir nur, weil wir ja euch so mögen“ und so etwas wie „Aber was ihr mit den armen Palästinensern oder mit euren armen Kindern macht, das darf doch wohl nicht sein“. Also wenn ein Brief so anfängt, dann ist man sicher, entweder unten oder oben stehen der volle Name und die Adresse dieser Person. Es hat sich ein bisschen eingebürgert: Wenn man diesen magischen Satz sagt, "unter Freunden wird man das ja noch sagen dürfen", dann ist alles, was danach kommt, nicht mehr antisemitisch, sondern nur freundlich gemeint. Ich denke, es ist so, dass Antisemitismus ein Krebs ist, der niemals ganz geheilt werden kann. Es wird immer Antisemitismus geben, es hat ihn auch schon immer gegeben. Die Frage ist nur, ist es gesellschaftsfähig oder nicht? Während der Nazizeit war er sogar Staatsraison, was er Gott sei Dank seitdem nicht mehr ist, aber heute wird keiner mehr öffentlich aufstehen und sagen "Ihr Juden seid so und so", sondern es ist eher Israel, das man angreifen kann. Genauso wie jetzt Anfang des Jahres, wo ein deutsches Gericht entschieden hat, dass ein versuchter Brandanschlag auf eine Synagoge keine antisemitische Straftat, sondern nur eine politische Aussage gegen den Staat Israel im Gaza-Krieg ist, was für mich eine absolute Schweinerei war. Was soll man dazu sagen? Natürlich fällt diese Straftat dann nicht in die

Kategorie von Antisemitismus und dadurch kann man auch diese ganzen Listen und Szenen von antisemitischen Straftaten klein halten.

Gab es in den letzten Jahren auch Antisemitismus in Fürth, in Bezug auf den Gaza-Krieg zum Beispiel?

David Geballe: Zum Glück gab es in den letzten Jahren keinen gewalttätigen Antisemitismus in Fürth, aber mehr oder weniger verdeckten, in Form von Briefen, Anrufen oder E-Mails. Neulich erst kam eine E-Mail, die an mehrere Rabbiner und Gemeindevorstände und berühmte Juden gerichtet war und diese aufgefordert hat, zu einem Kriegstribunal vorstellig zu werden wegen Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit und Sonstiges. Diese stammte von Leuten die nicht dem rechten Spektrum zuzuordnen sind, sondern eher dem linken.

Nochmal zu den Medien - Sie bekommen also Briefe, E-Mails und Anrufe?

David Geballe: Alle Möglichkeiten der Telekommunikation werden da ausgeschöpft.

Ich nehme mal an, in den sozialen Netzwerken ist der Antisemitismus weniger verkleidet oder versteckt, weil er dort anonym geäußert werden kann.

David Geballe: Man braucht nur auf YouTube gehen und irgendein Video, das mit Judentum zu tun hat, anzuklicken, und dann sieht man gleich zweierlei Arten von Kommentaren. Einmal die muslimisch geprägten, die dementsprechend anfangen, und dann die nichtmuslimischen, die dann mit Beschneidung oder sonst etwas anfangen. So etwas wird man überall finden, auf Facebook muss ich gar nicht eingehen. Als vor etwa drei Jahren die Beschneidungsdebatte war, war es dort sehr, sehr schlimm. Sobald irgendein Bericht in der Zeitung erschien, der auch online zu lesen war, gab es darauf natürlich Kommentare. Es war teilweise nicht mehr lustig, das mitzulesen. Von irgendwelchen Pädophilie-Vorwürfen gegenüber allen Juden und so weiter.

Wie sieht es mit antisemitischen Äußerungen von einer esoterisch-tierschützenden Bewegung zum Schächten aus, zum Beispiel?

David Geballe: Gibt es auch, zum Glück sind die in Deutschland noch nicht so stark. In anderen Ländern, z. B. in der Schweiz, ist das mit dem Schächten verboten, was auch zum großen Teil vom Tierschutz mitgetragen wurde. Das Interessante ist, wenn man einmal mit diesen Leuten spricht und sie nach wissenschaftlichen Beweisen fragt, dann kommt eigentlich nur warme Luft zurück. Also, es ist nur ein Nebenthema, diese klassischen Angriffe gegen das Judentum sind genauso substanzlos wie sie immer waren. Das Krasseste, was ich einmal erlebt habe, ist, dass ein Lehrer mich bei einer Schulführung mit einer katholischen Religionsklasse gefragt hat, was für ein Blut heutzutage für Matzen

benutzt wird. Am Anfang dachte ich, es wäre ein schlechter Scherz, aber das war es leider nicht.

Ich bin Historiker, ich habe ein Buch über Antisemitismus in Franken während der Weimarer Republik geschrieben und dabei ist mir aufgefallen, dass es in Fürth einen ziemlich starken zivilgesellschaftlichen Widerstand gegen die Nazis und gegen den Antisemitismus gab – ganz im Gegensatz zu Nürnberg, wo sich die Arbeiterklasse zurückgezogen und nichts dagegen gemacht hat. Ist jetzt noch etwas in Fürth zu merken von einem zivilgesellschaftlichen Widerstand gegen Rechte Gruppierungen?

David Geballe: Jein. Bei den Fürthern, die wirklich noch ein bisschen die Geschichte kennen, ist es immer noch ein bisschen im Kopf drinnen, dass Fürth eine Art fränkisches Jerusalem ist und so etwas. Das ist durchaus bewusst, aber weil die Gesellschaft heute allgemein viel schneller umzieht, stellt sich die Frage, wie viele von den in Fürth lebenden Menschen wirklich Fürther oder Franken in diesem Sinne sind. Ich meine, ich bin selbst keiner, und wird eine Person, die aus Berlin, aus Stuttgart oder ich weiß nicht was herkommt, wirklich wissen, was Fürth für eine Geschichte hat? Vielleicht nicht, vielleicht ja, vielleicht schafft sie es mal, hier ins jüdische Museum oder so etwas, aber das war es auch schon. Das Wissen ist in dem Sinne heute nicht mehr so stark ausgeprägt, wie es früher mal einmal war. Man muss natürlich sagen, dass die Stadt an sich, also beispielsweise der Oberbürgermeister, sich dessen voll und ganz bewusst sind. Es gibt daher auch ein sehr gutes Verhältnis zwischen der Stadt und der Gemeinde, in beide Richtungen. Die Stadt hilft uns, wo immer sie kann, wir helfen der Stadt, wo immer wir können. Das ist schon da, auf jeden Fall gibt es also Überreste davon.

Können Sie sich bei der aktuellen Erweiterung des Jüdischen Museums Franken in Fürth einbringen?

David Geballe: Das Museum hat ja einen Trägerverein und auch eine wirkliche wissenschaftliche Leitung, die dort natürlich hauptsächlich dort bestimmt. Natürlich gibt es auch eine Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Museum und der Gemeinde, aber Museum und Gemeinde sind getrennt. Ich bin mir ziemlich sicher, wenn ich einen Vorschlag machen würde, würde man darüber nachdenken und darüber sprechen, aber im Großen und Ganzen bin ich mit dem alten Teil zufrieden. Ich denke daher, dass auch der neue Teil gut ausgestattet werden wird.

Was halten Sie generell von der Bildung, die in Deutschland über das Judentum vermittelt wird, also in den Schulen oder auch anderswo?

David Geballe: Ich erweitere das mal ein bisschen mit der Bildung über den Zweiten Weltkrieg. Auf der einen Seite zu viel, auf der anderen Seite zu schlecht. Das soll heißen, dass die meisten Schüler, wenn wieder das Thema Holocaust

oder Zweiter Weltkrieg in der Schule hochkommt, sich denken „ah, nicht schon wieder“. Das ist natürlich genau das, was man nicht erreichen möchte. Und an einer Schule, an der 80% der Klasse aus Muslimen besteht, muss man natürlich ganz anders unterrichten. Es gibt Berichte, ich habe von einer Lehrerin aus Berlin gelesen, an deren Schule wirklich 90% der Schüler*innen Muslime sind. Als dann Fotos von KZs gezeigt wurden, haben die angefangen zu klatschen. Das ist natürlich genau das Gegenteil von dem, was man damit erreichen möchte. Von daher denke ich, es wäre sinnvoll, sich neue Konzepte zu erarbeiten, die dann für die Lehrer quasi verpflichtend sind. Vielleicht nicht ganz so oft, aber dafür wirklich besser.

Was würden Sie sich da vorstellen?

David Geballe: Natürlich kann man eine Klasse von einem Gymnasium in Bayern auf dem Land nicht mit einer Gesamtschule in Berlin vergleichen. Das Klientel ist ein ganz anderes, das muss natürlich auch dementsprechend angepasst sein. Es gibt keine magische Lösung, die immer funktioniert, aber es gibt Gott sei Dank genügend Leute, die von der Erarbeitung von Konzepten und Bildungsmaterialien mehr Ahnung haben als ich. Wie das genau aussieht, weiß ich nicht, darüber habe ich noch nicht wirklich nachgedacht, aber dass Handlungsbedarf besteht, da bin ich mir ziemlich sicher.

Ich war ein paarmal bei den Wochen der Brüderlichkeit dabei und mein persönlicher Eindruck war, dass das Verhältnis zwischen deutschen Christen und deutschen Juden etwas ritualisiert und bemüht ist. Ist dieser Eindruck richtig?

David Geballe: Die Woche der Brüderlichkeit an sich ist etwas sehr Gutes, sehr Tolles, es ist ja auch geschichtlich gesehen eine Abstammung vom *reeducation programme* der Amerikaner. Das Problem ist, wenn man sich jede Veranstaltung in der Woche der Brüderlichkeit anschaut und das Durchschnittsalter der Zuhörer oder Mitwirkenden berechnet, wird man jenseits des Rentenalters sein. Immer wenn ich eine Schulklassenführung in der Woche der Brüderlichkeit habe, frage ich die Schüler*innen, ob sie wissen, was für eine Woche gerade ist. Ich habe einmal bisher eine Antwort bekommen, aber auch nur, weil der Vater von einer der Schülerinnen evangelischer Pfarrer und deswegen bemüht ist. Deswegen wusste die Tochter zufällig, was das ist, aber sonst kamen dann Fragen zurück, vielleicht Champions League-Woche oder so etwas. Obwohl es doch eigentlich prädestiniert wäre, in den Schulen dazu etwas zu machen, passiert das in den allermeisten Fällen nicht. Es gibt hier in Fürth zum Glück eine sehr gute Ausnahme, das Helene-Lange-Gymnasium, wo es schon wirklich Tradition ist, am Donnerstag in der Woche der Brüderlichkeit eine Veranstaltung zu machen, die auch für die höheren Klassen verpflichtend ist. Das vordere Viertel der Stuhlreihen ist für Ehrengäste reserviert, aber der Rest sind wirklich Schüler. Ich finde, dazu ist die Woche der Brüderlichkeit da und nicht dieses gegenseitige „piep, piep, piep, wir haben uns alle lieb“, das ist etwas stilisiert

und schon fast eingeübt und nicht wirklich der Sinn und Zweck des Ganzen.

Was genau wird am Helene-Lange-Gymnasium an diesem Tag gemacht?

David Geballe: Es gibt jedes Jahr einen Hauptsprecher von verschiedenen Quellen, vor ein paar Jahren war z. B. jemand vom israelischen Konsulat in München hier und hat eine Rede gehalten. Dieses Jahr war es ein wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter der Uni Frankfurt, der über die deutschen Nazi-Prozesse berichtet hat. Es gibt verschiedene Vorträge, die ein Thema wirklich vertiefen anstatt oberflächlich zu bleiben, also wirklich ein *reeducation programme*. Nicht einfach Larifari, wir haben uns alle lieb, sondern wirklich Wissen, das vermittelt wird. Gott sei Dank ist Dummheit eine Krankheit, die geheilt werden kann. Ich bin der festen Überzeugung, dass Vorurteile nur dort wachsen können, wo Wissen fehlt. Das macht es nur umso schlimmer, dass die Woche der Brüderlichkeit nicht viel mehr in den Schulen thematisiert wird.

Und was bieten Sie persönlich in der Gemeinde an? Führungen für Schulklassen haben sie schon erwähnt, gibt es noch andere Sachen?

David Geballe: Im Durchschnitt mache ich zwei Führungen in der Woche. Meistens von Neuntklässlern, weil in der neunten Klasse andere Religionen sowie Traditions- und Toleranzbegriffe im Lehrplan stehen. Da sind eigentlich die meisten Führungen, es gibt auch ein paar andere. Manche machen es schon in der vierten Klasse, obwohl ich das persönlich nicht so gerne mache, wegen des Alters und der Aufmerksamkeitsspanne. Wenn ich wirklich jede Anfrage annehmen würde, was rein zeitlich leider gar nicht mehr geht, würde ich manche Wochen mit zehn Führungen haben, aber es gibt Gott sei Dank auch genügend andere Dinge zu tun in einer Gemeinde, für die ebenfalls gesorgt werden muss.

Wie sind Ihre Erfahrungen aus den Führungen, sind die Schüler interessiert oder muss man sie wirklich dafür begeistern?

David Geballe: Es kommt darauf an. Meiner Erfahrung nach hängt es davon ab, wie gut die Kinder darauf vorbereitet wurden. Kinder in der neunten Klasse sind ja Jugendliche, meistens so um die 15 Jahre alt. Was ich eigentlich allen Lehrern mitgebe, wenn sie nach einer Führung fragen, ist „ja, aber nur wenn Fragen auch im Unterricht vorbereitet werden“, ich muss hier ja keinen Frontalunterricht durchführen. Dafür ist mir meine Zeit viel zu schade. Wenn die Schüler einfach nur die Augen verdrehen und sich fragen, wann es endlich zu Ende ist, dann ist das eine Zeitverschwendung für sie und für mich. Das heißt, ich will diese Stunde sinnvoll nutzen und das funktioniert meistens dann gut, wenn die Schüler gut vorbereitet wurden.

Welche Fragen stellen Schüler Ihnen, wenn sie welche vorbereitet haben?

David Geballe: Es gibt Verschiedenstes. Also es gibt Fragen, die sich aus dem

Unterricht ergeben haben, auf die der Lehrer oder die Lehrerin keine Antwort wussten. Meistens gebe ich auch eine Einführung in das Judentum. Ich habe es leider oft gesehen, dass Lehrer bei dem Thema eine kleine Nachbildung gebrauchen könnten. Es kommt nicht nur vor, dass Informationen fehlen, sondern auch, dass teilweise wirklich falsche Dinge beigebracht wurden. Ich erläutere die wichtigsten Dinge im Judentum, wie eine Kurzfassung, und dann bleiben wir bei ein paar Themen stehen, die für Jugendliche vielleicht einen Anreiz haben oder sie vielleicht selbst bewegen. Dabei entwickeln sich meistens auch sehr viele Fragen.

Das kann ich nur bestätigen, ich war ein halbes Jahr in der Lehrerfortbildung bei Berufsschullehrer*innen tätig. Das war mein härtester Job, weil alles, was Lehrer nicht wollen, ist belehrt zu werden. Und das Wissen war wirklich gleich Null, also erschreckend schwach. Haben Sie das bei Religions- oder Geschichtslehrern erlebt?

David Geballe: Also die meisten, die kommen, sind Religionslehrer, weil es dort im Lehrplan verankert ist. Geschichtslehre hatte ich noch nicht, wenn ich mich nicht täusche. Es gab mal einen Philosophiekurs, aber Geschichte noch nicht.

Und was ist mit anderen Gruppen, also Nicht-Schüler?¹²

David Geballe: Sind meistens das andere Spektrum, das heißt Rentengruppen, meistens überwiegend von Kirchen oder so etwas. Ich hatte auch schon einmal den Rentnerclub der Siemenswerke in Erlangen. Bis dahin wusste ich nicht, dass es so etwas gibt, aber das ist ein Club von ehemaligen Siemens-Angestellten, die verschiedene Ausflüge anbieten.

Wie sind da Ihre Erfahrungen?

David Geballe: Die Erwachsenengruppen sind meist doch etwas fragaktiver, um es so auszudrücken. Es gibt aber auch dort Leute, die – wie sie eben gesagt haben – nicht belehrt werden wollen. Es gibt auch einige, die mit einer festen gebildeten Meinung über Juden oder das Judentum herkommen und diese eigentlich nur bestätigt haben wollen. Ich hatte es schon ein- oder zweimal, dass diese wirklich ausfallend wurden und meinten, ich solle endlich mal die Wahrheit erzählen und nicht irgendetwas Geschöntes.

Wie reagieren Sie in so einer Situation?

David Geballe: Die Organisation muss angepasst werden. Man muss schauen, wie der Rest der Gruppe reagiert. Wenn der Rest der Gruppe nickend zustimmt, ist es etwas anderes als wenn die Gruppe diese Person komisch anschaut und fragt, was da jetzt los ist. Natürlich reagiere ich in beiden Fällen anders. In

¹²This question, as well as the following one, was originally asked at a later stage of the interview; for this publication, the passage was inserted here in order to avoid thematic breaks.

der beschriebenen Situation habe ich, wenn zeitlich die Möglichkeit bestand, quasi jede einzelne Aussage dieser Person auseinandergenommen und gezeigt, wie schwach das doch eigentlich ist. Zum Beispiel, dass Matzen eigentlich aus Blut gemacht und nur heutzutage, weil es verboten ist, aus Getreide hergestellt werden. Das war dann auch wirklich einfach: „Gibt es hier einen Chemiker?“. Zum Glück war jemand da, der sogar Lebensmittelchemiker war von Beruf. Den habe ich gefragt, ob er einen Prozess kennt, mit dem man Blut in eine weiße Masse transformieren kann, die auch noch essbar ist. „Nein, kenne ich nicht“ – und wenn selbst der Lebensmittelchemiker das nicht weiß. . .

Das was eine Anspielung auf die Ritualmordlegende?

David Geballe: Ja, das gibt es Verschiedenes. Zum Beispiel noch, dass Frauen im Judentum unterdrückt oder schwach seien, viele absurde Schwachsinnigkeiten. Falsches oder schlechtes Wissen gibt es leider auch sehr häufig. Hier in Fürth gibt es ein Weiterbildungszentrum des Deutschen Zolls, und die bieten in den verschiedenen Bereichen des Zolls, die mit anderen Leuten zu tun haben, Kurse an. Da kann man sich z. B. mal mit Amerikanern austauschen oder so etwas. Und jetzt hat es sich seit etwa vier Jahren eingebürgert, dass auch mal Gruppen des Deutschen Zolls in die Synagoge kommen und hier zollrelevante Dinge besprochen werden, zusammen mit einer Einführung in das Judentum. Das ist die dritte große Gruppe. Für eine Schulgruppe nehme ich ungefähr eine Stunde Zeit, für die Zollgruppen sind es eigentlich immer zwei oder zweieinhalb Stunden, weil meistens so viele Fragen kommen und so viel Praktisches für den Zoll-Alltag, was die Leute besprechen wollen. Sie erzählen mir z. B. von einer Situation, die aus dem Ruder gelaufen ist und fragen, was sie anders hätten machen sollen oder was besser gewesen wäre. Das sind auch meistens die interessantesten Führungen für mich persönlich.

Welche praktische Bedeutung hat das für den Zoll?

David Geballe: Ein klassischer Fall wäre, dass diese Leute z. B. in München oder Frankfurt am Flughafen beschäftigt sind und eine Maschine mit israelischen Fluggästen reinkommt, die einer Routineinspektion vom Zoll unterzogen werden soll, jeder kennt das. Und es kann mal passieren, dass dann einer der Reisenden etwas forsch antwortet, zum Beispiel mit „du durchsuchst mich doch nur, weil ich Jude bin, bist du etwa ein Nazi?“. Solche Sprüche, die völlig aus dem Nichts hergeholt sind, aber leider von manchen benutzt werden, nach dem Motto „Angriff ist die beste Verteidigung, und wenn ich ihn jetzt als Nazi abstempele, wird er sich nicht mehr trauen, mich zu durchsuchen“. Natürlich ist das nicht der Fall. Man kann sich damit auch eine Anzeige wegen Beleidigung einheimssen, und es gibt Tipps, wie man als Zöllner mit so einer Situation umgeht und was man sagen oder tun kann, um sie ein wenig zu entschärfen.

Interessant. Noch einmal zu den ganzen antisemitischen Angriffen, die Sie bekommen: setzen Sie sich mit denen auseinander oder ver-

suchen Sie lieber, sie zu ignorieren?

David Geballe: Je nachdem. Ich beschäftige mich mit allen Briefen, E-Mails, etc., die reingehen, und das nicht nur theoretisch besprechen, sondern z. B. sagen „Was macht ihr, ich werde euch dafür büßen lassen“. Solche Dinge werden natürlich an den Staatsschutz weitergeleitet, um akute Gefahren erkennen zu können und damit etwas dagegen getan werden kann. Gerade da muss man ganz klar unterscheiden zwischen denen, die vergleichsweise harmlos sind, mit theoretischen Drohungen, und denen, die wirklich Gewalttaten oder sonstiges androhen.

Archivieren Sie das selbst, oder leiten Sie nur bestimmte Sachen weiter?

David Geballe: Bestimmte Sachen werden weitergeleitet. Es gibt auch welche, die schon dermaßen außerhalb der Realität sind, dass sie eigentlich schon fast wieder komisch sind. Manche meiner Kollegen sammeln die einfach nur, damit sie nur ihre Mappe aufschlagen müssen, um wirklich gut darüber lachen zu können. Da denkt man sich manchmal, der Verfasser gehört eigentlich in die Klappe. Klar, zum Teil landet so etwas auch einfach gleich im Mülleimer.

Haben Sie eigentlich mitbekommen, dass es vor sechs, sieben Jahren wieder eine antijudaistische Prozession nach Heiligenblut am Brombachsee gab?

In Heiligenblut, so die Legende, hat ein böser Jude einen armen Bauern angestiftet, eine Hostie zu klauen. Der böse Jude hat dann hineingestochen und die Hostie fing natürlich wieder zu bluten an, weil die Hostie ja der Jesus ist. Der böse Jude hat den Jesus also ein zweites Mal erstochen. Dann wollte der Jude seiner Strafe entgehen und konvertieren, in der Kirche von Spalt hat ihn dann aber bei der Konvertierung der Blitz erschlagen. Daraufhin ist Heiligenblut erbaut worden, das war einmal ein Kloster und jetzt ist es noch eine Gedenkstätte. Die Kolping-Gemeinde von Spalt hat vor etwa sieben Jahren diese antijudaistische Prozession, die schon 50 Jahre lang aufgehört hatte, erneut ins Leben gerufen. Da sind dann ein paar hundert Leute mit dem Boot nach Heiligenblut gefahren. Ich bin mit der Prozession mitgelaufen, habe dann einen Artikel darüber auf *HaGalil* geschrieben und da gab es eine große Diskussion. Seit der Artikel erschienen ist, ist auch die Prozession wieder gestorben. Da gab es ja noch eine ganz interessante Debatte, weil mir der Pfarrer von Spalt (ein Philosemit, der eine Mesusa an seiner Tür hat und diese zweimal täglich küsst als Christ) gesagt hat, ich sei ein Antisemit, weil ich diese Prozession veranstaltet habe. Der Pfarrer dachte, ich sei Jude und habe ihn kritisiert. Daran kann man gut nachvollziehen, dass Philosemiten, wenn sie von den Juden nicht geliebt werden, im Nu zu Antisemiten werden. Ist das auch Ihre Einschätzung?

David Geballe: Es gibt diesen Typus von Menschen durchaus. Es ist eigentlich so, dass diejenigen, die am lautesten schreien, dass sie keine Hilfe brauchen, diejenigen sind, die am meisten Hilfe benötigen. Genauso gibt es diejenigen, die sagen, sie lieben alle Juden, nur um das zu übertünchen, was sie im Inneren wirklich fühlen. Da kann man dann beobachten, wie das sehr schnell ins Gegenteil übergeht. Das beste Beispiel ist Martin Luther.

Wie finden Sie jetzt im Lutherjahr den Umgang mit Martin Luther?

David Geballe: Es gibt durchaus gute und ehrliche Ansätze, aber natürlich auch welche, die verschönern. Gute Ansätze gibt es z. B. beim evangelischen Bildungswerk hier in Fürth, das eine Veranstaltung mit dem Thema "Luther als Antisemit" gemacht hat. Die spricht das wirklich aus und erklärt dann im Vortrag, wie es ist und was man nicht schönreden kann, und dass Luther nun mal nicht unfehlbar war. Dann gibt es andere Artikel, die das relativieren und entweder sagen, dass es nicht so gemeint war oder dass man es im Zusammenhang sehen muss und Luther kein Antisemit war.

Wie gehen Sie innerhalb Ihrer, Ihrer Religion mit Reformation um, z. B. dass Frauen Rabbinerinnen sind, so wie Frau Antje Yael Deusel aus Bamberg?

David Geballe: Es ist ein kompliziertes Thema in einem Sinne, aber auf der anderen Seite auch ein sehr einfaches. Es gibt hunderte von Richtungen im Judentum, von Reform, liberal, orthodox, ultra-orthodox, ultra-ultra-orthodox, neo-orthodox, man kann damit nicht mehr wirklich mitkommen. Eigentlich aus der jüdischen Sicht völliger Schwachsinn. Es gibt eigentlich eine einzige Frage, die in dem Sinne wichtig ist, und zwar ob man sagt, dass das Religionsgesetz bindend ist. Wenn man sagt, das Religionsgesetz ist bindend, dann ist der Rest nur Kosmetik. Wenn man sagt, dass Religionsgesetz ist nicht bindend, dann ist es ganz egal, aus was für philosophischen, theologischen Gründen man das tut. Oder als Ableger davon, wenn man sagt, das Religionsgesetz ist bindend, aber man kann selbst bestimmen, was das Religionsgesetz sagt, dann ist das natürlich am Ende nur eine Farce und man bindet sich nicht daran. Es gibt bestimmte religionsgesetzliche Gründe, warum eine Frau keine Rabbinerin sein kann. Dementsprechend sehen das auch diejenigen, für die das Religionsgesetz bindend ist.

Wie gehen Sie dann mit der Bamberger Gemeinde um? Die hatte sich ja eine Zeitlang dafür entschieden, aber ich glaube, sie wurde jetzt abgesetzt.

David Geballe: Sie wurde vor ungefähr eineinhalb Jahren entlassen. Es gab, soweit ich weiß, einfach Unstimmigkeiten zwischen dem Vorstand der Gemeinde und Frau Deusel. Interna kenne ich nicht, aber sie wurde nicht gefeuert, weil sie eine Rabbinerin war oder ist.

Zur Struktur Ihrer Gemeinde: Es sind wahrscheinlich meistens Juden aus Osteuropa, schätze ich?

David Geballe: Es sind zum großen Teil sogenannte Kontingentflüchtlinge aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion gewesen, die sind aber meistens schon in den Neunziger Jahren gekommen. Also sind es auch schon über zwanzig Jahre, die die meisten hier sind. Klar, bei denen, die schon in einem gewissen Alter hergekommen sind, war die Integration nicht ganz so erfolgreich, aber die jüngeren Leute sind voll und ganz integriert.

Haben Sie eigentlich Kontakt zur Chabad-Gemeinde in Nürnberg?

David Geballe: Die Gemeinde Fürth ist Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechtes, das heißt völlig autark. Es gibt zwischen Nürnberg und Fürth eine U-Bahn-Station, die heißt Stadtgrenze, und die heißt nicht einfach so Stadtgrenze, das heißt genauso wie die Jüdische Gemeinde in Nürnberg autark ist, sind auch alle anderen Gruppen autark. Natürlich gibt es eine Zusammenarbeit zwischen einzelnen Gemeinden, aber technisch gesehen ist Chabad Nürnberg ein Verein, wenn man so möchte. Wir machen nichts zusammen, aber es ist nicht so, weil wir sagen „oh mein Gott, die mögen wir nicht“, sondern es ist einfach getrennt.

Arbeiten Sie mit der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde in Nürnberg oder anderen Gemeinden in der Region zusammen?

David Geballe: Dort, wo es Sinn macht, z. B. in der Arbeit mit jungen Leuten. Viele Studenten ziehen von außerhalb her und werden in den paar Studienjahren nicht hier Gemeindemitglied, sondern nehmen das Beste aus allen Welten mit, indem sie ausnutzen, dass es hier im Umkreis von fünfzehn Kilometern drei Gemeinden gibt, in Fürth, Nürnberg und Erlangen.

Werden die antisemitischen Angriffe, die sie miterleben, gegen Gemeinde insgesamt gerichtet, oder gibt es auch persönliche Angriffe gegen ihre Gemeindemitglieder?

David Geballe: Briefe sind mir nicht bekannt. Es gibt sozusagen Spontan-Antisemitismus, das heißt man sieht z. B. einen Juden auf der Straße und sagt ihm etwas oder spuckt ihm vor die Füße oder sowas in der Richtung. Das ist aber nicht organisiert. Vor zwei Jahren, als der Gaza-Krieg wieder sehr heiß war, war es zum Beispiel so, dass Leute mich gefragt haben, ob sie lieber vor und nach der Synagoge die Kippa abnehmen sollen. Die hatten wirklich Angst, dass etwas passiert – Gott sei Dank passierte nichts.

Wie sieht es mit den ultraorthodoxen Juden aus, also mit denen, die Schläfenlocken tragen?

David Geballe: Davon gibt es ja nicht viele in Deutschland. Es gibt durchaus ein paar, aber auch da kann man es so machen, dass nicht gleich offensichtlich

ist, dass man jüdisch ist. Aus Sicherheitsgründen ist das vielleicht nicht die schlechteste aller Ideen.

Haben Sie das Ihren Mitgliedern geraten?

David Geballe: Ja. Wir haben anfangs darüber gesprochen, bei den hunderttausenden Muslimen, die nach Deutschland gekommen sind in den letzten zwei Jahren. Sicherlich würde keiner bei Verstand sagen, dass alle von denen gewalttätige Antisemiten sind oder sonstiges, um Gottes Willen. Selbst wenn man aber sagt, dass nur ein Prozent oder 0,1% davon gewalttätige Antisemiten sein würden, sind das bei fast einer Million, die ins Land gekommen sind, immer noch sehr viele. Und es braucht nicht viele, um etwas zu tun. Es braucht nur ein oder zwei Personen, die etwas machen wollen, und dann ist es getan.

Würden Sie den spontanen Antisemitismus nur Leuten, die als Flüchtlinge gekommen sind, zuordnen?

David Geballe: Nein. Man muss nur auf den Fußballplatz gehen, wo „du Jude“ eine typische Beleidigung ist. Das ist heute leider in der Jugendkultur und teilweise auch im Sport sehr tief verankert. Die Schule ist nun mal ein Schmelztiegel, in dem viele Dinge zusammenkommen.

Wissen Sie etwas von Initiativen oder Zusammenarbeit speziell mit Sportvereinen, um den Antisemitismus der Fans zu bekämpfen?

David Geballe: Berühmt ist in größeren jüdischen Gemeinden der sogenannte Sportverein Maccabi, der vor allem im Fußball immer große Probleme hat. Egal, in welcher Liga sie spielen, es kommt oft vor, dass im gegnerischen Team z. B. sehr viele Muslime sind und die Fans, also deren Familie, Freunde, etc. teilweise negativ auffallen. Das hat auch schon zu Sperren und Strafen geführt. Es gibt in dieser Hinsicht auch Versuche, das ein bisschen einzuschränken und dagegen zu wirken, aber Fußball ist nun mal der Breitensport schlechthin und nicht in jedem kleinen Dorf gibt es eine jüdische Gemeinde, die das Know-How, die Zeit und auch die Manpower dazu hätte, da wirklich groß einzugreifen.

Machen die Spielvereinigung in Fürth oder der Fußballclub Nürnberg da etwas?

David Geballe: Fürth war schon immer als judenfreundliche Stadt bekannt, und das gilt auch heute noch. Vor dem Krieg waren viele Spieler von Greuther Fürth jüdisch. Zur Veranstaltung am 9. November sind bei uns auch immer ein paar Spieler von Greuther Fürth dabei. Selbst wenn sie keine offizielle Ansprache halten, sind sie trotzdem da, um ein Zeichen zu setzen. Also da gibt es durchaus Vereine, die auch dagegen aktiv sind.

Dr Svetlana Bogojavlenska

Dr. Svetlana Bogojavlenska studied history from 1995 to 2002 at the University of Latvia in Riga. Between 1997 and 2002 she worked in the Museum "Jews in Latvia". From 2003 to 2008 she worked as a doctoral student and lecturer at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. Her doctoral thesis is entitled "The Formation and Position of Jewish Society in Riga and in the Government Courland 1795-1915". From 2011 to 2016, she worked in the DFG project "Russian in the Latvian Context: Russian Identity Formation in Latvia 1914-1940" at the Department of History of the University of Mainz. Since 2018 she is Research Associate in the project "Before the Cultural History: Functions and Dynamics Russian Historiography in the European Context (1750-1830)". Her research interests include Jewish culture and history, the history and theology of the Orthodox Church, sacred music and art, comparative religion, minorities in Russia and the Baltic States, and cultural transfer. For the interview she visited us in Nuremberg, the interview took place on September 5th, 2017 and was conducted in German.

Vielen Dank, dass Sie sich Zeit nehmen, uns ein Interview zu geben. Ich würde jetzt einmal mit der Frage beginnen, wann Sie, wenn Sie sich noch erinnern können, zum ersten Mal von dem Begriff "Jude" oder "jüdisch" gehört haben.

Dr. Svetlana Bogojavlenska: In der Kindheit. Ich glaube, ich habe es zum ersten Mal von meiner Großmutter gehört, und der Begriff war schon mit Vorurteilen beladen. Es war so, dass ich das Gefühl hatte, dass das etwas Fremdartiges ist. Was vielleicht ein bisschen gefährlich ist, aber noch gefährlicher waren "Zigeuner". In der Gegend, in der ich gewohnt habe, war das die Wahrnehmung der Bevölkerung. Oder die Wahrnehmung meiner Großmutter. Seitdem war der Begriff eigentlich immer wieder irgendwie da, aber ich habe mich dann nicht so viel damit beschäftigt. Bis ich dann selbst auf die Idee kam, dass ich eigentlich viele Klassenkameraden hatte, die plötzlich nach Israel ausgewandert waren. Vorher wusste man gar nicht, dass sie etwas mit dem Judentum zu tun hatten. Man hätte es auch gar nicht vermuten können. Sie haben sich nicht speziell als Juden ausgegeben. Das waren ganz normale Klassenkameraden wie jede und das wurde gar nicht thematisiert. Dann waren viele plötzlich in Israel. Und dann habe ich angefangen, mich dafür zu interessieren, welche Geschichte dieses Volk hat - was haben sie in Lettland gemacht und wie kam es dazu, dass wir eigentlich so wenig über sie wissen? Über ihre Geschichte und warum sie so unscheinbar da sind. Und plötzlich wandern sie nach Israel aus, weil sie sagen: "Ich möchte Jude sein". Warum kann man das nicht in Lettland sein, zum Beispiel? Auch das war meine Frage.

Also das haben sie gesagt? Sie könnten in Lettland keine Juden sein?

Dr. Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Zumindest ein Klassenkamerad von mir, mit dem ich Schriftverkehr hatte über Jahre. Seine Argumentation war: "In Israel habe ich zu mir zurückgefunden". Weil es keine Hindernisse mehr gibt, weil man sich frei zur eigenen Identität äußern kann. Und das war schon eine Überraschung für mich, weil ich ihn vorher nicht als Juden wahrgenommen habe und er es auch nie in der Schule thematisiert hat.

Sind ihre Klassenkameraden alleine ausgewandert oder mit ihren Familien?

Dr. Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Mit den Familien zusammen. Es gab eine Welle an Auswanderung in Lettland, das hat wahrscheinlich '91/'92 angefangen. Und in meiner Erinnerung ist es so geblieben, dass Berge guter Bücher irgendwo in den Höfen lagen, zum Beispiel, oder einfach in die Schule gebracht worden sind von den Familien, die auswandern. Das war dann um '94/'95.

Abgesehen davon, wurde das Thema Judentum, jüdische Religion und jüdische Geschichte in der Schule behandelt?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Überhaupt nicht, nein. Darüber haben wir nie geredet. Ich glaube mich erinnern zu können, dass im Geschichtsunterricht, als es um den Zweiten Weltkrieg ging, die Judenvernichtung erwähnt wurde, aber nur erwähnt. Und sonst nicht. Der Begriff Holocaust ist gar nicht erwähnt worden, er war völlig unbekannt. Dass Juden als ein Volk tatsächlich als Zielscheibe des Nationalsozialismus ausgewählt wurden und dann ausgelöscht wurden, das wurde schon thematisiert, aber wie gesagt sehr kurz. Mit ein paar Sätzen wurde das gesagt: Die Juden waren ein besonderes Ziel der Vernichtung, aber Hitler hatte vor ganz Osteuropa auszulöschen. - ungefähr in diesem Sinne.

Vor den Holocaust zurück bzw. vor die Okkupation zurück. Wie war die Stellung der Juden in der Zwischenkriegszeit in Lettland?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Juden waren gleichberechtigte Bürger, zum ersten Mal in ihrer Geschichte auf diesem Territorium. Sie wurden 1918 mit der Gründung Lettlands zu gleichberechtigten Bürgern, die sich auch vollständig in der Politik frei entfalten konnten, die sich auch tatsächlich in der Verwaltung betätigt haben, auch bei der Regierungsbildung. Bis 1934, bis zum Regierungsumsturz und bis zur Etablierung des Autoritarismus von Ulmanis in Lettland kann man tatsächlich von der vollständigen politischen Gleichberechtigung sprechen. 1934 hat sich die allgemeine nationale Politik des Staates geändert. Wenn bei der Regierungsdeklaration 1918 verkündet wurde, dass Lettland ein Staat für alle Ethnien ist, die auf diesem Territorium leben, dann wurde nach dem Regierungsumsturz 1934 propagiert, dass zwar alle bleiben und ihren Teil daran haben dürfen, aber Lettland doch für die Letten da ist. Das war sehr nationalistisch, aber das war nicht explizit gegen Juden gerichtet, sondern gegen alle ethnischen Minderheiten, die in Lettland gewohnt haben. Und da musste man schon zusehen, wie man sich mit dem Regime arrangiert. Mit dem Bil-

derungsgesetz von 1919 war es allen Minderheiten in Lettland erlaubt, eigene Schulen zu gründen und die Eltern konnten frei entscheiden, in welche Schule ihr Kind geschickt wird. Es kam deswegen sehr häufig vor, dass z.B. Kinder aus russischsprachigen jüdischen Familien in die russischen Schulen geschickt worden sind. Jüdisches Schulwesen existierte in 4 Sprachen: Es gab russische jüdische Schulen, deutsche jüdische Schulen, jiddische jüdische Schulen und einige hebräische jüdische Schulen. Und jede Familie durfte selbst entscheiden wohin das Kind geht. Nach '34 hat sich die Situation entschieden gewandelt, indem es dann vom Staat vorgeschrieben war, dass jede Ethnie ihre Kinder in die entsprechende Schule schicken muss. Wenn sie sich gegen diese Schule entscheiden, dann müssen sie ihre Kinder in die lettische Schule schicken, und die Sprache der Familie spielte dann keine Rolle mehr. Man konnte dann einfach nur noch sagen: "Ich bin Jude." - "Wenn du Jude bist, dann gehst du halt in die jiddische oder hebräische Schule". Es gab keine russisch- oder deutschsprachigen jüdischen Schulen mehr. Und dann wurde es komplizierter sich frei zu entscheiden und sich frei einer Kultur anzuschließen. Vorher war das viel einfacher und auch z.B. von den Russen war das akzeptiert.

Wie ungefähr sah die Zusammensetzung der jüdischen Bevölkerung aus? Sie haben ja schon erwähnt, dass es diese Schulen gab und dann dementsprechend auch die unterschiedlichen Sprachgruppen.

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Die überwiegende Mehrheit hat Jiddisch gesprochen. Bei den Volkszählungen, die damals durchgeführt worden sind, davon gab es drei, wurde Hebräisch fast gar nicht erwähnt. Vielleicht nur bei ein paar Leuten, weil nach der Muttersprache oder nach der Familiensprache gefragt wurde und Hebräisch damals noch keine Muttersprache der Juden in Lettland war. Von 93 000 Juden, die in Lettland 1930 erfasst wurden, haben ca. 10% Deutsch als Familiensprache angegeben. In Riga haben 15% der Juden im Alltag Deutsch gesprochen, in den Städten Kurlands bis zu 21%. Russisch haben 1930 etwa 6% der Juden in ganz Lettland als Alltagssprache angegeben.¹³ Es kann davon ausgegangen werden, dass mehrere Sprachen in der Familie gesprochen wurden. Jiddisch zum Beispiel parallel zum Deutschen oder zum Russischen. Lettisch als Familiensprache haben nur wenige angegeben, 652 Personen.¹⁴ Lettisch als Muttersprache war unter den Juden nicht so verbreitet. Aber wenn man sie dann nach der Sprachenkenntnis gefragt hat, war unter den Juden Prozent derer, die Lettisch beherrschten ziemlich hoch: 62% im Jahr 1930.¹⁵

In der Zwischenkriegszeit erstarkte die antisemitische Bewegung in vielen europäischen Ländern, in Polen oder in Deutschland. Gab es solche Tendenzen auch in Lettland?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Tendenzen gab es, es gab sogar eine offen anti-

¹³Skujenieks 1930: 456, 466

¹⁴Ibid: 456

¹⁵Salnītis 1938: 103

semitische Organisation, die hieß Pērkonkrusts. Es gab auch antijüdische Übergriffe, aber das waren tatsächlich nur sehr vereinzelte Übergriffe. Das war keine Massenbewegung, und 1934 hat Ulmanis diese Organisation sogar verboten, als staatsfeindlich und als eine, die dem lettischen Geist gar nicht entspreche, weil sie fremdenfeindlich ist. Einige Mitglieder dieser Organisation wurden später, während des Krieges, zu Tätern. Sie haben sich an der Ermordung der Juden beteiligt.

Wie stark war der Zuspruch in der lettischen Bevölkerung für diese Organisation?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Nicht so stark. Man kann nicht sagen, dass die Bevölkerung das getragen oder unterstützt hätte. Das war schon eine sehr begrenzte Gruppe.

Also nicht zu vergleichen mit Polen oder Deutschland?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Nein, überhaupt nicht. Antisemitismus war in Lettland, das weiß ich aus meiner Forschung über das 19. Jahrhundert, keine alltägliche Sache. Ich habe beinahe alle Archivbestände durchgeforstet und die ganze lettische Presse durchgelesen. Ab den 1880er Jahren mit der Pogromwelle in Russland kommt es zu zwei oder drei Zwischenfällen in ganz Lettland, wo vielleicht Stände, Obststände der jüdischen Marktkaufleute entweder zerstört wurden oder einige Juden verprügelt wurden, aber es kam zu keinem Totschlag. Es kam zu keiner Massenbewegung gegen die Juden, und man kann nicht sagen, dass Letten besonders antisemitisch eingestellt wären. Ich habe auch die lettische Literatur, die als Quelle dienen kann, analysiert und da gab es einige Erzählungen, in denen Juden sogar positiv dargestellt werden. Und es gibt ein Theaterstück, „Schneidertage in Silmači“, das immer noch jedes Jahr vor dem lettischen Johannisfest aufgeführt wird,¹⁶ was sicherlich in Deutschland nicht durchgehen würde. In Lettland ist es aber kein Problem, es gehört zum lettischen Kulturerbe. Da ist eine jüdische Gestalt zu sehen, ein jüdischer Hausierer. Das ist eine ironische Gestalt, könnte man sagen, sein Lettisch ist gebrochen und er sorgt dann immer für einen Lacher im Saal, weil er alles andere als normal ist. Aber auch dieses Stück zeigt, denke ich, dass die Juden einfach dazugehörten, sie waren im Alltag der Letten immer da. Der jüdische Hausierer war nicht aus Lettland wegzudenken am Ende des 19., Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts, und die Kontakte bestanden schon. Man beneidete die Juden für ihre wirtschaftlichen Erfolge, und es lässt sich bestätigen, dass die Letten die in Folge der lettischen nationalen Bewegung versuchten, sich in der Wirtschaft zu etablieren, auf die Juden trafen, die da schon ihre Nischen besetzt hatten. Dann kam es tatsächlich zu ökonomisch motiviertem Antisemitismus, der in den Zeitungen zu sehen ist. Aber man kann z.B. von keinem Antijudaismus sprechen, von keinen Ritualmordvorwürfen usw. Man hat es dann eben im Alltag gesehen - "Das sind

¹⁶ *Skroderdienas Silmačos* – Schneidertage in Silmači von Rudolfs Blaumanis, 1902 in Riga uraufgeführt

unsere Konkurrenten, und die gilt es zu vertreiben", aber nicht, weil sie Juden sind, sondern weil sie Konkurrenten sind. Wäre da ein anderes Volk gewesen, gehe ich davon aus, dass die Reaktion ebenso ausfallen würde.

Der Antisemitismus und Antijudaismus Luthers hat sich also nicht niedergeschlagen?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ich habe keine Beweise dafür gesehen. Eine der ersten Zeitungen in lettischer Sprache war *Mājas Viesis*, diese wurde von den lutherischen Pastoren für die Letten herausgegeben. Und erstaunlicherweise wurden darin ab den 1860er Jahren viele Geschichten aus dem Alten Testament wiedergegeben. Aber nicht nur das. Jüdische Feste wurden beschrieben, zum Beispiel Sukkot. Das hätte ich von einer lettischen Zeitung gar nicht erwartet. Da wurden Hintergründe beschrieben, "Warum feiern die Juden es?" usw. Es war sehr interessant zu lesen, dass die Letten darüber unterrichtet wurden, wie die Juden ihre Feste feiern ohne da irgendwie etwas Negatives draus zu ziehen. Sie waren eben Nachbarn, sie haben zusammen gelebt, vor allem in Ostlettland, denn östlicher Teil Lettlands, Lettgallen, gehörte zum Ansiedlungsrayon.¹⁷ Da sich die Juden laut Gesetz in den Städten registrieren mussten, kam es tatsächlich dazu, dass bis zu 90% der Stadtbevölkerung Juden waren, die mit den Letten immer in Kontakt waren, die in der ländlichen Umgebung gewohnt haben. Die Synagogen wurden errichtet, es ist kein einziger Fall bekannt, wo irgendein Anschlag gegen eine Synagoge verübt worden wäre.

Sie sagen "miteinander in Kontakt"? Gab es auch familiäre Verbindungen, zum Beispiel? Oder nur Freundschaften und so etwas?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Familiäre Verbindungen gab es eher nicht. Es gibt statistische Erhebungen, auch aus der Periode in der das Territorium von Lettland ans Russische Reich angegliedert war. Und da hat man auch kontrolliert, wer mit wem geheiratet hat. Im Allgemeinen gab es sehr wenige religiös gemischte Ehen. Es gab unter den Juden auch einige Übertreter zum Christentum, nicht aber umgekehrt, denn das war auch verboten. Es gab einen Versuch der deutschen, evangelischen Mission, beispielsweise Juden in Kurland zu christianisieren, sie evangelisch-lutherisch zu machen. Die Mission konnten allerdings keine großen Erfolge feiern. Die Übertritte beliefen sich auf 10 Personen pro Jahr. Insgesamt waren die konfessionellen Gruppen stark voneinander abgegrenzt.

¹⁷ Als Ansiedlungsrayon der Juden (Russisch: *čerta osedlosti*) bezeichnet man die Teile des russischen Reiches, überwiegend in den Gebieten der heutigen Ukraine, Weißrussland, Litauen und Lettland, in denen Juden ohne eine Sondergenehmigung leben und arbeiten durften. Der östliche Teil Lettlands, ethnographisches Gebiet Lettgallen, gehörte zum Gouvernement Vitebsk, das zum Ansiedlungsrayon gehörte. Der Ansiedlungsrayon wurde erst 1915 offiziell abgeschafft. Seit den Liberalisierungsreformen des Zaren Alexander II. durften verschiedene Gruppen von Juden, z.B. Handwerker mit ihren Familien auch außerhalb des Ansiedlungsrayons wohnen. Auch davor gab es schon jüdische Berufsgruppen, denen es erlaubt war mit Sondergenehmigung außerhalb des Rayons zu wohnen: so z.B. in Kurland, Riga, St. Petersburg usw. Vgl. z.B. Kotowski et al. (2001): 180-195.

Wie ist heute in der lettischen Bevölkerung die mehrheitliche Einschätzung von Karlis Ulmanis? Wie bewertet man ihn heute, welchen Ruf hat er?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Es gibt ein Denkmal für Ulmanis in Riga. Dieses Denkmal ist sehr umstritten. Es gibt einen Teil der Bevölkerung der glaubt, dass diese Zeit die Beste war. Man glaubt ja auch immer, dass alles besser war, als man jung war. Die Zeit des Autoritarismus haben sehr viele Letten, die heute noch leben, miterlebt, die Zeit des demokratischen Lettlands jedoch kaum. Diejenigen, die diese Unabhängigkeitszeit erlebt haben, die haben schon in dieser autoritären Zeit ihr Leben verbracht. Und was kam danach? Danach kam das sogenannte "schreckliche Jahr", das Jahr der sowjetischen Besatzung, das so schlimm war, dass in der Erinnerung der Letten die Herrschaftszeit von Ulmanis, die damals auch nicht unumstritten war, tatsächlich als eine paradiesische Periode die Zeit überdauert hat. Sie meinen, die Zeit von Ulmanis war die Blütezeit. Wobei das nicht so stimmt, da war ja auch die ökonomische Krise, man blendet das Ganze also aus. Denn im Vergleich zu dem, was danach kam, war das natürlich ein Paradies. Das würde ich auch vielleicht sagen, aber eine andere Sache ist, wie geht man damit um, dass man so einer Persönlichkeit, die die Demokratie abgeschafft hat, ein Denkmal im Zentrum von Riga aufstellt? Dieses Denkmal ist in seiner Darstellung kein heroisches Denkmal, deswegen gab es kaum Widerstand dagegen. Es steht da, in einem Park, da kommen ein paar alte Omas vielleicht ab und zu hin, stellen Blümchen hin. Sein Todestag, der noch nicht ganz geklärt ist, wird erinnert. Er wurde von den Sowjets verhaftet und ist in einem sowjetischen Gefängnis 1942 gestorben. Obwohl ihm versprochen wurde, dass er auf freien Fuß gesetzt wird, wenn er alles unterschreibt und nicht gegen die Sowjets kämpft, und die Erlaubnis erhält in die Schweiz auszureisen. Im Endeffekt endete er in einem Gefängnis in Turkmenistan. Er war einer der Gründer Lettlands und einer der aktivsten Politiker, auch in der demokratischen Periode. Deshalb kann man seine Persönlichkeit so oder so sehen. Natürlich ist es ein Verbrechen seinerseits, die Demokratie abzuschaffen. Unter Historikern herrscht die einhellige Meinung, dass er das nur gemacht hat, weil er um seine politische Karriere bemüht war und Angst hatte, dass bei der nächsten Wahl des Parlaments seine Partei nicht mehr ins Parlament kann und er dann politisch ausgeschaltet wird. Politik war sein ganzes Leben. Und deshalb ist er wirklich eine sehr widersprüchliche Persönlichkeit. Aber von der Mehrheit der Bevölkerung und ihrer Einstellung kann man gar nicht sprechen. Die Meinungen in der Bevölkerung sind auch sehr widersprüchlich.

Wie hat sich dann die Situation der Juden mit der sowjetischen Besatzung verändert?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Es hat sich alles geändert mit der sowjetischen Besatzung. Erstens gab es den lettischen Staat nicht mehr, zweitens wurde eine Deportation vorbereitet und durchgeführt. Bei dieser Deportation wurden auch ca. 5000 Juden deportiert. Prozentuell gesehen war die jüdische Bevölkerung

die, die am meisten unter dieser Deportation gelitten hat. Bei der ersten Deportationswelle wurden Vertreter der Intelligenz, nicht nur der lettischen, sondern auch der jüdischen und der russischen aus Lettland nach Sibirien gebracht, und dieses eine Jahr der sowjetischen Besatzung bedeutete für die Juden, sowie für alle anderen, Enteignung. Und eine Verschlechterung ihrer Lage und ein Verschwinden der politischen Rechte. Aber es gibt auch die Legende, dass der Rabbiner Dubin¹⁸ vor der sowjetischen Besatzung gefragt wurde, "Was sollen wir jetzt machen?", und dass er zu der jüdischen Gemeinde gesagt habe: er war auch politischer Vertreter der Gemeinde: "Lieber gebt die Schlüssel von euren Geschäften an Stalin, als eure Leben an Hitler." Dadurch lässt sich auch erklären, dass viele Juden sich dazu fast gezwungen sahen, die sowjetische Macht zu begrüßen. Es gibt sehr viele Fotos von den Demonstrationen, die die Sowjetmacht in Lettland begrüßten. Die organisierten sich nicht spontan, sondern wurden von den Sowjets organisiert. Die Beteiligung an diesen Demonstrationen ist auch das, was von der lettischen Seite den Juden gegenüber vorgehalten wird. "Ihr wart diejenigen, die die Sowjets damals mit Blumen empfangen haben!" Es gibt tatsächlich auch Fotos auf denen man sieht, dass da überwiegend, oder sehr viele Juden sind in der Menge. Und das ist unter anderem damit zu erklären, dass sie zwischen Pest und Cholera auswählen mussten.

Waren die Juden die einzigen Demonstrationsteilnehmer?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Nein, natürlich nicht. Nein, es waren von der sowjetischen Besatzungsmacht organisierte Demonstrationen, aber wenn man eine lettgalische Kleinstadt nimmt in der 90% der Bevölkerung Juden sind, dann sind auf dem Bild natürlich nur Juden. Dann sieht man da kaum Letten oder andere. Andere sind in den Dörfern, lettische Bauern, russische Bauern, die werden dann auch natürlich zum Demonstrieren angehalten, fotografiert wird aber in der Stadt.

Kann man sagen, warum es prozentual vor allem Juden waren, die von diesen Deportationen betroffen waren?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Weil sie viel Eigentum hatten, wirtschaftlich erfolgreich waren und weil sie gefürchtet wurden. Man fürchtete, wenn man die reichen und gebildeten Juden dalässt, organisieren sie einen Widerstand. Es wurde von der jüdischen Gesellschaft kurz darauf befürchtet, dass auch eine zweite Deportationswelle bevorstand, in der dann noch mehr Juden deportiert worden wären, aber das ist dann nicht geschehen, weil Lettland von Deutschland überfallen wurde.

Wie wurden diese Listen zusammengestellt? Woher wusste man, wer gefährlich sein konnte?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ich kann das nicht ganz genau sagen, ich weiß nur,

¹⁸Mordehai Dubin, 1889-1956, Politiker und einflussreicher spiritueller Führer

dass es schon vorher vorbereitet wurde. Die Besetzung Lettlands passierte ja nicht einfach so von einem Tag auf den anderen, sondern wurde von der sowjetischen Seite vorbereitet, es wurden Agenten nach Lettland geschickt. Die lettische Polizei verzeichnete auch den plötzlichen Anstieg der Exilietten, die im letzten Jahr der Unabhängigkeit aus der Sowjetunion nach Lettland gekommen waren. Die Listen der verdächtigen Personen wurden seit Herbst 1940 zusammengestellt.

An die Informationen zu kommen war nicht so kompliziert. Es waren auch wirklich bekannte Familien.

Gab es unter den Sowjets und vorher Antisemitismus in Russland? Welche Art von Antisemitismus gab es?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ja, eindeutig. Es gab stark ausgeprägten Antisemitismus, der auch nach dem Krieg Durchschlag hatte. Z.B. ging die Pogromwelle 1881 von Russland aus. 1880 hat es schon angefangen, '81 mit der Ermordung des Zaren wurden die Juden der Ermordung beschuldigt, obwohl es Anarchisten waren, die sich in der Wohnung eines Juden versammelt hatten, als sie diesen Anschlag auf den Zaren planten. Und der jüdische Historiker Simon Dubnow, der 1941 in Riga bei einer der Massenerschießungen ums Leben kam, ging davon aus, dass diese Pogromwelle sogar vom Staat organisiert wurde. Das wurde durch spätere Forschungen widerlegt, was aber nur das Zeugnis dafür abgibt, dass die Bevölkerung eher antisemitisch eingestellt war und aus verschiedenen Gründen auch selbst Pogrome verübt hat. Was die Regierung sicher nicht gemacht hat, war die Pogrome rechtzeitig zu stoppen. Die Gendarmerie hat immer ein paar Tage gewartet, bis da nichts mehr zu retten war. 1905, während der Revolution, gab es auch Pogrome, und die gingen auch nicht von staatlicher Seite aus, aber sie beschränkten sich auf den Ansiedlungsrayon der Juden. Dort, wo es eine sehr hohe Konzentration jüdischer Bevölkerung gab, da kam es auch zu den Pogromen. 1905 gab es nur ein Pogrom in Lettgallen, der dokumentiert ist, in Ludsen, heute Ludza. Ansonsten nicht.

Kann man dann sagen, dass der Antisemitismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit in allen ethnischen Gruppen in Lettland gleich stark, bzw. gleich schwach vertreten war?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Vom Antisemitismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit halte ich nicht viel. Ich habe mich mit der Zwischenkriegszeit und der russischen Bevölkerung beschäftigt. Die größte russische Zeitung wurde von einem Juden herausgegeben und hat eigentlich für beide Bevölkerungsgruppen gearbeitet und für verschiedene Parteien. Die Zeitung hat sowohl für die russischen als auch die jüdischen Parteien Wahlkampf gemacht und Probleme beider Minderheiten gemeinsam besprochen. In der russischen Bevölkerung war jeder Jude, der sich zur russischen Kultur bekannte, als Russe angenommen. Die haben verstanden, "Wir sind hier alle fremd, aber wir haben alle eine gemeinsame Kultur." Juden, die im russischen Imperium von Russen nicht als Russen akzeptiert wurden, wie

sie sich auch bemühten, wurden in Lettland plötzlich anerkannt als russische Angehörige. Ohne dass sie sich von ihrer Religion oder ihrer ethnischen Abstammung lossagen mussten. Jeder Jude konnte sagen: "Ich fühle mich der russischen Kultur angehörig." Was die lettische Bevölkerung betrifft, ich habe das ja auch schon angesprochen, war Pērkonkrusts die wichtigste antisemitische Organisation. Man kann vielleicht noch die Universität Lettlands erwähnen, wo die studentischen Korporationen gegründet worden sind. Da gab es lettische Korporationen, in denen kein einziger Jude vertreten war. Aber die waren auch anderen gegenüber nicht aufgeschlossen, auch Russen wurden da nicht aufgenommen. In den russischen studentischen Organisationen, oder übrigens auch in den polnischen, waren Juden drin. Wenn sie gesagt haben, ich fühle mich hier angehörig, wurden sie auch aufgenommen.

Wie war das Verhältnis der Letten zu den Deutschen 1941?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ich würde nicht pauschalisieren und sagen, alle Letten hätten Deutsche mit Begeisterung empfangen. Aber ich stimme dem Argument zu, dass das eine sowjetische Jahr so ein tiefer Einschnitt in die Geschichte Lettlands war, dass die Feindschaft gegenüber den Deutschen durch die Erfahrung 1940/41 mit der Sowjetmacht weg war. Dass die Deutschen tatsächlich als Befreier von der sowjetischen Besatzung angesehen worden sind. Als eine Chance, Lettland vielleicht wieder unabhängig zu machen. Es gab vom lettischen Zentralrat (*Latvijas centrālā padome*), das ist eine Widerstandsorganisation, die gegen beide, d.h. gegen die deutsche und gegen die sowjetische Seiten gekämpft hat, Versuche, Lettland wieder als unabhängigen Staat herzustellen. Die lettische Selbstverwaltung dagegen, die von den deutschen gebilligt wurde, wurde am Ende zur rechten Hand der deutschen Besatzungsmacht. Die nationalsozialistische Besatzung hat eine kluge Politik in diesem Sinne durchgeführt. So hat sie zum Beispiel die Gottesdienste in den Kirchen wieder erlaubt, die in dem Jahr der sowjetischen Besatzung verboten waren. Die haben die sog. Pskower Orthodoxe Mission gegründet und die orthodoxen Kirchen in den besetzten Territorien wieder aufgemacht, auch in Lettland. Das hat natürlich die Sympathien derjenigen gebracht, die nicht direkt vom nationalsozialistischen Terror und Mord betroffen waren.

Es gab auch eine Zeitung in russischer Sprache, die hieß *Za Rodinu*, für das Vaterland, und man hat so versucht, die russische Bevölkerung zu instrumentalisieren. Es war sehr interessant, dass die russische Intelligenz und die russischen Bauern darauf angesprochen wurden, wie schlimm es der russischen Bevölkerung während der Zeit der sowjetischen Besatzung ging und dass der große Hitler natürlich alles besser machen würde. Es wurden sogar verschiedene Beiträge in dieser Zeitung veröffentlicht, die in der Zwischenkriegszeit in der russischen Zeitung *Segodnya* publiziert wurden. Dabei wurde natürlich verschwiegen, dass diese Zeitung von einem jüdischen Herausgeber stammte. Die antisemitische Propaganda der Nazis wurde sehr sorgfältig vorbereitet und der wichtigste Punkt war, dass die Repressionen, die die lettische Bevölkerungen 1940/41 durch die Sowjets erlitten hatte, von Juden organisiert und durchgeführt worden

seien. Als im Rigaer Zentralgefängnis die Leichen der dort getöteten politischen Häftlinge gefunden worden sind, hat man sie alle in einen Hof gelegt und als Opfer der jüdischen Kommunisten dargestellt. Und fast sofort danach kam der Aufruf in der propagandistischen deutschen Zeitung in lettischer Sprache Tēvija, "das Vaterland", sich zu formieren, um das Vaterland zu beschützen. Selbstschutzeinheiten, Polizeieinheiten zu bilden. Es wurden zuerst tatsächlich nur Freiwillige aufgenommen. Auf diesen Aufruf hin hat sich auch das Arājs-Kommando gebildet.

Kann man abschätzen, wie viele Letten kooperiert haben mit den Nazis, was die Judenvernichtung betrifft?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Man kann schauen, wie viele danach verurteilt worden sind durch die Sowjets. Das waren einige Tausende. Aivars Stranga hat die Zahl geschätzt in seinem Beitrag¹⁹ in dem Sammelband "The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia", das von der Historikerkommission Lettlands herausgegeben wurde. Man hat in der sowjetischen Zeit allerdings auch vermieden zu sagen, dass die Opfer Juden waren. Die Kollaborateure wurden wegen Verbrechen gegen sowjetische Bürger verurteilt. Wenn die Überlebenden des Holocausts nach dem Krieg in verschiedenen Städten, wie z.B. in Riga, einen Gedenkstein aufstellen wollten, durfte man nicht darauf hinweisen, dass das jüdische Opfer waren. Es stand dann "Opfern des Krieges", "Opfern des Faschismus" oder "den sowjetischen Opfern" auf den Gedenktafeln. Das einzige, was in Riga gelungen war, war der Bau einer Gedenkstätte im Wald von Rumbula in den 1960er Jahren. Die Inschrift, dass dort sowjetische Bürger ermordet worden sind, wurde in drei Sprachen geschrieben: Auf Russisch, Lettisch und Jiddisch. Allerdings, wenn man an den Gedenktagen der Rumbula-Aktionen im November und im Dezember dorthin fuhr, da wurde man vom KGB oder vom Sicherheitsdienst überwacht und einige wurden dann sogar verhaftet. In das sowjetische Bild passte es nicht, dass ein Volk mehr als die anderen Völker der Sowjetunion während des Krieges gelitten hat. Die Akten der Verurteilten wurden geheim gehalten, bis 1991. Erst dann konnte man sie einsehen. Wenn man die Verhörprotokolle liest, dann sieht man ganz deutlich, dass es da um die Juden ging. Dass das die "Selbstschutzbataillone" waren, die eigentlich in dieser Zeit nur dazu dienten, um die Juden in den Kleinstädten Lettlands zu ermorden. Bis Ende August 1941 waren alle Juden in Kleinstädten Lettlands tot, sie wurden alle ermordet.

Das waren also kleine Einsatzgruppen?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Genau, in der Provinz waren es in der Regel die Freiwilligen. Die Befehle wurden von der deutschen Seite erteilt, also waren es keine spontanen Aktionen von Seiten der Letten, sondern es kam nur durch

¹⁹"The accurate number of Latvians who took direct or indirect part in the annihilation of the Jews is not easy to establish; an approximate figure could constitute a few thousands." (Stranga (2005) 167)

die Befehle der Besatzungsmacht. Aber die Schützen wussten schon, wofür sie da sind, und sie hätten sich auch dagegen aussprechen können. Bei den großen Massenaktionen in Riga in Liepāja, Libau, haben sie nicht geschossen. Sie haben "nur" eskortiert. Aber in den Kleinstädten hatten die Deutschen noch nicht so viele Militärangehörige, und deshalb hat man die Einheimischen genommen. Das ist ja das Tragische: Es waren die Nachbarn, die die Leute umgebracht haben. Die Kranken, Kinder, Frauen, Älteren, das war egal, alle. In jeder Stadt wurden diese Einheiten gebildet, es waren nur Freiwillige. In dieser Zeit wurde noch keiner zwangseinberufen, wie das später der Fall war. In den ersten Monaten der Besatzung hat man nur auf Freiwillige gesetzt.

Wurden bewusst die entsprechenden Nachbarn als Freiwillige eingesetzt?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ja, es ist in der Geschichtswissenschaft in Lettland inzwischen auch ein Konsens, dass es von der deutschen Seite so gewollt war, um das als spontane Aktionen zu verkaufen. Dass die Einheimischen die eigenen Nachbarn umbringen, dass der Antisemitismus, der da herrschte, einfach selbst ausgebrochen sei, die "Vergeltung" für die vermeintlichen Verbrechen der Juden während des einen Jahres der sowjetischen Besatzung, so wurde das dargestellt. In den Aufrufen, sich zu den freiwilligen "Selbstschutzmannschaften" zu melden, stand dann schon, dass diese Einheiten nicht nur für den Schutz da seien, sondern auch dazu, das Vaterland von "fremden Elementen" zu bereinigen. Von Kommunisten, von Juden und so weiter. Und das war auch allgemein in der lettischen Bevölkerung bekannt. Noch Jahrzehnte danach war bekannt, wer beteiligt war, auch wenn die Städte sich verwandelt hatten, denn die jüdische Bevölkerung fehlt ja völlig. In die Häuser, die der jüdischen Bevölkerung gehörten, zogen Letten ein. In kleineren Städten war auch bekannt, wessen Familien an der Ermordung beteiligt waren. Man wusste dann auch, wer von den Sowjets verurteilt wurde. Wer dann die 10 Jahre in Sibirien oder in einem Gefängnis verbracht hat und warum er da war. Und diese Familien, so wie ich das in einer Stadt in Lettgallen in Gesprächen mit den Einheimischen Anfang der 2000er Jahre verstanden habe, waren nicht so beliebt. Also die galten nicht als Opfer der sowjetischen Verfolgung. Diejenigen, die bei der zweiten Deportationswelle 1947 deportiert worden sind, die schon.

Gab es innerhalb der Freiwilligenverbände im Nachhinein irgendwelche, die sich reuig geäußert haben?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Es gibt eigentlich nur eine Forschung darüber, das ist eine Forschung von Rudīte Vīksne²⁰. Sie hat die Verhörprotokolle von den Freiwilligen aus dem Arājs-Kommando analysiert. Da wurden die Beschuldigten auch nach den Gründen gefragt, warum sie dem Kommando beigetreten waren. Nur sehr wenige meinten explizit, dass sie Juden hassten. Und viele meinten, man konnte das nicht mit ansehen, wie die Juden ermordet worden sind, sie hät-

²⁰Vīksne (2005)

ten es sich völlig anders vorgestellt. Aber wirkliche Reue zeigte keiner. Zumindest geben es diese Verhörprotokolle nicht wieder. Man muss aber damit auch sehr vorsichtig umgehen, die Verhörmethoden vom KGB sind ja weltbekannt. Das, was ich selbst gelesen habe, sind Unterhaltungen von Richtern und Verhörenden aus Preiži: "‘Was haben Sie denn gefühlt, wenn Sie diese Menschen umgebracht haben? Das waren doch Ihre Nachbarn, die sie gekannt haben! Das waren doch Kinder und Frauen, das sind doch auch Menschen!’". Und dann kam die Gegenfrage, "‘Sind die Juden etwa Menschen?’". Also die Gehirnwäsche, oder tatsächlich die persönliche Überzeugung hat da wahrscheinlich gewirkt.

Das sowjetische Regime wollte sich ja nach dem Krieg möglichst stark von der Naziideologie abgrenzen. Ist es dann nicht verwunderlich, dass der Antisemitismus nicht verschwunden ist? Wie passt das zusammen?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Es gibt eine sehr bekannte Rede von Stalin, in der sich Stalin bei allen Völkern der Sowjetunion für den Sieg im Großen Vaterländischen Krieg bedankt, aber besonders bei dem russischen Volk, dass das größte Volk unter allen Völkern der Sowjetunion sei. Und jeder, der das bezweifelte, galt als Feind, obwohl Stalin selbst kein Russe war, sondern Georgier. Dieser ganze Internationalismus beinhaltete immer die Unterstreichung der Rolle eines Volkes. Alle mussten zu sowjetischen Bürgern werden, nicht zu lettischen Bürgern der Sowjetunion. Es gab eine Tendenz zur Russifizierung und Sowjetisierung. Diejenigen, die versucht haben, ihre nationale Kultur in der Zeit des Stalinismus zu pflegen oder wiederzubeleben, wie es Juden versucht haben, waren zum Scheitern verurteilt. Da es für die jüdische Bevölkerung sehr wichtig war, nach dem Krieg die Reste zusammenzuhalten, haben sie versucht das jüdische Theater in Riga wiederzueröffnen. Das wurde ihnen verboten. Das war noch Anfang der 50er vor Stalins Tod, nach der Zerschlagung des Jüdischen antifaschistischen Komitees 1948.

Gab es da schon Auswanderungswellen nach Israel?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ja, es gab zumindest Versuche. Auch aus Litauen emigrierten viele Überlebenden Juden. Die erste größere Auswanderungswelle nach Israel gab es in den 1970ern, als es vielen gelungen war über Ungarn die Sowjetunion zu verlassen. Und danach noch einmal in den 80ern.

Gab es auch vorher schon Auswanderungswellen?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ja, nach den jüdischen Pogromen im 19. Jahrhundert, auch aus Lettland. Und nach der Revolution 1905, die dann auch mit jüdischen Pogromen einherging. 1905 ging es aber überwiegend in die USA und nur ein sehr kleiner Teil nach Palästina. Der Zionismus war ziemlich weit verbreitet, es gab verschiedene zionistische Organisationen. Es gab auch Sommerfreizeiten für die Jugendlichen, die speziell geschult worden sind, wie sie in Palästina die Wüstengebiete in Ackerland verwandeln konnten, "*Hachschara*". Das war sehr

populär. Zu Beginn waren es nicht viele, die ausgewandert sind, denn die Zwischenkriegszeit war gerade die Blütezeit der jüdischen Gemeinde in Lettland. Diejenigen, die hingefahren sind und dort sich niedergelassen haben, wurden als Helden angesehen. Aber man kann da nicht von einer großen Auswanderungswelle nach Palästina sprechen. Den Staat gab es ja noch nicht und die Idealisten meinten, "Wir bereiten jetzt unsere Jugend hier bei uns vor." Und dann wurde auch Hebräisch in jeder jüdischen Schule gelehrt.

Wie sahen die politischen Parteien in der Zwischenkriegszeit aus?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Die waren sehr zersplittert. Aus dieser Zeit stammt der jüdische Witz: Wo drei Juden sind, sind fünf Parteien. Die jüdische Minderheit vertrat sehr verschiedene Auffassungen, auch was das Leben im lettischen Staat anging. Und man kann auch von keiner Homogenität der jüdischen Bevölkerung in Lettland sprechen. Es gab die sozialistischen Bundisten, die Erzkonservativen Zionisten, die sich einen Gottesstaat in Palästina gewünscht hatten, und auch demokratische Bewegungen.

Gab es von diesen Bewegungen Anti-Antisemitische Arbeit?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Nein. Anti-Antisemitische nicht; die Juden, wie die Russen, die Deutschen und die Weißrussen und die Polen, wie alle Minderheiten, mussten auch in der ganzen demokratischen Periode für ihre Rechte kämpfen. Für ihre Rechte als ethnische Minderheit, dafür, ihre eigenen Schulen zu haben und sie selbst zu verwalten. Weil es immer wieder von Seiten der Regierung Bestrebungen gab, das Schulsystem zu unifzieren und die Schulen zu lettisieren um eine homogene Bevölkerung zu bilden. Es gab Regierungen, die sehr aufgeschlossen den Minderheiten gegenüber waren, unter denen man weniger darum kämpfen musste. Und es gab auch Regierungen, die alles daran gesetzt haben, diese Gesetze, wenn nicht ganz abzuschaffen, so doch ihre Wirkungsbereiche zu begrenzen. Indem sie zum Beispiel die Inspektoren für ethnische Schulen abgeschafft haben und gesagt haben: Jetzt kontrolliert das Bildungsministerium die Schulen der Minderheiten. Das galt zwei Jahre lang, dann hat die neue Regierung die Stellen wieder eingeführt auf Nachdruck der Minderheiten, die dann dafür zusammengearbeitet haben.

Wie wurde die Auswanderung nach dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion in Lettland wahrgenommen?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Dazu habe ich schon Eingangs einiges erzählt. Das Bewusstsein war da, dass Juden auswandern. Aber auch Verwunderung. Was die Migration der jüdischen Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion betrifft, so muss dazu gesagt werden, dass die Kontakte zwischen den Juden und der russischsprachigen Bevölkerung in Sowjetrußland besser ausgeprägt waren, weil fast alle Juden, die in Sowjetlettland gelebt haben, nach dem Krieg Russisch gesprochen haben. Viele von ihnen sind nach dem Krieg nach Lettland emigriert, aus der Ukraine oder aus Russland. Und die hatten auch eigentlich

keinen Bezug zum vorherigen Lettland. Den Holocaust haben knapp 1500 lettische Juden überlebt, und nicht alle von ihnen sind nach Lettland zurückgekehrt. Diese 1500 sind mit denjenigen zusammengerechnet, die es geschafft haben, vor der deutschen Besatzung Lettland zu verlassen. Von denjenigen, die dort geblieben waren, sind vielleicht knapp 1000 am Leben geblieben.

Wie haben sie den Holocaust überlebt? Wurden sie versteckt?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ja, einige haben sich versteckt. Es sind sogar bis zu 600 Fälle der Judenrettung in Lettland heute bekannt. Das heißt aber nicht, dass sie alle überlebt haben. Anfang der 1990er waren um die 200 Fälle bekannt, in denen tatsächlich Juden überlebt haben. Einige Fälle sind in den Akten der Polizei aufgezeichnet worden, d.h. dass jemand gefunden wurde, der einen Juden versteckt hat. Das bedeute für beide den Tod. Wie überlebt man den Holocaust? Schwierig zu sagen. Viele sind 1944 nach Auschwitz gekommen und dort dann die Befreiung erlebt, einigen ist die Flucht 1944 gelungen, als die sowjetische Armee sich näherte.

Haben Sie ein Beispiel von einer Person, die überlebt hat?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Herr Margers Vestermanis ist die prominenteste überlebende Persönlichkeit in der jüdischen Gemeinde. Als ich dort noch gearbeitet habe, waren häufig seine Freunde da, also Leidensgenossen, mit denen er zusammen im Ghetto und im KZ war, Konzentrationslager Kaiserwald. Die haben sich auch gegenseitig Bestätigungen darüber ausgestellt, dass sie bezeugen können sich im Ghetto oder im KZ begegnet zu haben. Weil es keine Papiere gibt, die das belegen können. Als die Wehrmacht sich aus Lettland zurückgezogen hat, wurden die Dokumente verbrannt. Deshalb war es schwierig nachzuvollziehen, wie viele da inhaftiert wurden. Die Familie von Herrn Vestermanis ist bei der Rumbula-Aktion in Riga 1941 umgekommen. Er hatte zwei Geschwister, einen älteren Bruder und eine Schwester. Sein Vater war Textilfabrikant in Riga. Er war ein sogenannter kurländischer Jude aus dem Westen Lettlands. Seine Muttersprache war Deutsch, und seine Mutter war russische Jüdin. Die erste Muttersprache von Herrn Vestermanis war Lettisch, weil er eine lettische Nanny hatte. Dann hat er Deutsch gelernt, er war im deutschen Kindergarten. Er meinte, wäre die Familie bei der sowjetischen Deportation von Juni 1941 deportiert gewesen, hätten sie eine Chance gehabt zu überleben. Er selbst hat sich als Elektriker im Ghetto ausgegeben. Er meinte auch, dass er wie durch ein Wunder überlebt hat, weil ihm das abgekauft wurde, obwohl er einmal das ganze Haus, an dem er arbeiten musste, lahmgelegt hat. Und er hat sich danach im Gespräch mit mir auch gewundert, dass er damals deswegen nicht umgebracht worden war.

Kommen wir zu der Veranstaltung am 16. März in Lettland, die jedes Jahr einen internationalen Aufschrei erregt. Vielleicht können Sie darauf eingehen, wie der Charakter dieser Veranstaltung ist und

welche Interessen hinter dieser Veranstaltung stehen.

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Das ist eine Veranstaltung der Veteranen der lettischen Waffen-SS Legion, die 1943 gegründet wurde. Die lettische Waffen-SS hieß auch wie überall in Europa Freiwilligen Waffen-SS Division, was aber nicht stimmte. Freiwillig waren nur die Schutzmannschaftsbataillone, zu denen sich Letten 1941 tatsächlich freiwillig gemeldet haben. Diese wurden dann 1943 in die 15. Waffen-SS Division eingegliedert. Das waren auch diejenigen, die an der Judenvernichtung 1941 teilgenommen haben, auch an den "Sonderexpeditionen" und an der Vernichtung der Zivilbevölkerung in Weißrussland beteiligt waren. All die anderen wurden einberufen, sind aber auch zur Musterung erschienen. Das sage ich, weil uns aus dem Baltikum ein anderer Fall bekannt ist. Die Waffen-SS Legion wurde auch in Estland gegründet und in Litauen. In Estland ist es gelungen, in Lettland ist es gelungen, in Litauen nicht. Nur jeder Fünfte erschien dort zur Musterung. Und diejenigen die erschienen, nur dürftig ausgestattet, haben sich dann geweigert den Eid auf Hitler zu leisten. Und 1944 musste man einsehen, dass sie nutzlos sind. Und deswegen gibt es keine litauische Waffen-SS Legion.

Das heißt aber, Widerstand dagegen war offenbar möglich und wurde auch nicht so sehr geahndet?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Zumindest nicht in Litauen, in Lettland schon mehr. Die ganzen Familien konnten inhaftiert werden, man hat nach ihnen gesucht. Aber wenn Sie den berühmten Film "Lettische Legion" anschauen, von Uldis Neiburgs,²¹ da haben einige Einberufenen erzählt: "Es kam dieses Zettelchen, ich muss dort erscheinen an dem und dem Datum. Und dann fragt der Vater: "Und was machst du jetzt? Gehst du hin oder gehst du in den Wald?". Was konnte man machen, man wusste ja, die Familie wird verfolgt, dann ging ich hin." Herr Vestermanis erzählte, dass die Partisaneneinheit, die er im Wald getroffen hatte, als er während des Todesmarsches geflohen war, zum großen Teil aus den Deserteuren der lettischen Waffen-SS bestand. Es gab Leute, die sich gewehrt haben. In Litauen sah es natürlich so aus, dass man sich massenhaft dagegen gewehrt hatte. In Lettland nicht. Sie haben sich dann tatsächlich zusammen mit der deutschen Wehrmacht an den Kämpfen an der Front beteiligt. Sie wurden aber nicht mehr zur Ermordung der Zivilbevölkerung eingesetzt, deshalb kann man tatsächlich sagen, dass die 1943 Einberufenen keine Verbrecher im Sinne des Nürnberger Tribunals sind. Aber es sind auch keine Helden. Sie haben den Eid auf Hitler geleistet, auch wenn viele danach erzählt hatten, "Ich hatte so ein ungutes Gefühl dabei". Es ist auch so, dass dieser 16. März tatsächlich als ein offizieller Feiertag in den lettischen Kalender aufgenommen wurde. Ein paar Jahre später, als es einen großen internationalen Aufschrei gab, wurde es auf Vorschlag der damaligen Präsidentin Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga wieder aus dem Kalender gestrichen. Und jetzt ist es in Riga so, dass jede öffentliche Veranstaltung bei der Stadtverwaltung angemeldet

²¹Latvian Legion, Filmstudio "Devīni", 2000.

sein muss. Jedes Jahr reichen die Veranstalter die Anmeldung ein, bekommen eine Absage und gehen gerichtlich dagegen vor. Und das Gericht erlaubt es jedes Mal wieder. Das Schlimme ist, dass diese Veranstaltung auch die Neonazis mobilisiert, die antisemitisch eingestellt sind, aus dem In- und Ausland. Auch Rechtsradikale aus der Ukraine, aus Ungarn, sind jetzt jedes Jahr wieder dabei. Es gibt einen Legionären Friedhof in Vidzeme, in Lestene. Da wurde auch ein Denkmal errichtet, aber es ist anders als in Deutschland, wo es mit Scham gesehen wird. In Lettland gelten die Waffen SS Veteranen tatsächlich als Helden, nicht als Opfer. Zum Beispiel, sieht man in besagtem Film am Ende einen Mann, der in der sowjetischen Armee gekämpft hat, gegen seinen eigenen Bruder, im kurländischen Kessel. Er war jünger, er wurde also später einberufen, als sowjetische Armee nach Lettland einrückte und die Wehrmacht und die Legion sich nach Westen, Kurland zurückzogen. Sein Bruder ist im kurländischen Kessel gefallen. Und er weiß auch, dass er vielleicht derjenige ist, der ihn erschossen hat. Er weiß es ja nicht. Er sagt da: „Zu Sowjetzeit sind die die Verbrecher gewesen, jetzt sind wir die Verbrecher.“ Das ist eine lettische Familie, die auf beiden Seiten kämpfen musste. Das Interessante ist, als die ersten Märsche zum 16. März organisiert worden sind, wurde Herr Vestermanis, der auch Historiker ist, gefragt, was er dazu meint. Er war damals der Meinung, die sind keine Verbrecher, die wurden einberufen. Die Verbrecher wurden danach tatsächlich auch von der Sowjetmacht verurteilt und zur Rechnung gezogen. Das sind einfach Veteranen. Es ist unklug, dass sie jetzt da rausgehen. Sie durften das die ganze Sowjetzeit nicht, sie galten ja als Verbrecher, wurden aber nicht bestraft dafür, dass sie in der Legion waren. Die Mehrheit nicht. Herr Vestermanis hat sie damals verteidigt.

Aber er wird nicht die Sichtweise der Waffen-SS Veteranen verteidigen, oder?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Nein, natürlich nicht. Er hat sie auch als Opfer des Krieges dargestellt. Man kann sie aber nicht mit den anderen Opfern vergleichen. Einmal war sogar der Verteidigungsminister bei deren Gedenkveranstaltung in Riga dabei. Seine Handlung wurde natürlich danach verurteilt von der Regierung. Die evangelische lutherische Kirche macht allerdings jedes Mal mit. Es gibt einen großen Gottesdienst im Dom. Die marschieren dann von der Domkirche durch die ganze Altstadt zum Freiheitsdenkmal. Früher war das nur auf dem Friedhof in Lestene. Aber jetzt hat es offizielle Züge durch die Beteiligung der lutherischen Kirche, die im Dom auch zum Beispiel am Unabhängigkeitstag Lettlands einen Gottesdienst feiert. In derselben Kirche, mit demselben Pfarrer. Jedes Jahr sind am 16. März auch mehrere Parlamentsabgeordnete dabei.

Gibt es lettische Politiker oder andere bedeutende lettische Figuren, die sich antisemitisch äußern?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ja, es gibt die Partei Tēvzemei un Brīvībai, “für

das Vaterland und Freiheit". In dieser Partei gibt es ultranationale Kräfte, die den extremen Nationalismus salonfähig machen wollen. Sie kommt immer ins Parlament hinein, seit Anbeginn. Von denen kommt ab und zu schon was, aber nicht von den Abgeordneten in der Saeima. Die sind natürlich gegen alle, nicht nur gegen Juden.

Gibt es zivilgesellschaftliche Initiativen gegen Antisemitismus und Rassismus in Lettland?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Staatliche Maßnahmen gibt es jede Menge. Es gibt immer wieder europäische Projekte, es gibt immer wieder soziologische Untersuchungen, es gibt immer wieder Empfehlungen der Wissenschaft an die Politik, was man noch machen könnte, um die Gesellschaft zu konsolidieren und demokratischer zu gestalten. Aber ob das alles tatsächlich da ankommt, wo es ankommen sollte, das ist schwer zu beurteilen. Es sieht nicht danach aus. Offen antisemitische Politiker werden auch nicht so stark angeprangert. Die Kritik kommt dann immer nur von der Opposition und nicht von den etablierten lettischen Parteien.

In welcher Weise werden jüdische Letten heute im Alltag mit Antisemitismus konfrontiert?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Offen überhaupt nicht, aber sie zeigen sich sehr selten als Juden in der Öffentlichkeit. Ich habe meine jüdischen Freunde in Lettland gerade gefragt und die meinen, latenter Antisemitismus sei da. Man spürt, dass man anders behandelt wird. Eine gewisse Aggressivität im Verhalten, vor allem wenn es um den Beruf geht. Man wird da nicht so gerne gesehen und wird ausgegrenzt, wenn man als Jude erkannt wird.

Und wie groß ist das Problembewusstsein? Wie sehr ist Antisemitismus im Bewusstsein der Leute in Lettland?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ich glaube, es ist nicht im Bewusstsein. Es gibt lettische Wissenschaftler, die sehr wohl wissen und verstehen, dass es dieses Problem gibt. Aber ich denke nicht, dass in der Mehrheit der Bevölkerung ein Bewusstsein dafür da ist. Wenn es darauf ankommt, dann sagt man sowas wie hier in Deutschland: "Man darf das wohl noch sagen...", "Ich bin kein Antisemit, aber..."

Wissen Sie, ob jüdische Institutionen dem Antisemitismus ausgesetzt sind?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Ich weiß, dass die Synagoge in Riga von der Polizei rund um die Uhr bewacht wird. Einmal wurde da eine Flasche mit Brennstoff reingeworfen. Und die Wände der Synagoge wurden beschmiert. Aber das liegt schon mehr als 10 Jahre zurück. Man hat dann auch auf den Bildern der Überwachungskamera gesehen, dass das Jugendliche waren. Und der damalige

Rabbiner, Natans Barkans, meinte, die sollten einfach zuhause von ihren Eltern dafür bestraft werden. Er glaubte auch nicht, dass das irgendwie fundiert antisemitisch war. Aber dass die Synagoge als Zielscheibe diene, das ist schon markant. Man könnte dann sagen, wenn das Jugendliche sind, woher haben sie das? Und dann bietet sich die Antwort, die haben das aus dem Umfeld, aus der Familie. Höchstwahrscheinlich haben sie etwas gehört und dann ist es in die Taten übergegangen. Diese Jugendlichen sind jetzt inzwischen erwachsen. Was sie jetzt darüber denken, weiß man nicht. Die Synagoge wird seitdem rund um die Uhr von der Polizei bewacht. Da steht immer ein Bus voller Polizisten. Die jüdische Gemeinde hatte mal ein sehr offenes Durchgangssystem. Man konnte da einfach so rein. Und viele Ausländer haben das bewundert und uns im Museum gefragt: "Haben Sie hier keine Angst, einem Angriff der Antisemiten zum Opfer zu fallen?" Man hatte tatsächlich keine Angst. Inzwischen kommt man nur durch die eine Tür rein. Die zweite Tür ist geschlossen. Auch um ins Museum zu kommen muss man sagen wohin und zu wem man möchte. Ab und zu sind es Letten, die dort arbeiten. Nur leider sind das Ausnahmen. Die Letten werden dann immer gefragt "Was machst du da? Das ist doch ein jüdisches Museum." Ich wurde auch immer gefragt "Bist du Jüdin?", und musste sagen "Nein", "Und was machst du dann da?", "Arbeiten?". Als die renovierte Synagoge wiedereröffnet wurde, wurde darüber in der lettischen Presse berichtet. Ich habe die Kommentare der Leser gelesen und Angst bekommen. Einer der harmlosesten Kommentare war "Müssen wir Letten tatsächlich davon in Kenntnis gesetzt werden?". Das ist diese Nicht-Bereitschaft, das als Teil der Kultur und Geschichte Lettlands anzuerkennen. Was allerdings die Aufarbeitung des Holocausts betrifft, da hat Lettland, zumindest die lettische Wissenschaft, große Fortschritte gemacht. Es ist fast alles aufgearbeitet worden, was aufgearbeitet werden konnte. Fast alle Archivbestände sind gesichtet und systematisiert worden. Und das Okkupations-Museum hat sogar zusammen mit dem jüdischen Museum vor einigen Jahren, 2011, eine Ausstellung zusammen gemacht namens "Rumbula. 1941. Anatomie des Verbrechens",²² explizit zur Judenvernichtung.

Ich hätte noch eine Frage zur Schulbildung in Lettland. Wie sehr sind in den Lehrplänen die Themen Judentum und Diskriminierung gegen Juden verankert?

Svetlana Bogojavlenska: Das Thema ist auf jeden Fall präsent. Es war sogar eine Lettin, Ieva Gundare, sie arbeitete bis vor kurzem im Okkupationsmuseum, eine der ersten, die sich überhaupt überlegt hat, wie man das den Letten erklären kann, ohne den Nationalstolz zu verletzen. Zu sagen, das lettische Volk hat bei der Judenvernichtung mitgemacht, nicht das ganze Volk, sondern einige Letten. Dem jüdischen Museum war es sehr wichtig zu sagen, dass nicht das ganze Volk am Judenmord beteiligt war, sondern bestimmte Individuen, die namentlich bekannt sind. Man kann nicht das ganze Volk für den Judenmord verurteilen. Die anderen waren ja auch Opfer. Und das war sehr wichtig auch

²²Die Ausstellung ist auf der Internetseite des Museums digital zugänglich: <http://okupacijasmuzejs.lv/rumbula/en> (12.08.2019)

für Ieva Gundare und das Okkupationsmuseum. Es gab bestimmte Menschen die am Judenmord beteiligt waren, es gab aber auch Menschen, die den Juden geholfen haben. Und es gab auch diejenigen, die sich das gleichgültig angeschaut haben. Oder mit Schaudern. Oder, mit Staunen, "was passiert jetzt?", und sie wussten nicht, was sie tun könnten. Frau Gundare hat Pädagogik studiert und war diejenige, die 2001-2002 die Arbeitsmaterialien, die ersten Arbeitsmaterialien für lettische Schulen in engen Beratungen mit dem Museum "Juden in Lettland" ausgearbeitet hat, um das Thema den Schulkindern nahe zu bringen. Sie hat dann danach im Okkupationsmuseum das gleiche für die sowjetischen Deportationen gemacht. In dem sie auch aufgezeichnet hat, dass nicht nur Letten darunter gelitten haben, sondern auch andere ethnische Gruppen, die in Lettland zu dieser Zeit gewohnt haben. Es gab schon die Tendenz zu sagen, dass es ein Genozid gegen das lettische Volk war. Was aber nicht stimmt, es war kein Genozid gegen das lettische Volk. Das waren Repressionen gegen alle Völker Lettlands, gegen die lettische Bevölkerung oder vielmehr gegen Bevölkerung Lettlands. Weil wenn man lettisch sagt, denkt man in Lettland nur an die Letten, nicht an die Bevölkerung Lettlands, die ja multiethnisch aufgestellt ist. Und das war ihr dann auch gut gelungen. Es gibt in der Schule in jedem Fall ein Programm. Nur muss man bedenken, dass der Schulplan natürlich anders ist als hier. Während hier dem Nationalsozialismus viel Zeit gewidmet wird, ist es dort anders, man hat dort andere wichtige Themen. Und es hängt sehr vom Lehrer ab. Ich habe auch schon Berichte gehört, dass die Lehrer das Thema einfach weglassen, sodass der Holocaust gar nicht erwähnt wird. An der Universität gehört es dazu. In der Schule muss es wie gesagt mindestens eine Stunde sein, aber die wird nicht von jedem Lehrer durchgeführt. Aber ich weiß, dass man an den Schulen Projektwochen hat, und erstaunlicherweise entscheiden sich immer noch ziemlich viele Schulen, auch aus der Provinz, für einen Gang ins jüdische Museum.

Vitaly Liberov

Mr Liberov will introduce himself in the course of the interview, which took place in Nuremberg on March 8th, 2017. The interview was conducted in Russian and translated into English for this publication.

Could you please tell us something about yourself first?

Vitaly Liberov: My name is Vitaly Liberov. I am forty years old. I am an entrepreneur. I was born in Bryansk, Russia. I was raised as usual Soviet kid, I was a Young Pioneer, then I joined Komsomol, so, I was not familiar with religion. But as I was growing up, I remember men in our family going together somewhere several times a year, whispering about something, coming home with big slices of Matzah wrapped up in paper, and things like that. But it all was so strange to me that I did not pay attention. The first moment I realised I was a Jew was when I came to government office to receive my passport at age of sixteen. The official asked me: “Kid, do you really want to be registered as a Jew?”. I naively answered: “How could that be otherwise?”. It was the time of Perestroika, 1989 or 1990. The first branches of the Jewish Agency Sokhnut²³ started to appear in the Soviet Union, and that was the reason why I decided to discover my origin. I discovered that my grandparents spoke Yiddish in their youth, my grandmother’s original name was not Galina as I thought, but Golda. The fear of the Soviet system was so great, that everybody in our family was afraid of talking about their Jewish origin. That is why I knew only a few words in Yiddish, as elderly people in our family used them occasionally. And there I was standing with my passport, in which the word “Jew” was written down, and I knew nothing about that. That is how I became an extremely active member of the Sokhnut Bryansk branch. I started working as a *Madrich*²⁴, and I liked it. It was really amusing, because we had to organise camps for children without any knowledge of Judaism and traditions. So, there were evenings and nights before the events when we had to learn ourselves. That was quite an interesting time. Then my parents decided to emigrate to Germany. It was quite a difficult decision for me personally, I was not fond of my parents’ decision because I wanted to go to Israel. But it was not for me to decide, that is why I in 1996 I came to Germany, and now I live in Germany for a longer time than I lived in Bryansk. When I came to Germany, I directly applied to the Center Council of Jewish Communities of Germany. That is how I became a member of Jewish community.

²³The Jewish Agency for Israel (Hebre: *HaSochnut HaYehudit L'Eretz Yisra'el*) is a Jewish non-profit organisation founded in the early 20th century that is seeking to connect Jews worldwide with their people and heritage, primarily by fostering immigration to Israel (*aliyah*). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many thousands of Jews emigrated from its territory into Israel. The Sochnut supported this process.

²⁴Hebrew word for caretaker

Is it correct that you realised that you are a Jew at the age of sixteen?

Vitaly Liberov: I always knew I was a Jew. Even as a kid I had to fight with other kids who were mocking me because I was a Jew. But until the age of sixteen, I never considered myself as a Jew religiously. It is hard to explain, that there is a difference between being a Jew as ethnicity and being a Hebrew as religion. But at age of sixteen, I decided not to distinguish these two meanings – I accepted both ethnicity and religion.

Were your relationships with other children good, before the age of sixteen?

Vitaly Liberov: I do not want to say that I was an unhappy child. In Soviet school it was officially not acceptable to distinguish people by ethnicity, because all were Little Octobrists, then Young Pioneers and so forth. And if someone was trying to say something bad against Jews in school, then the teacher had to punish this kid. State propaganda showed the Soviet Union as a multi-national state of fraternal friendship among the peoples, but in fact there was a huge control over the number of Jews accepted to universities, so-called quotas. In the streets, of course, there was anti-Semitism among the children.

How did your family preserve Jewish traditions?

Vitaly Liberov: In a very rudimental form. For example, my grandparents used not to eat pork, not to eat bread during Passover or to restrain themselves from food during Yom-Kippur. It was not the question of preserving traditions, but rather some little nuances. And, of course, no Yiddish could be spoken. But, by the way, when I came to Germany, I surprisingly discovered that German people, especially elderly in Bavaria, use some Yiddish words without realising it. For example, “Masel”, which means “happiness”, or “Tachlis”, which means being honest or speaking the truth.

How did you become a member of the Jewish Community of Nuremberg?

Vitaly Liberov: I just came to the synagogue for a daily prayer, and I got acquainted with other members. I wanted to keep doing what I was doing in Bryansk. Luckily, the Jewish emigration from post-Soviet countries started, and I got a lot of friends for whom Russian was their native language. And of course, there is a peculiarity of Judaism, that whenever you pray, whenever you celebrate Shabbat or any other holiday, there are people in every country of the world that are doing the same. That is why you cannot be alone. I was never alone when I became a member of Nuremberg community.

Is the Jewish community of Nuremberg different today from what it was like when you came?

Vitaly Liberov: Tremendously. I came before the large wave of emigration started. Before that the people at the synagogue could not gather for the Minyan to read the prayer. But in the end of the 1990s, the community hugely enlarged. There are a lot of members of community that regularly attend ceremonies. We have a nursing home, a big hall for events, classes for youth, we even think about opening a kindergarten. Sometimes hundreds of people attend celebrations. But, of course, we have also other kind of events, for example lectures, classes, conferences. We invite people from other organisations, everybody is welcome. I think that Nuremberg is getting a new “face” thanks to the growing Jewish community, because German people are interested in coming to us.

How many Jews live in Nuremberg at the moment?

Vitaly Liberov: I know that there are two thousand members of our community, and I think it is forty percent of all Jews in Nuremberg. Actually, our community is not the only one. It just happened historically, that there is also Chabad community and several alternative groups. These groups even have their own rabbis, who are less conservative. Our community is a classic orthodox community. Our liturgy was written in the middle of 19th century, specifically for the needs of community.

Does your community have contacts with Israel?

Vitaly Liberov: We have Hebrew classes. Nuremberg’s sister city is Hadera, that is why we have exchange programmes with Israeli schools. Many Israeli students come to Nuremberg and especially to our community.

Do you think that there is anti-Semitism in German society?

Vitaly Liberov: My answer would be very subjective. I just want to remember summer of 2014, when there was a military operation in Gaza. At this time, I was really afraid, because everyone – far-right, far-left, Muslim organisations – united in hatred for the Jews. People were out on the streets shouting anti-Semitic things like “*Hamas, Hamas, Juden ins Gas*”, and the Police did not do a thing to stop them. A huge crowd of young men broke into the main station building because they thought the owners of Burger King and McDonald’s are Jews, whereas in Nuremberg, these stores belong to Muslims. They vandalised the building because of hatred for the Jews. That is why I can definitely say that there is anti-Semitism in Germany. I think there is a huge gap in the educational system. After the War, the topic of the Holocaust was broadly discussed at schools in Germany. Moreover, there were people who Survived during the War, and they could tell a lot. Nowadays, there are a lot of children at schools to whom the topic of War and the Holocaust is not as close as to people of my generation. Unfortunately, to children from some Muslim families, the topic of the Holocaust is irrelevant, or they consider it to be fake. In my opinion, this is a problem of the educational system. There is no unified system of teaching history among Federal Lands in Germany. There is no unified pedagogic plan.

Of course, there are standards set by the Ministry of Education, but in the end, everything depends on the teacher, who are afraid to have a discussion. That is why many teachers just tell pupils to write an essay on Spielberg's Schindler's list, which does not show the Holocaust. Speaking about reasons of anti-Semitism, I would like to refer to director Sokhnut, Nathan Sharansky. He developed the so-called "Three D" test of anti-Semitism: deligitimisation, demonisation and double standards. Each of these "three Ds" is a basic of anti-Semitism. Some people say, "Yes, Israelis are entitled to protect themselves, but they at least have automatic rifles, Palestinians do not", or "Yes, Jews were killed during the War, but other peoples were killed, too". Nowadays, anti-Semitism is not as primitive as before, because some people tend to hide anti-Semitism under a leftist fight against capitalism and globalism. Some tend to use euphemisms like "antizionism" or "critique of Israel", which is a pure form of anti-Semitism. Sometimes, these are the same people that attack refugees, both in reality and in social media. People do not realise that anti-Semitism is not only a problem of Jews – this is a problem of society as a whole. Even when I speak with my German friends, they admit that they do not consider anti-Semitism as their problem. I remember that when I was a *Madrich* in a Jewish camp in Frankfurt in 1998, some German kids sneaked to the venue to see, as they said, how the Jews drink blood. This example shows how deeply anti-Semitism is rooted in society, and how different the forms are that it can take.

What can be done to fight anti-Semitism?

Vitaly Liberov: First of all, we have to work with children. It is necessary to show at school the consequences of hatred and intolerance. Secondly, we must make our politicians listen. Of course, in the end summer 2015 there was a huge manifestation in Berlin near the Brandenburg gate organised by the Center Council of Jewish Communities of Germany. Even Angela Merkel attended. Some politicians came and said right things, but most of them do not care. There are still fascist parties in Germany, which are not prohibited. It just changes its name from "German National Union" to "Gathering of German Nationalists" and then to "National Party of Germany". They pretend to be democratic, but in reality, everyone knows its nature, despite that the Construction Protection Bureau inspect them. But there were even underground groups who murder people, vandalise shop and businesses. Unfortunately, the police are not efficient in catching them.

We would like to ask you about the Forum of Jewish Culture in Germany. Could you please tell us about this organisation?

Vitaly Liberov: This organisation is based in Nuremberg. I am a member of the managing board. It is a society which consists of Jewish and non-Jewish members. Our purpose is to tell about the history and traditions of Jews in Germany and in Nuremberg, particularly. We organise some events, lectures, we invite representatives of different confessions to discuss some topics, for example

marriage, raising children and so on. We also organise excursions and seminars. People like it and the number of participants increases.

Does the Forum speak about Reformation and Martin Luther's attitude toward the Jews, about his anti-Semitism?

Vitaly Liberov: Yes, and this topic was especially interesting for Catholics. But Nuremberg is mainly a Protestant city, that is why it is not so easy to speak about this. Unfortunately, in some churches in Germany there is still such an anti-Semitic thing as the *Judensau*, "Jewish pig". Just a few years ago, stones from a Jewish cemetery were found in the floor of the southern tower of the Lorenzkirche in Nuremberg. The former chairman of the Community, Arno Hamburger, was working on taking these stones out of church, there were many obstacles imposed by the Lutheran church. But we managed it, and now these stones are back on the cemetery. The history of Jews in Nuremberg is very rich. One of the oldest Jewish cemeteries is in Nuremberg. Actually, Nuremberg is tragically connected to Riga, since many Nuremberg Jews were deported to Riga and shot in Bīķernieki forest during the War. We have also so-called Riga Committee, which is working on commemorating those people.

Dr Axel Töllner

*Dr. Axel Töllner (*1968) is a Protestant pastor and, since 2014, Federal Church Commissioner for Christian-Jewish Dialogue in Bavaria, Germany. After graduating from high school in Munich in 1987, he completed his civil service and studied Protestant theology in Erlangen, Kiel and Jerusalem. During his studies he completed additional training in Christian journalism and journalism. From 2003 to 2011 he worked as a pastor in various communities. He received his doctorate in 2007 at the University of Koblenz-Landau and then worked until 2010 as a research associate at the project Synagogues-Memorial Band Bavaria at the Chair of Modern Church History at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg. From 2010 to 2011 he worked as a research associate at the Working Group Catholicism and Protestantism Research for the NS Documentation Center Munich, then until 2014 again at the Synagogue Memorial Band Bavaria.*

The interview with him took place on April 21st, 2017 in Nuremberg, it was conducted in German.

Dr. Axel Töllner: Bei unseren Recherchen zu einem Projekt mit etwa 200 jüdischen Gemeinden in Unterfranken sind wir auf das Problem gestoßen, dass die Quellenlage zu diesen vielen kleinen Orten total disparat ist. In einem Ort gibt es unendlich viel und im anderen Ort gar nichts. Ein anderes Phänomen, auf das wir gestoßen sind, ist dass die Leute im einen Ort Leute schon relativ früh angefangen haben, sich mit ihrer jüdischen Geschichte zu beschäftigen, und in anderen Orten scheint bis heute irgendwie ein Deckel drauf zu sein. Aber das folgt auch keiner Gesetzmäßigkeit, das lässt sich keiner bestimmten Region zuordnen, im Nachbarort kann das schon wieder ganz anders sein. Das ist auch sehr abhängig von einzelnen Personen – oft sind das Leute, die da nicht groß geworden, sondern zugezogen sind.

Das ist auch ganz interessant, wenn man sich Ortschroniken anschaut, oder Vereinschroniken oder Ähnliches, da sind meistens nur kurze Notizen: 1933 wurde „Der-und-der“ Vorsitzender und der nächste Eintrag ist dann erst 1945 – die ganzen Heimkehrer oder Flüchtlinge, die dann dazugekommen sind und dem Vereinsleben eine ganz neue Richtung gegeben haben. . . Die ganzen Ausschlüsse durch irgendwelche Arier-Paragraphen, solche Geschichten, das wurde nicht dokumentiert. Es ist auch oft schwierig an das Archivgut der Gemeinden ran zu kommen, weil die Gemeindearchive zum Teil nicht geordnet sind. Ich habe von einem Ort gehört, wo der frühere Bürgermeister sich mit der jüdischen Geschichte des Ortes beschäftigt hat und eine Publikation dazu geschrieben hat. Von seinen Quellen war dann aber überhaupt nichts mehr auffindbar, und jetzt haben sie in den letzten Jahren erst hinten in der Ecke des Gemeindearchivs den ganzen Stapel gefunden, den hat der einfach beiseitegeschafft, er hat das Material also nicht entsorgt, sondern im Archiv versteckt, und das ist eigentlich

ein perfektes Versteck.

Man stößt ja bei solchen Recherchen immer noch auf sehr starke anti-semitische Ressentiments. Es gab mal die Initiative eines Juden, der in den USA lebt, der einen ziemlich hohen Geldbetrag spenden wollte, für eine Gedenktafel, die an die Synagoge und an die Juden erinnert und da war der ganze Gemeinderat dagegen. Vielleicht kannst du mal deine Erfahrungen an ein paar Beispielen anführen?

Axel Töllner: Also, was mir immer wieder auffällt ist, dass selbst die Leute, die sich mit der jüdischen Ortsgeschichte beschäftigen und sagen, dass das wichtig ist, immer von den Deutschen reden und von den Juden. Das ist also eine Sondergruppe, die anders ist als die Anderen. Dass die seit Jahrhunderten in dem Dorf gelebt haben, das Dorf mitgeprägt haben, das ist im Bewusstsein nicht so eingedrungen. Das finde ich sehr interessant, dass selbst bei den Leuten, die sich bemühen, die jüdische Geschichte ins Gedächtnis zu rufen, noch die Vorstellung da ist, dass die Juden irgendwie die Anderen sind. Und ich kann mich an ein Forschungsprojekt erinnern, auch aus einem unterfränkischen Dorf, mit den Schulen und den Kirchengemeinden vor Ort: jüdisches Leben in unserem Dorf. Das mündete dann in einer Broschüre und es wurden Stolpersteine verlegt. Und ein Künstler im Ort hat versucht, von der Synagoge, die 1938 zerstört wurde, eine schöne Zeichnung zu machen, basierend auf historischen Fotos. Und interessant ist, wie er die Leute dargestellt hat, die in die Synagoge reingehen. Das sind nämlich Leute, die gekleidet sind wie Ultraorthodoxe mit Schläfenlocken, mit schwarzen Hüten und Kaftanen und so etwas. Das ist überhaupt nicht durch historische Fotos gedeckt, sondern die Fotos zeigen Leute, die gekleidet sind wie alle anderen auch. Ich finde es interessant, dass sich dieses Bild so festgesetzt hat. Gelegentlich wurde ich an verschiedenen Orten mit der Haltung konfrontiert „das alte Judentum, das ist doch lange vorbei, das interessiert doch keinen mehr“ usw. - da gibt es also Leute, die scheinbar nicht wollen, dass man da was aufrührt. Ich habe auch mit verschiedenen Heimatforschern gesprochen, die sich zum Teil seit vielen Jahren auf diesem Gebiet engagiert beschäftigen. Die erzählen dann auch – besonders wenn es darum geht, wer ein Haus gekauft hat, in dem früher eine jüdische Familie gelebt hat – unter welchen Umständen man an dieses Haus gelangt ist, oder an irgendwelche Möbelstücke. Das ist immer noch schwierig. Ich habe den Eindruck, die heutigen Leute identifizieren sich so sehr mit ihrer Großelterngeneration – die wissen schon, dass da irgendwas nicht mit rechten Dingen zuging, aber „das sind ja unsere Verwandten, die werden es schon richtiggemacht haben.“

Wie gehen eigentlich die Gemeinden mit Synagogen um, die noch erhalten sind?

Axel Töllner: Das ist ganz unterschiedlich. Es gibt Synagogen, die restauriert oder wieder zugänglich gemacht wurden. Ein ganz schönes Beispiel ist die ehemalige Synagoge in Arnstein – ungefähr 30 Kilometer nördlich von Würzburg –

eine wunderbare Synagoge: frühes 19. Jahrhundert, klassizistisch – die hat im frühen 20. Jahrhundert noch eine ganz tolle Jugendstilbemalung bekommen, neben dem früheren Toraschrein, der zerstört worden ist. Oben rechts und links waren Greife aufgemalt, und jeder dieser Greife hatte ein Wappen in der Hand – das eine ist weiß-blau und das andere ist schwarz-weiß-rot. Ein wunderbares Beispiel für das Selbstverständnis der Juden. Die Stadt hat diese Synagoge vor einiger Zeit gekauft, weil sie vorher in Privatbesitz war, sie war zu Wohnraum umgebaut worden und durch die nachträglich eingebauten Zwischengeschosse sind ein paar Sachen kaputtgegangen, aber es ist im Grunde noch relativ viel von der Bemalung erhalten – 2010 wurde die Synagoge saniert und ist seitdem als Museum und Veranstaltungsort zugänglich. In anderen Orten findet sich niemand, der bereit ist, etwas an der Synagoge zu machen oder Geld zu investieren. Viele der Kommunen, vor allem in Unterfranken, leiden darunter, dass die Leute wegziehen – da gibt es viele leerstehende Häuser im Ort, die Infrastruktur bricht langsam zusammen und dann gibt es vielleicht noch eine Synagoge – das wertzuschätzen und da Energie rein zu stecken und das Ortsleben neu beleben zu können, das findet man eigentlich selten. Die Synagoge ist da, aber andere Sachen sind uns jetzt einfach wichtiger. Ob da irgendwie antisemitische Ressentiments dahinterstecken, das weiß ich nicht – das ist schwierig. Interessant ist, was verschiedene Heimatforscher erzählen, wie sie in ihren Orten angefeindet werden – für uns ist es ja in gewisser Weise komfortabel, wir gehen dahin, wir unterhalten uns da mit den Leuten und sind dann wieder weg. Und die, die da leben, sind damit konfrontiert, dass andere sie schief anschauen und immer sagen „die mit ihrem Judenzeug da“ und die zum Teil auch Kontakte zu Nachkommen von Überlebenden oder Migranten pflegen und die dorthin einladen und durch den Ort führen, wo dann die Deutschen gucken, „was ist denn jetzt mit denen und wollen die womöglich irgendwelche Rückerstattungsansprüche geltend machen?“ Und man hört auch so Sachen wie „meine Großeltern, die haben damals das Haus 1936 oder so einem Juden abgenommen, weil der halt wegmusste, die haben natürlich einen fairen Preis bezahlt! Und nach dem Krieg wollten die nochmal Geld haben, da fühlt man sich dann irgendwie schon beschissen!“, Dieses Stereotyp, dass die Juden irgendwie nach Geld gieren, dass die immer auf ihren eigenen Vorteil schauen und sowas, das kommt da schon durch, das hört man immer wieder mal. Aber man hört auch das Andere, „die Juden, die sind ja besonders geschäftstüchtig gewesen, haben dann eben viele erfolgreiche Geschäfte gehabt hier im Ort“, also auch hier diese Sonderstellung, sie hätten besondere Qualitäten und deswegen waren sie so erfolgreich und deswegen haben sie sich den Neid der anderen zugezogen. Ich habe den Eindruck, das ist für viele Leute oft sehr schwierig, das so einzuordnen, dass das ganz normale Kaufleute waren, von denen einige gute Ideen hatten, wie sie bestimmte Vertriebsmodelle einfach ausbauen und dadurch auch sehr innovativ auf dem Land wirken konnten. Man hört auch mal „bis 1933 war das Zusammenleben in unserem Ort eigentlich wunderbar; die Christen und die Juden haben sich super verstanden.“ Die Frage, warum das dann so plötzlich anders geworden ist, können die Leute dann nicht beantworten. „Ja, das war halt Propaganda und die Leute waren abgeschnitten von Informationen! Das einzige, was es im

Ort gegeben hat war der Stürmerkasten und wenn man da jahrelang geprägt ist, dann glaubt man dem irgendwann.“ Da ist ja sicherlich was dran, aber die Vorstellung „du bist mein jüdischer Nachbar, dich kenne ich, du bist natürlich anders, das weiß ich schon, aber die Juden sonst, die sind problematisch und gegen die muss man was machen.“, das ist schon seltsam.

Zumindest in Mittelfranken war ja die evangelische Kirche schon ziemlich frühzeitig nationalistisch und antisemitisch geprägt, hast du da irgendwelche Erklärungen dafür?

Axel Töllner: In Akten aus dem 19. Jahrhundert finden sich überhaupt keine konfessionellen Unterschiede, was judenfeindliche Ressentiments angeht. Man könnte vielleicht sagen, dass im katholischen Bereich Legenden – Geschichte, dass die Juden Ritualmorde verüben würden und sowas – verbreiteter waren. Der Katholizismus hat durch die Priester, die tendenziell in der bayrischen Volkspartei organisiert gewesen sind, aus parteipolitischen Gründen zunächst gegen die Nazis opponiert. Und auch die Erfahrungen aus dem Kaiserreich haben bedingt, dass da eine gewisse Distanz da war, aber es zeigt sich jetzt in Unterfranken, wobei das konfessionell total zersplittert ist, dass der Klerus, als der kirchliche Druck weg war, die Meinung vertreten hat, die Nationalsozialisten seien nicht wählbar für Katholiken, weil sie bestimmte christliche oder katholische Dogmen in Zweifel ziehen oder bestreiten. Sobald das wegbricht, setzt doch relativ schnell ein Nazifizierungsprozess ein. Was zum Beispiel antisemitische Gewalt in den einzelnen Orten angeht, kann man heute nicht sagen, dass das in den evangelisch geprägten Orten exzessiver wäre als in den katholisch geprägten Orten. Ich denke, Mittelfranken hat natürlich mit Julius Streicher auch noch eine Gallionsfigur gehabt, der hat insgesamt das Ganze unglaublich hochgeschaukelt und die Situation für die Juden wirklich schon extrem früh zur Hölle gemacht. Otto Hellmuth als Gauleiter in Unterfranken hat längst nicht diese Möglichkeiten gehabt wie Streicher, obwohl auch der natürlich auch schon sehr rigide gewesen ist. Also - Erklärungsmuster zu finden, das ist wirklich sehr, sehr kompliziert und viele Protestanten haben ihre Hoffnung in die NSDAP gesetzt, als „evangelische Partei“ und so...

Hat das vielleicht auch was mit Luther zu tun?

Axel Töllner: Die Zwanzigerjahre sind dafür ganz interessant, da ist die Auffassung von Luther als Antisemit gar nicht mal so präsent, zumindest im klassisch-kirchlichen Protestantismus. Die völkische Bewegung – also Theodor Fritsch in seinem Antisemiten-Katechismus – hat verschiedene Lutherschriften zusammengestellt, um zu zeigen, dass Luther schon sehr früh erkannt hat, wie die Juden „wirklich sind“ und so. . . Das hat sicherlich bei manchen dazu geführt, dass der Gedanke aufkam, das sei anschlussfähig.

Es gibt aber auch Stimmen, die sagen, „die Nazis instrumentalisieren Luther und versuchen ihn dann noch irgendwie zu retten – Luther hat schon sehr heftige Sachen gegen die Juden gesagt, aber im Grunde ging es ihm ja um eine re-

ligiöse Auseinandersetzung und nicht darum, die Juden da in jeder Hinsicht zu diffamieren“, da würde ich heute sagen, das sehe ich skeptischer als manche damals, aber das muss man, denke ich, auch als Apologetik einordnen. Wir wollen die Deutungshoheit über Luther behalten. Das hat sicherlich auch etwas damit zu tun, aber es gibt im Katholizismus auch genau solche vehementen Judenhasser – das unterscheidet sich nicht sehr.

Das ist sehr interessant – Nürnberg war ja gewissermaßen die protestantische Hochburg des Antisemitismus, Wien dagegen zu gleicher Zeit die katholische Hochburg des Antisemitismus. Das scheint regional sehr unterschiedlich zu sein und von verschiedensten Faktoren abzuhängen. Jetzt ist ja gerade das Lutherjahr und es finde viele Veranstaltungen zu Luther statt. Luther wird zwar nicht gefeiert wegen seinem Rassismus, aber es relativ wenig zu geben, was über seine antisemitischen Veröffentlichungen und Haltungen aufklärt, oder?

Axel Töllner: In der Forschung ist das inzwischen unübersehbar. Ich glaube, bei diesem Jubiläum wird das erstmals ein bisschen fundamentaler angegangen. Allerdings gibt es natürlich unterschiedliche Strömungen – manchen geht es viel zu weit, die sagen „Wenn wir uns so kritisch mit dem Luther auseinandersetzen, dann betreiben wir Geschichtsklitterung“ und andere sagen „es geht nicht weit genug und man hört nicht genug darüber.“ Ich habe verschiedene Vorträge zu dem Thema gehalten und finde es total interessant, dass die immer gut besucht sind und ich wirklich auf ein großes Interesse stoße. Viele der Zuhörer sagen, das hätten sie gar nicht gewusst, das wäre sehr erschütternd. Dabei gibt es viele Gemeinden, sowohl Kirchengemeinden als auch Kommunen, die Veranstaltungen dazu anbieten, es gibt auch verschiedene Wanderausstellungen zu dem Thema, die zum Beispiel in ehemaligen Synagogen ausgestellt werden. Manche Gemeinden machen auch kleine Veranstaltungsreihen zu dem ganzen Thema und beschäftigen sich damit – ich würde sagen, das hat in den letzten Jahren zugenommen und die Fragen sind auch ernster und selbstkritischer als früher. Die EKD-Synode hat im Herbst 2015 eine – wie ich finde – recht beachtenswerte Erklärung verabschiedet, wo sie sich nicht nur – und das ist meine Kritik – auf ein paar wenige Stellen innerhalb von Luthers Werk beschränkt, also diese klassischen Forderungen, die Synagogen anzuzünden, die Juden zu vertreiben und zu vernichten Zwangsarbeit und solche Dinge. Dieser Forderungskatalog, der ist furchtbar genug, aber das ist eben nur die Spitze des Eisbergs und man kann sich nicht damit begnügen, zu sagen, „das ist furchtbar gewesen an Luther und war eine Entgleisung des späten Luthers, aber ansonsten sind wir froh, dass er auch noch anderes gesagt hat“. Das geht sehr, sehr viel weiter und da versuche ich auch immer den Fokus darauf zu legen, dass die Art und Weise, wie Luther die Bibel interpretiert hat, unser eigentliches Problem ist. Gegen so exzessiven Judenhass werden sich schnell viele Leute stellen. Da sind wir uns schnell einig, da braucht man keine Vorträge zu halten, da braucht man auch keine Ausstellungen zu machen, sondern jeder wird das ekelhaft finden. Aber wenn es um die Frage geht, welches religiöse Recht die Juden in Luthers

Werk haben und wie er sie insgesamt betrachtet – das müssten mehr in den Fokus treten. Also bei Luther ist es nicht ganz einheitlich, es gibt auch ein paar Stellen, die einen optimistischer stimmen, aber insgesamt, finde ich es ziemlich ernüchternd.

Man liest ja manchmal heute noch die Positionierung, dass Christen Juden missionieren sollten. Wie verbreitet ist diese Haltung?

Axel Töllner: Die gibt es immer noch, aber auch die EKD-Synode hat im letzten November eine Erklärung veröffentlicht, wo sie das, was in den letzten Jahren als kirchlicher Konsens unter den Gremien und Kirchenleitungen gewachsen ist, zusammengefasst hat: „wir sind nicht dazu berufen, als Christen den Juden den Weg zum Heil zu weisen.“ Das hat heftigen Widerspruch hervorgerufen. Die Frage, „darf ich dann als Christ einem Juden nicht mehr sagen, dass ich an Jesus glaube, und dass Jesus für alle Menschen gut ist?“ – das ist damit nicht gemeint. Wenn ich mich mit Juden unterhalte, und die etwas von mir wissen wollen, dann erzähle ich denen natürlich auch, was ich glaube – weil ich von ihnen auch erwarte, dass sie mir das erzählen, so wie sie das erleben. Aber ich verfolge nicht das Ziel, dass sie das genauso glauben müssen, wie ich, und das ist der Unterschied. Jeder soll für seinen Glauben einstehen seinen Standpunkt zeigen, aber mein Gegenüber muss auf derselben Augenhöhe stehen und das selbe Recht haben. Der muss auch seinen Standpunkt sagen können und mich damit konfrontieren, so verstehe ich das. Aber es kommt natürlich drauf an, wie ich das mache. Ich würde ich mich jetzt nicht in Tel Aviv oder Jerusalem mit einem Stand auf die Straße stellen – aber, wenn ich in Vorträgen gefragt werde „Sag mal was als Christ dazu“ oder, wenn ich in Diskussionen, in denen wir als Juden und Christen zusammen über die Bibel reden, gefragt werde „Wie siehst du das als Christ?“, dann sage ich natürlich, wie ich das sehe. Und dann sagen die, wie sie das sehen und wir stellen fest, da gibt es vielleicht Gemeinsamkeiten und da gibt es auch Unterschiede und damit habe ich kein Problem. Und ich denke mir, Gott wird sich schon was dabei gedacht haben, dass er das so gemacht hat, er hätte es ja auch einfacher haben können.

Nochmal zu Ihren Erfahrungen bei der Recherche zu den Synagogen – haben Sie Unterschiede zwischen den Generationen festgestellt bezüglich der Haltung zum Judentum oder dem Interesse und Desinteresse?

Axel Töllner: Ich habe in allen Generationen engagierte und desinteressierte Leute getroffen – wobei mein Eindruck ist, dass in den Schulen das Thema jüdische Geschichte mittlerweile zum Heimat- und Sachkundeunterricht dazugehört. Ich verspreche mir davon, dass es selbstverständlicher ist für die jungen Leute. Ob daraus ein Fazit erwächst, da würde ich jetzt mal nicht zu optimistisch sein – aber zumindest, dass es dabei hilft, das mal als Realität anzuerkennen! Unseren Ort haben über Jahrhunderte hinweg Juden mitgeprägt. Dass das Realität ist, dass zur Heimatgeschichte auch die jüdische Geschichte dazu gehört, das ist nochmal ein Unterschied im Denken zu früheren Generationen. Ich habe

den Eindruck, es gibt unter den älteren Leuten einige, die jetzt mittlerweile auch schon gestorben sind, die sich mit der jüdischen Geschichte beschäftigt haben, auch einige, die erzielen irgendeine Art Wiedergutmachung. Die haben als Kinder oder Jugendliche vielleicht miterlebt, wie ihre jüdischen Klassenkameraden gehänselt und verfolgt wurden, haben vielleicht selber mitgemacht. Die hatten dann hinterher das Gefühl „Ich muss da irgendwas machen“ – mit den Veranstaltungen 1988, 50 Jahre Novemberpogrome, haben einige Leute angefangen, sich mit der jüdischen Geschichte im Ort zu beschäftigen und haben dann sehr engagierte Sachen geschrieben. Die können zwar nicht unbedingt wissenschaftlichen Kriterien standhalten, aber es wird deutlich, dass die Leute von irgendeiner Schuld getrieben sind und versuchen, das auf irgendeine Weise wieder gut zu machen.

Vielleicht ist da Gunzenhausen ein ganz gutes Beispiel? Da gibt es eine Schule, die sind da ziemlich engagiert - die haben Kontakt aufgenommen mit Nachfahren der Juden, die jetzt in den USA wohnen, haben einen Austausch organisiert und dadurch einen persönlichen Zugang geschaffen.

Axel Töllner: Ja, das ist natürlich ein Beispiel für wirklich nachhaltige Arbeit. Es gibt ja auch Orte, da ist eine engagierte Lehrkraft, und wenn die wieder weg ist, dann schläft das wieder ein. Aber dass das dort schon über viele Jahre hinweg gelingt, das finde ich eine tolle Sache. Ich glaube, da haben die Kleinstädte auch gewisse Vorteile. Es gibt eine ganze Reihe von Beispielen, wo Schulklassen recherchiert haben und dann über die Heimatforscher an Überlebende oder deren Nachkommen gekommen sind und dadurch Informationen über die Menschen bekommen haben und zum Teil auch Leute Interesse bekommen haben, sich mal anzuschauen, wo ihre Familie eigentlich herkommt, wo dann auch Kontakte entstanden sind. Aber es hängt in der Tat von den einzelnen Leuten vor Ort ab, die da engagiert sind.

Inwiefern gibt es eigentlich noch die ganz archaischen, antisemitischen Vorurteile, zum Beispiel in dem Buch zum Thema 100 Jahre Wasserthüringen aus den 80er Jahren? Da steht drin, die Juden legen deshalb die Steine auf die Gräber, damit, wenn der Messias wiederkommt, sie ihn nochmal steinigen können. Gibt es sowas immer noch?

Axel Töllner: Sowas habe ich schon immer wieder mal gehört. Volksglaube ist unglaublich nachhaltig, das kommt, denke ich, auch von bestimmten Vorstellungen, die Juden als Sondergruppe sehen - „die wollen unter sich bleiben“ und „die haben so komische Bräuche“ und am Shabbat mussten dann immer die Christen zu ihnen kommen und den Ofen anschüren und sowas. Natürlich, das hat es ja gegeben – aber die Vorstellung, dass Christen unter Juden dienen müssen, das gibt das Gefühl, die Juden hätten sich für etwas Besseres gehalten und das merkt man schon auch noch immer wieder. Das ist schon interessant, wie zäh

solche Vorstellungen sind.

Jetzt ist ja zum Glück ein direkter, offener Antisemitismus in Deutschland – im Gegensatz zu Polen, Ungarn, Österreich und vielen anderen Ländern – nicht gesellschaftsfähig, sondern eher tabuisiert. Antisemitismus ist trotzdem weiterhin vorhanden, was wissenschaftlich untersucht ist – die Frage ist, wie dieser versteckte Antisemitismus in Erscheinung tritt.

Axel Töllner: Es gibt zum Beispiel immer wieder Friedhofsschändungen, deswegen sind die Friedhöfe verschlossen, und es ist manchmal schwierig, herauszufinden, woher man den Schlüssel dafür kriegen kann.

Wir haben auch ein Interview mit dem Rabbiner aus Fürth geführt, und der sagt, typisch für ihn seien, auch während der Woche der Brüderlichkeit, antisemitische Tendenzen unter Freunden. Die Christen leiten das dann immer ein, er hat da Stapelweise Briefe, mit „Kritik unter Freunden muss doch wohl erlaubt sein“, und dann legen sie los.

Axel Töllner: Was ich auch immer wieder finde, ist die Aussage „Das war ja so schlimm damals, was die Nazis mit den Juden gemacht haben, aber jetzt, was die Israelis mit den Palästinensern machen, das ist doch eigentlich nicht sehr viel anders. Das ist doch eigentlich schlimm, die sollten es doch besser wissen.“ und so. Das ist sehr weit verbreitet und das höre ich auch oft nach Vorträgen, wenn Leute sich melden und fragen „Und, was sagen Sie denn jetzt dazu?“ – und natürlich, sowas wie „Kritik unter Freunden“, da würde ich tendenziell sagen, das ist auch eine Generationenfrage – das scheint mir doch eher die ältere Generation zu sein, die das sagt, weil viele von denen haben angefangen in den Gesellschaften, weil sie natürlich was gegen den Antisemitismus machen wollten und mit Juden freundlich reden wollten, aber letztlich das Gefühl hatten „ganz das richtige ist das Judentum nicht“.

Da ist doch auch bei den deutschen Juden so eine Unsicherheit. Eine Art Selbsthass, weil ein „anständiger Jude“ – sagen die Israelis zum Beispiel – ein Zionist ist und nicht auf den Gräbern seiner Vorfahren wohnt. Ich habe die Erfahrung gemacht: Israelis, die hier zu Besuch sind, wollen eigentlich mit den Nürnberger Juden nichts zu tun haben. Ein anständiger Zionist wohnt nun mal nicht in Nürnberg, sondern in Tel Aviv. Und ich denke, da ist auch bei den Nürnberger Juden, die ich so kenne, eine Unsicherheit bzw. Selbsthass – „eigentlich müsste ich ja in Israel wohnen“. Die meisten machen dann einen Kompromiss und haben eine kleine Eigentumswohnung in Tel Aviv, damit sie sagen können „ich wohne auch in Israel“.

Axel Töllner: Das kommt noch dazu. Das jüdische Leben in Deutschland nach 1945 ist schon immer ein angefochtenes Leben gewesen. Die wurden von

den Nicht-Juden genauso wie von Juden in Israel oder europäischen Ländern kritisiert, die für sich in Anspruch genommen haben „Wir haben wenigstens nicht die Shoah erfunden“. Auf der anderen Seite nehme ich doch wahr, dass es auch bei den Leuten, die aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion zugewandert sind, die älteren, die es ohnehin schwierig haben, die mit Deutschland erstmal nichts zu tun haben – und hier auch keine Wurzeln haben oder sich hier nicht in den Nachkriegswirren niedergelassen zu haben – die sich erstmal zu diesem Land und zu diesem Staat verhalten müssen. Wobei es interessant ist, dass diejenigen, die in den 90er Jahren als jüngere Leute gekommen sind, dass viele von denen sehr dankbar sind dafür, dass sie hier einen Ort gefunden haben, wo sie leben können – auch sehr sensibel sind, was so antisemitische Tendenzen angeht – wenn man weiß, dass sie das aus ihrer Kindheit und Jugend aus der Sowjetunion noch kennen und eigentlich sagen „Deutschland ist für mich das Land, wo es diesen staatlichen Antisemitismus nicht gibt, und weswegen ich hier auch gut sein kann – und klar, ich hab viele Verwandte in Israel, aber da ist es mir zu heiß und da ist alles komisch, das ist so eine fremde Welt – hier ist es mir doch noch lieber.“ Und dann gibt es mittlerweile die Erfahrung, das hab ich in Israel gehört, letztes Jahr, es gibt ja die Klassenfahrten in der 9./10. Klasse nach Polen, Auschwitz und andere Vernichtungslager, und das Interessante ist, dass viele junge Israelis ein ganz positives Deutschland-Bild haben, und die Shoah jetzt von Deutschland abspalten und auf Polen projizieren. So nach dem Motto „Das hat alles da stattgefunden – Polen ist das böse Land und die Polen sind die Bösen! Und die Deutschen sind aber unsere Freunde“ und so – und das gibt dann zum Teil eine ganz komische Schlagseite...

Darum reagieren die polnischen Politiker dann gereizt, wenn von „polnischen KZs“ die Rede ist.

Axel Töllner: Genau, das ist aber auch ein wirkliches Problem! Ich glaube, es gibt natürlich auch Deutsche, denen das gar nicht unlieb ist, die sagen „Das können wir jetzt outsourcen!“, um das mal ganz flapsig zu sagen. Aber umso wichtiger ist es dann, hier die Begegnungen zu haben.

Was ich auch interessant finde ist, dass in den letzten ca. 10 Jahren auch die Vereine in den Dörfern langsam ihre jüdischen Mitglieder wiederentdecken, oder auch die Leute, die im späten 19. Jhd. diese Vereine mitgegründet haben - Turnverein, Freiwillige Feuerwehr, etc. Da gab es ja wirklich an vielen Orten Juden, die da ganz vorne mitgearbeitet haben. Auch wenn man sich neuere Festschriften anschaut, hat man Fotos, in welchen dann Aussagen stehen wie: „Unser jüdisches Mitglied so-und-so“. Da verändert sich schon einiges. Aber es ist nach wie vor sehr unterschiedlich, je nachdem, wo man sich befindet. Dabei fällt mir noch die Meiser-Debatte ein, bei der doch deutlich geworden ist, dass hierbei noch einiges schlummert, wobei es Leute versuchen, auf einer definitorischen Ebene zu lösen und zu sagen: „Das ist Antisemitismus, das ist kein Antisemitismus“. Das, finde ich, kann es eigentlich nicht sein. Und das Niveau der Diskussionen fand ich zum Teil schon echt erschütternd, muss ich sagen.

Ja, am besten haben das die Münchner gelöst. Die haben die Meiserstraße in Katharina-von-Bora-Straße umbenannt, haben also eine Antisemitin für einen Antisemiten...

Axel Töllner: Wir wissen ja von ihr eigentlich zu wenig. Ich meine, es gibt eigentlich nur diese Geschichte, dass Luther sagt: „Wenn du jetzt hier wärst, dann würdest du sagen: ‚Die Juden haben’s gemacht‘“, aber er schreibt auch in diesem Brief an seine Frau 1546, er sei an einem Dorf vorbeigefahren, wo Juden wohnen und der giftige Judenwind wäre ihm kalt ins Kreuz gefahren oder so ähnlich und er schrieb dann: ‚Wenn du jetzt da gewesen wärst, würdest du sagen, es wäre das Werk der Juden gewesen.‘ So sinngemäß. Dass er sterbenskrank sei und die Juden ihn vergiftet hätten.

Die Namensumbenennungen haben auch ihre Probleme. Also, ich denke, man kann auch auf die Art und Weise Geschichte entsorgen. Wenn da diese Meiserstraße Meiserstraße heißt, dann ist sie für mich jedenfalls ein permanenter Pfahl im Fleisch, dann muss ich mich damit auseinandersetzen. Und jetzt habe ich die Katharina von Bora, eine Frau, super. Ich habe jemanden, der nichts mit München zu tun hat, jemand von vor 500 Jahren. Das ist auch eine Form der Geschichtsbewältigung, die ich problematisch finde.

Wäre es nicht besser, die Straße so zu belassen und dann wenigstens irgendwie eine Erläuterung hinzuzufügen?

Axel Töllner: Das hatte ja dem Eckart Dietzfelbinger²⁵ hier in Nürnberg vorgeschlagen. Das hätte ich persönlich auch besser gefunden, aber der hat von einem antisemitischen Nationalprotestanten und einem nationalprotestantischen Antisemiten gesprochen. Da fühlte sich wiederum die Familie Meiser diffamiert. Da geht es eben wirklich um: „Was ist jetzt antisemitisch?“ Oder: „Darf man jemanden Antisemiten nennen?“ Das hat in der Form nicht geklappt. Aber bis heute gibt es dann die Partei, die sagt, das sei alles ein Fehler gewesen. In München gab es eine Gemeinde, die einen Saal in ihrem Gemeindehaus danach dann in „Hans-Meiser-Saal“ umbenannt haben, aus Trotz. Und ich finde, dass die inhaltliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem Meiser da ein bisschen auf der Strecke geblieben ist. Die Suche nach einem Etikett, um das auf eine bündige Formel zu bringen, die hat manches damals schwierig gemacht. Für mich persönlich war der Meiser ein Antisemit. Das Problem ist nur: Wenn ich diesen Satz sage, habe ich damit noch nicht sehr viel gesagt. Denn die einen Leute verstehen da eine Sache darunter und die anderen verstehen etwas ganz Anderes. Das ist, finde ich, nach wie vor schwierig auf den Punkt zu bringen, zu erklären, warum der Meiser Antisemit gewesen ist. Und dass Antisemit nicht gleich Antisemit bedeutet. Das ist etwas, dass man auch ganz schwer vermitteln kann, dass der Antisemitismus sehr viele Spielarten hat und auch die Frage, dass jemand antisemitische Denkstrukturen haben kann, ohne dass er jetzt in jedem zweiten Satz sagt: „Die Juden sind unser Unglück!“, ich sage das jetzt mal bisschen plakativ. Sondern dass es da subtile Formen gibt, die bestimmte,

²⁵Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter im Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände

jahrhundertealte Denkmuster weiter tradieren und in diese Schiene reingehören. Das finde ich schwer zu vermitteln. Zumindest habe ich damit gerade in so gut kirchlichen Kreisen meine Probleme, mich da verständlich zu machen. Und auch, dass auch jemand, der ein Antisemit ist, etwas getan haben kann, das aus unserer heutigen Sicht als gut bezeichnet werden kann. Fällst du mit dem Urteil, jemand war ein Antisemit, ein Totalurteil über das ganze Leben von ihm, oder kann man sagen: „Der war Antisemit, aber wir haben ihm auch in mancher Hinsicht was zu verdanken.“?

Das war in Polen sehr extrem. Da gab es ja die Pelota, das war eine antisemitische polnische Organisation, eine erklärt antisemitische polnische Organisation, die Juden gerettet haben und dadurch ihr Leben aufs Spiel gesetzt haben. Weil sie gesagt haben: „Ja, Juden nach Madagaskar, Juden raus aus Polen – aber umbringen? Nein.“ Also auch extrem, die Position.

Axel Töllner: Ja, und das Problem ist, je intensiver man sich damit beschäftigt, desto vielschichtiger werden die Graustufen, die man dann wahrnimmt. Und das irgendwie so ein bisschen bündiger zu vermitteln, ich denke jetzt noch mal zurück an diese Erklärungstafel an so einem Straßenschild. Das ist schwierig. Aber ich finde, das wäre eigentlich das Ziel.

Ein positives Beispiel: Ich weiß nicht, ob ihr das Kriegerdenkmal kennt in der vorderen Ledergasse. Das ist so ein Denkmal für alle möglichen gefallenen Nürnberger im Boxeraufstand in China, Herero-Aufstand - und zu den Herero gibt es dann unten drunter noch eine Tafel, und auch zum Boxeraufstand. Das ist gut gelöst.

Axel Töllner: Das finde ich auch. Weil es im Grunde ja auch zur Geschichte Nürnbergs dazugehört, dass der Stadtrat damals beschlossen hat, die Spitalgasse nach dem Nürnberger Hans Meiser zu benennen und ich finde auch, wir können uns nicht nur die Sahnestückchen raussuchen und sagen: „Das ist prima und den Rest, den schieben wir ganz nach hinten, wo ihn niemand finden kann. Im Archiv beispielsweise.“ Ich denke, heutzutage könnte man mit elektronischen Medien, mit Apps sicherlich auch einiges machen. Zum Beispiel irgendeinen QR-Code, damit die Leute ein paar weitergehende Informationen bekommen, wenn sie sich dafür interessieren und mehr darüber erfahren möchten oder es noch nicht verstanden haben. Das wäre vielleicht noch eine Möglichkeit.

Es gibt auch eine ganze Reihe von Fotos und Zeichnungen, wo man zumindest noch die Häuser erkennen kann, die zum jüdischen Viertel in Nürnberg gehört haben. Ich finde ganz interessant, dass es in den 1980ern oder 1990ern, einmal Grabungen in der Frauenkirche gab und da wurde auch so ein Sockel von einer Säule der Synagoge gefunden. Und dann haben die Archäologen von dem Säulenabdruck sagen können, wie hoch die Säule wahrscheinlich war und wie groß die Synagoge dann wohl gewesen ist. Ein bisschen vergleichbar mit Regensburg, die von diesem Altdorfer Stich, die man so ein bisschen kennt. So was noch

sichtbarer zu machen, das wäre eine tolle Sache. Aber es gibt so viele schöne Sachen, die man machen könnte. Bis dahin, dass ich mir denke, alles was da so unter dem Hauptmarkt drunter ist mal richtig archäologisch zu untersuchen, das wäre eigentlich eine Pflicht, die der Stadt des Friedens und der Menschenrechte gut anstehen würde.

Dr Katja Wezel

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Her research focuses on the history of the Baltic countries, especially Latvia, on history politics and culture of remembrance, nationalism and ethnic conflicts, as well as spatial history and digital history.

From 1999 she studied history and English in Heidelberg, Aberystwyth and St. Petersburg; her Ph.D. thesis carries the title "History as Politics. Latvia and the Historical Reappraisal after Dictatorship" at the Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg. From 2013 to 2018 she worked in the field of history at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. We thus got in touch with her via Skype on June 30th, 2017, the interview was conducted in German.

Inwiefern haben Sie sich mit Antisemitismus in Lettland auseinandergesetzt?

Katja Wezel: Ich habe meine Dissertation zur Aufarbeitung des Kommunismus in Lettland geschrieben.²⁶ Dabei habe ich mich ursprünglich gar nicht mit der Frage auseinandergesetzt, wie Lettland mit seiner nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit umgegangen ist. Aber mir ist relativ schnell klar geworden, dass die beiden Themen immer wieder zusammenfallen, gerade bei der teilweisen Verwendung des Genozid-Begriffs. Es gibt bestimmte Gruppen oder auch Wissenschaftler, die diesen auf die sowjetischen Deportationen in Lettland anwenden, insbesondere die beiden großen Wellen 1941 und 1949. Da habe ich mich natürlich gefragt, inwiefern es eine Auseinandersetzung mit der jüdischen Geschichte und mit dem Holocaust in Lettland gibt. Dabei habe ich herausgefunden, dass der Holocaust als eine Art Vergleichsfolie verwendet wird. Natürlich liegt der Hauptfokus für die Letten auf der Aufarbeitung des Kommunismus und auf der Aufarbeitung der Verbrechen Stalins. Dann erfolgt ein Rückgriff nach dem Motto: Der Holocaust wurde aufgearbeitet und das müssen wir jetzt auch mit den Verbrechen Stalins tun. Dieses Vergleichsmoment birgt natürlich bestimmte Problematiken in sich und das habe ich primär untersucht. Meine These ist, dass in Lettland ein ganz starkes Augenmerk auf den Molotow-Ribbentrop oder Hitler-Stalin-Pakt gelegt wird, der als der Beginn allen Übels betrachtet wird. Dem wohnt dieser Vergleich der Verbrechen schon inne, denn wenn Sie sagen, damit hat alles begonnen, Hitler und Stalin haben sich verbündet gegen uns Kleine – so wird das aus lettischer Sicht wahrgenommen – dann ist dem implizit, dass die Verbrechen von Hitler und von Stalin auf gleich Weise begangen wurden und deswegen auf gleiche Weise aufgearbeitet werden sollten.

²⁶Wezel (2016)

Weshalb der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt so zentral ist, geht dabei zurück auf den Beginn der lettischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung.

Für manche steht Kārlis Ulmanis noch heute für die Unabhängigkeit Lettlands. Was war charakteristisch für seine Diktatur und wie ging es den Minderheiten unter seiner Herrschaft?

Katja Wezel: Ulmanis ist eine wichtige Gestalt, um die Zwischenkriegszeit zu verstehen, wobei man da ein bisschen früher ansetzen muss. Ulmanis war mehrfach gewählter Ministerpräsident, bis er 1934 einen Putsch gemacht hat. Nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg ging es sehr stark darum, dass die Letten die Verantwortung für ihren eigenen Staat übernehmen und die Minderheiten aus verantwortungsvollen Positionen entfernt werden. Für den Fall der Universität Lettlands wurde dies vom schwedischen Forscher Per Bolin in einer Detailstudie untersucht.²⁷ Er weist darin nach, dass es immer darum ging, Letten in verantwortungsvolle Positionen zu bekommen und dass Minderheiten zwar akzeptiert wurden, aber nur für den Übergang. In der kompletten Zwischenkriegszeit spielten kulturelle Grenzen und die Identifikation mit der Muttersprache eine bedeutende Rolle. Aus lettischer Sicht war man Deutscher, wenn man Deutsch als Muttersprache sprach, obwohl sich die meisten Deutschen als Baltendeutsche und nicht dem Reich zugehörig gefühlt haben. Der Coup 1934 ist aus Ulmanis Sicht notwendig, denn Lettland war eine instabile parlamentarische Demokratie, die mit genau solchen Problemen zu kämpfen hatte wie Deutschland und andere Staaten dieser Zeit auch. Lettische Regierungen haben immer nur drei, vier Monate gehalten und brachen dann wieder zusammen. Es gab wahnsinnig viele Parteien und Regierungen im Parlament, weil es keine 5%-Klausel gab wie heute; das machte politisches Arbeiten sehr schwierig. Nach der Wirtschaftskrise wurde es politisch noch schwieriger, was einer der Gründe war, weshalb sich Ulmanis an die Spitze gestellt hat. Eine der wichtigsten Konsequenzen dieses Coups war sein Slogan „Lettland den Letten!“. Es ging darum, vor allen Dingen die ganzen Deutschen loszuwerden. Das hängt damit zusammen, dass Riga sehr stark von der deutschen Kultur geprägt war. Es gab aber relativ viele Juden, die auch deutschsprachige Schulen besuchten und die im deutschsprachigen Milieu zuhause waren. Und es gab gerade unter Händlern, Kaufleuten und Unternehmern relativ viele Juden, gegen die sich das natürlich auch richtete, auch in Form von Enteignung. Ich würde aber sagen, dass dieses Enteignungsvorgehen gegen die jüdische Bevölkerung relativ wenig mit Antisemitismus zu tun hatte und viel mehr mit einem sehr, sehr starken Nationalismus und diesem Verständnis, „Lettland den Letten“. Dieser starke ethnozentrische Nationalismus ist letztendlich ein Problem, das Lettland heute in einer anderen Form immer noch hat, jetzt richtet er sich gegen die Russen.

Wenn Minderheiten über die Sprache definiert wurden, galten deutschsprachige Juden dann überhaupt als eigene Minderheit?

²⁷Bolin (2012)

Katja Wezel: Das Problem der jüdischen Bevölkerung in Riga, aber auch in Lettland allgemein war, dass sie sehr stark auseinanderfiel. Jiddisch sprachen eigentlich kaum noch Leute in Lettland. Es gab zwei Gruppen von Juden in Lettland. Die einen hatten sich der deutschen Gemeinschaft mehr oder weniger angeschlossen und schickten ihre Kinder auf deutsche Schulen, die anderen waren aus dem russischen Zarenreich gekommen und sprachen russisch. Zwischen der deutschen und der russischsprachigen jüdischen Gemeinde gab es aufgrund der Sprachbarrieren relativ wenig Miteinander. Die Religion war dennoch von Bedeutung. Es ist wichtig festzustellen, dass es im späten neunzehnten, auch noch im frühen zwanzigsten Jahrhundert undenkbar war oder faktisch nicht vorgekommen ist, dass ein Nichtjude einen Juden oder eine Jüdin heiratete, weil die konfessionellen Grenzen sehr bestimmend waren. Die Deutschbalten waren alle Lutheraner. Es gab durchaus intermarriage; es gab Verheiratung zwischen Letten und Deutschen, die den gleichen Glauben hatten, aber mit Juden kam es faktisch nicht vor. In dieser Hinsicht gab es einen großen Unterschied zum deutschen Reich. Dort gab es jüdische Bevölkerung, die sich komplett assimilierte und sogar zum protestantischen Glauben übertrat. Das gab es in Riga oder in Lettland gar nicht. Das führte dazu, dass die Gruppe als solche weiterhin sehr separat lebte, als „die Juden“, selbst wenn sie Deutsch sprachen oder wie einige wenige anfangen, auch lettisch zu sprechen. Sie wurden trotzdem als die Anderen gesehen.

**Gab es wie in Deutschland auch im Mittelalter schon Antisemitismus?
Ab wann gab es überhaupt Juden in Lettland?**

Katja Wezel: Die ersten Juden, die auf dem Gebiet des heutigen Lettlands lebten, waren in Kurland, das zu Polen-Litauen gehörte, bis das komplette Gebiet 1795 von Katharina der Großen mit der polnischen Teilung einverleibt und Teil des russischen Zarenreiches wurde. Das heißt, in Riga gab es im Mittelalter zwei, drei jüdische Händler, die von Kurland kamen, nach Riga gereist sind und ihre Ware vertrieben haben. Aber das waren Handelsreisende und keine wirklich sesshaften Juden. Erst im 18. Jahrhundert fing es an, dass Juden auch sesshaft wurden. Es war ihnen zuerst nicht erlaubt, innerhalb der Stadtmauern zu leben. Die meisten Juden lebten in der Moskauer Vorstadt, wo es ein ursprünglich von der Stadt eingerichtetes und später selbst betriebenes Gebiet ähnlich einem Ghetto gab. Die meisten Juden lebten dort auch weiterhin, selbst als das Verbot, in der Stadt zu leben, aufgehoben war. In der Rigaer Altstadt wurde erst relativ spät eine große Synagoge gebaut, die 1905 fertiggestellt wurde. Vorher gab es noch keine Synagoge in der Altstadt, sondern nur in den Gebieten, in denen sie lebten. Juden waren in Lettland nie eine sehr große Gruppe. Das unterscheidet zum Beispiel eine Stadt wie Riga stark von Vilnius. Juden machten vielleicht sechs, sieben Prozent der Bevölkerung aus und auch in der Zwischenkriegszeit waren Juden mit bis zu 5% in der Bevölkerung eine relativ kleine Gruppe. Diesen historischen Antisemitismus findet man in der Region des heutigen Lettlands in der Form daher nicht. Wie haben die Letten die Juden gesehen? Mein Eindruck ist, dass man sie distanziert als die Anderen be-

trachtet hat. „Sie interessieren uns nicht, solange sie uns nichts tun und solange wir nicht das Gefühl haben, sie nehmen uns etwas weg.“ Wenn es Ausschreitungen gab, die man als antisemitisch aufgeladen sehen kann, was gerade an der Universität Lettlands in der Zwischenkriegszeit vorgekommen ist, ging das von einzelnen radikal-konservativen, nationalistischen Studentengruppierungen aus.²⁸ Die Burschenschaften in Lettland sind in der Zwischenkriegszeit relativ stark gewesen, von denen ging das aus. Und aus den Burschenschaften speisen sich auch später diejenigen, die das sogenannte Arbeitskommando bilden, das Mörderkommando, das dann für die Deutschen während der nationalsozialistischen Besatzung Lettlands letztlich die Arbeit macht. Das war eine Gruppe von sehr radikalen nationalistisch gesinnten Menschen. Es ist immer wieder in Forschungsarbeiten nachgewiesen worden, etwa von Kathrin Reichelt, dass das eher eine Art des Opportunismus war.²⁹ Sie wollten davon profitieren, dass die Juden weg sind und waren weniger von antisemitischen Grundüberzeugungen geprägt.

Wie hat die Zusammenarbeit zwischen lettischer Bevölkerung und Nationalsozialisten ausgesehen?

Katja Wezel: Sehr wichtig ist das sogenannte Arbeitskommando. Das war eine Gruppe von insgesamt ca. 3000 Männern, wobei nicht alle die ganze Zeit dabei waren. Es kam ja erst zur sogenannten sowjetischen Besatzung von 1940 bis '41 und dann zur nationalsozialistischen. Arājs ist ein absoluter Karrierist und Opportunist, der erst versuchte, bei den Kommunisten anzuheuern. Als diese dann weg waren, ist er umgeschwenkt und hat sich bei den Nationalsozialisten in Stellung gebracht und wollte für sie arbeiten. Er hat versucht persönlich zu profitieren, was bei vielen der Fall war, die mitgemacht haben. Das waren häufig Männer, die eine sehr starke nationalistische Überzeugung hatten, die sich auch aus der Ulmanis-Zeit speiste, „Lettland den Letten und alle anderen sollen weg“. Das war allerdings eine Gruppe von sehr Radikalen und betraf nicht das Gros der Bevölkerung. Dieses Arbeitskommando funktionierte dadurch, dass sie persönlich profitiert haben: Wenn sie Juden verhaftet haben, konnten sie hinterher in deren Wohnungen einziehen. „Meine Familie braucht eine Wohnung, also mach ich da jetzt eine Weile mit, weil dann bekomme ich eine Wohnung“, so wurde häufig sehr einfach gedacht. Dabei handelte es sich um ein wirkliches Mörderkommando. Sie hatten ihre Zentrale in der Valdemāra Straße und wenn die Deutschen angerufen haben, sind sie aktiv geworden. Sie hatten einen Fahrer, der hat sie dann dort hingefahren. Letztendlich hat das Arbeitskommando die Ermordung der jüdischen Bevölkerung Lettlands in den Kleinstädten innerhalb von wenigen Monaten übernommen. Die Großstädte waren zunächst ausgenommen, in Riga, Liepāja und in Daugavpils hat man Ghettos eingerichtet. Aber in den Kleinstädten, in denen häufig nur vielleicht zwei jüdische Familien wohnten, haben die Deutschen Arājs beauftragt und dieser ist mit seinen Leuten losgezogen und hat die Leute einfach ermordet. Da

²⁸Cf. Bolin (2012)

²⁹Reichelt (2011)

kann man sich natürlich fragen: Warum haben die Nachbarn nicht geholfen? Um das zu verstehen, muss man wiederum die lettische Geschichte verstehen und die nationalsozialistische Besatzungszeit einordnen.

Im Jahr davor war das erste Jahr der sowjetischen Besatzung, die mit den großen Deportationen vom 14. Juli 1941 endete und zwei Wochen später kamen die Deutschen. Das heißt, viele Letten waren sozusagen in Schockstarre, weil Familienmitglieder oder Freunde verhaftet und deportiert worden waren, das heißt sie wussten gar nicht, wo diese sind – und jetzt kommen die Nächsten. Viele Letten dachten erst mal, dass es ihnen unter den Deutschen besser gehen würde, im Sinne: „Mit den Deutschen haben wir schon eine Weile Erfahrung gemacht, früher und im Ersten Weltkrieg war es auch nicht so schlimm.“ Das haben übrigens auch viele Juden gedacht. Viele Juden sind nicht geflohen, obwohl sie die Möglichkeit gehabt hätten, mit der abrückenden sowjetischen Armee zu fliehen, weil sie nicht gedacht haben, dass es so schlimm kommen würde. Denn das, was in Lettland berichtet wurde, war gerade zur Zeit von Ulmanis sehr begrenzt. Das heißt, in Lettland wusste man nur sehr begrenzt Bescheid, was in Deutschland abging. Wie stark die Nürnberger Gesetze die Juden entrechteten, wusste man in Lettland nur bedingt. Die These, die manche lettische Wissenschaftler aufgestellt haben, dass den Letten erstens die sechs Jahre Ulmanis und dann das Jahr Sowjetzeit zivilgesellschaftliche Verhaltensweisen abgewöhnt haben, dass man sich lieber auf sich selbst und seine Familie und nicht auf das Ganze konzentrierte und man, wenn die Nachbarn abgeholt wurden, lieber nicht hinschaute, erscheint mir doch sehr glaubwürdig. Man muss auch noch dieses Verständnis mitbedenken, dass die Juden nicht wirklich zum Staat dazugehören, weil in der gesamten Ulmanis-Zeit „Lettland den Letten“ gepredigt wurde. Auf der anderen Seite ist es wichtig, dass es auch Fälle von einigen österreichischen auch deutschen Juden gab, die in den späten 30er Jahren nach dem Anschluss von Österreich in Lettland Zuflucht fanden. Vestermanis hat dazu geforscht. Sie wurden eigentlich ganz positiv aufgenommen oder hatten zumindest das Gefühl, dass sie hier existieren und überleben können. Solche Einzelfälle gab es auch. Aber der Einschnitt der sowjetischen Besatzung 1940/41 ist wirklich zentral, um zu verstehen, wie sich die Letten verhielten, als die Nazis einzogen.

Gab es die Bewertung, dass es unter der deutschen Besetzung besser gewesen sei, auch rückblickend von Letten, und gibt es das noch heute?

Katja Wezel: Kaum, ich habe immer den Eindruck, die Letten interessieren sich relativ wenig für die nationalsozialistische Besatzungszeit. Während der 50 Jahre Sowjetherrschaft wurden die Deutschen natürlich als die Faschisten und die Schlimmsten dargestellt und heutige Letten sind natürlich durch diese Schulbildung gegangen. Dass es heute noch ganz alte Leute gibt, die sagen, so schlimm war das gar nicht unter den Deutschen, halte ich zahlenmäßig nicht für sehr relevant. Die sowjetische Periode, in der das Thema auf eine ganz andere Weise unterrichtet wurde, war da prägender.

Immer am 16. März wird in Riga die SS geehrt. Das spricht doch dafür, dass es auch heute noch Letten gibt, die das irgendwie verherlichen.

Katja Wezel: Das kann man so nicht sehen. Ich weiß, dass das von Deutschen gerne so wahrgenommen wird. Denn aus deutscher Sicht ist die SS natürlich gleichbedeutend mit den schlimmsten Naziverbrechern, weil sie die Konzentrationslager überwacht haben und so weiter. Man muss aber auch verstehen, dass die Letten die SS gar nicht so sehen. Es liegt schon am Namen, dass es aus lettischer Sicht nicht die SS ist, die da marschiert, sondern die sogenannte lettische Legion. Diese wird quasi völlig losgelöst betrachtet von der SS. Viele der Letten, die das positiv sehen und sagen, denen müsse man doch gedenken, haben überhaupt gar keine Ahnung, was die SS war. Aus lettischer Sicht war die lettische Legion eine verkappte Nationalarmee, die versucht hat, Lettland zu befreien oder zumindest dafür zu sorgen, dass Lettland nicht erneut von den Sowjets besetzt wird, denn das war das Schlimmste. Aus lettischer Sicht ist es tatsächlich so, dass es den Letten unter der nationalsozialistischen Besatzung besser ging, denn es wurden keine deportiert oder verhaftet, es sei denn man war jüdisch. Wenn man ethnisch lettisch war, dann ging es einem unter der nationalsozialistischen Besatzung auf jeden Fall besser und man war sicherer vor Deportationen, Verhaftungen, etc. als unter sowjetischer Besatzung. Als diese lettische Legion 1943 gebildet wurde, haben die Letten das so interpretiert: „Wir versuchen, unser Land vor den Bolschewisten zu schützen.“ Davon gibt es Poster. Es ging also gegen die Bolschewisten. Ob auf der Uniform das SS-Zeichen war, war für die Letten völlig irrelevant. Wichtig war für sie, dass auf dem Gewehr trotzdem das Zeichen Lettlands klebte. Es handelte sich um eine Fremdenlegion, die die Nazis ausgenutzt haben, indem sie sagten: „Wir brauchen Kanonenfutter, wir brauchen Leute, die für uns kämpfen.“ Sie haben einen Deal mit den lettischen Militärs gemacht. Diese haben aber von vornherein gesagt, wir kämpfen nicht an der Westfront. Das war eine Kampftruppe, die auch nicht in Konzentrationslagern eingesetzt wurde, der kämpfende Teil der SS und letztendlich nichts anderes als eine Fremdenlegion, ein Teil der Wehrmacht. Nur da man keine Ausländer in die Wehrmacht aufgenommen hat, hat man diese ausländischen SS-Legionen gebildet. Sie haben also von vornherein gesagt, wir kämpfen nicht gegen die Amerikaner und nicht gegen Großbritannien, wir kämpfen nur an der Ostfront gegen die Sowjets und das haben sie dann auch gemacht. Die lettische Legion hat mit dafür gesorgt, dass Kurland in sechs Schlachten nicht besiegt und besetzt wurde. Kurland war bis zum Schluss unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft. Nach der Kapitulation am 9. Mai hatten viele der Letten, die da gekämpft hatten, im Prinzip nur zwei Optionen. Sie konnten versuchen, noch übers Meer nach Schweden zu fliehen, das haben auch ein paar gemacht. Dann konnten sie versuchen, in die Wälder zu gehen und sich zu verstecken, was auch manche gemacht haben. Das war sozusagen der Ursprung von den sogenannten Waldbrüdern, die noch bis in die 50er Jahre als Partisanen gegen die Sowjets gekämpft haben. Oder sie sind in Gefangenschaft geraten und meistens im Gulag geendet, nur wenige davon haben überlebt. Das war die eine lettische Legion, es

gab zwei. Der andere Teil der lettischen Legion hatte es ein bisschen besser. Die andere lettische Legion kämpfte in Vorpommern, geriet letztendlich in britische Gefangenschaft und wurde auf den Nürnberger Prozessen freigesprochen, weil man gesagt hat, die kann man eigentlich nicht als SS-Truppen betrachten, sondern muss sie wirklich separat als Fremdenlegion behandeln. Sie waren nur partiell freiwillig beigetreten; junge Männer hatten Einweisungsbefehle erhalten, für die Legion zu kämpfen. Infolge dieses Urteils in den Nürnberger Prozessen konnten sie auswandern und haben eine Aufnahme beispielsweise in den USA und in anderen Staaten gefunden. Diejenigen, die am 16. März marschieren, sind natürlich nur noch ganz wenige Veteranen, da sind ja kaum noch welche übrig. Aber es gibt eben nationalistische Letten, die sagen, wir müssen an sie erinnern, weil sie für unser Land gestorben sind. Der Heldenstatus erklärt sich auch daraus, dass einige von ihnen im Gulag geendet sind oder als Waldbrüder und als Partisanen gekämpft haben. Das erklärt, weshalb man verschiedene Namen in einem Topf hat. Nun zur Beteiligung an den Verbrechen der Nationalsozialisten. Man kann die Anführer der lettischen Legion nicht völlig davon freisprechen, weil ungefähr 15% tatsächlich freiwillig beigetreten sind und unter diesen 15%, gab es auch welche, die tatsächlich vorher während des Holocausts dem Sicherheitsdienst geholfen haben. Aber das sind einzelne, es ist definitiv nicht die Mehrheit. Das ist wichtig zu unterscheiden, denn der Holocaust war in Lettland 1943, als die Legion gebildet wurde, abgeschlossen. Es gab noch ein paar Ghettos, aber der Großteil der Verbrechen war vorbei. Insofern muss man das trennen und muss die lettische Seite verstehen, für die die lettische Legion nichts mit der SS zu tun hat, auch wenn es aus deutscher Sicht paradox klingt.

Die lettischen Kollaborateure im Holocaust waren also eine von der lettischen Legion größtenteils verschiedene Gruppe?

Katja Wezel: Ja. Denn die wenigen, die wirklich kollaboriert hatten, wurden von den Nazis dann gerne als Hilfspolizeitruppen weiter eingesetzt. Diese Mördertrupps sind dann weiter nach Weißrussland gezogen und in der Ukraine eingesetzt worden. Unter den lettischen Legionären gab es bestimmt den einen oder anderen, der auch darunter war, aber man kann nicht sagen, dass es die Mehrheit war.

Die Judenverfolgung in Lettland war unter den Nazis am größten. Aber trotzdem gab es Antisemitismus und Judenverfolgung auch unter Stalin. Sind der Nationalsozialismus und der Kommunismus in der UdSSR zwei gegensätzliche Ideologien, die dennoch denselben Feind in den Juden haben?

Katja Wezel: Nein, weil der Ausgangspunkt ein anderer ist. Aber was stimmt ist, dass gerade von den ersten sowjetischen Deportationen und dem 14. Juli 1941 Juden prozentual stärker betroffen waren, als sie in der Gesamtbevölkerung repräsentiert waren. Das erklärt sich wiederum daraus, dass relativ viele Juden als Händler und Kaufleute in wichtigen Positionen ein bisschen bessergestellt

waren. Sie galten dann aus dieser Perspektive als bürgerlich und die Kommunisten sind gegen alle Bürgerlichen vorgegangen. Sie wurden also nicht verhaftet und deportiert, weil sie Juden waren, sondern weil sie angeblich zu viel Geld hatten, bürgerlich waren, zu erfolgreich waren und so eingestuft wurden, dass sie sich gegen den Kommunismus wenden würden.

Wurde das dann auf alle Juden pauschalisiert, dass sie bürgerlich und wohlhabend seien oder wurden vorrangig die Juden verfolgt, die tatsächlich wohlhabender waren?

Katja Wezel: Gerade unter den lettischen Sozialdemokraten gab es auch sehr viele Juden und die waren natürlich "die Guten". Die haben die sowjetische Besatzung dann auch mitgetragen und unterstützt. Der Gegenpol zur lettischen Legion während des Zweiten Weltkriegs waren die sogenannten lettischen Einheiten in der Roten Armee. Darunter waren zeitweise bis zu 17% jüdische Letten³⁰, die entweder noch geflüchtet sind, kurz bevor die Nazis kamen und sich dann der Roten Armee angeschlossen haben, oder die eh schon in Russland waren und sich dann angeschlossen haben. Daher kann man das nicht pauschalisieren.

Wie aufgeklärt ist heute das Geschichtsbild, etwa in den Schulen oder auch in der lettischen Forschung, zum einen allgemein gegenüber den Besatzungszeiten und zum anderen speziell auf die Judenverfolgung bezogen?

Katja Wezel: Zum einen ist es wichtig zu sagen, dass Lettland diverse Abkommen unterzeichnet hat, z.B. in der Stockholmkonferenz 2000³¹. Lettland hat bereits 1991 einen Gedenktag für die Ermordung der Juden eingerichtet. Er ist immer am 4. Juli, weil dieser Tag den Startschuss für die Entrechtung der Juden in Lettland war. Am 1. Juli sind die Nationalsozialisten in Riga einmarschiert und am 4. Juli haben die Synagogen gebrannt. Der Gedenktag ist deswegen ein vor allem lokal bedeutsamer Termin. Von Seiten der Politik gibt es eine Gedenkveranstaltung, aber es ist immer die Frage, inwiefern das den Großteil der Bevölkerung betrifft. Als ich die ersten Male in Lettland war und dann gefragt habe, wieso die lettischen Flaggen am 4. Juli mit Trauerflor sind, konnten vielleicht 80% der Leute das nicht sagen. Natürlich gibt es gut Informierte, aber das Gros der Bevölkerung weiß es nicht. Da kann man natürlich schon sagen, dass die Schulbildung offensichtlich ein bisschen versagt hat.

³⁰Laut Merritt (2019) waren es im Jahr 1941, am Kriegsende lag der Anteil bei 8.3%. Dr. Katja Wezel nannte im Interview die Zahl von 30%, dabei handelt es sich laut Merritt jedoch um die nachträgliche Übertreibung eines Generals. In jedem Fall war der Anteil im Vergleich zum jüdischen Bevölkerungsanteil sehr hoch.

³¹Gemeint ist eine internationale Holocaust-Konferenz, die vom 26.-28. Januar 2000 (im Interview sagte Frau Dr. Wezel irrtümlicherweise 2001) auf Anregung des schwedischen Ministerpräsidenten in Stockholm stattfand. Aus der Konferenz ging eine Erklärung hervor, die die Beispiellosigkeit und anhaltende Bedeutsamkeit der Verbrechen der Shoah hervorhob und in der sich die beteiligten Staaten dazu verpflichteten, das kollektive Gedenken an die Shoah und die Bekämpfung von Rassismus und Antisemitismus hochzuhalten.

Der Holocaust wird definitiv unterrichtet. Es gibt auch sehr gute Projekte wie das neue Haus von Jānis Lipke, der über 50 Juden gerettet hat. Das ist jetzt ein Museum, das gut angenommen wird. Es wirkt vielleicht erstmal ein bisschen merkwürdig, dass man das Thema aus dieser Sicht betrachtet, indem man sich denjenigen anschaut, der Juden gerettet hat, denn es gab nur eine Handvoll Menschen, die das gemacht haben. Aber trotzdem ist die Bildungsarbeit, die gerade dieses Haus leistet, sehr wichtig, weil sehr viele Schulgruppen hingehen und dann auch gefragt wird: „Was hättest du in der Situation gemacht?“ Man kann sich in diese Person Jānis Lipke sehr schön reinfinden und verstehen: Die Situation war sehr schwierig, und er hat trotzdem Juden gerettet. Wenn man dieses Programm durchlaufen hat, ist relativ klar, dass die meisten nicht so gehandelt haben, weil sie nicht diese Courage besaßen. Es gibt also aus meiner Sicht sehr gute Bildungsprogramme. Letztendlich hängt es aber sehr viel von der Eigeninitiative des einzelnen Lehrers ab, was er mit seiner Schulklasse macht. Was ich in Bezug auf die Wissenschaftler sagen kann: Es gab in den letzten Jahren zahlreiche Konferenzen, die das Thema Holocaust in Lettland bearbeitet haben, aber es ist letztendlich eine Handvoll von Wissenschaftlern, die sich wirklich damit beschäftigen. Das ist ein bisschen meine Kritik, wobei ich auch wenige Lösungsansätze habe, denn es ist sehr schwer, das in die Bevölkerung zu tragen, weil viele Letten der Meinung sind, „erstmal müssen wir darüber reden, was uns alles widerfahren ist, der Holocaust ist doch schon gut erforscht und die Juden sind doch überall präsent, aber von uns weiß keiner“. Es gibt auch die Ansicht, die ich teilweise verstehen kann, dass in Westeuropa die Verbrechen Stalins nicht sehr bekannt sind.

Wie ist die Situation der Juden, die heute in Lettland leben? Wie viele von ihnen haben die lettische Staatsbürgerschaft und sind gut integriert?

Katja Wezel: Das Problem ist, dass es nur eine Handvoll Holocaust-Überlebende gab, die tatsächlich nach Tallinn, Riga oder in andere Städte zurückgekommen sind. Die jetzige jüdische Gemeinde in Riga und auch in anderen Städten speist sich hauptsächlich aus Zugezogenen, die aus anderen Teilen der ehemaligen Sowjetunion gekommen sind, größtenteils aus Russland. Sie werden primär nicht als Juden wahrgenommen, sondern als Russen, weil sie russisch sprechen, russisch assimiliert sind, auf russische Schulen gehen und so weiter. Sie haben dann die gleichen Probleme, die teilweise auch andere Russen haben, dadurch dass sie eben keine lettische Staatsbürgerschaft haben. Es hängt auch damit zusammen, dass die jüdische Bevölkerung häufig erst in den 80er Jahren zugewandert ist. Das heißt, sie leben häufig noch gar nicht so lang in Lettland. Diejenigen, die dort seit längerem leben, also vor allem die Nachkommen der historischen jüdischen Bevölkerung, haben natürlich auch alle Bürgerschafts- und Staatsbürgerschaftsrechte, weil das Staatsbürgerschaftsrecht Lettlands darauf fußt, dass man Bürger Lettlands in der Zwischenkriegszeit war. Alle, die vor 1940 Staatsbürger waren, haben 1990 automatisch die Staatsbürgerschaft gekriegt. Daher gilt die Staatsbürgerschaftsfrage nur für diejenigen, die als sowjetische

Immigranten später dazugekommen sind.

Inwiefern gibt es heute in der Bevölkerung antisemitische Klischees?

Katja Wezel: Ich würde sagen, dass die meisten Letten sich mit dieser Frage nicht beschäftigen und auch überhaupt keine Meinung über Juden haben. Das große Problem, das es meiner Ansicht nach in Lettland gibt, ist die Schwierigkeit, Leute überhaupt für das Thema zu interessieren. Die jüdische Minderheit ist aus lettischer Sicht immer eine kleine Gruppe gewesen. Letztendlich ging es Jahrhunderte lang darum, sich mit den Deutschen und dann mit den Russen auseinanderzusetzen; die jüdische Minderheit ist irgendwie immer untergegangen. Die Feindbilder bauen sich also nicht primär gegen Juden auf. Das heißt nicht, dass es keinen Antisemitismus gibt; es gibt auf jeden Fall Nationalisten, die auch antisemitische Feindbilder integrieren, aber das ist nicht der Hauptfokus der Xenophobie in Lettland.

Inwiefern ist Antisemitismus in Lettland überhaupt vorhanden? Was müsste man ändern an Geschichtsaufarbeitung und allgemeinem Umgang mit dem Judentum in Lettland?

Katja Wezel: Also ich glaube, dass man mit dem Antisemitismus-Begriff nicht sehr weit kommt, weil der nicht wirklich geeignet ist, um diese sehr spezifische Konstellation, die in Lettland vorherrscht, zu erklären und um auch zu erklären, warum es den Holocaust in Lettland in dieser spezifischen Form gegeben hat. Zweitens denke ich, dass man in Ansätzen schon genau das Richtige macht, indem man versucht, die Bevölkerung für Sachen zu interessieren, die tatsächlich in der eigenen Stadt passiert sind. Zum Beispiel gibt es jetzt an der ehemaligen großen Synagoge in Riga ein Denkmal. Schülergruppen gehen da wirklich hin, wie auch zu solchen Museen wie dem Jānis-Lipke-Haus. Das ist aus meiner Sicht das Wichtigste, dass man das lokalgeschichtlich einbettet, weil ich glaube, dass das auch in Deutschland Sachen wie die Stolpersteine am ergiebigsten sind. Das gibt es in Riga jetzt auch verstärkt, aber noch nicht sehr weit verbreitet. Das wäre auf jeden Fall schön, wenn es noch mehr davon gäbe und wenn die Leute dann auch wüssten, was das eigentlich ist und was da dahintersteckt. Es geht darum, diese Leerstelle aufzuzeigen, dass die Juden einst einen wichtigen Teil der Bevölkerung ausgemacht haben und jetzt in dieser Form nicht mehr da sind, weil die Juden, die jetzt in Lettland leben, größtenteils keine Nachfahren von den im Holocaust Verfolgten sind.

Valters Nollendorfs

Valters Nollendorfs was born in Riga in 1931. At the age of 13, he fled to Westphalia in Germany with his family. He emigrated to the United States of America in 1950, where he became professor of German language and literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 1988, he first returned to his home country and became a member of President of Latvia's Historians Commission and the Latvian Academy of Science. Until today, he is Chairman of the Board of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga and offers tours through the museum. We met him in the museum in September 2017. Before we started the recording of the interview, we talked about the historical development of Latvia with him, namely what role occupations through foreign powers played in this history.

Valters Nollendorfs: With a few exceptions, those countries did not accept the Soviet occupation by military Force, by threat and of course they didn't accept the Nazi occupation or the continued Soviet occupation, which means that there were military units in Latvia from 1939 to 1994, which could have overpowered any resistance. The government was dissolved, but in international recognition by law Latvia continued existing although it was occupied and de facto was not sovereign. And when Latvia redeclared independence in 1991, most of the countries wrote, we are willing to take up diplomatic relations again, so the first foreign minister who wrote to Latvian government after the coup in Moscow and after Latvia declared full independence in 1991 was the Foreign Minister of Iceland, and in his letter he wrote, we have never recognised the military occupation and the illegal annexation of Latvia by the Soviet Union, more or less, we are ready to take up relations again if you are ready. That has repercussions, that means that immigration at the time from other countries was illegal. That is one reason why people did not get immediate citizenship here, unless they were citizens or children of citizens, and second and even more important, that resistance was in international law legitimate with one exception: crimes committed during resistance were not. The Nuremberg Trials said very clearly, the SS is an illegal, a criminal organisation, but that doesn't mean each member is guilty until this member has committed crime against humanity or a war crime, that's individual. That means to some extent that the drafting of Latvian citizens in the Soviet army and in the Nazi army was illegal. When you saw that there were two Latvians serving in the two armies, Hitler saying, this is a volunteer operation, but the note says, this is a draft notice, you have to appear. So, it's the coercion of the local population into acts which otherwise could be criminal, or which are forbidden by international conventions. And that means that people who after the war went into the woods and carried out resistance until 1956, unless they committed crimes against humanity or war crimes, were legitimate fighters for Latvian independence, which they declared.

Now, the Russian Foreign Ministry right now does not recognise this doctrine of continuity. They say, you wanted to join us in 1940, you saw how that was done, Crimea is a good example, and in 1991 you left. That's a different doctrine. They say, people who came here were legitimately here, but in international law there is no question, international law has recognised Latvia as a continuation state with some exceptions.

If it's ok for you, we would like to ask some general questions about you. How exactly did you get here, how did it happen that you just changed your profession and everything and just came here?

Valters Nollendorfs: Well, I was born here. I was 13 years old when I left because my father had served in the police force. When the Soviets came, and it was very clear that we either had to take the ship to Germany, hoping that and well knowing that Germany has lost the war, rather than taking a free train ride to Siberia. so that was clear. I was in a refugee camp, displaced persons camp Greven, Westphalia until 1950, when my family went to the United States. And that's where I got my academic education. And then I became professor, and in 1996 I was bold enough to retire, they gave me emeritus status, which means that they recognised that I could use the lavatory, for example, and so, and since I saw what can be done, I was involved in academic reform. Then the museum had been founded, 1993, and I started volunteering, I didn't want to work here. They don't pay me. They say I'm too expensive to be paid. Anyway, I do this, this is not a state museum, keep in mind, this is a museum that is run by an organisation, and I'm the chairman of the board of this organisation. We own and we administer, basically, the museum, but the museum is day-to-day operated by the museum director. I work in the museum and then I'm under the director and when I'm not working in the museum, the director is under me.

And why did you choose to educate people about the history instead of searching for more information and just do research?

Valters Nollendorfs: Why I'm not in academic life anymore? I think freer. In academic life, there are a lot of things that you have to do, and I thought I have done enough for German literature as professor, as publisher of a professional journal, as a reformer, in effect, in America for German studies. So, I had to prove myself to get my salary increase and everything else. Now, I was 65, they said bye-bye, well, it was not a sad parting. I just felt, now I can be free and work for my country and in my country and be home. So, my children and my grandchildren are in America, but they understand that daddy and granddaddy have things to do in Latvia. And I can say, the Latvian anthem, it's very simple, God save Latvia, God bless Latvia, God bless Latvia, God bless our fatherland, oh God, bless her. Where the Latvian maids are blooming, where the Latvian boys, where the Latvian sons are singing, let us be happy here in Latvia. And I'm happy there in Latvia. So, that much is for me. Yes, but I feel that in the situation that the world finds itself in these days, actually the

museum is performing a very crucial task by telling the best we can and the most correctly we can what actually happened, and try not to gloss over, no fake news . Of course, Russia is accusing us of rewriting history, and indeed, we are rewriting history because the Soviets first started rewriting history and the Nazis rewrote history, so we are trying to put the history back where it should have been and trying to tell the truth, so that is very important, and this mission becomes certainly much more important because of what is going on in the internet, something that we didn't know 50 years ago . The internet is full of everything. We'll be trying, we'll try to be honest, we'll try to tell our story. For the most part, we'll also want to convince the world that we have a story to tell and that is not simply something that can be, "ah, yes, the same was in Estonia". Yes, and no, the same in Lithuania, yes and no. So, the Lithuanians, when the Germans said, hey, the Estonians have a Legion, which of course was no Legion, it was not a fighting unit, Latvians have Legion, how about you, Lithuanians, Lithuanians said no. And the Lithuanians had more Forest Brethren after the War than the Latvians and Estonians because they had not decimated their young people in the War. You know the Polish story, horrible. If anybody that tells me about the Poles, I say Poles were the ones that got it from both sides first and who showed what Germans, Nazis, and the Soviets thought about Polish interests in being independent, being Poles in Poland after so many years of being spread out. I say, Poles are very proud people. And I think that Germans in the nineteenth century under the Kaiser finally became a unified country. Germans deserved to be a unified country, but they are not entitled to be a country that imposes its will on others. Latvia can't impose its will on others, so there's a difference between big countries and small countries, but we like this Germany much better. And I was in Wrocław a couple of years ago when they celebrated the famous bishops' letter of coming rapprochement, coming to terms with the past, I think it is very significant. I think it is very significant that Germany accepted what certainly was not by any measure a just thing, making so many millions emigrate, which was caused by the Soviets pushing the borders of Belarus and Ukraine west, so you pushed the whole thing west, the question is whether that had to be achieved by force. In other words, so many injustices have been done there, but that if we dwell on those injustices these days in the world, we will never have the end of it, so the best thing is that we sometimes just simply say, forgive us. Let's not forget it, but let the past not stand in the way of the present and, especially, of the future. . And time and again, we still have this going back, the history to prehistoric times. So, again I say, democracy, the free exchange of opinions and ideas, but especially facts, trying to come near to truth, we will never get the truth, people who are religious would say, truth is up there, only God knows the truth, we can only approach it. I am a literary person. Goethe says in one poem that the poet's words are only trying to knock at the gates of Heaven asking to be let in. They are trying to be true, but as in poetry, so in life, we can only strive for the absolute truth, and the striving effort is what is important. But now ask me, you certainly want to know more about Holocaust because otherwise, Dr Zinke will be angry at you. When the Jews were persecuted in Germany,

Latvia allowed Jews to come into Latvia and gave them passports, so they could emigrate. This is a little-known story. There is also my story about how the Latvian exile dealt with the Holocaust or rather did not deal with the Holocaust. We are not dealing with the exile as such, but I've been involved a little bit in questions concerning Holocaust and questions of the guilt and the inability to come to terms with the Holocaust in Latvian society, here and in exile. In exile, there were 100,000, 150,000 Latvians, organisations and so on, activities. We kept our Latvian identity alive in the States, in Germany, in Great Britain, in Canada and all over the world. But there were certain things that were not discussed and one of those things that was not discussed was the Holocaust. In Latvia, it was well known that there had been a murder of the Jews, but again it was not a topic of discussion. In the Soviet Union, you probably know, Jews were a hot topic, so they were included in the total losses of civilian population, *friedliche Einwohner*, as it says in Soviet parlance. "Oh yes, they were Jews", but the Holocaust was not taken out of the framework. It was not dismissed. In the west, discussions, real discussions about the Holocaust came about late 1960s, 70s. There is an American book by historian Peter Novick, "Holocaust in American Life", where he points out that Israel was very ambivalent about the Jews that were killed, that allowed themselves to be killed, because they were not the fighters, not the warriors they needed. And only when Israel was threatened, when they felt that they are surrounded by enemy forces, did the Holocaust play a major role: Films, remember, Holocaust on television, Schindler's List and so on. The Holocaust as public discussion became great in the 70s and 80s while of course, there was no discussion and so the consciousness in the west is such, the Holocaust was the only crime against humanity, forgetting that another crime was committed here. And German historians were so politically correct that they were sometimes afraid to raise the question of Stalin's crimes because that would be interpreted as trying to relativise, we don't have to relativise, we could call all things with the right name, but this is the context of the Holocaust discussion and that's why people here, having suffered under the Soviet regime, don't want to be bothered by it to some extent. To some extent it was not raised officially. I regret that. But it is possible to raise such questions only when the context becomes clearer, and here you will find in the public oftentimes a "Yes, but". Oh yes, there was Holocaust, but we also suffered. And if only we could get rid of the "yes, but" and say Holocaust, yes, Soviet atrocities yes, but not put the "but" in between them. That any suffering is equal to any other suffering. That is not only I, my suffering, that is important, it is important that other people suffered. And when we are talking to people who were in the Gulag, who suffered in war, who were tortured by the KGB and so on, oftentimes they say, I suffered so much, I cannot forgive. But then you meet people who say, yes, I suffered, but I understand that those who were in the camp with me suffered as well, and those were not only Latvians. Once, I took a poet whose picture is there in the exhibition, a good friend of mine, whom I met first in Münster at the Latvian Gymnasium when I was playing director there for a year in 1989, to my office, and we started talking, and one of the first thing he said was, "I was kept for 8 years, and the one thing I learnt, I was not the

only one who suffered". And Western Europeans should learn a little bit more about Polish suffering, Latvian suffering, Estonian suffering, German suffering, all those who were suffering under these regimes, who died in Siberia, who were executed, who were killed. And yes, there is one thing that the Holocaust stands out for, that is, it is directed against one specific group with total annihilation. That was Hitler's aim, total annihilation. Latvians, if they had not liberated themselves with Western and other assistances, one more generation, we would still be Latvians here, we would still speak Latvian language, but we would be part of the Soviet Union, we would be as post-Soviet as Belarus, for example. It's the annihilation of national identity, which is the ultimate, not the physical annihilation, and that has been averted, but we have difficult time coming to terms with the difficult past we have, let alone coming to terms with the whole world. We are 50 years behind. And I have sometimes difficulties talking to my compatriots here, look, don't concentrate just on yourself, concentrate on the Syrians right now, concentrate on the Jews, concentrate on the Africans, and if you don't concentrate, at least keep in mind that you're not the only ones who have the privilege of suffering. It could be a little bit more of this general understanding, but this coming out of yourself is very difficult after you have been into yourself.

I would like to ask just one more question about the museum. Of course, the mission of museum is really ambitious, but have you got a place here for the Jewish community?

Valters Nollendorfs: The Jewish community has a building and the museum "Jews in Latvia" is located in that building. We have very good cooperation with the founding director of the museum, Margers Vestermanis, who for example is spending his life concentrating on those people who rescued Jews. He himself escaped from the concentration camp in the last year of War, went to the woods, fought against the Germans with the partisans, and he has spent his lifetime on that, and we have a very good relationship. We have every year an Austrian coming here, a young Austrian in the alternate service, you have that in Germany as well, if you don't want to go into the obligatory, then you can go into the alternate service, and every year, a young Austrian comes here and works half-time in the Jewish museum and half-time in the Occupation Museum. So, the answer is yes, we have good relationships. The Jews do not meet, but the people who were deported, for example, people who publish a book, for example, when they hold a book presentation, it is open to those people who are involved and whose speeches you sometimes see in our exhibition or whose stories are told. We gather life stories, we gather testimonials, *Zeitzeugen*. We have close to 2,500 on video. You maybe saw those who were young people at the time when they were deported, they are in our collection, they are recollecting how it happened, how they were taken prisoner. And then you put one, two, three, four, five together, and you get a total picture, you get what these young people at that time experienced. And that ends up to the true story of the experience, not only to historical facts, but also of personal experience. And since

these stories complement each other, we can come closer to the true psychology of how that, what that meant for these people. So, yes, the former deportees time and again come here, we talk to them. These are the sad stories, there are people whose minds have been affected. For example, once a month we had a lecture, and for seven years, one woman showed up always. And then there was discussion. Her hand always went up. She had only one question: "When will I get my apartment back?" When will I get my apartment back – of course, we couldn't answer that question. See what the whole experience had done to this woman. She's not the only one. And then you can admire those who come back and say, "I understand I was not the only one who suffered." So, I sometimes call those people saints because they use this experience to become better people. And there are some people who couldn't, who were broken. There are too many of those broken people who don't want to talk about it. They keep it in themselves, they never tell their children. And then there are those who talk, and I think those who talk and who are willing to share are the ones... The Holocaust question, as I say, has been so long swept under the rug that it is difficult to talk about it. If there was somebody who was involved in the actual killings of the Holocaust - we don't know, there may be some still, probably old people. It's difficult to bring up such old items which are not alive, but we have to keep reminding this society. And we certainly avoid doing it, but we will continue with it. We are also the first ones who did the unimaginable thing, put these events side by side in 1941. Imagine, mass deportation, mass killings, and then comes the Holocaust, within one-month time. Psychologically, you can imagine shock after shock, and I would be telling you the untruth if I said that Latvians did not have certain anti-Semitic bias. But they were never violent, they have been no pogroms here. My father had two images of the Jew: Next to the police station at the street was a Jewish tailor, people who made suits, dresses and so on, there were little tailor shops there. He was a policeman; he was walking the beat. And he says, "Oh, where is this Jewish tailor?" And he says, "Officer come on in, I can put cloth, I'll make you a nice suit", and he says, "Such wonderful people". And then there is "the Jew" with emphasis, big, now where does this image of the Jew come from, the Jewish image comes from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. That's an insidious document which has left huge impression because we are so apt in thinking in terms of conspiracy - unfortunately, but that is a world-wide problem. Look at what is happening in America, whose citizen I am, too. I cannot imagine, Neo-Nazis walking in the city of Thomas Jefferson, shouting anti-Semitic slogans. Where are we coming to? So, it is a world-wide problem and therefore, I think it's important in combating anti-Semitism of Latvians here, to keep that question alive. I keep reminding the people. But also keep reminding that the other side is not far away, that it's right across the border. And so, people are worried and must be worried. There could be a resurrection of similar attitudes. So, let's keep democracy alive, let's keep asking questions, and let's insist on getting honest answers.

Was there any member of your family who was forced to serve at the

Nazi or Soviet army?

Valters Nollendorfs: No. Not my immediate family, and not the closes relatives that I have. My father during the German occupation served the so-called German self-administration. I am unhappy that at the time when my father was nearing his last days and I interviewed him I didn't ask him such crucial questions, so I am not sure of how he was involved in the take-over. I know that during the Soviet occupation, he resigned, left the police force, and we lived in our summer home all through winter. I was in Riga with my aunt, I went to school, but he, his wife and my little brother were in this summer home, during the winter, and we were not arrested, we were not taken away in the deportation. So, when the Germans came, I know he worked for the so-called self-administration, and I know he inspected stores to make sure that the supplies are not stolen and so on, and that the book are in order. But obviously, in those terms he participated – as most people had to under military occupation. But I don't know whether he was involved in any other capacity, so, I also have not really looked for documents, but right now, I feel it's more important to do my job here and to simply say that I don't know. But not in a military force – my father was too old, and I was too young. I was 13, if I would have been 16, I could have been called up as the Flagggehilfe, in the German air force as an anti-aircraft operator, supposedly. But those were 16, 17-year-olds. Towards the end of the War, even German young kids went into the army, which is also a crime, of course. Now, there are too many crimes which we should do the best to keep the world honest about.

I have one more question for you. Just imagine, if Holocaust never existed, how would the world look nowadays? Would it be better or not?

Valters Nollendorfs: If the Holocaust had not occurred? I think it would be much better. For the Holocaust, in many ways, revealed that in the world – You have to imagine, when did we first find out that there was a world? In the 15th century, 16th century! And when did the world become more or less accessible, when was Australia discovered? In the late 1700s. Now, let's say, 19th century, beginning of 20th century, we were already starting to understand the world, communicate around the world with telegraph and so on, but not the way we understand the world today. The Holocaust that the Nazis instigated broke down the basic moral structure by saying that there are people whom we can eliminate because they are not fit to be part of humanity. There were theories about it, as I heard, the Soviets did it in Holodomor and so on, but concentrated mass murder of one specific group of people to such an extent, it was something, in my opinion, unprecedented, and put in question the moral order. Whether your Christian or belonging to another religion anybody would say, probably, that killing is a crime, killing is a moral transgression – but here, a state, as state policy, was applying these methods. Gas chambers were not used in Latvia. It was only murder by bullet. As for the Polish Jews,

Treblinka was opened in 1943, and the Germans didn't want to kill the Jews on their land, so they sent them to Poland, they sent them here. And now of course, the Poles have to answer for the Nazi murders on their soil. That's also a crime, in my opinion. But yes, I think that if the Holocaust had never happened, I hope we wouldn't have come up with the idea that we could simply eliminate a group of people just because they are. But the communists did that, too, because they were trying to eliminate in the so-called Gulags. That's the Holodomor in Ukraine. But they did it mostly by deportation, sending them away. So, the Holodomor is certainly a crime, but it is questionable to what extent it's as central as the Holocaust. The first book about the Holocaust in Latvia came out in 1995. That's by Andrew Ezergailis, who is a good friend, historian in America. And he had a great deal of difficulty; he had to take a lot of flak from certain Latvian circles for raising the question and raising the question of the involvement of our people in the Holocaust. I am a member of the historian's commission - actually, the historian commission has done a lot of research on the Holocaust, unfortunately, most of it in Latvian. We know exactly what happened in small towns, for example, how it was carried out. There was a method to it. It was not a spontaneous action, it was certainly always an organised action, and behind the organisation was Stahlecker with his Einsatzgruppe which did not issue orders, there are no orders. Orders were issued by word of mouth or by telephone. That's how we understood it. No written orders, because they said, "Do it so they cannot trace it back to you, and make it look as if it was the local populations doing it. But then, in November 1941 came the man whose picture is also there, Friedrich Jeckeln. Friedrich Jeckeln came from Ukraine. He was involved in Babi Yar Massacre, and he did the final killings in November/December with this SS men. But he, of course, involved again support groups, police and so on. If you take 25,000 people out of a ghetto, that's a huge number of people. They killed them on two separate days. So, for taking them out of the ghetto, making them march kilometres, you have to have an organisation, but the killing was not by Jeckeln's men. So, to me, the Holocaust is very significant, despite everything else that our people might say. But we, too - I say yes, we, too, but let's keep in mind that there is a state involved in killing its own people, people who belong to other states, just because they are Jews. But you have to first eliminate the state structures, you have to make the field open and then, anything can happen. Shoot at will. But they didn't shoot at will, even here, it was very much organised. And so it was, actually, in Poland. Our historians don't quite believe the Jedwabne story. Cause there has been this sort of picture that the Jedwabne people were murderers and so on. Our people think that was also German-organised, German people certainly were present. And if you have military presence, well - don't trust that what happened. The same in Lithuania, for example, infamous massacre in the Lietūkis Garage. You saw, in pictures, you see German militaries standing around. And according to the Hague Convention of 1907, according to the Hague Convention, the occupying power has to keep order. In other words, the Nazis at that time shouldn't have stood around, but should have prevented. And so, I'm sorry for those people - Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles,

Ukrainians, Belarusians, who participated then. Because they were in such conditions that they may be felt forced, but certainly, the Germans would have been, under international convention, obliged to prevent it, and they didn't, of course, because that was their policy. And that's why I think that this breakdown of this very basic order by state is very important and allowed for other things because, well, if you once have started killing, you might as well kill some other people. Kill the Tutsi for instance. That was a genocide, wasn't it? Well, kill all these people with dark hair. Let's live, let's help people live. Angela Merkel is now suffering before allowing the refugees to come in, but it's in German constitution. And maybe, the refugees came in and that was like breaking down the doors, of course. But lo and behold, if the ultimate right here in Germany comes to power. I like the European Union; we have certain peaceful ideals. It's difficult to live up to the ideals, but we can strive to approach the ideal, and not leave it out of sight. But I don't see any other way for the world to survive and for humanity to survive except this way. And the ultimate right answer is, "Roll it all up", and maybe we will someday. But I hope not. We still have children, we have grandchildren, we have great-grandchildren. Generations are coming, and I hope they will be better, and they will learn a little bit from the past. My regards to Mr Zinke – it's a great thing that you're doing, that you're going after these stories, learning about it. Keep in mind that it's for the present and future that you are doing it. And that it is not only the task that you're doing that all of us should be doing.

I have one last question. These future generations you have mentioned a moment ago, do you think that they will be full of grief or hatefulness to those crimes, or to the orders?

Valters Nollendorfs: They should know that we should first of all intellectually understand that it happened and be convinced that it did happen. Now, there are people who deny it. That's number one. You have to understand it, and then comes empathy. And then comes enlightenment. You should also be able to feel it, just to know it intellectually is not enough. You read that 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust. This numbers game is no good. Peter Novick says, first of all, the number was 11 million victims of Nazis, of all kinds, that was the first. And when the Jewish question, the Holocaust came up, they decided what the figure is. So, they said, dividing sort of fifty-fifty is also not possible. Let's make it six million. And then, the rest were forgotten. Six million may be very close to truth. Counting that in Latvia, we had about 90,000, 70,000 of them were killed, and you start adding up the Polish Jews, the German Jews, the Hungarian Jews, the Jews in Russia, the Jews in Belarus, the Ukrainian Jews, and so on. And you'll probably come up with millions, I don't know whether anyone has done it the other way, from this general number that is being thrown around. In Latvia, we have been discussing the numbers, but 70,000 seems to be where it is all centred. And that's a huge number, a huge number. You have to understand it. Then, you start to understand it in human terms, and then you can become a saint, as I say it. A poet, friend of mine said, you suffer, but

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you understand you're not the only one who are suffering. And only when we develop that sense, then we can move forward.

Jānis Urbanovičs

*Jānis Urbanovičs³² (*1959) is a Latvian politician and member of the Saeima (Latvian parliament) since 1994. In 1998, he became one of the founders of the Baltic Forum, one of whose aims it is to maintain good relations with Russia. The Forum has gradually become a dialogue platform for post-Soviet states. As part of his work for the Baltic Forum, Jānis Urbanovičs has published several books on culture, history and economics. From 2005 to 2010, he was chairman of the National Harmony Party. He was chairman of Harmony from 2010 to 2014.*

Jānis Urbanovičs' father fought Nazi Germany in the Red Army, while his uncle was in the Latvian Waffen-SS Legion.

We met him in Rīga in the end of September 2017, in the company of an English-Latvian translator.

How was it for your uncle who fought for the Legion, was he conscripted or did he go there as a volunteer?

Translator: Vai Jūsu onkulis gribēja brīvprātīgi iet legionā vai viņu piespieda pierakstīties?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Es patiesībā zinu droši, ka tas bija piespiedu kārtā.

Translator: He says that he was pressured to go into this Legion.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Vispār par Latviju, par Latvijas laudīt, Otrā pasaules kara kontekstā, par brīvprātīgajiem runāt var ar ļoti, ļoti lielu izņēmumu.

Translator: And that people who went from their own will were very rare. They didn't want to.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Latvijā bija pavisam maz tikai Hitlera Vācijas vai Staļina Krievijas patrioti, kas gāja brīvprātīgi kauties.

Translator: There were very small part of people who went willingly on the side of the Nazis or the USSR.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Jā, ja iet runa par SS Waffen legionāriem, tad arī tur, vai Arāja slaveno brigādi, tad nu tas drīzāk ir izņēmums.

Translator: Well, there were exceptions, for example famous Arajs brigade.

Every 16th of March there is a celebration of the Waffen SS in Riga. What do you think about it?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Tā ir izrādīšanās, nevis legionāru piemiņas diena.

Translator: He says that it's just showing off, and not a day for remembering people.

³²Check whether Urbanovics holds a doctoral degree

Is it also anti-Semitic?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Visi antisemīti neieredz arī krievus.

Translator: Everyone who is anti-Semitic is against to Russians, too.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Otrādi nav.

Translator: It doesn't work the other way around.

So, it's a similar thing, anti-Semitism and anti-Russian racism?

Translator: What he wanted to say was those who are russophobes and anti-Semites are the same people. There are no people who thinks, I'm an anti-Semite, I'm not russophob, or vice versa. There is one small group that wants to provoke Russian people, those are the people who are going to this thing on March, you know, on the demonstration.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Latvijas neatkarības atjaunošanai bija par atdalīšanos no krieviem un visa krieviskā, un mēs turpinām šo atdalīšanos.

Translator: And that the declaration of independence here in Latvia was about the separation from Russia and Russian people and we are still continuing to do so.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Un no visām krieviskajām izpausmēm, mēs tā kā atdalāmies, līdz ar to arī pret saviem līdzpilsoņiem.

Translator: And we are still separating from traditions and everything connected with Russia. We are still acting like that year in Latvia with our own people.

Are there any other a signs or demonstrations of anti-Semitism today in Latvia?

Translator: Vai tagad ir kaut kādas antisemitisma izpausmes?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Šī ir raksturīgākā.

Translator: This is the most typical one.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Ebreju tautības pārstāvji bija aktīvākie padomju varas ieviesēji šeit. Viņi runāja krieviski.

Translator: Jewish people were the most active Russian supporters at that time.

That is the truth, or that is what many people believe?

Translator: Tā bija vai tika domāts, ka tā bija?

Translator: Both.³³

Jānis Urbanovičs: Bija, bija tādi personāži, bet bija arī tiražēts.

Translator: There were people in this communist party, but it was also talked about in a way not necessarily true.

³³Check whether there is something missing here

In Germany and in Poland, we have a very strong tradition of the anti-Semitism. And in Latvia, according to my knowledge, there is not a strong traditional anti-Semitism, but there were some collaboration during the Nazi time, is it right?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Latvija ir mazāka par Poliju un Vāciju, mums viss ir mazāks

Translator: Latvia is smaller than Germany and Poland, so everything is smaller. *[laughs]*

Jānis Urbanovičs: Mēs esam arī nedaudz perifērijā. Krievijā ir aizgājusi arī ziņa par tirazēšanā par Latviju. Viņi mazāk zina, tāpēc ka par mums mazāk runā kā par Poliju.

Translator: We are also in the periphery of European Union, that's maybe the reason why you know a little less than about other countries, maybe people are not talking too much about Latvia.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Bet Latvijas iedzīvotāji ir bijuši gan vācu pusē, gan Hitlera, gan Staļina pusē.

Translator: Latvian citizens had collaborations with the Hitler German and the Stalin –Russian side.

Do the Jewish community or Israeli diplomats complain a lot about anti-Semitism in Latvia? Are there any complains?

Jānis Urbanovičs: No, there are none.

What do they say?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Viņi satraucās par šo pusi.

Translator: They are concerned about it.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Jā, concerned is labākais vārds, lai to aprakstītu. Viņi ir bažīgi, bet viņi nav agresīvi.

Translator: They are not aggressive, they are just concerned.

Is there a lot of concern about the, say, anti-Semitism on the internet, or more about anti-Semitism in real life?

Translator: Vai antisemitisms ir vairāk internetā vai reālajā dzīvē?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Patiesībā es varu vairāk runāt par saviem vai tuvāko novērojumiem. Nav viņa daudz ne internetā, ne sadzīvē. Viņš ir vairāk politikā.

Translator: He can talk only about his experience and he says that it's not there in the internet, not there in the real life it's just there in politics.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Piemēram, holokausta upuru īpašumu nodošana ebreju draudzēm radīja atkārtotu antisemitisma vilni.

Translator: The government just gave back to the Jewish society a few buildings, which belonged to the of Jewish community, and of course it raised some wave of anti-Semitism.

Are there any programs by the government to combat anti-Semitism or racism in general?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Nē, nav tādu programmu.

Translator: No, there is not programme like this.

Are there any Jews in the parliament or in the Harmony party?

Jānis Urbanovičs: In parliament and in Harmony party. The Jewish is...

Translator: ...everywhere.

Also in other parties?

Translator: Yes.

Does it happen that politicians of the right wing in the parliament say anti-Semitic things?

Jānis Urbanovičs: No.

It doesn't happen?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Ir tikai daži izņēmumi.

Translator: There are only a few exceptions.

It's a taboo?

Jānis Urbanovičs: It is a bad tradition. Not Latvian parliament tradition.

And outside the parliament?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Mēs esam ļoti kulturāls parlaments un uz āru mēs esam visi ļoti kulturāli - gan politiķi, gan sabiedrība. Uz āra.

Translator: On the outside the parliament is very polite. [*laughs*]

If you look at a museum, for example, or at the historiography: Is it more scientific or more folkloristic -only heroes, only victims?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Mums ir, mums ir visāda veida vēstures sacerējumi, tajā laikā arī antisemitiski ļoti. Ir.

Translator: We have different kinds of these books and they have different thoughts of them.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Ir, piemēram, pētījums par Cukuru, ļoti komplimentārs viņam. Lidotājs Cukurs, kurš bija Arāja..., nu, kas nodarbojās ar ebreju...em...antisemitismu kara laikā.

Translator: There is a book about Herberts Cukurs, who was fighting against the Jewish people during the Nazi time. And there is a book very complimentary about him.

We heard that it's possible to Jewishness as a nationality put in the passport or ID document, like in the Soviet times. Is that still possible in Latvia?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Nav obligāti, bet var, ja grib.

Translator: If you want, you can put it.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Tas nav ar likumu norādīts, var neko nenorādīt pasē.

Translator: But the law doesn't say that you have to do it.

But do you have any advantages if you do it, for coming to Israel or something alike? Does it have any consequences if you do it?

Translator: It's not the same as citizenship. You still have the Latvian citizenship, all rights are the same, you can just put your nationality, if you don't want to put it, just leave it out.

How is the relation between Latvia and Israel? And how do most of the Latvian population think about the state Israel?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Konfliktā ar arābu valstīm mums lielākā daļa sabiedrības ir Izraēlas pusē.

Translator: In the conflict in the Arabic states we are in the Israel side, supporting them.

And so is the population?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Yes.

How is the government supporting the Jewish community? Are there any measures taken?

Translator: Vai valdība kaut kā atbalsta ebreju kopienu?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Caur vēstniecību. Vēstniecībā tur viņi sadarbojas. Ir vēl savas programmas bijušajiem Latvijas ļaudīm, īpaši tiem, kuri ir saglabājuši pilsonību. Ar Izraēlu mums var būt dubultpilsonība.

Translator: There are some programmes in Latvian embassy in Israel and in the country. There are few programs and one of these says that you can have double citizenships with Israel. It's not allowed with other countries, but you can be a citizen of Latvia and Israel.

We read that you have participated in the publication of a compendium of life stories of Latvians since 1934? Are there also life stories of Jewish people from Latvia in this book?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Es esmu rakstījis par pēckara laiku. Jā, protams, ka ir, skaidrs, ka tur ir, īpaši pirmajā grāmatā, nozīmīgi fakti par Izraēlas kopienu Latvijā.

Translator: Of course, there are some, especially in the first book there are some very important facts about the Jewish/Israeli community.

Is it documents from archives that are published?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Mēs rakstījām 3 autori, lasot arhīva dokumentus, tā laika presi, izdevumus, kā arī hronikas, un apmainījāmies ar viedokļiem. Tā grāmata ir viedokļu apmaiņa.

Translator: This book is an exchange of opinions and it was based on the facts from the archives, from publications, from chronicles. Everybody read them and then there was an exchange of opinions that is printed the book.

Are there any educational programmes about the Jewish religion, about Jews in Latvia, about the Holocaust, about anti-Semitism? Is it part of the school schedule, is it in the history lessons, in the religious education, maybe?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Tas viss ir skolā, bet, cik dziļi - nezinu, sen neesmu bijis skolā.

Translator: He says that these topics are taught in school, but how deep, he doesn't know, he ended the school a long time ago.

Do you have anything to add what could be done to improve the situation of Jews in Latvia, especially in politics?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Politikā tam nav nozīme, tas tiek izmantots tikai, lai kādreiz iekostu otram.

Translator: It doesn't matter in the politics, it's just a thing with which you can bite someone.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Kad trūkst argumentu, tad sākās kaut kādas piesaukšanas. Piemēram, valodas prasmes vai izcelšanās, tas jau ir tad, kad politiķiem trūkst argumentu.

Translator: When the politicians don't have enough arguments, then they just pick on things like language skills or nationality.

How big is the anxiety because of Russia? Today, we had an interview with a scientist, and she was saying there is a big anxiety that Russia can invade in Latvia like in Ukraine? Is there a big fear?

Translator: Vai ir bailes no Krievijas?

Jānis Urbanovičs: [*Nopūta*]. Blakus Latvijai ir Krievija.

Translator: Russia is next to Latvia.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Latvijā ir daudz krievu.

Translator: There are many Russians in Latvia.

That's why I asked this question.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Ja Latvijā krievi un latvieši dzīvo draudzīgi, atrod savu kopdzīves formulu, kur abiem labi.

Translator: And if the Latvians and Russians find a way to live together peacefully,...

Jānis Urbanovičs: Tad mums ir vienalga, kas notiek Kremļī.

Translator: ... then it doesn't matter what happens in the Kremlin.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Tad mums tik un tā būs labas attiecības ar Krieviju.

Translator: We will still have a good relationship with Russia.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Ja Latvijā latvieši un krievi dzīvos naidā un aizdomīgumā, tad arī mums vienalga, kas būs Kremļī, mums būs slikti, sliktas attiecības ar krieviem.

Translator: And if the Latvians and the Russians have bad relationships here, then it doesn't matter who holds power there in Russia, we will still have bad relationships.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Iespējams, ja Krievija būtu tālāk, tad latvieši un krievi sadzīvotu ātrāk labāk.

Translator: And maybe if Russia would be somewhere further way, then the relationship would be easier.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Bet es domāju, ka ekonomiski krievi ir ļoti izdevīgi tuvu, ļoti izdevīgi tuvu.

Translator: But economically it's good that Russia is nearby.

Jānis Urbanovičs: Atliek vien tikai mums mājās sakārtot attiecības starp 2 etniskajām grupām - lielo latviešu un mazo krievu.

Translator: The relationships between these two ethnic groups should be softened, and it would be better for both sides.

In history, the Baltic Germans were a ruling class in the Baltics. Is there still a anti-German resentment?

Jānis Urbanovičs: Līdz Pirmajam pasaules karam mēs neieredzējām vāciešus, pēc Otrā pasaules kara mēs neieredzējām krievus.

Translator: Until the Second World War, we hated the Germans, now we hate the Russians. *[laughter]*

What about the Polish people? *[laughter]*

Jānis Urbanovičs: Viņi arī ir Baltijas valsts.

Translator: They also are Baltics. *[laughter]*

Inese Runce

Inese Runce, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia in Riga.

The interview took place in Riga in September 2017.

Inese Runce: You can imagine what kind of reaction there was in general towards this particular person³⁴ and when the War started and the Soviets were preparing for leaving, when the Soviet army and the Soviet institutions left, they were about to organise an evacuation, and the communists were the first to leave. He wanted to take this family, he wanted to leave, but then the wife's family came and said, "you're responsible for everything they've done, for all of those atrocities, you're the one, if you want, you can leave, we haven't done anything wrong, we are staying". When the Nazi army came and this cleansing started, this partly Latvian family and the Jewish family ended up in the nearby forest, for the same reason, the Latvian family because they were communists, and the Jewish family because they were Jewish.

The interregnum period actually was not about Jewish people, but there was revenge taking place, and in just a few moments, mainly in the Rūjiena area, if I'm correct, it was about the ones who were associated with the Soviet regime during the first year of the Soviet occupation. Why did those anti-Semitic Nazi slogans sometimes appear at the beginning of the Nazi occupation? Of course, we can relate this to Nazi ideology in general, according to which the Nazi were liberating Europe from the bolsheviks. But there also was another person, Semion Shustin, a Soviet Jew who was sent here to organise the deportations, and for the Nazis - not only from Germany, but also local Nazis, the sympathizers with the Nazi regime -, Semion Shustin was a perfect example to be placed as the icon of the Soviet regime: He's a Jew, he's a communist, he's the one who's responsible for the Soviet deportations, and for the murder of the local population - a mystical Jew, in a way. You will be able to find something like this in Estonian and Lithuanian propaganda of the Nazi time as well, one particular person, a mystical figure, the Jew, the bolshevik. Here in Latvia, it had a particular face. There were very few Jewish people in Latvia in this interregnum period, and also only a few ones who were associated with this first year of the Soviet regime, it was not the Jewish community in general.

Does anti-Semitism play a role in the public discussion at the moment?

Inese Runce: I think it was a very important instrument when the discussion started in the 90s and in the beginning of the 2000, when the first Holocaust memorials started to be erected all across the Latvia, and it took years to fin-

³⁴ Explain whom she is talking about

ish the research, to deal with all of this not very pleasant topics in the history of modern Latvia, the issue of the collaboration with both the Nazis and the Soviets. I think we have worked on the issue of who was collaborating with the the Nazi regime, but we haven't finished our discussions about the collaboration with the Soviet regime yet. The recovery of the cultural memory is a very painful process for all the different groups. For example, it was a very typical and very strange leftover from the Nazi ideology - this was very popular and even the historians were arguing because there were no data to operate with - that there were so many Jewish people who were in the Communist Party, and that they were the ones who were organising the deportations. The slogans which were used by the Nazi regime, during th occupation somehow appeared in the public in the 90s and the beginning of the 2000s, and then my colleague, Leo Dribins, who is right now the leading researcher here at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, and head of the Holocaust Survivors' community here in Latvia, did a lot of research, in particular about the Jewish people and the Communist Party in Latvia. And he found out that Jews were a minor group in the Latvian Communist Party in the late 30s and after the Second World War. The biggest group among the communists, both in relative and absolute numbers, were Latvians, the second group were Russians, and then the third the Jewish population.

Besides, professor Aivars Stranga researched the Archives of the Latvian Communist Party in the late 30s to find out about the percentage and the ethnic division in this context. The Latvians were the overwhelming majority, not the Jewish people, but this thinking is somehow left from the Nazi regime. The propaganda and ideology somehow stayed alive because after the Second World War, there was no possibility in general to deal with history in the Soviet era. There was no possibility to discuss what happened during the Second World War, and then there were those propaganda elements, appearing in the understanding of history and in the explaining of certain historical events, and it's interesting that in the 90s, in the beginning of the 2000, when those topics were researched, the results showed something totally different.

The Museum of Occupation, is it rather scientific or rather folkloristic?

Inese Runce: I must say that I like what the Museum of Occupation does. For example, I think that they did a very good exhibition on Rumbula a few years ago, together with the Jewish museum, where I was working for 5 years, and I must say that the exhibition that was made by the Museum of Occupation on Rumbula was very good, both from the historical perspective and from the artistic perspective. The groups that run the Occupation Museum are, I think, strong and good enough, they do as much as they can, but sometimes, groups are volunteering in the Museum of Occupation, and they tried to push their own history forward, to emphasise certain topics. For example, they have a very good seminars and meetings between different groups on the occasion of May 8th, bringing people together, for example the Latvian soldiers who were

in the Legion. Of course, nowadays they are not very many of them alive, its' just a few, but they bring people together to discuss the different experiences....

But don't they equate the Nazi occupation with the Russian occupation? I think it's a problem to equate the Nazi occupation and the Russian occupation, and if you make a Museum of Occupation in general, I see the danger to equate it.

Inese Runce: The point is that the different groups have a different memories. For example, normal Latvians have nothing to do with the Nazi institutions or the Soviet institutions. They have a simple memory of what they experienced in daily life. For example, the Soviet chaos, poor people, rudeness of Soviet soldiers - different things that they might remember. And then they remember the Nazi time. But they had nothing to do with the Nazi ideology, and they remember mainly the German soldiers, whom they had gotten in contact with if there was such a chance, and who were nicely dressed up and organised. This is what they remember: they're totally different, as though they had nothing to do with this Nazi terror, they had nothing to do with official Nazi institutions, they remember, let's say, good, nice people whom they, because they knew German, were able to communicate with, and it was more or less the same German culture and milieu until the times of the First World War, so this was something familiar. And they didn't think of them as Nazis, but they thought of them as Germans. For example, it's very typical to remember that the soldiers were giving chocolate candies to the children around. And then, on the opposite side, there is the Russian army who, let's say, is robbing, who are not well-behaving, whom you try to escape, and first of all, you don't know the Russian language.

So, this might be the average Latvian's memory about the Nazi time. This is of course not valid for the whole nation, because the, the national history is composed of different memories, it's normal to have different points of view, and therefore sometimes, you can also see such a presentation about the times of the Nazi occupation: As a better era than the Russian era.

What about the other groups, for example the Russian people or the Polish people living in Latvia at that time, how did they perceive the Nazi occupation?

Inese Runce: It depends, there is not one unified Russian community, neither one unified Polish community. The Polish community is composed of two groups, for example the Polish people who are local and the Polish people who came after the Second World War from different parts of the Soviet Union. The same applies for Russians, the Russians are a even more diverse group. There is no homogeneous Russian community, and there are Russian Old Believers, for example, who were drafted into the Latvian Legion, or the Putin's refugees, as we call them, the ones who are moving here from Russia in modern days. And then you have a Russian-speaking population that is composed of different

groups, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Russians, the “Russified”, people from the different parts of the Soviet Union, and their cultural memory might be totally different. Then, for example, if you speak about Russian Old Believers, who are indigenous group for a long period of time, their memory is very close to the Latvian. They experienced the same events, except for the race theory which made the Slavic groups very attentive because the Latvians and Estonians, for example, were placed higher in this race pyramid. The Slavic groups were on a lower scale, yeah, so even for the Polish people, so this was a big issue, the Slavic background in general, that made them very attentive. The Latvians were not as much attentive to this.

Do you maybe know what the people of Latvia expected from the Nazis before the occupation?

Inese Runce: They didn’t expect anything. At the end of the 30s, there major issue was how to survive. On one side, you have the Soviet regime, on the opposite side, you have the Nazi regime. On one side you have this crazy man called Stalin, on the opposite side you have this crazy man called Hitler - so, how to survive, how to keep independence? This was the reality for the political elite, for the intellectual elite.

And I think there were many Latvians who were fighting either against Stalin and against Hitler.

Inese Runce And they weren’t fighting voluntarily, like my family, for example: The grandfather from the paternal side, he was taken to serve in the Nazi army, and the grandfather from the maternal side went to serve in the Soviet army. I know many families in Latvia whose oldest son was taken to serve in the Nazi army and the youngest son was taken to serve in the Soviet army, and they were fighting around Pulkova to each other, shooting at each other around Pulkova. The Soviet army hierarchy sent the Latvian troops to Volkova, and the Nazi army sent Latvian Legion to Pulkova.

And did the Jewish community in Latvia know about the crimes that were committed from ’39 to ’41 by the German army, about the beginning of the Holocaust?

Inese Runce: The authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, which was established in May of 1934, very strongly controlled the newspapers and radio, all of the media radio, in order not to publish bad news whenever possible.

It was like in Poland: People could have known it, but they didn’t believe it.

Inese Runce: That’s also true. Latvia was actually the last country in Europe which accepted Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany. And when the people came and they started to share, the local Jewish people said: “I

don't believe you", "you are simply exaggerating". There were, however, quite a few articles published about what's going on, but censorship measures usually controlled that nothing wrong was said about Hitler, in order not to provoke Nazi Germany, not to give a reason for occupation, and on the other hand, that nobody spoke of what happened under the Soviet regime, because it could also give Stalin possibility to occupy us.

Another thing is that for the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, it was a very important to create an image of paradise - everything is good, everything is quiet, everything is perfect, we will make it, everything will be okay, the political crisis in the Europe will be over and there will be a bright future. This image started to disappear in 1939, which was also the beginning of the significant economical crisis, when the German population, the Baltic Germans started to be resettled. There is this local saying here: If the Germans are leaving, it means Russians are coming. And therefore you also don't pay so much attention to other things, You're so concentrated on how to survive, on what to do, on what's going to be, and what's happening in Poland, it just loses its sense, and there were not very many news published in this regard.

Ilya Lensky

The interview took place.

As we couldn't find anything about your biography online, could you give us a summary of you ended up being the leader of this museum first?

Ilya Lensky: At rather young age, with six or seven, my parents brought me to the Jewish community, to all kinds of institutions. I was in summer camps, I was in a Jewish youth theatre which we used to have here, I've graduated at a Jewish school, I was involved in Jewish institutions my entire life. I've graduated at the history department in the University of Latvia, and it was quite logical then, when I was seeking a job, and after several unsuccessful experiments, that I ended up working in the museum as a historian, as also some very involved in Jewish community life. And then, in 2008, Mr Vestermanis offered me to take the position, because he himself was not very sure about his capacities, because of his health, to run the museum and to keep a hand on all everyday matters, and now he's the curator of the museum, and he's still a leading expert on the Holocaust, while I manage more the everyday life of the museum. That's my personal story, and of course, it's not available online because I don't see anything special about it. I don't have any scientific results that may get public.

What do you think, is anti-Semitism serious problem for the world?

Ilya Lensky: No. Let's put it like that, the Jewish community does not see anti-Semitism as a important challenge to its existence, which does not mean that there is no anti-Semitism. Of course, with anti-Semitism, we can't say if it's strong or not because usually, it won't manifest openly, so even if quite big part of Latvian society is infested with anti-Semitism, it does not result in violent acts or anything like that. The main manifestation of anti-Semitism we have is in comments on the internet. It's part of the broader problem of hate speech on the internet, which has to do not only with the Jews, but generally with all kinds of minority groups. Basically, in Latvia, the main minority that most of the hate speech is directed against is the Russian minority, most of hate speech on Latvian internet would be anti-Russian rather than anti-Semitic, but still, these comments on the internet are the main problem for the Jewish community in the field of anti-Semitism. Obviously, there are some prominent intellectuals who are anti-Semitic, some politicians, but we don't see it as a main challenge, as I said, to our existence.

And do people treat Jews differently and in a specific way nowadays in Latvia?

Ilya Lensky: First of all, it's important that the majority of Latvian Jews are not different from surrounding population, visually or in any other way. When you encounter a person, usually in Latvia you do not know their ethnic background. And of course we have issues with, for example, non-white people being treated differently - this is a very strong problem, we have anti-black racism, for example - but not so much against the Jews, because the Jews look more or less like anybody else. Then, we have not heard of cases of people, for example, being dismissed from work because of their Jewish origin or something like that, which does not mean that it does not happen, but at least we haven't received reports about anything like. Actually, during the Soviet years, when there were rather strongly, although unofficially anti-Semitic policies of the, of the state, Latvia was one of the regions where the overall situation was better. It was easier for the Jews to enrol in university in Latvia than, let's say, Russia or in Ukraine. This was one of the reasons why many people would come to Riga to study, because they could just not enrol in university in their native region. I can hardly say that the Jews will be treated differently on the everyday level.

Today, we talked to someone who said that those people who make anti-Russian statements also make anti-Semitic statements and vice versa. Is that correct?

Ilya Lensky: More or less, although of course you can have "pure anti-Semites" and "pure Russophobes". We also have a quite significant group of people who are strongly anti-Russian, but constantly make philo-Semitic statements, which I do not believe, because to me, it more seems like they're trying to whitewash their image by showing, "you see, we are no hardcore xenophobes, we're distinguished", and they would also emphasise that there are good Russians, whom they do not hate, and so on. Generally, I don't believe such statements. I think if a person is racist or xenophobic, then this resentment covers all possible groups, including LGBT, women, and so on. I would say that there are different groups, but also of course it's true that if they are real xenophobes, they would hate both Russians and Jews. But we have to keep in mind that there is a rather strong anti-Semitic sentiment in Russian minority as well.

Those people you were referring to, what kind of philo-semitic statements do they make?

Ilya Lensky: They would always emphasise that the Jews are a traditional minority, a good minority, which never had any problems with the surrounding population, and that they are so sorry that they were exterminated during the Holocaust, something like that. Obviously, they are always great fans of Israel. To me, it has kind of an overtone of "Jews, go to Israel. Leave Latvia and go to Israel." - that every nation should stay in their own country. Russians should pack their suitcases and go to Russia, Jews should pack their suitcases and go to Israel, and as Latvians, we want to live here in a racially pure state. It's not stated explicitly. Maybe I'm wrong. But it is very much the feeling that I have

when someone suddenly is very philo-Semitic and very pro-Israeli - to me it is always suspicious.

Is Jewish culture popular in Latvia? Are there a lot of places like this museum?

Ilya Lensky: I would rather say no. It's hard to say what popular means, of course, but if we compare it, for example, to what happens in Germany or what happens in Poland with all the festivals of Jewish culture being organised in different localities and involving mostly local, non-Jewish population, we have almost nothing like that in Latvia. Of course, Latvia can't be compared in the sense of size and importance to Germany and Poland, I mean historically, because in Poland there was the dominant Jewish community and in Germany, the Jewish community was culturally dominant. Here, many municipalities would like to have something Jewish such as organising Jewish events, but usually they would invite us to organise them, they would say, "we want to hold a Jewish culture day, could you bring us a choir or a dance company or something", rather than organising it on site. I can't say that we do much to change the situation. To me, of course, it is very important that the Jewish culture would be perceived just as one of many cultures, and that you don't have to be sorry for your interest in Jewish culture - if you can have, say, Salsa contests and Salsa courses, which are part of Latin American culture, and if you can be fan of Indian cuisine, there is nothing to feel sorry for in being interested in Jewish culture. It just normal, just as liking French movies. We want Jewish culture to be treated like that, like something normal. Currently, I know only one place in Latvia where you have local, non-Jewish population in Jewish cultural activities: In Rēzekne, they have a Klezmer band. In other places, nothing like that happens. On the other hand, in several local history museums we have sections on the Jewish history of the respective locality, so the interest is there, but not in a way comparable to, as I said, Germany or Poland or Hungary. So I think we were only at the beginning of this process, but obviously, the situation has changed significantly compared to with what it was like 15, 20 years ago.

What about anti-Semitism under the Soviet dominance? Was it different?

Ilya Lensky: As I said, there were several levels: On one hand, there was this state anti-Semitism, and on the other hand, there was the local context. Generally, in Latvia, as I said, anti-Semitism was weaker than in certain other regions of the Soviet Union, if we speak of such things as the possibility to enrol in the university - if you take, for example, Moscow, major universities there were just closed for the Jews in the 70s and 80s. It was clear that if you're Jewish, you cannot enrol in these universities - you can try, but you won't pass the exam. Especially in departments like maths, physics, and so on, it was considered that the Jews are dominating Soviet maths, Soviet physics, so we will not allow them to the universities. For many Soviet Jews, this was the first stimulus to think

about their Jewish identity because Soviet authorities, as it turns out, were pressuring them to become Jews. They did not perceive themselves as Jewish. They wanted to be regular Soviet physicists, for example, but Soviet authorities said “no, you’re a Jew and a Jew cannot be a Soviet physicist”, so they somehow had to form their attitude or Jewish identity. In Latvia, this was much weaker, you could enrol in the university, you could find a better job, but of course, for example, during late Stalinist period, in ’48, ’49, ’50, when there was a big anti-Jewish campaign in the Soviet Union, Latvia was also part of this campaign, many prominent intellectuals were arrested and imprisoned, they spent several years in prisons or camps. Basically, all the possibilities to revive Jewish culture after the Holocaust in Latvia were destroyed in 1949 and 1950. This was also a time when situation changed, for example, with regard to language: After that, most of the parents would be afraid to speak Yiddish to their children, to transmit Jewish language to them, they would rather switch either to Russian or to Latvian. This was during late Stalinist years; in the 70s and 80s, it was still better than in many other regions of the Soviet Union, but of course it’s an enormously big topic, and yet under-researched very much: Riga was one of the centres of Jewish national movement in the Soviet Union, so there were number of underground groups in Riga. We cannot call them resistance groups or dissident groups, it was different, and this was also very important: They emphasised that they don’t want to be called dissidents, because dissident is someone who tries to change the Soviet Union; for them, the main thing is either preserving Jewish culture or getting the possibility to emigrate from the Soviet Union, and the Jews were lucky to be one of the few groups that were allowed to emigrate, between 1970 and 1979, there was a window where it was allowed. About one third of Latvian Jewish community emigrated in these years and one additional third after 1989, when it became possible to emigrate again.

Do they still emigrate from Latvia?

Ilya Lensky: Hardly. Today, it’s again part of a broader problem of emigration from Latvia - to Ireland, to England, to Germany, Norway or wherever. I mean, since we became part of the European Union as there are open borders in the EU, Latvia lost about 15% of its population in general due to emigration. Of course, the Jews are part of this movement, but it’s not particularly a Jewish movement, as it was in the 90s when the Jews emigrated mostly to Israel, but some of them also to Germany or United States or Canada or wherever. From 2001, I would say, there is very small specifically Jewish emigration, and those people who emigrate to Israel do it because of certain individual reasons: People go to study, or they move with their relatives, or they want to develop business, whatever, but these are personal stories rather than mass emigration, as it was in the 70s and in the 90s. Several years ago, the local representative of the Jewish agency, the main institution that works with emigrants, said, “I know each and every Jew who emigrates from Latvia, both of them are great guys”. Maybe it was a little bit of an exaggeration, and it’s not two people, but, let’s say, ten, but anyhow we’re speaking of very limited movement.

Is the Holocaust an important topic in the history lessons? I have the feeling that in Poland, we pay more attention to that. What is it like in Latvia?

Ilya Lensky: In Latvia, as far as I remember now, they have two lessons about Holocaust in grade 9 and two lessons in grade 12, so four lessons altogether as a part of the history course. But this is not the biggest problem because actually, we don't have a reference point of how many lessons there should be. It's the same when I'm constantly asked why Latvia does not have "normal" policy of commemoration - what is normal? "Like in Germany", they say, what does that mean, like in Germany? You can't say what is proper and what is improper. It's the same with Holocaust lessons, we have a group of teachers, not very big, but I would say that 50, maybe 100 teachers in Latvia, who are really interested in the topic, most of them have been once, at least once, to Yad Vashem, to the special teacher training seminars they have. They come to our museum, they try to bring their pupils to our museum, so we have a group of teachers who teach Holocaust well, who are interested and who also maybe try to do some research on the topic. On another hand, of course, there are a lot of teachers who are not interested in the topic, and the biggest challenge for them is how to balance, in these four lessons, the general context and the local context because today, it seems to me that the main emphasis is on the general aspects of Holocaust, so that pupils will know about the *Kristallnacht* and about Auschwitz, but they would not know what happened to the Jews in their native town. But this is a general problem with the school curriculum: Constantly there are discussions whether Latvian history should be integrated in the general history course or if it should be a separate subject.

Generally, Latvia is a very centralised country with a certain obsession with centralisation and with very sceptical and suspicious attitude towards local identities and local stories. And I think it's problematic because of course, for Latvia, the history of the Holocaust is not about Auschwitz, it's something very different. An absolute majority of Latvian Jews were killed here on spot, there are approximately 130 Holocaust killing sites in Latvia. Usually, only small group of people in the town would know something about it. Although again, the situation changes now, but still, I feel it's a bit insufficient.

Is the subject present in arts, in literature and in films?

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Ilya Lensky: Yes, but of course not to the same extent as in Polish culture. Although, as far as I understand, now they have one movie ready [...], "The Mover"?, "Tēvs Nakts"] presents next year, about Holocaust, but it's not only about Holocaust, it's about story of Žanis Lipke, who rescued more than 55 Jews. In the literature, it actually was present all through during the Soviet times, starting with the first post-war years, 48, 49, and up till now, but I think the first work of literature that would be dedicated to the topic of the Holocaust

appeared two years, three years ago, I think. The novel of Māris Bērziņš, “Svina garša”, the taste of lead, which is specifically dedicated to the Holocaust. Then, important thing was the memoir of Valentīna Freimane, who is very popular art historian and theatre historian, and most of Latvian theatre actors studied under her, and so she being a, one of the prominent figures in Latvian intellectual world, wrote a memoir about her childhood, well, she is Jewish, so she wrote a memoir about her growing up as a Jewish child and Jewish teenager in 20s and 30s in Latvia and then about her Holocaust experience, so she did, decided not to go to the ghetto when all Riga Jews were transferred, were ordered to resettle to the ghetto, so she went into hiding and she was hiding all through the occupation, so actually more than three years she spent in hidings in different places in Riga, and so she, she wrote a memoir about it. It was a bestseller and it, to me it seems that really for many people it was kind of mind-changing thing that wow, this prominent Latvian intellectual turns out, she is Jewish, and turns out you can be Latvian intellectual, you can be normal person and Jewish. Yeah, and not only Jewish, but Jewish with a kind of Holocaust experience. I think it for, for many weeks it was number one bestseller list of Latvian bookshops. Still, it's rather popular. So, by the way now it's being published in German as well or maybe already it is published, I don't know.

So, in, in theatre, there were several theatre performances touching the topic of the Holocaust in one way or another. The same novel of Māris Bērziņš that I mentioned, “The Taste of Lead”, was also presented as a, as a theatre play in Latvian National Theatre, I think. Then, in so-called Riga New Theatre, which is main [...] modernist theatre, several years ago there was a play called “The Grandfather” about a man who searches for his grandfather and he encounters three men with the same name, who possibly can be his grandfather, and each of them had different fate. One of them served during the war, immediately after the war in Soviet army, and he in a very detailed manner tell [...] about the Holocaust in his native town. Yeah, and National, when theatre worked on the play, they quite closely cooperated with us, so they came to us, they researched on the topic of Holocaust in Viļaka, north-eastern Latvia, small town, with significant Jewish population. And so, so this was a, the story about Holocaust was historically very correct in the play. Yeah so, so that's more or less of course, it's not as prominent topic as it was in Polish culture, but again, I mean in Poland not, not immediately it became prominent. And also all the discussions now happening in Poland concerning the movie “Ida” and so on. That's different story.

Peter Zinke: How is the Latvian state dealing with the Latvian SS forces?

Ilya Lensky: It's complicated story. No, as you understand, there were all kind of different groups in which Latvians fought in the Nazi-occupied territory and [...], I mean, one story is about Waffen-SS, to which people were conscripted in 1943, so basically, we [...] that these people, who were drafted against their will to German army, after the Holocaust, basically when most of the Jewish were already killed, obviously in this Waffen-SS also were people who were involved

in the Holocaust, but that's different story. Much more problematic of course is, are the police battalions, so-called, and of course the auxiliary police units like Arājs Kommando, which was the main collaborators' unit, which basically travelled from Riga to local small, small, small localities to murder the Jews there. On the official level, of course, they are not glorified in any way and, actually, when Latvia became independent, most of the legal cases of people who were accused during Soviet times and sentenced during the Soviet times on political basis, they were once again checked, reviewed and quite often people would be rehabilitated. Yeah, for example, many people who were drafted to these Waffen-SS, they would be during the Soviet times sentenced to five years, ten years, twenty years of imprisonment for betrayal, although of course, as Latvia today does not recognize Soviet Union and considers it as occupant force, obviously, you cannot betray the country of which you are not citizen and to which you do not serve, so obviously these accusations could be dropped. But if person was accused not only of these political, purely political, also for example, what we would call crimes against humanity, then they would not be rehabilitated, yeah, and as far as I understand, then he does not receive, for example, the status of "victim of political persecutions" and actually, what's interesting, in Latvia today, the status of "victim of political persecution" have not only people who were imprisoned by the Soviets, but also the Holocaust survivors, so they are also seen as victims of political persecution. So, in this sense I would say that Latvia deals quite, quite well, yeah, although we still have some problems with that, but at least on the official level, the government, every public figure speaking, at least at the commemorative events, considers it's important to mention and to, to mention the participation of Latvians in the Holocaust and to say something bad about it, yeah, so, so, it's, it's I think important thing because I mean, 25 years ago, it would be a bit different.

Peter Zinke: But for example, the National Historical Commission has no clear statement the 17th of, to the 16th of March.

Ilya Lensky: No, 16th of March is absolute, it's different story. So it was for two years, it was an official day, but in 2000 it was, it was dropped from the calendar, so today basically 16th of March is a, well, do you understand what happens on 16th of March? Today 16th of March is the private event, we can say, organized by the nationalist groups, usually with very limited participation of real World War II soldiers, well, because of different reasons, because of age: As you understand, these people are not 18 years anymore. But also I think, several years ago the main organization issued a statement that it advises its members to abstain from the participation in the event, yeah, so, so that was once to commemorate, it said, they should on 16th of March go to Lestene, where the big Brethren cemetery, and commemorate there, which is absolutely no problem, I think, in my opinion. So, Prime Ministers for several years now, they demand from the members of government not to attend the events, I think one of the ministers had to be dismissed because he wanted to come to the event several years ago. Some of the members of parliament you can still see, but it's

mostly a private event, and it's as, one of my colleagues wrote an article about it where he described it as a political circus. So it's, it's very much an event to advertise certain political forces, but of course also so-called anti-fascists come, which are basically Russian-affiliated organisations and so on and for them, it's also a possibility to advertise themselves. So, so the Jewish community [...], every year journalists want our comment about 16th of March, and every year we've said that we have no comments on that event because it has nothing to do with Jewish history, it has something to do with current political issues in Latvia and we're abstaining from comments on current political situation.

Johannes Probst: So, are there, are there any anti-Semitic statements on this, on this demonstration?

Ilya Lensky: Sometimes, but usually not on the official level, not, you know, carrying it on posters, but in the crowd, but we ignore that. It's, for us it's more or less on the same level as anti-Semitic talks someone, you know, starts cursing the Jews in the, in the tram, yeah.

Johannes Probst: And today we talked to a politician from the Harmony party, his name was Jānis Urbanovičs, and he said that some of the members of parliament participate in these events.

Ilya Lensky: Yeah, so, it was governmental event in 1998 and 1999, but not now anymore, yeah, so, so this is, the government tries to distance itself. Again, how sincere are people, that's a different story, but at least on the official level, which is important, they, they distance themselves from the event. In recent years also the level who participate in the demonstrations would be carrying posters denouncing both Nazi and Soviet occupation and so on and trying to present Legionnaires as freedom fighters or, again, that's, that's purely political showing off, but, but I mean it's not an official event anymore, yeah, and, and they, they try to find new modes of organising this event because obviously, it's not commemorative event anymore, as well, yeah, it's obviously glorifying event now and obviously, it's affiliated with certain political parties.

Peter Zinke: But of course the government could find clearer words.

Ilya Lensky: Then it would be different government. Different governments, but for example, I mean, Riga city council several times tried to ban this event, but then the court overruled this decision. And again, it makes sense because it's non-violent event. They, officially, they do not glorify Nazi or Soviet regimes, so basically, there is no basis to ban the event, yeah, as we understand in a democratic society, even very unpleasant people have the right to demonstrate, yeah, and so, so I think that's, that's obviously the right thing and I prefer it happening like that, so on one hand, the Riga city council shows their attitude, another hand, the court does what the court has to do. Yeah, so to me, I do not see this event as problematic, for me in person.

Rafael Schütz: We read that there is always some kind of religious service in the Lutheran church after that, and my question would be: How are the relations between the Lutheran church and the Jewish community, and also between the other religious communities and the Jewish community.

Ilya Lensky: As, as I understand, this service in the colorboxyellowSaint Peter Cathedral/Church is mostly organised by one of the priests who is affiliated with this event, who often comes to all kind of similar events and so on. The, the relation between the Jewish community and most of other religious denominations are quite good, yeah, so, well, the Jews of course are minor religious group, so we have like three, four let's say dominant religious groups that would be represented in all of the events, Lutherans, Catholics, Russian Orthodoxes and Baptists, so other smaller groups would usually not be represented officially, but of course their representatives would be, would be invited and so on. So we have quite, quite good relations. We don't have any sort of commissions on cooperation and so on. There is organisation called Jewish-Christian Council in Latvia [look up] that's not very active, I think, because of all kind of reasons, yeah, as [...] small country, you can't devote 100 percent of your time to NGOs, you have to, to do something in NGOs or your, your hobby, usually. But generally, I would say that relations are quite good, yeah.

Peter Zinke: There is no traditional Lutheran anti-Semitism? You know Luther was an anti-Semite?

Ilya Lensky: Yeah, yeah, I understand, we, we don't have that. So, there were attempts to make Lutheran church very strongly anti-Semitic during the 30s and then of course, during the Nazi occupation, it seems that the Lutheran church was quite, let's say quite conform, towards the, towards the regime, different from Catholics, for example, because we have a number of Catholics, Catholic priests who rescued the Jews, and actually there were even, at least one priest, I mean, who was imprisoned because of a sermon he gave on occasion of murder of Jews in his native town, Aglona, it was Agluona, (latv. Aglona, latg. Aglyuna) where the main Catholic basilica of Latvia is located, yeah, so Aloizis Broks (in Latgalian Alozis Broks), gave a sermon condemning murder of the Jews, so he was imprisoned and he perished, I think, in Neuengamme, if I'm correct. So, then, well of course, we have a lot, and I think Mr. Vestermanis will tell much more about it tomorrow when we meet him, Baptists and Seventh-Day Adventists and other religious minorities were quite actively involved in rescuing the Jews because of different reasons, yeah but so today, we don't have Lutheran anti-Semitism, yeah, I think last time Luther's book "The Jews and their lies" was published in 1943, I think, since, or 42, since then it was not reprinted, basically today, I think, Lutheran church in Latvia, although it's very conservative, it's one of the most conservative Lutheran churches in Europe, it has more serious issues than, than the Jews.

Peter Zinke: So they did not allow women to be priests?

Ilya Lensky: Yeah, well, not just they do not allow, they banned women, because women could be priests until very recently, but very recently, they changed it. So that's not just conservative, it becomes more conservative, but anti-Semitism is not part of their agenda. And generally, our relations are normal, and of course to all of our important events, we would invite the heads of all the religious denominations, not always the heads themselves can attend, but of course, for example the Catholic archbishop Stankevičs, he quite often comes to our events and so on.

Rafael Schütz: Another question about the, the general population, if they had to estimate how many Jews live in Latvia, what would they estimate and how wrong would it be?

Ilya Lensky: That's, well, that's an interesting question, actually we never, we never checked that, I know that in some other countries there were, not even polls but yeah, we can call them polls like that, not in Latvia, I don't know. I don't know what would, what would people think, well what we know of course, many people think that Jews have too much influence on Latvian life, on Latvian economy, on Latvian politics and so on, but I don't think that they have any estimate about the number of the Jews.

Peter Zinke: So, in the United States, people are estimating that 30 until 40 percent of the citizens are Jews, and in fact there is just, just two percent [...]

Ilya Lensky: Yeah, but it's, it's very much the same as what people estimate persons that are Muslims in Central European countries, so also they would estimate 25 percent, 30 percent, and it would turn out five, six, seven percent, yeah, but concerning, concerning Jews in Latvia, I just, I don't know. It can be anything.

Peter Zinke: In Germany, open anti-Semitism is of course taboo, officially at least, and so we don't have too many anti-Semitic acts, but especially when Palestine is fighting against the Israelis or the other way around, there is some extreme criticism against Israel and according to, to my thinking it's the expression of hidden or shame-faced anti-Semitism. Do you have it?

Ilya Lensky: It could be, it could be, so here we, let's say we're not so interested in, in Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I think when there was last war in Gaza, three years ago, four years ago probably, then the polls, people were asked during a poll, who do you support in this conflict, and about equal shares like seven and eight percent said that they support Palestine or Israel and 85 percent said that they don't care or don't support anybody. On another hand of course, so when during this war, there were two anti-Israeli demonstrations near Israeli embassy, which gathered combined only 16 people Yeah, and well, well, pro-Israeli demonstration which was organized by a group of, group of activists and also by some Israeli expats living in Latvia, they had about 150 people, yeah, but generally for example, as Latvia is very pro-American, it de facto is

also very pro-Israeli, yeah, we have very good relations with Israel. In recent years, we have very good and very active Israeli ambassadors here, who try to outreach and who try to explain their position and who do not run around, you know, advertising Israel, as sometimes it happens to Israeli diplomats, no, they, they try to explain, and also the complexity of the conflict, yeah, so although obviously they are Israeli diplomats, they are on the Israeli side of the conflict, but they do not avoid problematic questions and so on, so I think it's, it's very important, so we, we almost don't have this, this so-called new anti-Semitism masking as anti-Israeli sentiments. We hear if people are anti-Semitic, they can be openly anti-Semitic and for example, we also, what is important, yeah so as we understand quite often in this anti-Israeli demonstration, people from emigrant communities, yeah so the same Palestinians and so on. In Latvia, we don't have that problem with, for example, the Muslim communities being anti-Semitic or whatever, yeah so even people with emigrant background and Muslim communities, they, I don't know if they have or don't have this sentiment, but we don't have that issue, for example, and so basically, the only hardcore anti-Israeli and also strongly anti-Semitic group in the Muslim community, for example, are recent converts to Islam, Latvians, Russians, actually one of the most prominent Latvian anti-Semites converted to Islam, and to me it seems that for him the motivation to convert to Islam was his anti-Semitism because he thought that Islam is the main anti-Semitic force of today, but then Muslim community just tried to get rid of him, yeah because we, as a, as a normal community, they want to deal with religious, cultural issues and so on, they don't want to get involved in anti-Israeli demonstrations, anti-Semitic hate speech and so on, Holocaust denial and all those things, I mean, so, so, so for us it's, it's very good, and also of course speaking about immigrant issues, of course Jewish community is, well, I can't say scared, but we watch with certain suspicion the anti-immigrant activity because most of the people who organise anti-immigrant demonstrations and so on, of course these are people with strong record of anti-Semitism, yeah and, so of course we see it as a danger, yeah so this, this anti-immigrant activism can also switch to anti-Semitic and broadly xenophobic activism.

Rafael Schütz: This man you were talking about, what's his name?

Ilya Lensky: Roberts Klimovičs [Latvian name].³⁵ Ahmed Roberts Klimovičs. And so I mean he's, he's a prominent figure, he's rather active on, on the media, he is former journalist and so on.

Rafael Schütz: And today the, the man we were talking to, he mentioned a book that was, well, about Semion Shustin, the main communist organiser of the deportations of Latvians, who was also like half-Jewish or something like that. It was a book that like, was, was again to do with this anti-Semitic statement that it's like Jewish Bolshevism.

³⁵ possibly insert above

Ilya Lensky: Generally of course, we have this issue, this myth of Jewish Bolshevism, and the same like in Poland with the story of Żydokomuna is [...] in Latvia of course, we, we have that. It's, it's a strong belief of part of Latvian society. We published a book, so actually we sponsored publishing a book about Jews and Soviet authorities, how they communicated and what was the attitude and so on. This was book written by group of Latvian historians, university professors and so on, so we did not pay them to write the book, yeah so they, they were employed for the project by the Institute of Sociology and Philosophy at Latvian University. The Jewish community just provided funds for the book to be published when it was ready, yeah, and so there I think was counted each and every Jew who was somehow involved in the communist activities, well maybe if someone was, I don't know, a janitor in the Ministry of Interior, he was not mentioned in the book [laughter]. If, if he was at any position, then it would be mentioned. Needless to say that anti-Semites don't read books like that.

Yeah, so there we see that actually involvement of the Jews in 1940, 1941 in the oppressive institutions or any kind of institutions that would making decisions was actually even lower than would be estimated, so we see that in only one organisation, the Jews were really active, that's the communist youth organisation, where they was, yeah, quite high, but still not high percentage of the Jews, yeah, but we did not see Jews, for example, on leading position in party organisations and so on. And also one thing that we forget quite often when we speak about the role of the Jews in Latvian Communist Party, that, yeah, the Jews were significant part of Communist party of Latvia, but in 1940 when Soviets invaded, Communist Party of Latvia was about, I think, 400 people, of whom about 200 were in prisons. So this basically was not existent political force. That's one thing and second thing that most of the people were involved in communist activities during the independence years, they were not appointed to any position during this first year of Soviet occupation. It is also something, something very important and this is one of the reasons why, for example, we, in our museum, you see, we have the story about 1940, 1941, the first year of Soviet occupation, and we also mention the involvement of Jews in the communist organisations, but we do not mention Semion Shustin, yeah, who's the kind of main image in anti-Semitic, in Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda. The reason is very simple: He's not Latvian Jew, he was just Soviet official appointed to this position. Before that, he was on a similar position somewhere in northern Russia in the Ministry of Interiors, yeah so, the same, they could send anybody else, yeah for example Estonia had I think, Russian or Soviet Estonian in the same position, yeah so basically, it was just accidental thing that Latvia got the Jewish Minister State Security, I'm sorry about that, oh yeah so, what was the name of the book?

Rafael Schütz: Yeah so, I'm, I was wrong, it was not about him, but about Herberts Cukurs.

Ilya Lensky: Ah, that's a different story, that's a different story. Yeah, then

I know, the journalist is Baiba Šāberte, story of Herberts Cukurs is very, extremely complex, extremely complex, and [...] Herberts Cukurs, you know who Herberts Cukurs was? He was a famous Latvian pilot who in 1941 became the member of Arājs Kommando, and he was the head of transport section there and also the main arms officer, so he was responsible for distributing arms to the units going to the shootings and so on. Then in 1944, 45, he retreated with the German army to the west, and through France, I think, he emigrated to Brazil. He lived in Brazil under fake identity and so in, several times he was accused as a, as Nazi collaborator and war criminal. Brazilian governments, I think at least twice, refused to grant him Brazilian citizenship. There was big pressure and there were investigations of different international organisations, but never any formal trial against him. And so in 1965, he was murdered in Uruguay, allegedly by Mossad agents. So, basically, his story is not part of the story of the Holocaust. It's very much a story of how we perceive the Holocaust, and what was the driving force for people to involve in the Holocaust, and there, there are a lot, a lot of legends, not legends, myths about him, misconceptions about him. What we know, what we see from the documents, that he was a member of Arājs Kommando, he was in quite high position there, he personally was involved at least several times in shootings. What he did not do is what is stated in many books that he was not leader of Arājs Kommando, he did not murder 30000 people and so on, yeah. So we, we tried to, to show that he was kind of, I don't know how to, we, we, we formulated like a murderer or, on offer. So as it happened in many people who collaborated, yeah so they, basically, they did not have anti-Semitic background. They were offered by the Nazis to participate in killing of the Jews and they agreed, why not? If they would not be offered, they would not participate. Yeah so, Cukurs for example, one of the reasons, main reason he came to participate in Arājs Kommando was that during Soviet year, he was favored by new authorities as a pilot, as an aviation engineer. He went to Moscow to offer his help to construction companies there and so on and so forth. So when he returned, actually as, as far as I remember the story, someone even tried to arrest him for being a Soviet collaborator. So for him joining the Nazi collaborators unit was basically the way whitewash him, himself. And he knew Viktors Arājs from before, so he went to him for protection, basically. So, another important issue with Cukurs is that he, technically, he saved at least one Jewish girl, who was his lover, and he made her his lover already during the Holocaust. So, to me it's problematic to call it rescue, but still, technically she survived because she was affiliated with him, and he really took her when he escaped, and he took her with him to Brazil. And we have her witness account that she gave in Brazil, where she mentions him as rescuer and so on and so forth. So it's a very complicated story, and for, for many years now, the right tends to whitewash him and to make him kind of national hero, whom treacherous, murderous Jews have killed despite him being such semite. And there is not only book by [00007.MTS, 28:27, Latvian journalist's name]. I think there is another book by Armands Puče, which is published about year ago. Armands Puče is sports journalist, so his knowledge and understanding of Second World War issues is not very professional, let's say. Then there was a musical staged

about Herberts Cukurs. Let's say very bad musical [laughter], besides everything, it's just bad as a musical, and so I'm, I'm very happy that the company that staged it, the producer that staged, went bankrupt [laughter]. So, and but, but what was problematic with this musical, because of this musical I started researching a little bit on Cukurs, is that in musical, many stories were told in a very distorted way, yeah, I mean, one story, if he personally murdered someone or not, this can be questioned, yeah. We can say yes, the witness accounts who mentioned him with a gun, okay, these are witness accounts, they can be critical. But definitely he was member of Arājs Kommando, we know that, but about if he personally murdered somebody, okay, we can be extra sceptical, if you want. But what we know, for example, there is [...] that he rescues a seven year old Jewish boy, whose father asks Cukurs to protect this boy, and first this father, when the members of Arājs Kommando come to arrest him, the father tries to give them money for, for them to leave him alone and so on and when it turns out that anyhow they are arresting him, so then he asks Cukurs to protect this boy. First of all, we, we know the name of the boy, the boy died three years ago or five years ago and 12 I think. He was not a boy. Yeah, in musical, seven year old boy, but real it was 17 year or 18 year. Second thing, of course, his father did not offer money, but we know from [...] of the boy that the father showed his ID card of independence war veteran. He was independence war veteran, he presumed that as someone who has fought for Latvia's independence, he would not be arrested, yeah, so again you see there was this very strong anti-Semitic myth of the Jewish money and Jews being in a, trying to, to sneak out with financial means and so on. Then, of course, Cukurs did not rescue the 17 year old boy, actually what happened, he did not kill him. We, and, and, and, that's reflected actually both in the memoirs of this boy but also another witness accounts, so Cukurs killed some, according, if I remember correctly this memoir [...], he killed someone else, but he decided not to kill this boy, who worked in the, in Arājs Kommando headquarters. Hardly this can be called a rescue. So, so, so, the musical is also very problematic from this point of view, so this pressured us to write an article about it and so on. But let's say, I was quite surprised, there were about, I think, 300 comments on the internet, under this article. I would say that about quarter of them were positive, so yes, 75% were anti-Semitic and so on and so forth, but about one-quarter said, ok, I'm surprised, because I mean the, our, in our article, we gave a huge amount of witness accounts and we analysed them and we said that this account, which is quite often mentioned, cannot be trusted, and there, there, there is an important problem there. For example, Wiesenthal centre when discussing Cukurs uses a lot of witness accounts that they found in Yad Vashem, which are absolutely not believable, they're not usable as historic source, there just nonsense, yeah, but still Wiesenthal centre refers to them because they are very colourful, yeah, to us it seems that Holocaust is dreadful itself, yeah, we don't have to, to, to decorate it more than, so, so we mentioned a lot of accounts and we analysed what we can trust and actually people were surprised. The Jewish community tries to analyse it cold-mindedly, normally, and so on, yeah, because that we're not trying in all possible ways to say that all Jews are good and all Latvians are

bad and that's right that he was killed and so on, yeah, so, actually, currently the Commission of Historians did not give their statement on bad boy, but several members of Commission of Historians gave their opinions, so one of them being, so, so, parallel to that there was also discussion of possibility of reinter Cukurs from the cemetery in Brazil, where he is buried to Brethren cemetery in Riga, which is kind of pantheon, yeah, why he can't be buried there because he was an independence war veteran, well, he was conscripted and he fought in independence war and Brethren cemetery, independence war veterans can be buried, so they wanted to reinter him there. Commission of Historians strongly opposed that. They said that this would be politically very problematic issue and also historically, someone who was member of Arajs Kommando cannot be Latvia's hero. So this was stated explicitly in an article by Karlis Kangeris and basically that's it, yeah, so, so it's really very complicated story, yeah, and it, it shows that, I mean, you, you can not [...] history with just black and white [...], yeah, but, yeah, with, this was one of the most important of my encounters with Holocaust history in recent years and we really had to explain lots, to speak a lot of this issue, we're glad that I think in last, at least last year, there were no more discussions concerning him.

Johannes Probst: I, I have another question. You said that anti-Semitism in Latvia is not very strong, but it, but it exists. Could you give us some examples of anti-Semitic discrimination that has happened during the last twenty years.

Ilya Lensky: Well, as I, as I said, as I said, we don't have discrimination. What we have, we have cases of vandalism in Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust memorials. We have sporadic anti-Semitic statements by certain politicians. I think the last statement was about two years ago, probably, by member of parliament Kārlis Seržants. He apologized, he apologized. Then, of course, we think that main reason for Latvia not solving the restitution issue is anti-Semitism, yeah, so, what else? We don't have violent attacks, I think at least in last fifteen years, probably. We almost don't have Holocaust denial, although we, sometimes it appears mostly on the Internet, yeah, so not in the public sphere.

Johannes Probst: Does it happen that Jews get insulted in public?

Ilya Lensky: Sometimes happens, sometimes happens, but it's [...] compared to the, to the extent how it happens in Hungary, for example, yeah, so in, in Riga you can easily walk dressed as a traditional Jew and nobody cares about that, yeah, so I, I heard of maybe two, three cases in last years of someone being insulted in the street. So generally, anti-Semitism seems to become more and more a taboo, yeah, so, well, the day before yesterday, I was taking the taxi and the driver started talking, not knowing that I'm Jewish, that I come from the Jewish seminar, started talking that he likes Jewish, Jewish proverb, and so on. Well, of course, I've heard all the possible stereotypes about how Jews are good with money and so on and so forth, and that's why we should learn

from them. That's an important topic, but when, when speaking, he tried to use, well, in Latvian, there are two words for the Jews, current, currently is used the word *ebreji*, in 1920s, 1930s, there was more used the word *žīdi*, which today is derogatory, but occasionally still used in vernacular speech, but so this driver said, well, I know now politically correct you should say *ebreji*, so he continued using only this word, not knowing that I'm Jewish. Yeah, so, so for him, it was clear that with someone you don't know, you should use politically correct terms. It's a, I think it's a big step forward, already, yeah, and you have to understand that in Latvia, political correctness and tolerance, these are perceived as, as improper words, yeah, so Latvia generally is very intolerant country, yeah, where we take pride in our intolerance, yeah, so, so I think it's, it's an important change.

Johannes Probst: And do you have hope that anti-Semitism will completely stop somewhere in future? Is it possible?

Ilya Lensky: No, I don't think it's possible. I, I think as, as with most xenophobia, they never can disappear completely because they have not only, not only social roots, we, social roots we can work, but also sometimes individual roots, I don't know, psychiatric roots, they are very deeply connected with conspiracy theories and so on, yes, and and these are such individual things that you never can fully, fully destroy them, make them fully disappear, so no, definitely not disappear.

Peter Zinke: Even in Eastern Germany, we have many counties with a high percentage of anti-Semitism, but without any Jew, so you don't need to have a Jew or to have Jews for anti-Semites, okay.

Ilya Lensky: Yeah, also, of course. Yeah. So that's why I don't believe that anti-Semitism will disappear, but I think it will be at a certain point decreased to the level when it is just a, not an issue, so it will be the same as you know that there are people who believe the earth is flat.

Probably, we can't do anything with these people, but that's a small marginal group, so probably at a certain moment, anti-Semites, anti-Semites will be decreased to also such group of marginal freaks.

Rafael Schütz: You were mentioning this 25% of comments under your article that were not anti-Semitic, the rest was anti-Semitic? But you were surprised that?

Ilya Lensky: Yeah, that was a surprise that you had a, you know, a significant number of not anti-Semitic comments.

Rafael Schütz: So, is there a lot of hate speech directed against the Jewish community?

Ilya Lensky: On the internet, yeah, yeah. But again, [...] problem [...] on the

internet, is that you don't know either maybe that's one person writing under 25 nicknames, or whatever. And really, we don't have capacity to, to research it more, yeah, so there are certain organisations that do the monitoring of hate speech on the internet like Latvian Centre for Human Rights [look up] and so on. So for us, we, well, we can't do everything, yeah, so what we do when we get a certain [...] that there are comments, not just anti-Semitic comments, but incitement to violence, then we'd record and we have very good cooperation with security police, but, but it's only when there are incitement to violence, yeah, so if there is ranting against the Jews, you ignore it, I mean the moderators of all the web sites, they would do their job, and actually the most harsh comments will be deleted and some of the web sites, they basically [...], the articles related to the Jewish community, sometimes they would not allow comments there, switch off the comments, [...] and it usually happens under articles dedicated to the Holocaust somehow, yeah, because it's very troll-provocative topic [...], yeah, so, and, and we, we have quite good cooperation with the let's say authorities [...]

Rafael Schütz: Are there any anti-Semitic phone calls or letters?

Ilya Lensky: No. No, well, very rarely, definitely not, not phone calls, sometimes there are all kind of weird letters, but again we, we don't take them seriously, yeah, so generally I can say that Latvia is rather safe country for Jews, I mean I'm for probably an hour now telling you about anti-Semitism in Latvia, so you have to understand that Latvia still rather, rather safe country, and, well, as you've seen, we have no guards here in the building, we have, yeah, we have permanent police monitoring, presence in the synagogue, but they're not checking anybody, yeah so, so they are more to scare people away, bad people, away from the synagogue than really to check everybody who enters and so on, which is impossible in many other European countries as you know. The Jewish community institutions have really strong security presence and definitely with, with reasons because they're constantly under threat of attacks from different extreme groups, so here we, thanks G d, we not have this issue.

Johannes Probst: One last question. Now that you're here. when people come to this museum, does it happen that people maybe, for example, pupils together with their school class, that some people have anti-Semitic opinions and, and learn something in this museum that, sort of, well, mind-changing.

Ilya Lensky: Well, I think, I think we have maybe one or two cases like that, that schoolchildren already came with certain anti-Semitic mindset, but that's very rare. I don't think what they learn here would very much change their attitude, well, for, for grown-ups it sometimes changes, so, I think, but, you see, we're lucky that I guess, if a person is anti-Semitic, he does not come to this museum. So, we have certain distorted prism because we do not communicate with anti-Semites. But, but I don't think that, that you can change this mindset, because I mean if, if you're really a hard-core anti-Semite, it means that you've

invested certain time in, you know, educating yourself, in reading all kind of texts. And the texts you read led you to the strengthening of your anti-Semitic belief. Yeah, so hardly you can encounter it, change, change it by encounter with the Jewish museum or something. Yeah, so usually I think our museum contributes to the understanding of many people who are not anti-Semitic, yeah, who didn't know nothing about Jews and they turn out that the Jews were kind of a bit important part of Latvian landscape, not too important, but important one. And, also, also among politicians, for example, yeah, so many, many of them have no [...] of the museum [...] coming [...] they're surprised what they see here. Yeah, so, but, but not, definitely not hardcore anti-Semites.

Rafael Schütz: Are people in general interested in visiting the museum, visiting the synagogue?

Ilya Lensky: Well, we see quite big interest during the night of the museums, you know the event? Yeah, so we usually have several hundred visitors, the biggest we had 1200, more even, visitors, but you seen how limited is our space, so we're not very fit for such huge number of people. Most of the people who come, these are locals, these are not tourists, who come during the night of the museums. On regular days, of course, the majority of our visitors are tourists. So to me it seems that many people are afraid to come to our museum because of different reasons. I know personally, some of my friends didn't want to come to our museum because they thought that it's mostly concentrated on Holocaust and it will be too dark, too grim and so on. This can be one of the reasons. Another reason probably can be that people think that, same as being interested in Jewish culture, something kind of guilty pleasure, that you should be ashamed of it. The same going for the Jewish museum is something that you should be ashamed of, yeah so, that's something like not normal.

Rafael Schütz: Okay, I don't get it. Why, where does it come from?

Ilya Lensky: I have feeling like that. That people still are afraid to go to the Jewish museum because they think that then, I don't know, neighbours or classmates will [...]: Are you Jewish? Why do you go to the Jewish museum? Why are you interested in Jewish culture? Why do you read books about Jews? And so on and so forth. Yeah, yeah, to me it seems like that, obviously, I can be wrong.

One question, I think you mentioned before the universities that discriminated against Jews during Soviet times, was it something that universities did on their own or was it from [...]

Ilya Lensky: No, no, no, it was state policy. State policy, yeah, so, you have to understand, it was not formulated, yeah, so there was no law on discriminating against the Jews, well, different from other European countries in the 20s and 30s, for example, yeah, where, basically, there were official anti-Semitic laws and so on and so forth, including Poland where and all kinds of things like that,

yeah, so special seats for the Jewish students in the universities, but by the way, in Latvia in 20s and 30s, there were also officially no anti-Jewish legislation. Inofficially, there was a lot of legislation, but inofficially, a lot of regulations. And the same happened during the Soviet times. Yeah, so, but it was not, as it was not officially regulated, there always was kind of space for manoeuvre for the, for the administration of the university. Yeah, and we know that, for example, in some universities many professors also on their own would impose restrictions for the Jews. Yeah, another hand, I mean in, in Latvia, they did not have that much discrimination and it was okay. Yeah, so, again we don't have to think that the Soviet system, the same as Nazi system, was kind of monolith, there was a lot of space for all kind of things.

Rafael Schütz: And then, we read an interview with the leader of the Jewish community in Latvia saying that there is no anti-Semitism in Latvia. I mean, as I gathered from what you were saying, that's not entirely correct, but

Ilya Lensky: No, I mean, you see, for, for the interview, I would say more or less the same thing. Because, because the interview is something where from two hours of talk, you get ten minutes of interview, and so on. So if I would be asked, open, answer me correct, short and concise, I would also say, there is no anti-Semitism. Yeah, where, as a formula for we don't anti-Semitism as important challenge for the Jewish community, yeah, I mean as, as your project is dedicated to researching anti-Semitism, that's why we're talking deeply and nuancedly about it in details, and so on. But in general, as I said, we, at least compared to many other European countries, I would say that we don't have anti-Semitism, we don't have it as, as a problem, for example.

Kalevs Krelins

Kalevs Krelins is a rabbi in the Peitva Shul Synagogue in Riga and at the same time chief rabbi in Lithuania and Vilna.

He was born in Moscow and studied in Jerusalem. He served as a Rabbi in a school in Copenhagen, Denmark, in Heidelberg, Germany, and for a Young Israel community in the United States. In 2012, he was asked to serve as the Rabbi of the community in Riga. Together with Shimshon Daniel Isaacson, he has been appointed as the chief rabbi of Lithuania in 2016. Besides, he also works as the Mashgiach (Hebrew word for supervisor) of the European Council of Kashrut (EEK) in the Baltic states.

The interview took place in the Peitva Shul Synagogue on September 28th, 2017. Throughout the conversation, Mr Krelins exclusively expressed his own views, not those of the Jewish community in Riga.

How did anti-Semitism develop in Latvia after World War II?

Kalevs Krelins: It's hard for me to describe, because I didn't spend the years after the war here. As far as I know, the Soviet Union had a pretty powerful control over anti-Semitism. They were able to bring it higher or lower according to the international situation. As a child, I was raised in Moscow. For us, Riga was always the top of Jewish development compared to Moscow in terms of civility, and also in terms of religious freedom. There was no religious freedom in the Soviet Union, but in terms of what they could do here compared to what they could do in Moscow and other cities, it was an example of a very well functioning community. They had kosher meals, they baked matzah and sent it to the whole Soviet Union. They always performed circumcisions. I do circumcisions myself. I travel to other countries and people say: "We had a circumcision thirty or forty years ago, and the guy came from Riga". Riga was always the place. For sure, there was the KGB, people were tortured. But if we compare it with Moscow, it was not so bad, and many very knowledgeable people were raised here after the war in Soviet times. That's what I know from stories. My own experience here is limited to the last five years. I don't see major issues with anti-Semitism here. We all know that we cannot judge any place according to strange local people. I believe that the government here is very nationalistic, but in my opinion, their nationalism is related to the conflict between Russians and Latvians, so the Jews are not in the picture. We used to say that we can't relax, because they'll finish the conflict with the Russians and then they come after us, but we thank G-d that we don't have any problem. There is a joke: they finish with them, they'll start with us.

Do you think there is some reality behind this joke?

Kalevs Krelins: Historically, yes. History shows that Jews were always seen

as an enemy. When a new enemy came, the Jews went to the second line. As soon as there is peace with that enemy, they go back to see the Jews as their enemies. I hope I exaggerate. But we have to be aware.

In Germany, synagogues are protected by the police. Is it the same in Riga?

Kalevs Krelins: Here we don't talk about protection. I know how the synagogues in Germany are protected. When I was the rabbi in Heidelberg, I once parked at my parking place next to the synagogue. It was September 11th, the year after the attack. The police didn't recognize me, so they jumped on me and checked me. They take it very seriously. Here people go around the whole country, they feel that nothing happens. It's not only about synagogues, in the whole country, they're relaxed. They're only afraid that Russia will invade. In Germany and France, synagogues are much more protected. I personally never had any bad feeling in Germany, but I was in the most intelligent place, Heidelberg, which is a university city. Here in Riga, I don't feel anti-Semitism.

So you don't have any problems walking around with a kippah?

Kalevs Krelins: First of all, I don't walk around with my kippah. I wear a casquette, for a simple reason. I came here from New York, where it's easy to walk around with my kippah. I know that there are many people who hate Jews, but if someone who hates Jews and wants to express himself to a Jew meets me with my kippah in New York, he can go further down the street and meet someone else with a kippah. Here in Riga, the guy who wants to say or do something has to wait a couple of years to meet the next Jew. That's why they hurry up to express themselves. Sometimes on Saturday, I go with a hat, sometimes I go with my kippa, my kids too, but we've never had any issues. Maybe once or twice somebody said something.

How was the situation while you were growing up in Moscow?

Kalevs Krelins: I grew up in Moscow till the age of 19. The Moscow of today and the Moscow of those days, it's a different world. There was a lot of official anti-Semitism. I went to a school for mathematically gifted kids. We were 38 kids in my class, 30 were Jews. And almost no one went to the university entrance exams, we went to lower-level colleges. Some Jews tried and they were gifted in math, but the chances of getting accepted were very low. The government controlled everything, and they maintained the level of anti-Semitism that they needed. When they had negotiations with the West, with Reagan, they lowered the level, when they wanted to push the Jews, they raised it. In the nineties, they lost control and all the things went crazy. Now the control is back in Russia more or less. We may blame them for whatever we want, but Anti-Semitism is not in the picture today.

The Russian government nowadays is not anti-Semitic at all?

Kalevs Krelins: Very extremely not anti-Semitic. I don't think that there was ever in the Russian history a more philo-Semitic leader than the one who is ruling now.

Why is that?

Kalevs Krelins: I heard from many people that it is very personal. I can bring an example: Vladimir Putin is coming to some city somewhere in Russia. They show him the town, the buildings, the church, the mosque. He says: show me the synagogue. They show a small synagogue. He says: I don't like it, rebuild it. In half a year, they build a high-scale synagogue. I mean, it's something personal. I heard he had good experiences with Jewish teachers and Jewish neighbours. Thank G-d. I'm not talking about his politics, and not even the politics with Israel, Hamas or Iran. I'm talking about Jews as a nation, there are very positive relationships. I don't want to be blamed for praising him, I'm talking about this specific issue. And we always used to appreciate what we get. There might be some negative things, but we have appreciation. From the experience of Russian history there has never been such a positive leader for Jews.

And the general population?

Kalevs Krelins: Different. They also have an issue with the Muslim population of Russia. They have to prioritize.

Did you experience anti-Semitism personally on the streets, not from the state?

Kalevs Krelins: Very little. At school, maybe.

What happened?

Kalevs Krelins: Some were making fun of the Jewish last names. It was at elementary school. When I moved to the math-gifted school, there were mostly Jewish people. No one would take a risk, not even teachers.

What are the differences regarding anti-Semitism between Germany and Latvia?

Kalevs Krelins: My personal experience is that Germany recognized and experienced the pain of what it has done, but Latvia never did. Latvia and the Latvian people were extremely cruel with the Jews. They say that the German government gave them free rein and the Latvians did the whole job. The Latvians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians were the most cruel, more cruel than the SS themselves. The people who remember say that the German government was certainly terrible, but as people, Latvians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians were much worse than the Germans.

Is the Holocaust remembered and spoken about in Latvia?

Kalevs Krelins: No, they say that there was the occupation. They always say that they were under occupation, we're under German occupation, we're under Russian occupation, we're under Swedish occupation 400 years ago, they are always under occupation, it's not their fault. But they did their best to destroy all the Jews. The terrible thing is that the number one or number two in the destructions was Herberts Cukurs, who is a national hero. He's not officially recognized, but officially praised for his achievements: He built planes, he flew to Arctica. There was a musical about his greatness here. We see that he has achievements, but these achievements can't cover up what he did. He was killed by the Mossad during the sixties in Uruguay. He fled from America, from Russia, he fled from everyone. Many war criminals fled to Argentina. The Mossad killed them. They now say that it was a mistake that they didn't bring him to court.

Do you mean that Latvians are not remembering and recognizing their own guilt?

Kalevs Krelins: No, they are not recognizing their own guilt. They do say that unfortunately there were some Latvian people who collaborated. They have Waffen-SS marching here, you know, every 16th of March. They say it's not exactly against Jews, but against Russians. When they say it's against Russians, everyone is forgiven.

Is the Jewish community offended by these marches?

Kalevs Krelins: Definitely. The Jewish community is very offended by these celebrations. We know that some of these people from the Waffen-SS participated in mass murder.

Do you think that the government is distancing itself enough from this march?

Kalevs Krelins: It's very hard to follow what the government is doing here. I don't want to speculate, but certain members of the parliament and of the government are participating in or praising the celebrations. And there are very few demonstrations against it, just expressions. Usually when they catch somebody who expresses himself against it, they say it is an agent of the Kremlin. For example, when somebody screams "You are nazis", "You are killers", they take him aside for disturbing the public order and say it's inspired by Putin.

Does the Jewish community organize any demonstrations against the celebrations?

Kalevs Krelins: No, I don't think so.

Would they be seen as agents of the Kremlin if they organized demonstrations?

Kalevs Krelins: Yes. Latvian Jews were almost all killed during the war, ninety percent. After the war, Latvia became a very developed part of the Soviet Union. It was the Silicon Valley of the Soviet Union. I remember that all sorts of computer parts and cars were made here. Latvia was top technologically. So they sent many professionals from Russia here, among them many Jews. A big part of the Jewish population of Latvia today are descendants of Russian Jews that came as professionals to develop the economy of Latvia. So, most Latvian Jews are actually not Latvian. For us, if a person is a Jew, it doesn't matter where he comes from. But for them, Latvian Jews and Russian Jews are different. Latvian Jews were exterminated and now these Russian Jews are associated with Russia.

Do you think that those who are anti-Russian are also anti-Semites and vice versa?

Kalevs Krelins: A bit. I have to admit that many Jews who were oppressed in Russia went to the communist movement after the Revolution. Jews were one of the most oppressed nations, so they went against the system and joined the reds, the communist party.

Did they consider themselves as Jews?

Kalevs Krelins: They considered themselves as Jews. They were secular, they considered themselves as people who stand against different types of oppression. And oppression of the Jews was one of the oppressions in Russia before the Revolution.

How big is the Jewish community here?

Kalevs Krelins: We don't have official memberships like in Germany, for example. In Germany it works with Kirchensteuer, the register. Here we don't have such numbers. Very approximately, we talk about 8000 Jews in Latvia. I know that the Jewish community in Riga has 100 members, but that doesn't mean that 100 people are coming to the services. On a daily basis, about 15 people come. On Saturday, we talk about 40 people more or less, and on high events it's packed. It depends on the weather, the time of the year, but it's a lot, 150-200, sometimes more.

How have the numbers developed since the independence of Latvia?

Kalevs Krelins: Many people moved to Israel after the Soviet Union broke apart. The numbers have certainly gone down. But the whole population of Latvia is going down.

Was it illegal to emigrate before independence?

Kalevs Krelins: No, it was legal, but the government did not appreciate it. People applied and they got a permission, but only a few. In the beginning of the seventies, many people got the permission. After the war in Afghanistan in the early eighties until 1987, it was very hard to get a permission. After 1987, it got easier again.

Is there a discussion in the Jewish community about moving to Israel?

Kalevs Krelins: I think it's already settled. Some people come to me and ask why I don't move to Israel. I think if people are here, they have a reason to be here. Young people go to Israel to learn, to go to school or college. There are many people who lived in Israel, experienced Israel, and then came back. They decide to settle here. So more or less everyone came to his or her own conclusion to this question until now. The same is happening in Germany.

Do you see any future for the Jewish community here in Riga?

Kalevs Krelins: When someone from the Jewish community asks such a question, I have to say it's up to you. It's like a free market. If there is a demand, we will supply the demand. Sometimes there is a rabbi who wants to have a synagogue, so he creates himself the crowd. I think this concept is wrong. If the people need it, if they show that they want to know, they want to learn, I want to teach, but the first step has to be done by the people. Otherwise it's counterproductive.

How are the relations between the Jewish community and the other religions?

Kalevs Krelins: There are official meetings, sometimes I have to go and say hello, or they come to us and say hallo. On the personal level, some people are good friends, regardless of their religion or the nation.

Are there many family or friendly relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish Latvians, intermarriages for example?

Kalevs Krelins: More Russian and Jewish, not Latvian and Jewish. This country is also divided into nations. There are Russians and Latvians. Russian-Jewish intercultural relationships are more common than Latvian-Jewish relationships.

Are the stereotypes about Jews still alive?

Kalevs Kralins: That they crucified Jesus?

For example.

Kalevs Krelins: I don't know, it's hard to say.

What about the stereotype that Jews were collaborators during Soviet times, that they were sending Latvians to Siberia? It is the most common stereotype about the Jews in Latvia. When you try to explain that it is not like this, they say that you are a victim of Russian propaganda.

Kalevs Krelins: Yes, but listen, we have to admit that many Jews were in high communist offices. Not actively Jewish, I mean, praying, going to Synagogue, no. They were of Jewish origin. So the stereotypes still exist, because maybe the name of the officer who was in charge of the deportations was Jewish. But it was not a national issue at all. People were not acting as Latvians, people were not acting as Jews, people were acting like bandits. Stalin killed everyone. He destroyed all the nations in the Soviet Union. The most terrible thing he did was directed against his own nation, the Georgians. There certainly were measures directed against Latvians as a nation, but also against everyone else. The aim of what happened in Germany was the final solution for the Jewish nation. In the Soviet Union, there was no final solution for any nation. They just destroyed people to impose a rule of terror in the country, to keep people under pressure regardless of their nationality.³⁶

³⁶We substantially modified and shortened this passage in order to make it more easily understandable. Throughout the interview, there were some difficulties with the language since English is not the mother tongue of Kalevs Krelins. We had the feeling that this passage, in its original wording, did not quite convey the argument that Mr. Krelins actually wanted to make. The full original transcript of the interview is available on demand.

Małgorzata Zajda

*Małgorzata Zajda (*1948) was born in Kraków, as her parents and grandparents. She is of Polish-Jewish descent. She studied Russian.*

From the beginning of Jewish Community Centre in Kraków (2008), she co-operates with it as a coordinator of the Senior Club. She organises plenty of activities and events for seniors such as Shabbat dinners, choir meetings, yoga, mind training sessions and many other Jewish celebrations and everyday activities for the elderly.

The interview took place in the Jewish Community Centre in Kraków on January 26th, 2018. We talked about a variety of subjects with Mrs. Zajda; for this publication, the transcript of the interview was shortened to the sections directly related to anti-Semitism and Jewish life.

Małgorzata Zajda: My parents were Jewish descent. They introduced me into Jewish life as in the 50s, it was almost impossible to talk about Jewish culture. But since I was a child, I was aware that I am Jewish and I was really proud of it, because being a Jew after all those incidents during the War was something amazing. I felt like being better than other people.

Have you ever been confronted with anti-Semitism?

Małgorzata Zajda: I came from a really rich family; my father was a lawyer. All people think that Jewish people in Poland after the War were poor- but it is not true when it comes to me. My father told me a lot about Jews, he taught me a lot. He told me about my grandparents, about life before the War, but he never was willing to talk about it. My mother was trying to raise me in catholic life, she didn't know about her origin - probably her mum hid it from her. My father was organising meetings with influential people, every week they were meeting at our house and were resting, talking about art etc. - all of them were Jews. When I looked at them, I thought that every Jew is elegant and clean. When my father died, I got to know that Jews can be all kinds of people, not only intelligent ones, I saw that Jews are normal people and that they take up various jobs.

Can you tell us about the experiences of your father during the War?

Małgorzata Zajda: My father was in a camp in Janów. They were working by the train tracks. My father was athletic, he never had problems with sport and really liked it, so he could cope with this hard work. Somehow, he managed to escape from the camp and was wandering. He was in Czech Republic; he was a witness of Lidice's pacification in Czech. He was working in a bakery, selling bread. Later, he came to Kraków and hid. Unfortunately, he was caught, and was kept in Montelupich, and there he met a man who helped him to fake

documents to prove he was of Aryan origin- that man was one of the Righteous Among the Nations of the World. With those Aryan documents he could lead a normal life in Poland.

My father told me a story when he was coming back from the prison about how Jews were treated by other people, it was about 45'/46'. When the Jews were coming back home, people were throwing rotten tomatoes at them, they were very disrespectful to them, and it stayed in his psyche. He was scared to be among the people, he was scared to leave his home, he was happy that he changed his surname and could lead a normal life thanks to it. He said that being a Jew isn't as good as some people think. In my childhood, I never encountered any anti-Semitic acts, but I remember when we had a polish housekeeper - her name was Marysia -, once I came back from holidays and Marysia came to me and told me that people don't accept the fact that she is working for Jews. This was my first encounter with an anti-Semitic act- it hurt me so much, because our housekeeper was leading a really good life with our family. The second encounter was when a friend of mine moved to the US and worked as a nanny, she told me that everything would be okay for her if those people who she was working for weren't a Jews. They told her to eat kosher, and she didn't like that. During my young life, I experienced it many times that people painted a Star of David at our house door- but I never took it seriously. They were also painting it on my car, I always treated it as a stupidity of people. Nowadays we encounter less anti-Semitic acts, in Kraków, for example, anti-Semitism almost doesn't exist. In my opinion, nobody has got to love Jews, and everybody has the right to hate Jews and I'm not going to change it, it is their choice. I think we should respect each other even if we don't like somebody. I am not a person who has bad memories of Catholic people if it comes to anti-Semitism. Some of my friends, when they learned that I am Jewish, broke off contact with me. I think we should respect each other even if we don't like it, and I always repeat if when I talk about anti-Semitism. Nowadays, we experience situations in which Jews who were faced with anti-Semitism during the War think that people are acting anti-Semitic to them because they know that they are Jews, for example they say, "when somebody does not hold the doors for me, they don't want to because I am a Jew". My job is to work it through, to tell that it is just a random. They think like that because it stayed in their psyche after the war.

Are you able to say how many Jewish people live here in Kraków?

Małgorzata Zajda: There are about 100 people. There are much more, but they don't admit to be Jewish.

Before, people were more against Jews, now they respect us and don't show it, even if they don't like us. If somebody will try to find anti-Semitism, they will find it everywhere, in every single situation.

Do you think that there is a way to stop anti-Semitism in the future?

Małgorzata Zajda: I think that we will never stop it; in my opinion, it

will always be there. I am happy that I am from the generation of people who weren't faced with War so far. There might always be something that can change everything. Before, we never had security guards in the Jewish Community Centre, but now we have some special safety stuff. I can't say that anti-Semitism will not exist in the future; I think "anti-Semitism" is a wide word. If somebody wants to have anti-Semitism, they will get it.

A few years ago, I had a situation where a Polish priest came to my house and showed me Jewish images and asked me if I am a Jew and left my house, he didn't respect my religion.

Do you think there is a real danger for Jewish people in Poland?

Malgorzata Zajda: Before, I would say, not, but now I think that there is a little danger. There is no day without talking about Jewish issues.

People only see how bad are you and don't see how much good you do for people. Maybe instead of talking about anti-Semitism, we should talk about Jewish culture and learn people about it, so that it might change?

Malgorzata Zajda: Yes, exactly, it would help. We only talk about anti-Semitism and it might be a reason of this issue. There are lots of stereotypes, not only about Jews - "you are mean like a Jew", "you drink as much alcohol as Russian" etc.

People say that Poland is a country full of anti-Semitism, what is in your opinion?

Malgorzata Zajda: It was an anti-Semitic country, but after the War, it was caused by the fact that Poles thought Jews will never come back and took their houses, their shops and their jobs after them. But when the War was over, they came back and wanted their properties back, and in my opinion, it is mainly caused by that. Anti-Semitism always was and always will be, now it does exist, but it is hidden, and we can see it just like that. I think that the Jewish Community Centres is a place which shows the Jewish culture and tradition and thanks to that, we reduce anti-Semitism a little.

Do you think that the problem of the Jews as an affected group is exaggerated?

Malgorzata Zajda: No, I think it is not. Jews always were not respected, mainly because of money and success. Jewish people are scared of anti-Semitic acts. An example of it is when a Jewish group comes to Poland to visit the camps, they have special securities, and in my opinion, it's because of that they are more scared by seeing it. It makes them think that they are in danger and it might make them feel scared. People in Israel think that Poland is an anti-Semitic country, and they are scared of it because of history.

Dr Steffen Huber

Dr Steffen Huber is a research assistant at the Department of Polish Philosophy at the Institute for Philosophy of Jagiellonian University in Krakow since 2005. He is also a member of the Policy Council of the Józef Tischner Institute, an institute that, according to its website, was founded by pupils and friends of the philosopher and priest Józef Tischner (1931-2000) for the purpose of preserving and spreading knowledge about his works and of continuing research and development about the most important aspects of his philosophy.

Dr Huber's research interests are Polish philosophy of the Renaissance, social philosophy and translations of philosophical texts. We talked to Dr Huber and two of his students, Pawel Karpinski and Krzysztof Turek, on the 26th of January in the Institute of Philosophy. Before Mr Karpinski entered, the interview was conducted in German; the respective part of the transcript has been translated into English for this publication.

In our project we examine the continuities and fractures of anti-Semitism since 1945. From the interviews we lead with scientists, we hope to get an overview over the country's history in its connection with the anti-Semitism found in this country. In your case, we would be particularly interested in a comparison of Germany and Poland, as you have lived in both countries. So, on the one hand, what you personally have experienced or heard second-hand of anti-Semitic incidents. And then, how anti-Semitism is rooted in the history of ideas in the two countries.

Dr Steffen Huber: That's a big task. I have not dealt scientifically with the subject of anti-Semitism, for me it is a marginal phenomenon which one has to deal with every once in a while. It is also a very contested area, especially the question of what anti-Semitism is, we've also had this here at the university. Even today, it is often the case that one encounters anti-Semitism and then has to hear people say that it would be none. Even if the classical motives occur, of conspiracy and 'cultural destruction' and a low level of development of the Jews.

If I compare Germany and Poland, I would say the major difference is that anti-Semitism in Germany basically has no basis of experience for most people in the twentieth century. People had virtually no experience with Jews who were culturally recognizable as such, and certainly not as groups. There was practically no Jewish cultural group in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. These were basically phantasies of the extreme right.

These parameters are different in Poland at the moment. In other words, Jews in Poland have a much stronger recognizable Jewish identity, even as a group identity, which goes well beyond the religious and becomes tangible as a cultural linguistic, ethnic and economic identity. At first, there were consider-

ably more areas of conflict. One should not only rate conflicts negatively, there are also productive differences in a society that stimulate development. There is a much larger base for this kind of conflict in Poland, also because Jews were not assimilated over the centuries for a much longer period than in Germany. Until the Holocaust, the Jews were clearly defined culturally, linguistically, ethnically and economically. This, in turn, is related to the fact that over the centuries the Jews have been very intensively involved in the political and social history of the country. A very important area that does not exist in Germany, is the history of self-government in Poland, this term still plays a major role in the state or in the universities today. What universities call university autonomy in Germany is called self-administration by universities here; according to this model, local social fragments that have formed, for example, out of religious or ethnic reasons, organise themselves from within. This is also the basis for this Polish history of republicanism. Poland is arguably the only country in Eastern Europe where there have been a large number of edicts comparable to the *de non tolerandis judaeis* written in Western Europe. It was a privilege for cities not to have to tolerate Jews within their walls if they did not want to. In Poland, in turn, there was the *de non tolerandis christianis* for Jewish-managed municipal units. That is, Jewish communities in Poland have a much longer history than parts of society that have developed in parallel, a phenomenon which is also often described in the philosophical and political literature. Western European observers in particular have been interested in how this works. In the course of this observation, critical voices multiply, which then say that they are parallel societies and that it also has dangerous proportions if the social groups develop so differently. For example, this development of Polish society had a major impact on Polish romanticism, which was related to national rebirth in the 19th century and had a great deal of Jewish input. With Adam Bernard Mickiewicz one hears for example a very positive relationship with Judaism when it comes to seeking metaphysical inspiration for how to maintain a Polish identity in this difficult situation without a state of its own. There was a very fruitful and friendly dialogue between, let's call it Christian Romanticism and Jewish traditions in Poland. The second point is that, of course, where there are Jews, there is also anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism has always existed in Poland, but I would not say that Poland is particularly marked by anti-Semitism. Of course, there have always been tensions. There were pogroms, but these took place more in the east, especially in the Russian area of Poland. But to think of something similar to the Holocaust was something that never happened in Poland. Those who defined themselves as anti-Semites in the first half of the twentieth century have, for the most part, never gone as far as they did in Germany. On the contrary, there were very important people, including in this area, who started from racial nationalism and thought the Jews were a threat to Poland. These people then started to save Jews under the impression of the Holocaust. In that sense, I believe that the two countries cannot be compared directly at all. There is a sore spot in Poland: one has the feeling that the Germans have made the Holocaust and now they are moving around, accusing people of anti-Semitism. This is a situation many people do not know how to handle.

Are there regions of which one could say that they were particularly anti-Semitic? Was there a difference between urban and rural areas?

Dr Steffen Huber: There are certain regional hotspots, we can see this even today in the election results. In Łomża there were nationalist groups in the 30s that very much defined themselves through anti-Semitism, they were very active. [*Paweł Karpiński enters*³⁷]

In this region was more activity by right-wing parties in the 1920s and 30s than in other regions. In this region the Jedwabne murder took place. But I would not say that this is only a problem of this specific region.

What I suppose is that in those regions where you find more anti-Semitism, you will also find more cultural contacts between the Christian majority and the Jewish minority.

You were talking about examples of anti-Semitism that you experience here. What would that be? Can you tell us about some of these experiences?

Dr Steffen Huber: First I have to clarify how I understand anti-Semitism. I think that there is a quite useful definition by Hannah Arendt, according to which anti-Semitism is based on images of the dangerous Jew, of the Jew who rules, of the Jew who is not rooted in the society and the culture or even in the ethical history of a nation, and of course, you can find this in Poland as you can find this in any other country. I am travelling around in Eastern Europe and I would not say that Poland is a hotspot of anti-Semitism. We have to remember that there was a very intense development of Jewish culture in Poland which later on moved to Israel. As we know that in the first year of the Knesset, the informal second language of the parliament was Polish because everyone from this part of Europe more or less used the “Lingua franca” of Polish, for example also those from the Ukrainian and Belarusian parts. I encountered anti-Semitism in Poland in two ways: First, there is a classical form of anti-Semitism that we find in the writings for example of Feliks Koneczny. He was a historian working here in the University of Krakow and he wrote some books on history from a very specific perspective. He presented a theory of civilizations saying that the highest form of civilization is the Latin, then we have the eastern one, which means Russia, and then we have the Jewish civilization. Of course, the Jewish civilization is the worst and the least and the most dangerous. He argues that Jews who are present in any way in a culture, in the economy or in the society, more or less destroy this higher civilization of the Latin type. He even came to the conclusion that the Holocaust, which he called a crime that was not acceptable in any civilization, even when directed against the ‘Jewish civilization’, is the outcome of the, he uses Nazi terminology here, ‘*Verjudung*’ of the German civilization. In his opinion, what happened in the Holocaust was that the Jews made the Germans organize the Holocaust. This is an extreme example of the intrinsic stupidity of anti-Semitism. These texts are used by the

³⁷Can we tell at what point Krzysztof Turek enters? Listen to the audio recording once again

right-wing political movement in Poland, they're quite popular. They are even used in some part of the academic discourse and of course, we have very hard conflict over that. Another example of anti-Semitism from Krakow: I talked to a man whose family owns some flats in the former Jewish part of Krakow, Kazimierz, and when I asked him about the Jews who lived in that house, he stopped talking to me. This does not mean that this man is an anti-Semite. Perhaps this means that his family had some bad experiences with the Germans or with anyone else in this context. This also means that what seems to be anti-Semitism sometimes is just the inability to speak about something what has happened to your own family. Even if this was 70 years ago. And I think that we should also learn to understand what real anti-Semitism is and what a situation is that does not allow you to speak about some experiences that you've made.

So, the idea would be that you cannot talk about this experience and then, you switch back to some usual stereotypes that you can easily state and then use it?

Dr Steffen Huber: Yes, we should learn to differ between this and the classical anti-Semitism I saw in Poland. This intrinsic stupidity of anti-Semitism can be exported to other topics and to other ethnic or religious communities. This is what happens in Hungary now. We observed this in Poland as well. I think the technology of exporting the logic of anti-Semitism to other topics, such as refugees from Syria, was invented by the Hungarian government, and now it's being used by the Polish government. It's a way of copying anti-Semitic patterns and using them in a new political discourse.

But these new discourses, they are directed against different groups, like refugees, for example, but not against Jews, are they?

Dr Steffen Huber: Just observe what the French right-wing Front National is doing. In a way, they argue that they want to protect Jews from being attacked by Muslims, but there is also the argument that the Jews are organizing Muslim immigration to destroy our culture, which is structurally quite close to the argument of Feliks Koneczny. I think we can clearly identify anti-Semitic patterns in the public discourse and they appeared to be directed against Jews sometimes, sometimes they are used to protect you from Muslims and sometimes they put together Jews and Muslims as this dangerous type of civilization, too strange and unacceptable for us. This is what happens in the official political discourse in Poland as well.

Is this limited to the present government? Do politicians from other parties also speak in this manner?

Dr Steffen Huber: I know some people who are really attached to the government of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, de facto of Kaczyński. And I'm absolutely convinced they are no anti-Semites. They are deeply rooted in that kind of even

pro Jewish romantic tradition in Poland and they would never accept any kind of anti-Semitism. And in the last weeks we also observed a process which I personally welcome, that government and the official Media tried to fight anti-Semitism and fight right-wing ideology - this has to be stated as well. On the other hand, I met people who are rather left-wing, or liberal, who are pro-European and so on, and they are anti-Semitic. This shows that there is no clear correlation. If there is a clear correlation of right-wing thought of the Conservative types with the nationalist or even racist type this is the extreme right. But this is not true for the main part of the conservatively thinking people in Poland.

Pawel Karpiński: The government and the media are trying to fight anti-Semitism and xenophobic ideology, but I doubt that it is a clear intention. For example, our new Minister of Interior once said that he clearly does not tolerate any kind of racism or xenophobia, but when legal procedures run against nationalist parties, nothing happens. These cases are dismissed, and this is a clear sign that it's being tolerated.

Dr Steffen Huber: Take as an example Mr. Winnicki, he is the leader of Ruch Narodowy. He is talking about racial separation and he came to Dresden and shouted the Nazi slogan "*Deutschland erwache*". If you shout "*Deutschland erwache*" at a meeting of Pegida in Dresden, this is Nazi ideology. After that, he declared he did not know what it means.

This racial separation, would it also include Jews as a separate race?

Dr Steffen Huber: Try to ask them.

Is there this kind of anti-Semitic stereotype that Jews appear to be keeping the Polish nation on its knees after the War and the Soviet rule?

Dr Steffen Huber: No.

Krzysztof Turek: This anti-Semitic motive doesn't really exist because we never had bad experiences with Jews in that context in our history for many centuries. Jews were an essential part of our Society. They've been building our economy and our science. They were also Polish citizens. There is only one person which is Jewish and which is also seen as an enemy of Poland by the government, George Soros. He is seen as an enemy because he wants, with his "dirty billions", to force people around the world to become atheists and liberals, but this isn't connected to his Jewishness.

Pawel Karpiński: I suppose it's not something completely original and George Soros is just an ideal feature of this. I would say one of the pillars of anti-Semitism is the fear from being dominated from abroad - it might be by the Jews, it might be Berlin or Brussels, it might be Russia, and we are willing to do anything to be safe from that because of our history. We had grandfathers who fought wars for Polish independence, and even though they won, we still were not independent. It's so ironic.

Did you ever encounter the stereotype of Judeo-Marxism, is it there?

Dr Steffen Huber: Yes, it is used sometimes, but it's based on the romantic heritage of the 19th century in the fight against the Russians, the Prussians and the Austrians. This was very closely culturally connected to the Jewish experience, so this is a very difficult situation.

Krzysztof Turek: There is another thing connected to Jews. It has a little bit of a different character, because the communist state has openly dismissed Jews in the 60s. Even the communists in Poland, 20 years after World War II, excluded thousands of Jews and people with Jewish roots. They lost their posts in public institutions, they were all removed from the universities, they were removed from the party, even those who were loyal party members.

You have mentioned several times that these people see liberalism and atheism as a big problem. What is the position of the Catholic Church in Poland regarding anti-Semitism? In Germany, the Nazi party was especially strong in Protestant regions, and rather less in Catholic regions. For example, in the region where we are from, it's in Bavaria, the City is Nuremberg, which is a largely protestant region where many prominent protestant reformers of the 19th century lived, and it was very anti-Semitic and very strongly supported the Nazis. Maybe you know Julius Streicher. He held many rallies in Nuremberg and was very successful. Apart from that, you can also look at the election results. Of course, in Poland the Catholic Church has a huge majority – so, what is their position?

Dr Steffen Huber: I think there is not just one Catholic church in Poland and I'm wondering why they don't split - which I think would have happened if Poland had a different history. The Church has been the strongest and most endurable institution in Poland for 1000 years, and it is very well trained not to split in a situation of conflict. Nevertheless, the Church was much stronger than the state for centuries. So, you have a part of the Catholic Church which is clearly pro-European; some texts written Pope John Paul II some 30 years ago would be unbearably liberal for a big part of the Polish Society. If you don't tell them that it was written by the Pope, they will say this is liberal ideology from the West. On the other hand, you have a very long tradition of Catholic nationalism or Catholic anti-Semitism in Poland.

When we are talking about the last three years of economic development, does it influence anti-Semitism anyhow? For example, could you say that when nations are rising socioeconomically, they develop stronger feelings of anti-Semitism, or that richer people have stronger anti-Semitic attitudes? Is there anything like that?

Dr Steffen Huber: No.

Is there any connection between the socioeconomic status of a society

and the level of anti-Semitism?

Dr Steffen Huber: No.

Pawel Karpiński: I suppose there might only be a connection between low status and identifying a threat: Some sentiment arising from seeing those who are well situated, who got money, and feeling it's somehow unfair.

Dr Steffen Huber: That is true, but it's also a stereotype of anti-Semites and racists. And the people with conservative, nationalist or racist convictions in parts of the society were absolutely not bad situated or in a bad economic situation. The rural part of Poland has developed very strongly over the last 10 or 15 years. It is true it has not developed as fast in the 1990s and before the membership of Poland in the European Union, but over the last 15 years you could see a very, very strong development. I rather feel attached to those philosophical theories that say that anti-Semitism is not a political conviction or political instrument. Of course, it happens to be one, but its most substantial element is the need to feel better than someone else.

Pawel Karpiński: When you are working hard and there is someone else who is working less hard in your opinion, then we might think it is unfair that they are better situated than we are, and this envy is the thing that might create such anti-Semitic views. I'm not saying that all the poor people are anti-Semitic.

Dr Steffen Huber: Are you referring to cities or to rural communities?

Pawel Karpiński: I'm not sure.

Dr Steffen Huber: In my opinion, in rural Poland, of course they don't like liberals, they don't like the European Union. They use the European Union, but they don't like it. They don't like the liberal elites in Poland. But there are no anti-Semites. The anti-Semites I met were rather well-situated in terms of economy. But that depends on your personal experience...

Krzysztof Turek: I want to give a very specific example of anti-Semitism in Krakow, but it is in no way related to the previous topic. There are two main soccer teams in Krakow, Wisła Kraków and KS Cracovia, and the fans don't like each other. Cracovia was founded by Jewish citizens of Krakow 113 years ago. Now for many fans of Wisła, anti-Semitism is a part of their identity as fans of the club. So, in Krakow, when you see anti-Semitic symbols drawn on a wall or a building, 95% were done by football fans because of that.

This vandalism you're talking about, is it directed at synagogues or cemeteries which are not related to soccer?

Krzysztof Turek: I don't know.

Dr Steffen Huber: They have to good security around the synagogues. If this happens it would be persecuted for sure.

This means that they need to have security?

Dr Steffen Huber: Yes, but not for that reason. There is a lot of tourists in Krakow, big parts of them from Israel and the United States, and they're

travelling around. For example, Jewish groups that are travelling to Auschwitz. They need some level of security. Yes, there are a lot of anti-Semitic symbols around the city but I would say not close to the synagogues because this is where the police are looking the closest.

And you would say that these symbols are related to the fans of this soccer club?

Krzystof Turek: In Krakow yes.

Is the soccer club doing something against it?

Krzystof Turek: I have no idea. But as far as I know, soccer clubs in Poland accept that there are also radical groups of fans because these are the people who fill the stadiums every week and also the people that make 20 meters flags and bring them to the matches.

Dr Steffen Huber: If you ask them why they do not do anything about it they could possibly say that this is not Germany where you have a very long tradition of murders. This is what you sometimes here in Poland: There is no tradition of bloody murder in Poland, so you can allow much more aggression in a verbal way which will not become physical aggression. Of course, this is a very risky way to go, and it might at some point not work. But this is how many people look at this problem.

What about the Jewish Communities? Do you personally know any of their members? How do they view the situation of anti-Semitism in Poland? Do you have heard anything about that?

Krzystof Turek: I don't know any person who is Jewish. After WWII and after the next cleansing made by the Communist Party, they were barely any Jews in Poland.

Dr Steffen Huber: I met some people. They are living in a quite normal manner and of course they will tell you about anti-Semitism. It's not an everyday experience. It's not systematic physical aggression, but they will tell you that of course it happens from time to time.

You were also talking about the role of romanticism. Do you think it only is conducive to anti-Semitism because of its negative stance towards rationality?

Dr Steffen Huber: No, this has to be treated very carefully. You'll find some roots of aggressive racist nationalism in romanticism. But some authors are clearly pro-Jewish and they take a lot of basics from the Jewish tradition. Those who fought romanticism in the 19th century in Poland belonged to the positivist movement which in the beginning was very liberal but after 30 or 40 years, at the beginning of the 20th century, it turned into the strongest and most serious strongest anti-Semitic force in Poland. The national democratic

party is rooted the positivist movement. This is quite strange and you cannot say that anti-Semitism is romantic, anti-rational and so on, and positivism is pro-Western and liberal and rational. It is just not true. I think a substantial difference between Poland and Germany is that the Jewish culture in Poland was much more conservative and much more religious and much more community and family based. This was the experience of the Poles and this is how they tried in 19th century to make some kind of Polish Jewish dialogue which really worked out in a very great manner. You have great pieces of literature and theater which deal with these common metaphysical feelings. This is really a great part of the Polish literature and culture, and this is also in the writings of Pope John Paul II, which of course are not read by the average Polish reader right now. "Lingua Tertii Imperii" by Klemperer shows it in the clearest way. He said that the Nazi ideology is based on a romantic pattern. But that this is a thing you cannot say about Polish culture; it wouldn't work out here.

Krzysztof Turek: I want to give another example: "Pan Twardowski" is a work by Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish "Faust". The Jew of the story is one of the most politic characters in the whole complex work.

The main idea behind this is the idea of fight between good and evil. A Messiah is a person who stands up against evil but for the very cause of standing up against the evil even if the cause is lost, as it was during the many uprisings that also are very important for Polish identity. Even if you know you fail. In 1943, there was the Warsaw uprising in Warsaw ghetto, where thousand Jews rebelled against the good working war machinery of the Third Reich, and even though they knew they would lose, they still made the uprising. This is an obvious thing to do for someone who thinks this way. For both Poles and Jews. This is also the thinking now, about what the Polish right-wing government is doing. They are standing against the evil of multiculturalism because it is evil and destroys European culture.

Dr Steffen Huber: Which is not a romantic message. If you read Mickiewicz, he is never talking like that. He was trying to reconstitute the ethnically and culturally heterogeneous Poland which existed until late 18th century. This was the romantic model of restitution in Poland, so, yes, Kaczyński is trying to put together two traditions, the romantic and positivist tradition. Yes, of course, there is some anti-Semitism. Of course, there is xenophobic material in romantic traditions, but there is more of it in the positivist tradition if you look at the late works. There was a strong conflict in the Second Republic before WWII between the romantic and the positivist parts of the society, and Kaczyński is trying to put these two traditions together. In a way, he is a pluralist talking about unity but practically, he is putting together very heterogeneous elements. If it helps him to get the effect he wants, he also uses anti-Semitism, but this is just an instrument for him. There is no deeper conviction. His conviction is that the west is bad.

Serhii Czupryna

*Serhii Czupryna (*1996) is a member of the Jewish community in Kraków. As such, he is involved in educational activities fostering dialogue between Jewish and non-Jewish people. He was born in Ukraine but is of Polish-Jewish descent, he is living in Kraków since 2013. He has lived in Israel for several years while studying as a kid and later as a university student. He studies at the Institute of the Middle and Far East of the Jagiellonian University.*

We met him in the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) in Kraków on January 27th, 2018.

Have you ever experienced anti-Semitism in your life?

Serhii Czupryna: Yes. Living in Israel, I've been to the West Bank a lot of times and I wanted very much to go to Gaza, but that was difficult for an Israeli. In Poland, I've never experienced anti-Semitism in its harshness as it may be seen by people from outside of Poland. The first question a lot of Jews, especially in Israel, ask me when I say I live in Poland and that's where I chose to live, is: "Why? Six million. Why?" But I see Poland not only as a place of historical depreciation of Jewish culture, but as a great place for its revival. I feel super comfortable of being Jewish in here, I feel super safe to walk around the city with a kippah on my head. I've never seen anybody in Kraków being mean to me just because of the fact that I'm Jewish.

So, do you think anti-Semitism is a serious problem in Poland?

Serhii Czupryna: I don't think of it in terms of the Poles against the Jews and the Jews against the Poles. I see it as a lack of education about who Jews are, what they do. I'm very happy to be with such a group like you and to answer questions, because dialogue is the first step to get to understand another culture.

Is the form of anti-Semitism in Kraków more passive than in other cities?

Serhii Czupryna: It may be passive, as I see Kraków as a big globalised city, in Polish borders it's one of the biggest cities, there are a lot of universities here, there are a lot of young people, young adults who come here for the outsourcing companies, to work here. From year to year, I see that this city is becoming more and more international and multicultural. In this situation, I don't see growing hate for any other culture. That's nice, it's kind of a change that I've seen since I came to Poland. Now, it's not only tourists who come here and see the Old City, go to Auschwitz and go back home, but there are people who don't even speak Polish yet they live here, work here, do their everyday stuff here. By this, they're bringing their own culture that works for everybody, also

for the Jewish culture which is here, and works positively for Jews as well.

Do you think people in Kraków want to know more about Jewish culture?

Serhii Czupryna: Yes. There is a Jewish Culture Festival annually since twenty-something years. Visiting this event year by year, I see that more and more people are coming and simply because this event exists, I would say that people are definitely interested in getting to know Jewish culture more.

Do you as a student work with secondary school students, or do you do anything to educate people about the Jewish culture and heritage?

Serhii Czupryna: I would love to, but as I do my masters right now and I work full-time, I don't have much time to do so. But as soon as I'm done with my masters, I'm going to educate people about the Jewish culture, the influence of it on the Polish culture.

Is the Jewish culture matter of the teachings, generally?

Serhii Czupryna: Yes, there is a whole department of Jewish studies in the Jagiellonian University, so it's both historical and cultural. Academic studies on Jewish culture exist in the city, they thrive and revive.

I also know a few NGOs who go to schools and educate teachers. But it's difficult to teach about the Holocaust, because according to the programme, it's taught in an inappropriate way, maybe some teachers just go through it or don't even mention this subject. And maybe some will say, "six million people were murdered here during the Holocaust", and then full stop. But a lot of people don't mention that then there was communism, and that in the 60s, a lot of Jews had survived the Holocaust and either stayed or left the country. It's very important to educate in a correct way about Jews and about the historical context that the Jews are in here. I'm very supportive of those NGOs. I've participated in a few of their events.

Also, here in the Centre there are groups coming from the US, Israel annually, so this kind of impact on teachers is not only on the Polish side. When Israeli groups for example come to Kraków, they see only the history, they see the Holocaust, and a lot of groups just go through this building and say "ok, this is the Jewish Centre, it's cool that the Jews were here", but they don't see the community in here. So, for two years there has been an annual course for the guides of those groups from the US and Israel. They teach them how to raise more awareness for the existence of this community here.

Let's continue talking about education. Would you agree that some media say that Polish anti-Semitism operates on a verbal level, mostly? Do you think it's a chance to decrease anti-Semitism just by educating young people, especially in small cities, small villages and towns? In Kraków, people are better educated, they have lots of possibili-

ties to meet Jews and Jewish culture. What if we started educating people, students in smaller villages and towns? Probably the hate speech and anti-Semitism on the verbal level would decrease. I think it's the biggest problem that people sometimes say, "I hate Jews even if I haven't ever met any".

Serhii Czupryna: Exactly. I would say that it's a very important matter because the bigger the city is, the more chances you get to interact with people different from you. But for example, if you're from a small village, you have one school in this village, you have the homogenous society of Poles, you may have certain stereotypes about other people and other nationalities. It's like this, "Everybody hates Jews, I also hate Jews, I don't know why". I definitely see that there's a very high importance of coming to smaller cities or villages to educate people on those matters because very often, nobody even knows that before the war the whole village was eighty percent Jewish, while now it's one hundred percent Polish. A historian would come and say that there was the house of that and that person, there was a cemetery there and there, but locals don't even know about this. Education would help to change the verbal level of anti-Semitism. A lot of people, for example Polish, would use the word 'Jew' in this a little bit pejorative form of 'Żydek'. There are two different words: the person who believes in Judaism and the person who is born Jewish by nationality, and those are both different from 'Jew', but the word itself, 'Żyd' comes from the Hebrew three letters, the base of a word Jehud which stands for the person who believes in Judaism. For me, knowing that fact when people use the form of the word 'Jew' in Polish to any pejorative meaning, I explain them 'guys, this is how it works, and stop because it really has nothing to do with this matter'. But the level of the verbal anti-Semitism itself is, from what I've noticed, not even that harsh in Poland. It definitely exists, but even comparing to Ukraine, there is way less of verbal anti-Semitism. I've come across this a few times in my life, but I also don't see it as anti-Semitism, because people maybe just didn't know what they were saying. Education is the key to change all the negative meanings in our lives and our societies. As soon as we educate ourselves and other people on certain matters, the negative aspect of them definitely go away.

I'm not a history teacher, but my colleagues told me that students are usually not interested in the lessons of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, it's a little bit tiring for them. Don't you think that it would be a better idea to introduce some practical classes about it, I mean instead of two or three lessons about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, let's go to Auschwitz, let's go to your Community to show students what you do.

Serhii Czupryna: I would totally agree with this. I mean, I would not necessarily agree with the fact that high school students are the best audience to go to Auschwitz. I went to Auschwitz for the first time when I was twenty, that

was far away from my high school ages. And being twenty, I realised well that I was not ready for it yet. So, I would not say that visiting Auschwitz is the best way of practical studying about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, but such things may on the other hand, increase the interest of the students.

Do you as a Jewish Community Center organise workshops for students?

Serhii Czupryna: There is an organisation based in Kraków, they have a project which is called “Alev Bet of Jewish culture”, “the alphabet of Jewish culture”. It takes place annually in the autumn or in winter. They educate people on the whole basis of the Jewish culture, explain the basics of certain traditions and celebrations.

Are you a religious person, and do you take part in Jewish celebrations?

Serhii Czupryna: I’m not that religious, but yes, I would definitely say that what I believe in is Judaism. Not the orthodox version of it, but I also live in a kosher home. I don’t put lights on on Shabbat, and there are mezuzahs at the entrances to my rooms in the flat. I keep the kosher kitchen. I live with two more religious friends. From time to time, I go to synagogue.

There is the possibility of being a religious Jew in the city. There are three more or less full-time functioning synagogues. One is the Isaac synagogue, probably it’s the biggest in a matter of size, and it’s run right now by the movement Chabad-Lubawicz. So, their aim is to teach the Jews how to be a Jew and also to teach other people what the Jews are, and educate about Judaism. So, their main matter here is education, both to Jews and to non-Jews. They also run religious Jewish Sunday school. Here, there is a Jewish preschool, where children also get to know more about Judaism, about the tradition, religion, and certain religious celebrations. Three times a day there is a minjan, just like in the more orthodox Remus synagogue. The Chabad synagogue is more open for everybody. There is a full-time rabbi from an organisation which is called Szewa Israel, who works for a chief rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, and he is a full-time employee of the JCC. He also provides the Thora studies on Shabbat and helps people to convert. There are many different options of being a religious Jew in this city, as well as in other cities in Poland.

Do you speak Yiddish and, in general, how many people do?

Serhii Czupryna: I don’t speak Yiddish because of my family’s historical background. There is a certain amount of people who live here, who speak Yiddish. First of all, the more religious, orthodox Americans who chose to live here, they probably would speak Yiddish or at least some standard. Until this summer, we had one of the oldest members of the JCC, Mr Mundek, for whom Yiddish was the first language, so he learnt Polish as a second language, not native. And he was born somewhere around Kraków or maybe even in Kraków.

He spoke perfect Yiddish; unfortunately, he passed away this summer. There are certainly other members of the community who speak Yiddish. In this building, there is an opportunity of having a private course of Yiddish. Besides, they teach Yiddish in the Jewish studies department of the Jagiellonian Univeristy.

And what about Hebrew?

Serhii Czupryna: I do speak Hebrew. Right now, I work as a kind of Hebrew native speaker in one company in the city. There is also the possibility of joining a Hebrew course here, it is provided for ten different levels of Hebrew language skills, so there are people who started learning it since the JCC opened in 2008, and they are still in their groups that continued from 2008, almost for ten years. Hebrew is nowadays very popular in Kraków, I'd say.

Are there any orthodox Jews in Kraków and in Poland in general?

Serhii Czupryna: Yes, definitely there are a lot of orthodox members of the community in general, and are few orthodox members of the JCC community. First of all, not every orthodox will have a beard, not every orthodox will have sztrajml, this huge hat. A lot of young people find themselves feeling way more comfortable in orthodox movement, they look just like us, you can spot only certain things which show that a person may be orthodox. When it comes to interacting with them in everyday life, you would notice that if you say "let's eat a sandwich", this person says "oh, but I need to wash my hands". And there is the whole ritual, it's complicated, Judaism is complicated.

Last November there was the demonstration in Warsaw with sixty thousand people, and hundreds of them were shouting "*Sieg Heil!*" and "Jews out".

Serhii Czupryna: It's the question that I often get from the people who ask me, "why do you chose to live in Poland? You're Jewish, go to Israel". You're talking about the Independence Day demonstration. The thing is that there were the far-right neo-Nazi movements, and it may be not very safe to interfere with them in Warsaw on the Independence Day. I was there once, I just had to help my friends. I had two friends from Israel visiting me in Kraków, and we came to Warsaw together on November 11th. And one of them is of half-Indian, half-Iraqi descent. He was born in Israel. And the second is from Ukraine. The problem was that none of them speaks Polish, and one of them looks definitely not Polish. So, I was just afraid of them going to Warsaw by themselves, especially seeing this in the media. But as I came there with them, I realized that as soon as we just don't go any close to the demonstration, which is controlled by police to a certain extent, we're fine, there's no problem with speaking Hebrew in the centre of Warsaw in the evening of the 11th. I would say that it's very important that media show this, but I also see it as just a different opinion as long as it doesn't interfere. They may destroy certain parts of Warsaw, but they don't hurt people. As long as they don't hurt people, I'm

fine with it. That's not the majority of Poland. According to me, their ideology is definitely a bad thing, but I see the lack of knowledge about the Jews. Even trying to interact with far-right people or with people who perceive neo-Nazi movements, both in Ukraine and in here, one of the main claims was: Jews go home. Why? Lots of Jews were born here, Poland was pretty much Jewish before the War, so where should we go home to? I can go home to Ukraine, but my ancestor is from Poland. I see both of these countries as my home. So, to which home should I go? And then the conversation goes on, "oh, okay, you were born here, so you're fine, you speak Polish, it's a different thing". No. It's totally the same thing, start educating those people about what is Jewish, who is a Jewish person. Sometimes, I can open their eyes and they say, "okay, I've been doing wrong" or "that's probably the ideology, maybe it's not that perfect, so maybe I should switch for something less far-right". I definitely see there's lack of education, and what I see as a problem is that the Polish government is not intervening in that situation. Until the moment the government bans neo-Nazi organizations, I think that it's going to be the same, but it's definitely not these sixty thousand people.

The whole demonstration consisted of 60,000 people. And some hundreds were shouting.

Serhii Czupryna: Yes, it's a small percentage.

But nobody from the sixty thousand cared about it. Normally, I would throw these people out of my demonstration.

Serhii Czupryna: Yes, that's also an organisational problem. What I dislike more about those marches on 11th of November is that each year, there was a symbolical burning of the statue of a rainbow on one of the squares, which stood for diversity and tolerance. If it was removed, so that it's not going to be burnt annually, that would also be a good step, first of all not to symbolise the intolerance while celebrating the pride of being Polish. I cannot call it patriotism; I call it nationalism. But certain people go there to celebrate patriotism, certain people go there to celebrate nationalism. That's the problem that maybe the organisers of those marches face.

Don't you think that the media, especially the media abroad stress the nationalistic marches and the fact that there are some acts of nationalism, not patriotism? What do they want to stress?

Serhii Czupryna: Media never show something like 'the panda was born in this and this zoo, let's celebrate it', it's definitely not interesting for people abroad. But if people hear that something bad or something incredibly good is happening, only then they would be interested in what is shown to them. That's why I would say that media stress this fact of nationalism, not patriotism. This year in Israel, it was the Independence Day of Poland, and I saw a lot of videos on the internet, on social networks, where were people saying "I go to

that demonstration not because of the fact that I'm nationalist, but because I'm patriotic." And a lot of them were translated to Hebrew or at least had Hebrew subtitles, so the situation about this matter of showing those marches as nationalistic starts to change, I would say. But it takes a certain amount of time to people to understand that there is a difference between people who go there to show some nationalist beliefs and between the people who are patriots of their country, who don't try to put any other nationality below them, who just celebrate the fact that they are proud of who they are.

Do you think that teenagers are more anti-Semitic than older people because they frequently use the internet and see a lot of hate about Jews?

Serhii Czupryna: I think that the middle-aged group is the most anti-Semitic of all age groups. What I like about the globalisation is that if you've seen a lot of hate on the internet, you can just google certain things that may disprove this hate, and the availability of the information for teenagers I see as a very good thing. I would definitely not say that teenagers may be more anti-Semitic just because they see some propaganda on the internet or in the media. Now, in my generation, I'm twenty-one, it's always like "okay, I would look for this, but also I want to find the arguments from the other side". I would say that a lot of people would choose the peaceful version of perceiving some other minority, not the hateful one, and they would probably want to learn more about the conflict.

Do you think that the anti-Semitism problem will grow in the future?

Serhii Czupryna: It's an interesting thing. It would definitely depend on the region, and what is going to happen there in the future. I would say that in Poland no, because from what I see right now, non-Jewish Poles are getting really interested in the culture, and they start understanding the influence of Jewish culture on Polish culture. It decreases radically, which I like a lot. Maybe in countries like France and Great Britain, which are more globalised, it may grow because of a negative change in the society, connected to other negative factors that are happening with the society. And as the country struggles with certain things, there is a possibility of other negative factors to increase. But the world learnt through the Second World War that anti-Semitism was the depreciation of a certain national minority, and they learnt from the Holocaust that it happened once, so let's not make it possible to happen anymore, with any group, not only the Jews.

There' is a new law in Poland called the law for protection of the good name of Poland. What do you think about this law?

Serhii Czupryna: I would not agree with a lot of laws and the implementations into the law that the current government brings on, not only in term of this one. From the patriotic side, this matter actually stands in line of the tension between patriotism and nationalism of the current government. It's really hard topic:

Auschwitz, the relations between Israel and Poland, but the whole relations between Poland and Israel and also the exchange of tourists and students and people just coming and going back and forth, these relations also increased in the recent few years. I think that as soon as the government changes, at the point where this law may be partially changed, it's going to be fine. I don't think that it may drastically change the relations between Israel and Poland, because diplomatic relations have been built up for a long time, with a lot of effort, so I don't think that one law like this may change a lot. I certainly see it as something which is really a problem, which depreciates the importance of other nations, national heroes of other countries. The same topic was raised recently in Ukrainian media, also with regard to this law because the national heroes that the Ukrainian government perceives to be national heroes were fighting against Polish forces in a certain period of time, and throughout the history, this whole interfering between the Poles and the Ukrainians took place. It was perceived negatively in Ukrainian media, and also in Israeli media, and it was depicted as anti-Semitic. But I would not say it will drastically change the situation between two countries.

According to Jan Gross and his book "Fear", in Poland solidarity with the Jews during the Second World War was not a mainstream thing. That means in France, people were celebrating when they helped Jews, and in Poland, many people are ashamed and they don't want to be mentioned to publicity. Is that right?

Serhii Czupryna: The whole matter of helping Jews during the Second World War is a very touchy subject, because a lot of people say "oh, Poland is this death camp where everything happened". No, it's not. It's just because of the fact that, sorry, Jews were living here, and it was the easiest way from the Nazi point of view to make it all happen there. Most of the Jews in this world were living in Poland. Helping the Jews during the War, you could have got a death penalty, you and your whole family. And probably this fear still remains in certain people. But on the other hand, when Israelis ask me, "Why do you live in Poland? Most of it happened in Poland.", the other side is that also the biggest amount of Righteous Among the Nations live in Poland, they are Polish and they are proud of it, and they celebrate helping the Jews in Poland during the War.

Have you experienced any anti-Semitic acts from Muslims when you were in Israel?

Serhii Czupryna: Actually, no. I feel very safe living in Israel. It's just a fact that the country exists in the region where it has to be militarized to a certain extent, just to exist. And that's what I know: That in Poland, you would feel weird if you'd go to a bus and there's a soldier with a gun. In Israel, it's totally a different thing. I feel safer when I see a soldier with a gun, just a normal servant who is of my age and who just has to do the service for his country. I

have a lot of Palestinian friends, certainly some of them are Muslims, and I've never experienced any negative acts from their side. Also, in Poland I have a lot of Muslim friends, and I get along with them very well just because of some common things between their cultures or our religious beliefs.

How do Polish people behave towards you? Are they curious about your culture and religion? Or are they intolerant and reserved?

Serhii Czupryna: They're definitely interested. I participate in few non-governmental organisations, except for the JCC, and it's interesting to see how people who are not even friends are interested in the fact that I'm a Jew and my friend is a Muslim. How come that we sit at the same table? We explain and say it's just a religion. Why should we sit at separate tables or not even go to the same café? There is a certain amount of curiosity. People may see me coming from the synagogue with a kippah, and my Muslim friend in hijab, and we're just coming across the same street, stopping to say hello to each other. Seeing the face of these people with certain stereotypes that they may have about our cultures, and seeing us destroying those stereotypes – it's really pleasant and funny. But I would say that to curiosity, there also comes a certain amount of stereotyping certain cultures, and we try to together destroy the stereotypes.

You said that people in Israel are always surprised when you are saying that you chose to live in Poland? Why do you think the do? Is it because of history and media or stereotypes or even something different?

Serhii Czupryna: I would say because of history and because of stereotypes. The biggest after-War influx of Polish Jews to Israel was in the 60s and in '68. That generation already has kids and grand-children, and probably a lot of them have never been to Poland except for Auschwitz. They think, "My family survived the Holocaust, then they were kicked out of Poland". This is the vision that they have about Poland since their childhood, from their parent and grandparents. I love bringing my Israeli friends to Poland to show them that this country is not black and white, as you see it on the pictures of your granddad. It's the country which has a lot of beautiful sites, except for Auschwitz, they definitely should visit. And I like to see those people being shocked when we talk Hebrew in public and everybody is fine with it. It's also a matter of education, destroying the stereotypes, it definitely comes from the stereotypes of Poland, and those stereotypes are created by a certain amount of negative historical background of Poland with regards to the Jewish society.

Mrs Zajda told us yesterday that these tourists from Israel are always isolated by bodyguards. They only go to Auschwitz, they don't integrate with other people, so they can't even get to know our culture, our behaviour.

Serhii Czupryna: It's true. Because of the fact that most tours from Israel are

organised with the help of certain ministries, the ministry of education or the ministry of foreign affairs. They should have bodyguards, it's fine. The problem comes when these groups go to synagogues. Can you imagine? We have the school trip to Italy and even if you're not religious, you go with bodyguards to the Sunday mass, and you're supposed to spend the whole time in the mass. That's what happens when those groups come to the synagogues and, according to me, it's like one of the small windows for them to interact with the local community because technically we also go to the same synagogues. Often when I try to enter the synagogue, I'm stopped and asked by Israeli bodyguards "Wait! Stay here. Where are you going?" Obviously, I have a kippah on my head. "Come on, why should a Jewish person go to synagogue on Friday?" I've noticed that the same bodyguards come with different groups. And after few situations like these, they start to remember your face and then say "*Shabat shalom, shalom*". And certain Israeli teachers, if you get to interfere with them, anyhow talk to them, they start saying "Okay, oh, so you live here? You're Jewish? Fine. Maybe we can make some meeting of our group with you?" It just needs some time to develop and also to explain the Israeli teens that Poland is not black and white, as on a picture from the War, and people here are smiling, and it's not bad to talk to them and you don't have to have bodyguards when coming here.

I think there is a problem because in most of the classes, there are sixteen or seventeen- year-olds, and when they come to Poland, they visit two extermination camps a day. Of course, it's too much. And the government of Israel makes a good silence with it. It's a little bit propaganda.

Serhii Czupryna: It's tricky because in the present situation in Israel, both political and military, in different contexts, I see that this propaganda is needed, the propaganda of "let's not let other people to destroy Jewish nation". But it's done inappropriately in the case of Poland, because instead of having this feeling that "yes, we need to stay together as a nation, we should not fight between each other and keep everything as peaceful as possible", those children probably learn about the fact that all the killings took place in Poland, and that's the only thing they know about Poland. And that is a problem, it's inappropriate propaganda. But Still, I see it as a need. I hope that Israeli will come up with change one day.

Don't you think that the Jewish trips of students who come to visit Auschwitz or Belzec and have gunned bodyguards can raise a bad attitude among Polish people? We may feel being perceived hostile. You said that the ministry tells them to do that.

Serhii Czupryna: It's actually a requirement by the ministry of education: As soon as you go to any tour, even in Israel, if you're a group of more than ten people, you should have a bodyguard with a weapon with you. For them, it's

not exclusively for Poland. But I definitely understand, as a person born here, how people see these groups. It's weird for Poles, it would be weird for Israelis not to do this, it's just the conflict of two contemporary cultures. Obviously, they know that is safe in Poland, because the same kids in their free time are just rushing to the shopping mall and those guards don't go there with them, obviously. That's just a requirement.

Don't you think that Polish people are most sensitive about it? I mean when Jewish trip goes to e.g. Germany, Germans don't care about a gunned man.

Serhii Czupryna: I'd say that Poles see it this way because of the history. In this historical context of Poland, after all that happened in this territory, it's just unpleasant to see an armed person in any situation. But I don't think that Germans are less sensitive in this matter.

What are your thoughts of the people who say that Jews are very influential all over the world? Is it the reason that the people are anti-Semitic? I'm about the Rothschild family.

Serhii Czupryna: Yes, definitely, in a certain historical context. Let's start with the different variations of anti-Semitism. Let's figure out that there are non-scientific terms, a 'positive' anti-Semitism and 'negative' anti-Semitism (but please, don't stick to these terms in any other situation). A 'positive' anti-Semitism is, according to this understanding, based on the good stereotype about the Jews, but they are still stereotypes. For example, those small figures of Jews holding a coin that you can buy as a souvenir on the main square. It is anti-Semitic, let's face the truth. But on the other hand, it's a 'good' stereotype, that they are good with money. Oh the thing that we're all lawyers, doctors, musicians and maybe scientists, sometimes - three things a Jew can do in their life. It's a very good stereotype when people say "oh, you're a good lawyer, it's because you're Jewish" - "No, it's just because I'm smart". And all those things, they have a negative context but they are not that negative as an actual anti-Semitism.

How did the Polish society deal with some anti-Semitic, some Catholic anti-Semitic facts like the Madagascar option in the thirties, and the pogroms in Kielce or Jedwabne, was it critically discussed?

Serhii Czupryna: There is a critical discussion and there is a commemoration of those events by both Jews and Catholic priests. It is like the Holocaust: it happened, somehow the world did allow this to happen, but let's not make this happen any time again. I would say that currently, the Catholics in Poland and the Catholic Church, especially in Poland stands for the same thing in terms of pogroms, *pogrom kielecki*, it's the field that is still studied and is not finished to be studied. It's a very complicated matter, but I would say that the Catholic Church right now is very active in the field of commemoration, to let the people

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know this with the message of “let’s not do this again, because it’s bad, let’s not kill people”. That’s one of the bases of the Catholic religion.

Dr Piotr Setkiewicz

Piotr Setkiewicz (born in 1963) is the director of Centre for Research at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and a graduate of the Faculty of History at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Mr. Setkiewicz received his Ph.D. degree in 1999 at the University of Silesia in Katowice for the work entitled "IG Farben - Werk Auschwitz 1941-1945". He is the editor-in-chief of scientific publication The Auschwitz Journals (Zeszyty Oświęcimskie) as the head historian at the Auschwitz Museum. We met him in the Auschwitz Museum on January 27th, 2018.

Thank you very much for your time for us today. We are a group of students from Latvia, Poland and Germany doing an Erasmus project about anti-Semitism and how it developed after the War. First, we'd like to ask you if you have had any first-hand or second-hand experience with anti-Semitism over the course of your life?

Piotr Setkiewicz: Over the course of my life? Always, almost every day. Just yesterday, I was called by a man who is anti-Semitic, who is denying the truth, who said that I can be blamed for all mistakes, all the false information that appeared in the media about the Holocaust. That I'm supporting the fake version of history which is based on Jewish, Polish and communist lies about the Holocaust, that we are promoting the Survivors who are lying, and that we falsified the documents in my archive. And that we are taking money from Jews in Israeli shekels. Many such things. Many people in different countries, not only in Germany but also in United States, practically all over Europe, including Poland, surprisingly, tried to persuade everyone that the Holocaust never happened, that Auschwitz was built, or at least the most important objects here, like the crematoria and the gas chambers, only after the war, and that the gas chambers were actually used for delousing purposes, for disinfection. My reaction usually is that I don't want to be involved in any sort of discussions with Nazis because as far as I know from my own experience, it's just a waste of my time and the arguments always stay the same. For instance, that conditions in Auschwitz were relatively good, that it was necessary to isolate the enemies of the Reich because it was a war and that of course, sometimes it might happen that somebody died here. That, nevertheless, the number of victims is highly exaggerated, the number of one million people who were murdered in Auschwitz. That obviously, it's not true because the capacity of the crematoria was many times lower than we read in books, read in documents, etc. Even some strange and surprising arguments are in the discussions: For instance, there is a picture taken by somebody from the staff of *IG Farben* works. *IG Farben* was a huge factory of synthetic rubber; it was situated on the other side of the City. Nevertheless, during the War many thousand prisoners worked at the construction site there. Apart from prisoners, of course there was German staff, men and

women, about 7,000 people, and, they resided in the Siedlung, the settlement, they lived somehow apart from the concentration camp, and they got, for instance, a sports club. And there is a picture of two people who are fencing, and there is a group of people in the background of the picture, and over them there is an inscription, the name of the sport club in German, the sports club *IG Auschwitz*. Now, the Nazis believe that this is a typical representation of the living conditions in Auschwitz, that the people in the picture are prisoners - which is stupid, actually, because that was a German club and they got even the training courses for pilots of incomprehensible, 05:21 and many such things, the soccer section, the athletic section, etc. Other than that, one of the most important arguments is the presence of the swimming pool in Auschwitz, which is visible just behind us. We know that it was the one of many pools or rather tanks for water for the fire brigade. In 1944, the Allies, American or British planes began to appear over Auschwitz and the SS suspected the threat of mass bombings and a fire, particularly in Auschwitz-Birkenau So, they built a number of such pools, reserves of water for the camp fire brigade. And surprisingly enough, in Auschwitz, the SS, or rather prisoners themselves, the functionaries, the capos or block overseers, mostly the German habitual criminal prisoners, they organised something like a competition swimming in this pool. There was something like that, as we know from the testimonies of Survivors and from somebody who was taking pictures, who was a fan. Nevertheless, there was a difference between the situation of the functionary prisoners and the real fate of regular prisoners at the concentration camp. So, as I said, there are many such arguments, many stupid discussions. The most difficult and rather new problem is the huge amount of such articles, comments, entries on the internet. On the internet you can write anything, and there's plenty of web pages explaining that Auschwitz never happened. The problem is that recently, we are faced with more and more people denying the Holocaust in Poland which, for me, was something I could not believe because many Poles lost their lives in Auschwitz, as well as the Polish Jews, and the knowledge about the German crimes in Auschwitz was obvious for everyone in Poland, for many years after the War. Now, I am afraid that there is a third generation of people who have no personal experience, they probably heard "My grand-grandfather was in Auschwitz", but the distance to history is too long. Just a few days ago, the Polish television showed a ceremony of the anniversary Adolf Hitler's birthday on the 20th of April, a group of Neo-Nazis meeting in the forest somewhere in Silesia. They were celebrating the anniversary, they had the Wehrmacht uniforms, they baked a cake for the Führer with the swastika. Perhaps that is still marginal in Poland. Nevertheless, these views are shared by the people who recently protested against immigrants, against attempts from the European Union to persuade the Polish government to accept a certain amount of people from Syria and other countries. It's still not the same as with the Nazis, nevertheless, within the relatively large group of Poles who don't want to even hear about immigrants from Arab countries, there is a narrow margin of people, particularly young people - I'd say 20-25 years old, football fans, something like that - who try to make a link between their anti-immigrant views and the Nazi ideology. In

the Museum there are very rare cases where we can meet such people here. It's not a problem for us, but of course, we believe that one day, we will face the situation that a group of people with the Nazi insignia will wish to visit the Museum - so, the problem is, what to do then? Our security guards should do something and prevent it, but something like this might happen. That's a good reason for us to do our work, to publish books. I don't want to be involved any sort of direct discussions with the Nazis, nevertheless, we are providing arguments for a lot of teachers, arming them with the documents. German documents, I'd say, are more useful in such discussions between students and teachers because if we gather the testimony of a Survivor, it's easier for a denier to say "Well, it's just nonsense, what this man is talking about". For example, a few weeks ago I did a critical review of a book written by a certain Survivor on the internet, and the Survivor wrote about 300 pages book about his experience in Auschwitz. And this is basically a good witness - I mean, there are many Survivors that are simply trying to tell us their stories. Nevertheless, there is unfortunately, and it's quite normal and natural, some people who believe that they should add something to their stories. For instance, if they were in Auschwitz, they testify about certain happenings that took place in Birkenau, and it's not true because they could have heard about the Sonderkommando rebellion, but they had no chance to bear witness of this uprising. Nevertheless, I understand that something like this might happen, that particularly the Survivors who used to take part in certain ceremonies used to meet with schoolchildren, being asked about the War experience, wish to say "I was in Auschwitz, I saw everything". Going back to this book: Although on one side he was generally credible, at one point in his book he said that he remembers that there was a small room in one of the barracks where the Germans, the capos, collected the bodies of those prisoners who died during the nights. That it was only after three or four days when they collected the bodies and they were put in the truck and the truck was taking the bodies to the crematoria to be burned. And, the author of this article on the internet, he made use of the fact that arguments like that are obviously not true, because I found a German document in which the commander of the Birkenau ordered to remove the bodies every day. For him, this is an obvious argument that this man was lying. And if he was lying in this particular point, in this particular page of the 300-pages book, probably the remaining 300 pages, are also not credible. Another category of sources, of course, are the testimonies by the guards themselves. They testified before the military tribunals of the Allied powers in West Germany, immediately after the War before the Polish courts, and then in Germany in the Frankfurt trials, and in many other locations. And at least some of them they accepted their guilt and admitted "Yes, I saw the people being selected on the ramp. I saw the people being driven to the gas chambers, I saw the thousands of bodies and the flames over the chimneys of crematoria." So, what is an argument of deniers against it? That they were forced to testify in this way, beaten by the guards, by British, Polish, whatever, communist, Jewish guards. That was why they had to give these false descriptions. And the last category - the German documents: The problem is that most of the German files from the chancelleries, from the office administration

of Auschwitz, they have been burned immediately before the final evacuation of the camp. If you take any testimony of a Survivor who was here in January '45, typically you can find therein information like "I saw the piles of papers, of documents on the crossroads of the camp being burned by the guards". And that's true. We've got a very small amount of original documents from German administration, a relatively large amount of documents from the German construction office, the Bauleitung, probably because that was a separate unit of the SS-administration, which was situated in several barracks at a distance about 300 metres from here, not inside the camp. So, by chance, for some reason, when the SS escaped from Auschwitz, they just forgot to burn these files. If you take into account all these surviving documents, they are good material for historical research, alone these plans and construction files of the central construction office of the SS. The amount is about 150,000 pages of documents, a large number of documents, and they are a very valuable source, very useful for our discussions – indirect discussions with these deniers. There is, for instance, a well-known author who wrote a number of books, and in one of them, he tried to summarise the most important arguments of the deniers. And one of them was, that if we talk about the first temporary gas chambers in Birkenau, called "the little red house" and "the little white house", the ruins of little white house are still in Birkenau, nevertheless he said that it's impossible that in so many surviving documents there is no mentioning, not any hint about these temporary gas chambers. So, the prisoners were lying, Survivors were lying, because they were Communists, Jews, Poles, whatever – that's obvious, and the main proof that these provisional gas chambers - they were abused mostly in '42/'43 – did not exist at all is that there is nothing written in the documents. His argument is as follows: That, if something like that had existed in Birkenau, then it must have been in the records of the trips of the trucks, especially for delivering bricks, and other construction materials to the site of these gas chambers – there must be anything. Information about the bills, about the amount of money spent for the construction of the gas chambers – but there is nothing. Thus, he tried to persuade his readers. But unfortunately, we have found seven such documents that clearly indicate that these gas chambers existed. That one of them costed 14,000 Reichsmark, for instance. That the SS ordered three wooden barracks for each of these gas chambers, which were used as a temporary store of clothes of the victims. And each of these barracks costed about 17,000 Reichsmark, and they were removed from the area in the moment when the Germans completed more modern and huge crematories in Birkenau, so the old gas chambers were dismantled and destroyed. We have found requests from the Bauleitung asking for the remaining wooden barracks, because they might be used for some other purposes in the camp. And we've got the information that there is a need to send 500 prisoners on a day to dig trenches around the bunkers. That was because one day in July 1942, Heinrich Himmler, during his visit in Auschwitz, ordered to empty the old mass graves and burn the bodies on piles of woods. Then, what else have we got to prove? Apart from testimonies of Survivors, apart from reports of Polish resistance members, some of them Survived. There is a document in which the SS ordered a cable, a long electric

cable, to provide electricity to nineteen burning places. It was necessary to install lamps there because the burning took place not only in the day, but also during the nights. There are many direct or indirect proofs that these burning pits existed. I don't think that you are familiar with the arguments by deniers, but we've got a relatively large number of counterarguments. The problem is that it's difficult to discuss with such people because when they say that all – let's say, 10,000 testimonies, the witnesses were lying, that these thousands of documents were fabricated by Poles, Jews, communists after the War - in such circumstances, it's rather difficult to raise any arguments.

What do you think, what makes people want to deny the fact of Auschwitz or the Shoah?

Piotr Setkiewicz: Why? For many reasons. Perhaps, some of them believe that this form of government in Germany in the 30ies, that it was ideal, that everyone knew his place in the society - but now, what do we see around us? The politicians, thinking only about how to gain more money, who are no true patriots. And the Führer, that was a man who solved the problem of the economic crisis in Germany. He built the highways. He restored the pride of the German nation. These might be the arguments of the German deniers. In other countries, I think, the reason is mainly anti-Semitism. Because the Holocaust, as a part of the Jewish history, by most Jewish historians is identified as a marking point in the history of the modern nation. In some books written by Jewish historians, you may see that they divided Jewish history in two periods: Before and after the Holocaust. It's a very important point on the map of the Jewish history. So, for those people who are anti-Semitic, who don't like the modern state of Israel, the Holocaust is something which is a guilt and a giant point which should be attacked. And, in the history of the Holocaust, Auschwitz is as central point. There is the famous quotation from the interview with David Irving, the leading British denier, who said "If we sunk the battleship of Auschwitz, it would solve all the problems of the 20th century's history". Auschwitz is a focus, the most important part of the story. If we would be able to proof that Auschwitz never happened it would be easier to destroy the myth of 6 million of Jewish victims.

Would you say that these Holocaust deniers are becoming more or rather less over the last twenty-five years? Is there any development, so that it becomes more usual?

Piotr Setkiewicz: Immediately after the War, it was the group of mostly the German veterans, particularly from the unions of the SS, who were deniers. It was a number of even the guards from Auschwitz who took part in certain ceremonies, where they solemnly declared that they were in Auschwitz, but they never heard about any gas chambers or crematoria. That was the first wave of denial. Then, it was in the 60s, there was a rise of interest in the Holocaust. On the one hand, we got the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, and on the other hand,

a few years later, a series of so-called Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt. And it was the time of student's rebellion in Europe, the leftists began to be interested the history of their own country, in the leftist press appeared the pictures of leading Nazis who were still living in Germany, the titles of the articles were as follows, "The assassins, the killers are still among us". So, there was this popular belief of the leftist that something must be done in order to cope with our past. And to punish the people who, in many cases, continued their pre-war career after the War. All the judges prosecuted those who had a Nazi past – the technicians, engineers from the companies like *IG Farben*, they were renowned chemists and board directors in different companies in Germany. So, these people, the young people at this time, thought that we should do something with this problem. The problem of the past, of the history of our grandparents. On the one hand, if you observe the rise of the interest in the Holocaust, it was a, so to say, natural reaction from the side of the right-wing radicals to deny the Holocaust. Then, in the 70ies, they got some financial problems, some newspapers and journals published by the Nazi organisations disappeared. And now, I believe, we can observe again the wave is going up – perhaps because of the internet. If, in the 70ies, there was a problem with publishing the journals, then now, in the era of internet, its costs almost nothing. And there is perhaps also reaction on an idea of a united Europe. As for Brussels, we should rather think of ourselves as Europeans, to a certain extent, not only as Poles, Czechs, whatever, but we are also Europeans, the members of a European family, which share the same values, the same budget. So, there is a reaction of the people who don't like this concept of a united Europe, who think "Primarily, we are Poles. And we don't want to be governed from Brussels, we got our own government, our own Polish Złoty, our own history" And , of course, the problem of immigrants, the terrorist attacks in other countries, among Poles there is a tendency to talk about it in this way. "Because our friends - England, Germany, accepted many thousand Arab refugees, and among them, there are of course terrorists, they got a problem. We don't want to have any refugees on the Polish soil, so, in the consequence, we haven't got the terrorist attacks and bombs in Polish cities. Therefore, we are right."

And how is this connected to Anti-Semitism?

Piotr Setkiewicz: Because, if you believe that we are the better ones, that our values are better because we are Christians, or Europeans, it's just one step to not liking the Jews because the Jews, they got too much money, they are directors of different banks, they control the world bank system, and the Jews are in primary leftists, they promote the leftist values, so, because we are nationalist to a certain extent, we don't like to accept these outer values. There is Mr Soros, who is a Jewish billionaire, and who is supporting the leftist organisations in Poland – on the one hand we don't like him because he is leftist, and because he is Jewish. It is not far from this concept of national unity, of "Because we are united, we represent the united nation, all Poles are brothers, and when we see these poor waves of Ukrainians, coming to Poland to work

in different jobs on the construction sites, in the shops...” Unfortunately, there is – quite human, I’d say – a tendency to look at them as people who are not us, of course, and who represent some lower cultural standards. Surprisingly, when Poles are going to the Western countries to work, they hear these anti-Polish jokes. There are very bad anti-Polish jokes, aren’t there? It is not nice to listen such things, but now, if we are looking at these Ukrainians, who come to Poland, at least some Poles unfortunately believe “Now, we are in the positions of the British, we can look at these Ukrainians from a certain higher level” It’s difficult – there is the question of policy, the question of a lack of education, and such tendencies to look at other countries as an enemy, as the potential threat, are a result of the modern nationalist eruptive at the end of the 19th century, and it continued. There is a model of patriotic education in the schools, in many countries, of course, to cultivate remembrance of national heroes. In many countries, there is a tendency to talk about the history of these countries in such a way: That we were always good guys, that we are always attacked by the neighbours. We’ve got of course our heroes, nevertheless, we are still fighting for our independence, and it is necessary to remember that independence is the most important value. We, as nation, have to remember that ourselves in such a way. And there is also this looking at the strangers in a specific way, that we can accept a limited number of foreigners, but if they ever exceed a certain amount, that is a potential threat for our identity. We are Christians, we are not Muslims. Nevertheless, Auschwitz is still present somewhere in the background of such discussions as a good illustration of what might happen if we would forget about universal values. When we see the strangers not only as the other people, but also as the representatives of the black forces of international conspiracies. And then, it’s very easy to cross the line, to be on the black side of the force. There is the question of reactions to the Nazism of German society in the 30ies, here, in the camp, the reaction on certain people who were not Germans, but who accepted the posts of Blockältester, the Capos – many Poles and even Jews here in Auschwitz who received a stick and tried to exercise force over prisoners, to beat them, because the prisoners could not work with efficiently, the stick is the best argument. These were symbols and pieces of man history that might have been used in the constant discussions about the condition of the modern world and the societies here. What should we do when we hear about certain atrocities, like a genocide in other countries? Is it possible to do such a thing? We heard about the massacres in Syria, or in Iraq, or in Sudan and such countries. What should we do? There’s not a single good answer for it. Nevertheless, if we talk about it in terms of constant discussions about human rights, for instance about the need to combat racism in many countries, Auschwitz is always somewhere, is being used as a symbol, as a turning point, as a milestone in such discussions. I was surprised when I saw once a textbook for history in Singapore schools. And there is a quite comprehensive chapter about Auschwitz, on the other side of the globe. If you talk about the history of Europe, Second World War, with, say, Koreans, or people from Argentine, most people say that they know very little about it. But in 99% of all cases, they have heard the name of Auschwitz.

Do you think that Holocaust denial is the most dangerous form of anti-Semitism nowadays?

Piotr Setkiewicz: This is a part of the ideology - important, but not the only one. Of course, anti-Semitism is something much wider, it's a popular belief, that the Jews are controlling the world economy, that, in some cases, leading politicians in certain countries have Jewish roots. That the governments are under the constant pressure from the national Jewish organisations. Holocaust denial is only a part of the ideology. But nevertheless, it is a very important one because anti-Semites believe that Jews are using the Holocaust as an argument to defend themselves, to blame other nations, that they wish to control the market in countries like in Poland, to go back to their property that was confiscated during the War by the Nazis, and after the War, it was taken over by the communist government in these countries. That's a good illustration of the situation in Poland. Taken altogether, the Jews are members of the world conspiracy, and they are trying to use the argument of the Holocaust in their propaganda. "We are poor guys who were persecuted in the course of centuries, and it's virtually impossible that we can represent a threat for the others. We were the victims, not the oppressors." So, if we, the deniers, would destroy this argument that the Holocaust happened, it would be much easier to preserve our arguments against Jews. Therefore, the history of Holocaust occupied an important position in the ideology of anti-Semites. Including the ones in Arab countries – you can buy *Mein Kampf* translated into the Arab very easily in the larger cities in the Arab world. And these people believe in these claims by Hitler, that Jews are insects, that something must be done in order to remove this constant threat, the Jewish threat, the danger for the German nation, and so on. So, is it possible to find an example of an official institution in Arab countries that combats such crimes by Nazis? No! I never heard about documental initiatives in Egypt or other Arab countries against deniers, against the movies or the internet, YouTube and Facebook activists. There is the question of, of course, politics, and the question of the legacy of the Arab-Israeli wars, etc. In Europe, the situation is different, nevertheless, the result is sometimes the same: The anti-Jewish propaganda, which is in most cases combined with fighting with the history of the Holocaust. But, if you ever have the opportunity to go to my archive, to the museum for a couple of days, I'm able, probably, to persuade the most stupid denier that Auschwitz happened. It would require some work, some time, nevertheless, that's possible. I believe that we have enough arguments, enough documents. The problem is that of course, there is nothing like the one single document, the order written by Hitler saying "Today, I decided to solve the Jewish problem in Europe, and to kill all Jews, Adolf Hitler". Such a document does not exist. But, after carefully analysing, say, 200 documents, even the most stupid denier would be persuaded by the force of the arguments. Because, even assuming that the documents were falsified, they would have to recognise that it could not be done in such a way. There is, for instance, a document in which the commander of a certain unit in Auschwitz tried to give his opinion about his sergeant, promoting him before the high military ranks – some guards

received military medals of their services in Auschwitz. He explained that the sergeant, was very active and very enthusiastic in collecting clothes during the action of evacuation of Jews. This means that in the result of this action of evacuation of Jews, the Jews were losing their clothes. Or, if we got the orders for the drivers of the truck. The trucks were bringing Zyklon-B from the factory in Erfurt. The problem was that Zyklon-B was used in Germany on a wide scale for delousing purposes, for killing insects. In one order we've got a sentence saying that the driver is going to Erfurt and the reason of the trip is delivery of Zyklon-B. Okay, why not. Somebody might say that Zyklon-B was used here, and that is the truth, for delousing of clothes. But there is a second order in which the reason of the trip is that the driver should bring the "material for special Jew treatment" or "*Materialien für die Judenumsiedlung*", materials for resettlement of Jews. Assuming that everything was okay with the Zyklon and that the Zyklon was always used for delousing purposes here – so why, in other documents, did the German administration use such complicated euphemisms like "materials for special treatment"? Why they did not simply name this as Zyklon-B, or as material for disinfection? My answer is that because this particular clerk who wrote the document, he knew that actually, a large quantity of Zyklon-B was used not for delousing purposes in Auschwitz, but for killing people. In this way, he wished to hide the truth.

So, if you give me, say, ten hours, I'd be able to persuade the strongest denier, I believe. Excuse me, I'm afraid I have to go to for the central ceremony in the city of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Dr Michał Bilewicz

*Michał Bilewicz (*1980) is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Warsaw since 2008.*

He studied sociology and philosophy in Warsaw between 1999 and 2003. His Ph.D. thesis, completed in 2007, carries the title 'Between self-verification and social identity processes: Social psychology of threatened ingroup status'. He has worked in New York and Delaware in the USA and in Jena, Germany.

His research interests, among others, are conspiracy theories, prejudices, inter-group conflict, the threat of positive social identity and dehumanization, mainly on the example of xenophobia, anti-Semitism and ethnic conflicts, reconciliation mechanisms after genocides, the influence of cognitive mechanisms and public language on the exclusion of minorities. He is the vice president of the Forum Dialogue Foundation, that is dedicated to fostering the relation between contemporary Poland and the Jewish people.

The interview took place in the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Warsaw on January 30th, 2018.

Michał Bilewicz: You're probably fully aware that you're coming to Poland in a very special time in terms of politics now. And this topic that you want to explore is actually a very big issue and a very sensitive one in the Polish-Israeli-Jewish relations.

I'm having a lot of collaborative projects with Germany and we're doing a lot of research actually exactly on the topic that you are working on, for example with Roland Imhoff, who is professor at the University of Mainz, and similar projects with another grant that we're doing with the University in Leipzig, with Immo Fritsche, so there are several researchers who are doing research very similar to mine, and we're collaborating, looking on how Germans, Israelis and Poles are viewing the history of the Holocaust, how they view the responsibility and the reasons, for example, we're looking on explanations of how it was possible that the Holocaust happened. And thorough representative surveys, big samples in the three countries, we found that in Poland and in Israel, people explain the Holocaust in a very similar way: They would say, the reason for the Holocaust was German anti-semitism and the German culture of obedience, and in Germany, most people would say that it was rather because of the economic crisis, because of social circumstances that Hitler seized power, and this is why the Holocaust took place - they're looking more on the social circumstances rather than on national character. And this is a typical pattern, actually, that everybody, every nation wants to look on its own misdeeds as caused by circumstances and by social factors, while own glories and own victories are seen as rather caused by our personality. It's just the opposite if you're talking about another nation. If you're talking about another nation, then you'd say that the failures of this nation are caused by their personality, but about the successes,

you'd rather say that they are caused by the circumstances.
Those of you who are from Poland, which city are you from?

We're from Zamość.

Michał Bilewicz: That's a very interesting area from the perspective of, Polish-Jewish relations. The whole conception of Polish-Jewish relations is a tricky one because it implies certain understanding that Jews are not Poles, which is, which is something located at the core of the discussion that we have now, a debate about the relations between Poland and Israel and the history during Second World War. There is this implied reasoning that the Polish state has to defend the good name of Poland and to show the world that all Polish people were rescuers of Jews. The question is: Actually, Jews were killed here, most of them were Polish citizens. So, why the Polish nation or the Polish state today has to represent the history of some of its citizens, but not others of its citizens? In my opinion, the Polish minister should also represent the interests of those people who were murdered.

Zamość is also interesting because of probably the best testimony from the times of the Holocaust written in Polish language, no, it's one of the two best. As the first of them I would consider Calek Perechodnik, "*Spowiedź*", "The Testimony". Calek Perechodnik was a Jewish person who was part of the Jewish police in Otwork ghetto, he was a collaborator, a Jewish policeman, and he sent his own family to the death camp. He survived until 1944, he was hidden on the Aryan side in Warsaw and then somebody betrayed his hiding place and he was black-mailed and then finally killed by Gestapo. He writes his testimony in 1943/44, and as he writes about his memory, he says: "The times of the Holocaust is the times when the morality collapsed. Nobody was moral." And he said that neither Poles nor Germans - of course Germans were the evil at that time, but he says that Poles were immoral at that time and they betrayed Jews, and Jews were immoral at that time because Jews trusted that everything will be fine and actually collaborated in a way. This is something which is very hard to read today because if you're Polish, it makes you feel uncomfortable, if you're Jewish, it make you fee uncomfortable, and if you're German, of course it makes you uncomfortable, but I think this is what is the truth about the Holocaust: That nobody can feel really comfortable. There is no way to feel comfortable. The second testimony which is really worth reading is that of Zygmunt Klukowski, who was a doctor working very close to Zamość, in Szczebrzeszyn. Most of the book is actually about Zamość because he was travelling to Zamość, he spent half of the time in Zamość and half of the time in Szczebrzeszyn. Szczebrzeszyn was a small town and he was educated doctor, he wanted to party and to be part of this nice cultural place of Zamość, you know, where there were good cafes and so on, this is where he spent most of his time, and he writes about the reactions of people in Zamość and in Szczebrzeszyn and in Izbica and in the whole area to the Holocaust. And about the problem of people who are sometimes trying to, you know, to earn some money, to earn some property, to get houses or apartments, taking advantage of the fact that their neighbours

are being sent to Izbica and then to Belzec. He's Polish, he's not Jewish, but he writes, how is it possible that this can happen, that now neighbours treat neighbours as an opportunity to loot, an opportunity to get some property? This is very difficult to read, it's a very interesting perspective because it's the perspective of a person who is just there, who's part of the Polish Underground, he was *żołnierz*, he was part of the *wyklęci* after the Holocaust, and still asks these questions. It shows that the history is very complex, it's not black and white. For me as a psychologist, it's very important to know that we never can use our moral standards to make judgements about what happened during the Holocaust, because it's so different, and nobody in this room knows how they would act if they were placed in such situations.

You mentioned that this picture of history and of how the Holocaust happened is different in these three countries. Is this a general thing, shared by all people, or would you say that a certain group of people in each of the countries has a different view?

Michał Bilewicz: I was talking about a kind of average, the average German, average Pole and average Israeli, and of course we know that average people do not exist. It's a composition of many different groups. In Germany I am sure you are aware of the diversity of the country. If you look at the distribution of attitudes in Germany you find that if you go from the east, from the Saxonian Ore Mountain Range, where you have high popularity of AfD and very anti-immigrant views to, say, the Rhineland, where generally, people are rather open towards immigration, then you realise, that we have very different histories here because those people in Eastern Germany lived in a very homogeneous country for a long time, while the people in the Rhineland were always very open, they always had a lot of contacts with France. There is a lot of different histories, and the same is true for education levels: People who are more educated usually feel more of a sense of responsibility or guilt for what happened in the past and people who are less educated usually are more defensive and would like to have this very idealised image "We were always good and never did anything bad". This is about Germany, but talking about Poland it is the same: The more educated people in Poland are, the more willing they are to talk about the dark aspects of the history and not only the glorious ones. Besides, we have the same regional pattern as in Germany, actually, if you go more to the east, people are more defensive, if you go more to the west, people are more open-minded, so paradoxically, there is also this east-west dimension operating in Poland when you talk about history. If you look on research on Lubelskie, where Zamość is located, and Podlaskie, these are the two Voivodeships where the willingness to talk about the negative aspects of the history is the lowest. People would rather like to talk about the glorious history and be silent about the negative aspects of history. And if you go to Israel, it's more or less the same, it's not about an east-west dimension there, but also about education, and people who are less educated would also like to perceive Jews as only glorious, not doing any harm, being absolutely good. While people who are more educated, they

are sometimes acknowledging that there were some crimes against Palestinians, the Arab population, and the willingness to talk about *Nakba*, for example, the moment where Arabs were pushed from Jerusalem, many Arabs were killed and forced to migrate from what was to be Israel. Not everybody in Israel commemorates that.

I know very little about Latvia. I know that Latvia has a very traumatic history in this respect, that there was also a lot of collaboration going on in Latvia and even in Poland we have memories of Latvians actually serving in the German troops during the War. But I don't know about the debates in Latvia today, whether there are debates about the collaborationist parts of SS.

There are no broad debates about this topic because people don't like to speak about it, people just want to stick to the image of either heroes or victims. We, the Latvian people, were either victims or heroes, we didn't collaborate. There is an official recognition that Latvians participated in the Holocaust, but it is officially said that this people were only a small group, but actually it is not so small - it was shown that the collaboration was very broad. Many Latvians collaborated.

Michał Bilewicz: And there are these veterans, the combatants who were part of *Waffen-SS*, who have veteran rights, which from a Polish perspective sounds quite strange.

As you said, there is no black and white in history. There is no historical evidence that this Legion, the *Waffen-SS*, participated in the crimes against Jews. There are evidences about the *Sonderkommando*, but there is not evidences about *Waffen-SS*, so you cannot condemn them.

Michał Bilewicz: This is an interesting thing because it's also a part of the debate in Poland: That we had, for example, a part of the Polish underground in the Naliboki region, today this belongs to Belorussian Lithuania, close to Vilnius, Nowogródek, Daliboki. These were areas where the Polish Home Army, which was the main Polish underground force for some time, collaborated with the SS. They were fighting against the Soviet partisans under Nazi occupation, and this was a part of the history of Poland where some Polish troops were actually fighting on the side of Axis against the Allies, which is something you cannot understand if you always thought that Poland was on the side of Allies, not of Axis, but the history gets complicated when you dig deeper into it, and suddenly, you can find the reasons why they did it.

There are some people that believe that this *Waffen-SS*, was fighting for the independence of Latvia. I think that it's not true because restoration of the independence of Latvia wasn't part of the plans of the Nazis. Actually, we had the, one participant which decided to

leave our group because she didn't agree on this formulation.

Michał Bilewicz: This is a problem. In Poland, right now, we try to use the term 'Nazi Germany' or 'German camps' and so on, but I think that using term 'Nazi' is very essential here because the Nazi system of understanding was of course it was imposed by Germany in Europe, but it was very clever - depending on the meaning of 'clever' -, they were very instrumental in using the ambitions of other nations, so even if we know now that Germans did not have the plan to establish independent Latvia and we know now that Germans didn't have a plan to establish independent Ukraine, I am really confident that at least for some time, they were very good in giving the impression that if Ukrainians collaborate, they will get their own statehood. And this is the reason why there were many Ukrainians collaborating with the Nazis, and in Poland, we have of course this memory of crimes committed by the Banderist Ukrainian Insurgent Army, *UPA*. In the end, the Nazis imprisoned all the leaders of *UPA*, and they killed many of them, but in the beginning they created some forms of collaboration. There was *SS-Galizien*, another part of the *Waffen-SS* that was composed of Ukrainians and these Ukrainians really believed that this could be a way to establish Ukrainian statehood after being a part of Poland. They really wanted to have their statehood for a long time, and their leaders were sent to prison in pre-War Poland - we had Bereza Kartuska and Brześć, we had two notorious camps for the leaders of Ukrainian nationalist movement. The more you look at this history, the more you see reasoning behind all actions of people. Even if you take this Nowogródek Home Army, the Polish underground who was collaborating with Germany for some time and fighting against the Soviet partisans, you realise that they do this after they were betrayed by the Soviet partisans. The Soviet partisans didn't want to support them in their fight, and this was like a response. It's good to analyse that and to analyse the motivations, and not to be very simplistic in the way you analyse history.

Would you agree with Jan Gross that during the Second World War, the Polish people killed more Jews than Germans?

Michał Bilewicz: This is a very provocative statement when you say it like that, but then if you go into details, you understand that it's not that provocative. How easy was it to kill a German under German occupation in Poland? What would happen if you would kill a German soldier in Zamość in 1941?

Nothing good.

Michał Bilewicz: Probably a whole lot would happen. Probably not only your family would be killed, probably all your neighbours would be killed, and half of the people from Zamość will be sent to Germany. And Zamojszczyzna knows quite well what it means to lose all your children being sent to Germany, to become Germanised. And all these kinds of things happened, repressions for killing German people were extremely harsh, it was a very hard thing to

do. Now, even if most people would really love to do that, they would not do it because of fear. And if you have a minority of the population which really would like to benefit from betraying Jews or even killing them for money, how easy was it to do that? It was very easy. First of all, you could get even money from Gestapo for doing that and you knew this was not a problem. Jews were not considered humans by the Nazi system. If you think about it that way, it's not surprising and it doesn't tell a lot about Polish attitudes. If you just say about the number, that there were anti-War uprisings - we had this Burza action, the Warsaw Uprising was a part, when the whole Polish resistance was waiting for the good chance to start the general uprising in the whole country. But knowing that their forces were so weak compared to the Nazis, they were just waiting. And then Warsaw Uprising started, and this was the moment when you have a lot of struggle between Polish underground and the Nazis. But before that, they rarely did that because they knew that the repression will not target partisans, the repressions will target civilians. And they were representative civilians. This shows the complexity of the situation. And behind of that, I expect the numbers that Jan Gross provided were correct, and they were based on estimations by Marginalia who is probably one of the best Polish historians today, it's good to understand the source of these numbers.

We're also very much interested in what you can do against anti-Semitism. You mentioned that the more highly educated people are and the more exposure they have towards different kinds of people, the more willing they will be to accept bad aspects of history. Are they also less anti-Semitic, for example?

Michał Bilewicz: Yes. We always find a tight relation between education and anti-Semitism. The more educated people are, the less anti-Semitic they are, and the more tolerant they are in general. And it's normal, because the more you are exposed to any knowledge, like being exposed to other ethnic groups, you'll learn that by being more educated you get more information. Some of you travelled to Israel, and having travelled to Israel you realize that Jews are not people with hats, beards and prayers, and all this outlook which probably your great-grandfather told you about, but they are just normal people like we are. And this is the process of changing your knowledge structure from being very simplistic to being more complicated. And then you realize, some of them look like that, some of them wear those beards and so on, which you'll probably see in Jerusalem, but if you go to Tel Aviv, there are these fit young people who are like everybody everywhere else in Europe.

But from my experience, I can also say that in Latvia, I think there is the highest percentage of people with higher education, and still, these stereotypes and prejudices about Jews live in the society, live among people, and you cannot deal with it, you cannot reduce it.

Michał Bilewicz: The point with countries like Latvia and Poland and Eastern

parts of Germany is that these areas are ethnically very homogeneous. And this is the problem: You can be well-educated, but if you are educated in a very homogeneous environment-

Actually, Latvia was never homogeneous.

Michał Bilewicz: Ok, there were Russians and Latvians...

Not only, there were also many Jews, Poles and Germans...

Michał Bilewicz: I see. I know that in the past, the best way in Poland to get good education was to go to Tartu, the Dorpat. The Tartu University was the best university in this whole part of Europe, I know that there were lot of Poles going there to get their education. But those people who were raised in the Soviet times, I don't think that they had so much exposure to any otherness, and it's certainly for Poland and Germany: That if you look on this East-West dimension in Germany, it's also quite true that people are mostly prejudiced and mostly Islamophobic and mostly anti-immigrant in those areas. I mentioned to you those mountains of Erzgebirge because I went cross-country skiing two years ago there, and I was really impressed because this was a beautiful area, and there are nice mountaineers, who have their own tradition and culture, it's a fascinating place, but on the other hand, they are very homogeneous, there are only white, German protestants – maybe secular, in a way, but in the mountains not so much –, you cannot see any people looking in a different way or having a different culture there. And when you see the results of far right-wing parties there, this is probably the reason for that. It's the same if you look at Poland, in the more heterogeneous places, like bigger cities, you will have much less popularity of far right-wing parties. I remember being in Tomaszow Lubelski, maybe ten years ago. And on the street in in Tomaszow Lubelski, I saw posters everywhere of *Młodzież Wszechpolska*³⁸. And I was surprised because in Warsaw, I didn't see any posters like that, and I realised that this is the difference: That in the Poland that I know, which is the Poland of, Warsaw, Wrocław, Gdansk, maybe, Kraków, I don't see much of that because there is a lot of diversity - you know, you just hear English language spoken here at this university, and if those people see a poster of *Młodzież Wszechpolska*, which spreads hatred, these people will just take this poster down. It would not be attractive for them. Now, if you go to Tomaszow Lubelski, I don't think there would be any people who would say, "this is bullshit, take the poster down", because they don't know anything about what it means to be African, to be Muslim. They will be afraid of meeting Muslims, and such parties will get popular.

The Germans during the Nazi time, the Germans weren't uneducated, right? They also knew about maths, they knew literature,

³⁸English: "All-Polish Youth", an ultra-nationalist organisation forming part of the National Movement party

some of them were very well-educated. And still they were able to commit something as horrible as the Holocaust. So, my question is, what makes a *good* education? Because, obviously, there were educated people that still were very evil.

Michał Bilewicz: That's a big question, because basically we see that education makes people more open-minded, and you can say the same about this heterogeneity: Some of these Nazi criminals, like Adolf Eichmann, for example - he had many Jewish friends, he was friends with the president of the Jewish community in Budapest, he even spoke some Hebrew and some Yiddish. And he was the person that designed the whole destruction of the Jews, he designed the whole logistics of the Holocaust. And of course, you have many well-educated people holding doctoral degrees - which, at that time, was very rare. The biggest criminal in the history of my city was Oscar Dirlewanger, he created this brigade, it was in SS, the Dirlewanger Brigade, it was a brigade of former poachers and hunters - they were skilled, because they were hunters, they were poachers before, they knew how to fight in the forest very well, and they were used to fight partisans. When Warsaw Uprising happened, they were sent to Warsaw to kill the insurgents, the partisans who were fighting in the city during the Warsaw Uprising. But in fact, it turned out that they were just killing civilians, they made this huge slaughter of Wola, a region of Warsaw; they came from house to house, they were raping all women and they were killing all men whom they would see in that whole part of Warsaw. And we are talking not even about Jewish people, they were killing Polish people. And Oscar Dirlewanger held a doctoral degree, he was a political scientist before. So, you are right that not all education makes you moral and open-minded. I think that even Goebbels was holding a doctoral degree, there were more of them who were holding doctoral degrees, among the top Nazis - Mengele, too, who was a medical doctor. Now, there is this big question for me, and I try to pass it on to my students as far as I can: That there is always this question of how you understand your responsibilities and your duties if you are a scientist. And the case of Mengele is a good example, because he was thinking that he's actually doing medical research. He was thinking, "I have these Jewish inmates of the Auschwitz Camp, and I can do experiments on them that are normally considered unethical - now, nobody will check whether I do ethical or non-ethical experiments. So, if I can do these experiments on twins, for example, I can discover some very important patterns about human physiology, that maybe later on could cure thousands of people. Just because I killed these ten or 15 Jews or Gypsies." And this is a kind of reasoning which, if you think in a scientific way, is a big risk of studying science and of doing research. Because at some point, you could say, "I can make the world a better place. But to make the world a better place, I have to waste life of some people." This is something that we have learned from the Holocaust as well, that this is a trick that really works for some very well-educated people. And this is something that we have to be really cautious about. This is why many well-educated people in Germany were attracted by Nazi ideology. Because Nazi ideology claimed to be based on

science. “First, we are looking at correlations, we are doing some statistics and are looking at how different diseases are distributed in a population. And we say that among Slavic people, - Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Russians - you find that there is a significantly higher level of some diseases than among Germans, Austrians, Swiss people, and Dutch people.” This is their discovery, and then, there’s somebody who tells you, “Now, what can we do to make sure that our population will not have these diseases? Maybe we should do something that they don’t marry these Slavic people, because it will be bad for the health of our children, and we really want to have healthy children.” Today, it sounds awkward, but if the Holocaust had never happened... This was the way people would think in a scientific, reasonable way, this was also the way Americans were thinking: When people were trying to get from Europe to America, in the United States they had quotas, of how many people they would let in from different countries. So, if they knew there were more diseases in Ireland, or if they there was a higher criminality rate in Ireland, they would say, “We want lower quota of immigration from Ireland, we don’t want Irish people to come”. And there was Ellis island, where they were selecting people, and they’d say, “Irish people, go back. Jewish people – maybe we can take them, because statistically, they are quite smart. They are quite criminal, but - okay, let’s take them. Polish people, they’re quite healthy, hard-working, we can take them - German people, we can take them.” It was all based on statistical analysis of criminality, and this way of thinking was very popular in the whole pre-War era, even in democratic societies. And Nazi Germany took this whole idea and said, “Let’s design some more things even, let’s design whom we are going to marry and whom we are not going to marry, then later on design who is going to be alive and whom we will kill.

We are now in a very special building, which is now the Department of Psychology, and I’m teaching students of psychology, because there should also be a concern about how we understand psychological illnesses and mental health, because this was also very important in thinking about the Holocaust.

If you are in Zamość, I really recommend you to visit Bełzec as well. Once you go to Bełzec, there is very beautiful monument, very powerful – to me, it’s the best way of commemorating the Holocaust that I have ever seen in Poland. Auschwitz is very brutal, naturalistic, because everything is there, but if you got to Bełzec, you see more of a symbolic meaning. Anyhow, go down to the small museum which is there, and try to learn as much as possible about the biographies of SS troopers in Bełzec. Who were the people that were operating gas chambers, who were the people that were operating the crematoria in Bełzec? They were all from Berlin, they were doctors, people from the programme “*Tiergartenstraße 4*”, and they were all part of the medical staff of mental hospitals in Germany, like Hadamar and other mental hospitals in Germany. How is it possible that doctors – some of them were doctors, some of them were medical assistants – from a mental hospital somewhere in Germany, how could they end up in Bełzec, killing Jews in a massive way? To understand that, you have to understand the problem with psychology and psychiatry at that time. There was this whole beautiful idea of reform psychiatry. If you take the whole history

of psychiatry and psychology, it looked like that: There were people in mental hospitals. Those people were usually just kept there, and nobody wanted to cure them. There was no such idea like psychotherapy. It was times before Freud, and Freud was this new, fashionable way of thinking. But at that time, no attempts were made to cure these people. They were just retarded, you had to keep them there – and it costs a lot to keep them. The society had to pay money to keep these people in the hospitals. If you read Michel Foucault³⁹, this is how in the past, mental hospitals operated. And then there was this very bright idea in Germany, of very progressive people, who said, “let’s make psychotherapy, let’s cure people”. The best way to cure people is to ask them to work, that they go out of the hospital and start working in the normal society and then go back to the hospital. There is also a combination of therapy with making them work. And as you realise that some of these patients can work, it costs even more to make them work and to provide a therapy for them, and you are very happy that after a few years of therapy, they return into society. You had all these patients with a depression, with anxiety disorders and so on, and you cure them. But it costs a lot. Then finally, there are these people to whom you do the same, but you cannot cure them - people with schizophrenia, sometimes, sometimes people with neurological problems. You realise that you really need money to provide a therapy for those people whom you can’t cure, and you need to save money somehow, and somebody tells you, “now, if you cannot cure them, their lives are kind of worthless. Maybe we can create eugenic ways of killing these people whom we cannot help. By killing them, we save a lot of money, we can help much more people who actually can be cured. And the most progressive people at that time believed that this is what you should do it in times where you don’t have sufficient money for the medical system. Once you design this idea, you need to train some medical assistants that can take people and put them into gas chambers and kill them. This is how it all started, and once you have people who know how to do that, you just tell them, to think about different populations: “Now we occupy whole Europe. And we know from statistics that some nations have high level of certain illnesses. Jews are spreading typhus, they have parasites, and they have problems with their mental health as well – it will be better and safer for Europe as a whole if we just kill them.” It was easy for those people who were medical assistants, who were assigned different tasks, and who were told, “you are curing the nation now, not only patients, but you’re curing the whole nation. You can do that.” This is a very, very dangerous way of thinking, and I consider elements of it to be part of scientific thinking even today. And I’m very afraid of that.

Can you give an example?

Michał Bilewicz: Today, there is this question, for example, in medicine, of whether people should be cured from all illnesses, and of what we should do with patients who cannot be cured, of how much should we invest in them.

³⁹ provide some suggestions for Foucault readings here?

There is this question about genetic improvements of different kinds. The more wealthy you are today – it's not the case right now, but it will be in the future – the more you will be able to plan whether your children will have certain traits or not. And there is this whole issue of bioethics today, which touches upon important moral questions: We are kind of okay with the situation that in China, there are constraints of the fertility, people can have only two children in China, and nobody would suggest anything like that for Germans, Americans, Canadians, or Swiss people. What's the difference? Why are we agreeing that this is completely fine in China, while we would probably be really scared if somebody said that Chinese people can have as much children as they want. I think this kind of thinking is present in the works of today as well, that not everybody should have the same amount of children. When we ask these questions in surveys, there is this thing, for example, with immigrants, that we should invest in some form of birth control among immigrants – and many people would say, “yes, we should do that”.

If you turn on Polish TV, you also can things like “we cannot take more refugees to Poland, because if we do, Poland will not be Poland anymore, it will no longer be a Christian country”. This is a way of thinking about people who are in the worst situation you can imagine: They are, say, from Syria, escaping from a war zone, and you don't rescue them. Even top politicians in Poland were saying things like that. I see elements of this thinking that not every life has the same value, that some races, some nations or some ethnicities, that their survival has a lower value, and our life has higher value.

I have a very different question: What about the freedom of historical science and research in Poland at this moment?

Michał Bilewicz: I would say that at the moment, there is a full freedom of historical research and any science in Poland. What's more, we have a very good funding system, I cannot complain. I'm having a co-founded research grant from *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* and Polish National Science Centre, and looking at this grant, we can see that we have very similar system like in Germany. It's not working on an ideological basis, you can get money for research which is completely against the government's ideology. But there are tendencies, which are always being contradicted, and I think it's very good that they are contradicted. Now, we have this new law which was passed by the law chamber of the Polish parliament on Friday, there was an immediate reaction to that, and I don't think that it will be passed in that form. It's a very long story, this law was first invented in 2006, they have been trying for ten years to have this law, and there always was a clash. It has been voted down by the constitutional tribunal. And I really hope it will not succeed, because if it does, it will be kind of impossible to do scientific research in some forms and to talk about the things that we are talking here about, for example, and to talk about all these complexities. I am friends with many people doing Holocaust research in Poland, and discovering very negative facts about Polish history, and I never heard about any of them having any criminal case in Poland. But

of course, there are some pressures. For example, in our research centre, we're doing research about the levels of anti-Semitism in Poland, we try to measure anti-Semitism in different parts of the country, we are trying to look at the sources of anti-Semitism and at ways to decrease it. It was three times already that we were invited to speak at the Polish parliament's ethnic minorities' commission and present our studies. And once, after we presented these results, there was a letter from group of members of the Law and Justice party, PiS, to the rector of the University of Warsaw, and they asked the rector about the centre – where are they getting money from? How many are they? How much do they get from Polish budget? and so on and so on. They were putting a little bit of pressure on the chancellor of the university, trying to check what's going on, signaling that they don't want these guys to do the research that they are doing. But, to show you how independent our academic institution is, I can tell you that the rector responded, "any academic at my university can express any views properly, and it is not of my thing to criticise that". He stood in favour of academic freedoms at the university, and I consider this to be a very strong standard at universities right now, but you never know about the future.

Can you tell us more about the research you do on anti-Semitism today, about the results of the research?

Michał Bilewicz: There are a lot of studies. Basically, we are distinguishing three forms of anti-Semitism: The first form of anti-Semitism is conspiracy anti-Semitism. This is basically the belief that Jews are organising secret plans to take control over the world, control over the media, and so on. And this kind of thinking is very widespread in Poland, more people agree with such statements than disagree with them. The second form of anti-Semitism is something which we always consider to be very historical: Believing that Jews are responsible for killing Jesus, that Jews are using Christian blood for ritual purposes, that they are kidnapping children and so on. We always thought that's it's gone, but it's still approximately 20% percent of people in Poland who think that some Jews did that, different studies find 15-20% of the population who believe that. We are surprised by that; it's almost entirely in villages and small towns, you don't find this in cities, and it's very much correlated with education, it occurs mostly among people with lower levels of education. The third form of anti-Semitism is what we called secondary anti-Semitism – from German research, *sekundärer Antisemitismus* - which is about exactly what we are talking about today: Unwillingness to talk about history, unwillingness to acknowledge any responsibility, and the perception that Jews are exploiting history in order to have some gains. And it's very much related to the idea of a Jewish conspiracy, but in Poland, it's also driven by a sense of comparative victimhood- who was the bigger victim in history?- and, also a sense of a lack acknowledgement, which actually in Poland is a big problem: That, globally, the history of Second World War and the Polish victimhood was not very well acknowledged. When you go to America and talk about Warsaw Uprising there, for example, nobody knows about Warsaw Uprising. Even in Germany, if you talk about the fate of the

Polish people during the War, they don't really know about it sufficiently. And Polish people are aware of the fact that the world does not really know about Polish suffering and therefore, there is this fight: "Why do they know so much about Jewish suffering, while they don't know about our suffering?" We did some research on this as well, that once you give Polish people the information that Polish people are recognised, for example if you read statements by Barak Obama or by other big figures to them, that Polish people were brave and fighting very bravely with Nazi Germany, that Poland was the only country which had an underground state, and so on, then finally, Polish people are more willing to recognise the Jewish suffering. I think that it's not only that Poles are responsible because they are anti-Semites, but there wasn't sufficient recognition of Polish history for quite a long time in Poland, and I think that then, in Poland, there is this sense that we didn't get recognised sufficiently

What about the concept that Poland is a Christ of Nations?

Michał Bilewicz: There is this concept, it's an old romantic tradition in Poland - if you read Mickiewicz and romantic poets in Poland, you have this image of Poland as the messiah of nation, or Poland as the Christ of Nation, and the martyrdom of Polish nation is a way to liberate the world. This was how Mickiewicz was thinking about it: The more you suffer, the more the other people will be liberated by our suffering. I don't think people will think like that anymore, these are not the good old times where Adam Mickiewicz himself went to Turkey to organise insurgents – you know, Polish romantic poets were going to Bulgaria, Albania, Mickiewicz was also was in Italy as well, in France – he went everywhere, he tried to organise revolutions, local fighters for independence, and I don't think we have this messianic idea that we have to help all other occupied nations in the world anymore now - unfortunately, because this was a very nice aspect of Polish culture, that somehow, we don't care what happens with us now, but we want to help others.

Kaczyński and Smolensk has nothing to do with it?

Michał Bilewicz: In the life of Kaczyński, one element has something to do with it, because I think late Kaczyński really believed that way. When there was a war between Russia and Georgia, Kaczyński flew to Georgia, he went to the border, and he said, "Me, president of Poland, I'm there, you cannot cross the border". And this was his way of showing, that he felt he has to go to Georgia, and to state up with Georgia against Russia to show solidarity, even if he loses his life. I remember that at that time, Adam Michnik, the Polish liberal, the chief editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, who was very, very much against Kaczyński, said, "Wow, this was so brave and so glorious", and Kaczyński also organised other politicians from the region, the president of Lithuania was also there, and some other political leaders whom he took with him to the Russian-Georgian border. There were some incidents like that, I think that Lech Kaczyński, he was part of that story, I don't think that Jarosław Kaczyński would do things

like that anymore. Alexander Kaczyński did something like that once, when he went to Ukraine, and he took part in the Orange Revolution very actively, supporting freedom of Ukraine at that time. All of this was taken from this idea in Poland that we, because of having the history of suffering, because of being victims, have to help other victims. These are elements of thinking which have been present in Poland for a very long time, but for some reasons, I now think that it's more or less gone. And I think it's a mission of you who are teachers and you who want to be teachers, to also give your pupils this view on history: That if your nation had a history of suffering, or, like in Germany, your nation had a history of crime it really should make us have a sense of responsibility of what we do to others today. This is a very big challenge for educators. I think that I need to finish because there will be some exam in this room, and I heard that you need to leave as well at quarter past four, but I think it's great that you came, and I hope that the rest of your trip will be great, and remember to read in Bełżec the biographies of the SS who were operating the camp.

Bartosz Gajdzik

Bartosz Gajdzik is an educator at the “Grodzka Gate - NN Theatre” Centre in Lublin since 2012. Through collecting archives of Jews from the Lublin area, composing exhibitions to commemorate particular Jews of Lublin, individuals and families killed in the Holocaust, educating, conducting workshops and publishing, he is participating in ‘repairing the world’, as in the Jewish concept Tikkun olam. He is responsible for organising workshops for secondary school students and also for teachers, often mixed groups of Poles and Israelis. He is focused on propagating Jewish culture among Polish students and also fighting stereotypes in Polish society. He studied philosophy.

The interview took place at “Grodzka Gate - NN Theatre” Centre on January 27th, 2018.

Bartosz Gajdzik: First of all, we still have a problem with anti-Semitism in Poland. I'd like to say a few words about anti-Semitic attacks against this institution. It was attacked a few times by anti-Semites. They printed some anti-Semitic posters about it, even though all fifty-five people who work here in the full-time jobs are not Jewish. We are in a municipal institution where Polish people, inhabitants of Lublin work to commemorate the Jewish community that lived here before the Second World War. It's very meaningful that those attacks were prepared by anti-Semites, but against Poles, not against Jews. Our institution exists thanks to local people, I'm trying to show you the two sides of this situation. On one side local people, the local government decided that we cannot understand the history of Lublin without the Jews who lived here and that this is important. If we don't want to be ignorant, we must remember about the Jews who lived here. Before the Second World War, one third of the population was Jewish, but for example at the beginning of 19th century, Jews made up even more than half of the population. For this reason, we cannot understand history of our town without the history of Jews. It really doesn't matter that we aren't Jewish. But for some groups, it's the reason of being attacked. There were not only posters; the director of this institution, Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, was also attacked, it was a personal attack, someone broke the window of his kitchen in his private house. Those people used bricks with swastikas, it was a very strong symbol. It happened a few years ago. The police started investigation and it took a few months for them to find those people, and one of the men who was in this group was a full-time worker of the printing house of the State Museum at Majdanek. I want to show you this paradoxon: a man who works in a memorial site, in the State Museum at Majdanek, can be also an anti-Semite. Reality is very complex. On the one hand, we have inhabitants of Lublin who are trying to remember Jews in this town. On the other hand, they can be attacked. We co-operate with almost every school in Lublin, we conduct workshops. When I come to school as an educator, for example in the lesson

of Polish language or history, students usually don't know what will happen, they are not prepared, and at the beginning I introduce myself and then I'm trying to introduce the topic, "We're talking about Jews". And when I say this word in Polish, *Żydzi*, sometimes students start to laugh, as if this word was a bit shameful, or some kind of bad word. It shows the many stereotypes which students have about Jews: I just said that we were talking about Jews and they started laughing as it was some funny topic. We can just imagine what kind of stereotypes they have in their minds.

Have you encountered any anti-Semitic behaviour among students of secondary schools, except for laughing at the word "Jew"?

Bartosz Gajdzik: It's not so often about their behaviour. Sometimes I ask, "Why are you laughing? What kind of associations do you have with this word?" Then they explain that they start to laugh because sometimes people use the word "Jew" to imply that someone is very rich and doesn't want to share their money with others. Usually we talk about the reasons of this kind of behaviour, and we talk about stereotypes. And then I try to show them that, of course, we have stereotypes which can be negative and positive. For example, there is a stereotype about Polish readiness to help or Polish hospitality, or about Germans, that they are very good workers. Of course, it's again a stereotype. And reality is always much more diverse and complex than stereotypes.

Can you name any positive stereotype about Jews?

Bartosz Gajdzik: It's usually something between positive and negative, there's this stereotype that they can make a good business. It's something in between, of course, it's good to be a good businessman, but on the other hand, there's a negative side of this stereotype.

One of the Jewish students in Kraków told us about so-called 'positive' anti-Semitism⁴⁰: Some Polish reckon Jews as people who are good lawyers or doctors, but there is a slight negative side in it. They admire them as good workers, good craftsmen, intelligent ones, but at the same time, there is some kind of envy. There is a paradox of 'positive anti-Semitism'.

Bartosz Gajdzik: Yes, that's the paradox. Now, we are in the gallery which is dedicated to the Righteous Among the Nations, and I think this is a good occasion to talk about anti-Semitism in the countryside. We co-operate with the Yad Vashem Institute, the workers of this institute try to collect documents about non-Jews who helped Jews during the Second World War. And all testimonies which we recorded here are given to the Yad Vashem Institute. Sometimes we have some information that someone somewhere in the Lublin Region helped Jews during the Second World War, and we are trying to find those people, we

⁴⁰The interviewer is referring to Serhii Czupryna here.

knock on their door, but probably, even if they helped Jews during the war, they don't want to talk about it. Because of their neighbours, unfortunately. For those people it's kind of shameful: they helped the Jews during the Second World War, it means that they maybe got money because of that, and they are afraid that their neighbours will say so. Besides, we must remember that it was Nazi law that anyone who helped Jews during the Second World War was treated like a traitor. We don't know exactly how many people, probably a thousand Polish people were murdered in Poland, because they helped the Jews. And sometimes the Nazis murdered not only the family who helped, but the whole village. It was the risk for the whole village. Maybe those people don't want to talk about it also because it was the risk not only for them but also for their neighbours. We don't know exactly. But, at the end, what was wrong about it? Seventy-five years after the Second World War it is still a problem to talk about this. We still have problems with history, with memories.

Now, let me tell you about the reasons of anti-Semitism. I think the first reason is that in communities and societies there is always a kind of identity, a process of building the community identity for which we need to find an enemy. It was not necessary that those enemies were Jews. But some people can build their identities only if they know who the enemy is. I know my enemy, so I know who I am. Unfortunately, in my opinion, in these days they can be also refugees. The second perspective, in my opinion, is a conflict between Christianity and Judaism, in this case, religion is the reason. I think that this conflict was the most important reason in this part of Europe until the end of 19th century. After the War, the reasons of contemporary anti-Semitism in Poland, in my opinion, are Jewish properties. Many Poles don't want to remember that Polish people after the War started to use Jewish properties and that before the Second World War, three point five million Jews lived in Poland. All of them had homes and private properties. And usually, during the Second World War and in the aftermath, some buildings were destroyed, some not; usually Polish people started to use these properties. And it's very difficult for Jews to take them back right now. It's a good solution not to remember that Poles used Jewish properties and that's the moment when we start to use all these anti-Semitic stereotypes: the Jews were bad people, they were like aliens, and still they want something from us, they want our money, they want our properties, they want our house. We don't talk about it in public.

Do you think that the Jews who emigrated from Poland to Palestine or Israel claim to get back their properties?

Bartosz Gajdzik: It depends. Usually not. It's very difficult, it's even impossible. After the War Poland, in the communistic state, the law didn't allow to take back private properties, it was possible only for religious communities. For example, it was possible for the Jewish religious community or the Catholic religious community – take, for example, the building of Jewish school Jesziwa here in Lublin. After the War there was a medical university in this building. And in 2002 the Jewish religious community took it back. This is possible just

for religious communities. It also works, for example, for Polish farmers. After the War, huge farms were divided into small pieces and it was also impossible to take it back for Polish people. So, this law was not only against Jews, it was sometimes also directed against Polish people who were rich.

And recently, we are in strained situation. I mean this discussion about the relations between Poland and Israel and the law which is devoted to keeping the good name of Poland. It has different aspects. The official statement is that somewhere in the world, people use the phrase 'Polish death camps'. Of course, it's not true, it's a huge mistake to use it. But in this new law there's nothing about 'Polish death camps'. This new law says, more or less, that everyone who will say that some complicity lies with Polish people regarding the Nazi crimes can go to prison for three years. But sometimes the complicity of Poles in some crimes, particular crimes, like Jedwabne for example, is clear - it happened. Israeli people and other people who Survived, they feel afraid if they have had some bad experience during the War because of the Polish people. This law is not only for the Polish but also for people from abroad. It's a huge mistake, I think that we cannot change history and we cannot change history through a law. We must use educational tools, first of all.

Do you think there's a real danger for Polish Jews today because of that law? A few days ago, we made an appointment with a Jewish woman who lives in Kraków, and she was really scared. The day before, she went to Auschwitz, and she heard the speech of the Israeli ambassador, and she was afraid of what would happen to them right now.

Bartosz Gajdzik: If they feel fear, that's enough. It was not necessary to start this process. For example, yesterday I spent the half of the day here at my work to explain people from Israel what was going on here, because they had many questions: 'Can we visit Poland right now?' They feel really afraid; this law is not so clear; we don't know exactly what it means. For example, during discussions in parliament, there was a question about the latest book of Jan Gross about Jedwabne. And there was a question: is this book against the law or not? Some vice minister answered that it depended if the author talked about facts or not, if he was a researcher and if he used the correct tools or not. Who will decide about this? No one knows. I also want to say that in my opinion, we cannot talk about anti-Semitism without education about different kinds of exclusion and stereotypes. Anti-Semitism is only one kind of exclusion. We must learn not only about the exclusion of Jews, but also about exclusions of different nations, of women, and about homophobia. In my opinion, there are the same reasons that form the basis of all these exclusions. People cannot accept that reality is very complex and diverse, and we cannot change these diversities, we must accept the diversity of reality.

Usually, visiting groups from Israel have many guards with them. What do you think about it? Is it necessary?

Bartosz Gajdzik: That's a good question. Quite often, Polish students ask me why. It looks like they need security because they feel afraid of us. Is it true? Israel is a very untypical country because security is one of the most important matters in Israel, even inside the state. The level of security is much higher than here, in Poland, in Europe. The groups of Israeli students have security guards if they go somewhere as a full class, even inside Israel, when they travel to Galilee or to the Dead Sea from Jerusalem. They have these security measures because they live on the territories which are occupied. And they have them not only in Poland, but also in Germany, in France, in Israel, wherever. So, it's not because they feel afraid of Poles, but because they feel afraid of terrorism, wherever they are. But of course, it can be misunderstood.

Getting back to the past, I would like to ask about villagers who obviously had some anti-Semitic attitude because of Catholic priests' teaching. How would you call a person who is anti-Semitic because of the Catholic Church and at the same time saves Jews' lives? There were such cases. Would you call the person anti-Semitic or not?

Bartosz Gajdzik: Yes, I would. Because of their thinking. Many people who were anti-Semites helped Jews during the Second World War, because they felt that it was something obligatory for Christians. Even if I have stereotypes about Jews, even if I hate them, I must do it. And it means that anti-Semitic thinking and behaviour are not the same thing. It can cross, as in the case of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka. She was a writer, she wrote many anti-Semitic texts, but she helped Jews, many of them Survived thanks to her.

Can we compare it to today's immigrant crisis? If a person is against keeping refugees in their country but is Catholic? I can donate some money to support refugees in Syria for example, so I help them. But I don't want them here.

Bartosz Gajdzik: Yes. In my opinion, it's also our Polish contemporary paradox. Again stereotypes of Poles, they consider themselves very helpful and hospitable. They also like to remember that Polish Righteous Among the Nations are the biggest group. Usually, when we talk about the Holocaust in Poland, the mainstream only claims that Poles are the biggest group among them. It's the most important thing. Except for that, and the fact that death camps were not Polish, it's not necessary to know anything. A few years ago, there was a poll in high schools in Warsaw, and there was the question "What do you think about relationships between Poles and Jews during the Second World War?" Eighty percent answered that the Polish people helped Jews often or very often. We must remember that the group of people who helped Jews was really small, probably it was less than one percent. We know about seven thousand Righteous Among the Nations from Poland. On the one hand, it's twenty five percent of all the Righteous, but on the other hand, this percentage is highest in proportion because here in Poland lived the biggest Jewish community. For

example, in Latvia, there are not so many Righteous, firstly because there were not so many Jews there. Around fifteen million Poles lived in Poland before the Second World War. When we compare fifteen million Poles to seven thousand Righteous, what is the percentage? But right now, students in schools, not only in Warsaw, think that during the Second World War Poles, as a whole nation, were very helpful to Jews. And the same group seventy-five percent of students - I don't know if they want to help. They don't want to have refugees here. On the one hand, they regard Poles as very helpful in the past, but on the other hand, nowadays it doesn't work anymore. So that's also the paradox. It's a good example of using experiences from the history in contemporary challenges. It's not only history: anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, Shoah.

Do you see any chance to reduce anti-Semitism in the world, and do you have any ideas?

Bartosz Gajdzik: Of course, education and meetings can help, because many people have anti-Semitic stereotypes even if they haven't met any Jew. I imagine this Catholic priest¹. A few years ago, he told me that he was in hospital, he was standing in line, waiting to see a doctor. And as usually, people were talking to each other and someone said that we have a problem with doctors in this country, with the health service because there are always some Jews in the government and they do all the troubles to us. And he asked: "Jews? What do you have against the Jews? I'm a Jew. Did I do anything bad against you?" This man was confused, because probably he hadn't met any Jew before. I think that such meetings are the best way to recognise stereotypes and to break them. That's also the reason why we organise meetings between Polish students and students from Israel. They can understand that in the modern world everyone uses Facebook, everyone listens to the same music, and people more or less are very similar. And it's also good context to understand that many stereotypes about Jews are just not true.

And what are the main interests among students when you organise workshops? Is it rather anti-Semitism or the Jewish culture?

Bartosz Gajdzik: It's the Jewish culture. There are of course some students who are anti-Semites and want to talk about anti-Semitism, but usually they just know nothing about Judaism, about the Jewish culture, so usually they have questions like "why those *kipot* on Jews' heads, why the mezuzas on a front door?". They need explanations, they have some knowledge, a bit true, but also some false statements or false opinions, and they didn't have a chance to ask these questions before. Usually, we prepare students before a meeting with Israelis. Having the image of a Jew in black clothes in mind, in a black hat, with those funny elements on the both sides of heads, they ask me if the Jews look like other people, just like me and you.

How did your personal interest in this theme develop?

Bartosz Gajdzik: I don't know exactly, probably there are few reasons. The deepest is in my personality. But the first reason this priest, I mentioned this priest. He was my professor of philosophy, he talked a lot about Jewish philosophy, about the history of Jews, and I started being interested in Jewish philosophy from the beginning. I graduated from philosophy at the university and I wrote my thesis about the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, he was a Jewish Frenchman who lived in 20th century. When I was a student ten years ago, I rented an apartment with my friend in a building more than one hundred years old. One day, I met some people who were just looking around there, as if they were searching for someone. It was the family of this Jewish boy, whom you saw on a photo in the exhibition, Henio Żytomirski, and he had lived in this very building. Of course, I didn't know about this. I invited this Israeli family to my place. In this building there were four apartments, and they didn't know exactly in which one they had lived, they just knew the address Szewska 6. And Neta Żytomirska, the lady who was a cousin of Henio, said that she was in this building ten years before, but she was afraid to come inside because of her experience, probably some memories from the past. But when she met me, she felt she could enter. And we became friends. Always when I'm in Israel, I visit this family. But then, ten years ago I just asked myself: What's going on? I live in the building where Jewish people lived before, I don't know anything about them, anything about Jews. I know there was a concentration camp at Majdanek, of course, I know that before the Second World War, Jewish people lived in Poland, but actually I was ignorant. I just felt that I should change it. And it was in 2008 when I came to this institution for the first time. I still was a student, I started co-operating as an educator. They trained me how to conduct workshops in mixed groups of Poles and Israelis. And then I started a part-time job, and since 2012 I work here a full-time. For me, it's the mix of some reflections, some personal experience and history. I just felt that this is something very important. I don't have any Jewish roots.

What about Professor Waszkinel2? He is not a priest anymore, is he?

Bartosz Gajdzik: Officially he is, but he's out of the Church in Poland, he doesn't work as a priest. His bishop decided they didn't need him; it's actually his problem. The Church in Poland and also in Israel allowed him to move but they also didn't need him, so he could do whatever he wanted. He doesn't have a church to be a priest in Israel. It's very personal for him, if he's a priest or not, I know he had some internal dialogue between those two identities.

Do you know perhaps how he is perceived at the Catholic University of Lublin? Especially with his view of John Paul II's teaching, as he is the patron of the university.

Bartosz Gajdzik: I know that he felt bad at the university. It's hard to discuss about feelings, he started feeling like an alien at the university among

his colleagues. He's a priest but he's a Jew. They didn't accept his identity and he decided to retire and they accepted it. In his opinion, they didn't want him to stay longer at the university, even though he wasn't forced to leave. But on the other hand, in Israel he is like an alien as well. There are not so many Catholic priests, or people who used to be priests in Israel. I met him in Israel in December, and he told me he decided to stay in Israel because there many people have some trouble with their identity. There are people from all over the world and in this context, in this homogenous society, he feels similar to the majority of Jewish Survivors.

Teresa Klimowicz

Interview with Teresa Klimowicz: will be inserted as soon as the edition is done.

Dr Sonia Ruszkowska

Sonia Ruszkowska is an educator at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN since 2013 where she is responsible for the educational programme of the Museum directed at schools. She participated in the educational program of the main exhibition from the beginning. She is specialised in drama theatre workshops and anti-discriminatory education with a special focus on civil rights and the fight against Anti-Semitism. Her educational programmes are mainly aimed at children, youth and teachers. She studied philosophy, and wrote her PhD about the Holocaust, the death in the gas chambers and the possibility of bringing back subjectivity for victims of the mass deaths. Before she started her work at the Museum, she worked as a schoolteacher for philosophy and ethics and participated in a foundation called 'Forum for Dialogue', that projects with school children in different towns and cities in Poland, raising awareness for the Jewish history of the places. We met her in the POLIN Museum on January 29th, 2018.

You told us about a Forum for Dialogue. Is it only devoted to small towns and villages in Poland, or also to bigger cities? As an educator, do you see a greater need of educating in smaller towns?

Sonia Ruszkowska: There are programs of Forum for Dialogue in bigger cities like Białystok or Warsaw, but generally the project is run in smaller towns. I think the need is the same in smaller and bigger cities but in bigger cities there are more educational programs that are available for students.

These kinds of programmes are very necessary because kids do not know the Jewish history of their towns at all, they have no idea that Jews were living there and if they know, they do not know what it means because they know nothing about Jewish culture. But they are very interested, if we go there and we start the topic they are really fascinated by it.

In their homes, many times they encounter very anti-Semitic perspectives, so it's harder for them to really go beyond that, if they will never meet somebody for whom Jews are positively connoted.

What do you think, where do these anti-Semitic things come? Are the parents anti-Semitic because their parents were anti-Semitic?

Sonia Ruszkowska: That's a big topic. Generally, what we know from history, antisemitism comes for example (and we show it on our exhibition) from Christian-Jewish relationship, but also from economic rivalry...it's a big topic... there are so many books about it... But from an individual perspective, I meet mostly pupils and they say — that's a good example: "My grandma heard that there's a Jewish workshop in the museum and she told me not to bring my wallet." And this kid, he was laughing, like: "Oh, what is grandma saying", so this

is already okay, because he trusted us (assuming that we are Jewish if we make the Jewish workshops which is not the case, for example, for me, but there is this assumption). They hear it at home, from their grandparents and parents. And very small children, who do not really think in a conscious way, they have very bad assumptions with the word “Jew”. At the beginning of the workshop in the Museum I normally ask them: What does it mean that somebody is a Jew, what does this word mean?”, and many times they said “Oh, a Jew is a person who does not want to share with others”. In Polish it’s *skąpiec* — “greedy”. I always ask myself: “How does this six-year-old child know these stereotypes already”, and this is in language, because in Polish *żydzić*, it’s a verb, it comes from *Żyd* — “Jew”, and means “being stingy”. So it’s basically the language that gives them these stereotypes, but also, I have the impression that generally, in Polish society, there is a very bad association with Jewish culture, with Jews, and, of course, there’s always people who are fascinated by Jewish culture.

How we can fight these stereotypes, in your opinion?

Sonia Ruszłowska: In my workshops, I use this method called Non-Violent Communication (NVC), I try to give empathy to a person and not to judge this person, like “You’re stupid, you’re anti-Semitic, how can you say these things?” — I try to understand why this person is saying this, and mostly it is in the end that people want to feel safe. And if they don’t know something, they have this association of danger, for example, that their values are in a way endangered. So, I try to understand this person, what this person is saying, and then convert it into a language of needs — what does this person need? And then when this person really feels that I’m listening to him or her and is calm, then I can say how it is for me. For example I can say that I know many Jews, many of them are my friends and I would like people to respect them. Of course, I can also say that some Jews can do negative things as everybody else, but generally, for me, the respect is important. Or, for example, I can say that I wrote a book about the Holocaust and know a lot of testimonies, so it’s really important for me not to make jokes about the Holocaust. So, I try to make it personal, so that’s one thing – other thing: people need knowledge, because they don’t know so many things and they have only some images. For example, this topic that is always coming back that Poles were so great for Jews during the War and how Jews could say that Poles were murdering Jews. So, if people do not know that before the War there was a lot of discrimination of Jews in Poland and a lot of tension, they will never understand why Poles reacted the way they did during the War, why this tensions were even greater because of the occupation. So, if people learn things and understand things, they are more open. Another thing: I believe in meetings. If people have only images and they have never seen any Jewish person, they have really only an image. So, when I see these, for example, Israeli-Polish meetings, even if they last only for one hour, they can really change something, and I really believe, not that it will change everything but as an element of a project, it gives a lot of change. And I think that for example — what we do here is that we want to give a positive association

with Jews and the Jewish culture. Not like: ‘Jews means only Holocaust and Antisemitism – everything which is negative or difficult’, but also to show life, to show joy in Jewish culture, tradition and all these positive things. We want to show both.

So, many interview partners have said that with like the internet, there is much more Anti-Semitism, and it’s spreading, there’s also hate speech in the internet. What do you think that normal people could do against that? Writing back comments – it’s usually not that helpful.

Sonia Ruszlowska: I invented an anti-discriminatory workshop for youth, it is about hate speech, for example on Facebook and other platforms. It is a Drama workshop, so there is a hero which is the target of hate speech, and others who use hate speech, and people have to play both parts, and then we discuss and try to invent a solution: what they could do in this situation. So, I believe in transferring the online situation in real situation between people because this way I feel that we can do more. And, in both cases the conclusion was that it’s always good to search the people who can support you, who can help you, that the person who is using hate speech, it’s not that he or she have the whole power, it’s mostly like one or two people, and there’s a lot of people in the class or in the group that are bystanders. And if you can take them on your side or ask them for help, in many cases they will join you, in a way. I make this kind of workshop to work with people, to show them how is it to be this person against which hate speech is being used.

How common, do you think, are anti-Semitic stereotypes in Poland?

Sonia Ruszlowska: I think everybody knows them. Every little child knows this anti-Semitic perspective, somehow. I’m not saying that children consciously think like this. So, everybody knows the stereotypes, of course not everybody says that they are true, but the knowledge is common. I think, in a smaller towns, a lot of people really think in this way, also because of trauma after the War. In many little towns people live in so-called ‘Post-Jewish houses’, and it is too hard for them to really confront with this story, to really work with it. It’s easier to forget about this, but this conflict stays. It always makes you frustrated, so anti-Semitism is maybe the way to express this frustration against Jews. So, I think anti-Semitic stereotypes exists, but it’s not necessarily the case, that when Jews are in public space in Poland, there would be some act of violence against them – it is more about saying to other people that Jews are... for example greedy. In big cities, I think, there are some small communities that are fascinated by Jewish culture. There are people coming to our Museum on every festival, every concert or event – many of them are well educated or interested in culture in a general way. There are also people who just don’t care about Jews or Jewish culture. But I would say that Anti-Semitism is really strong. I didn’t do any studies or research about it, it’s more

like a general feeling.

I was wondering - as you said, pupils do not know much about Jews or how the actually are – is that part of the compulsory education? Because I think it is part of the Christian history as well.

Sonia Ruszlowska: You can teach something in school, but children do not know everything that's in their books. And it's only a small part of the program, and it depends on the teacher. Of course, there are teachers who are interested in the Jewish history and so it is possible to talk a lot about this history during lessons. But if you don't want to, you can do only one lesson about this, and then there is Holocaust. And the Holocaust is really present, but you can also teach it in different ways: is it about this Polish heroism or is it more about the Holocaust? Mostly, I think, Jewish history in school program is connected to War. So, it creates such an image: – there are no Jewish people, and then we see, out of the blue, there are a lot of them, and then they are murdered. So, that is basically the image that children have after the school education. But now, there is also the new thing that there is a lot of Islamophobia in Poland. And these two things are combined, that if I ask children about Jews, they often say that the book of Jews is Koran, and that Jews are Muslims. Really, it's very common now. The Jew is the alien, now, Muslim is an alien, so – Jews are Muslims.

During the Holocaust, there were Polish people who were helping Jews to Survive. And you can read a lot about that and there are whole exhibitions in the museums about that. But there were also collaborators, right? Polish collaborators. So, my question is: is it also well-known, is it also documented, easy to do research on that topic?

Sonia Ruszlowska: It's a very interesting story because there are a lot of scientific books about it. And if you want to know about it, it's not a problem. But no, people don't know about this. Students don't know about it at all, and we have the workshop about Jewish-Polish relationships during the War, and I made a film with material from the USC Shoah Foundation Archives, and there are people talking about their deportation to Ghettos. And during these deportations, when they were entering the Ghetto, they told what the reaction of Poles was. And they said that people were laughing, people were doing bad things to them, they were cruel. And we show this short film to students, and they are always shocked. They had no idea. Of course, it's not that every Pole during the War was doing such a thing. There were a lot of Poles that were sad and full of compassion during the deportations of Jews to the ghettos. But there were a lot of people reacting with cruelty. In fact, I think I realized that only during my studies. Nobody ever told me about this in my whole school education. Personally, I remember this moment of realization very well and I felt that they lied to me all my life. That I finished school in Warsaw, humanistic

classes, and nobody ever told me about this. Especially in primary school it was always: “Poles — the heroes, great” and then I discovered it’s not true, it’s a lot more complicated. This positive image of Polish people, it’s everywhere, and the truth is not so beautiful, it’s kind of hidden in the consciousness of society – but the knowledge, it’s really there, if you want to see it.

Do you think the government wants to sort of, well, lead it in the direction that everybody thinks Poles have helped the Jews, but no Poles have helped the nazis killing the Jews? And is difficult to do research in that direction, does the government control what is shown in the museums, something like that?

Sonia Ruszlowska: Yes, I think so. I think there is a danger of it because people who make research need grants, and it is the government that has influence on who will receive these grants. So, there is always this question: how much the researchers will be dependent, which university will get more money, which less, and so on. So – it’s never really objective, there’s always some interest in there.

Let’s not speak about universities. Why do you think normal people don’t want to admit that Poles didn’t help enough?

Sonia Ruszlowska: It’s not nice to see yourself like this. . .

But why do you see yourself immediately as one of them? It’s just a fact, nothing personal.

Sonia Ruszlowska: It is, because they identify with a nation. And you want to have the good image of your nation. So many people say: “It is not true that Poles were not helping enough, it’s only Jews who say this”.

You know, there is a good book about this, it’s called “*Polski Teatr Zagłady*”⁴¹ written by Grzegorz Niziołek. It’s about the theatre spectacles about the War, made just after the War. He writes from a psychoanalytical point of view. He claims that the bystander position, is very difficult, because it’s somebody who sees what is happening, who feels guilty that he or she didn’t do anything, and who is afraid because he thinks “I can be the next one”. He is also happy that it’s not him who was killed, and then he feels guilty because of this joy. There are many emotional layers. And it’s a very difficult position. There is a big, big guilt. Situation is not black and white. With Jews and Germans, it’s somehow black and white. Germans started the War, they were murderers, and Jews were victims. And Poles are kind of in between. They are victims, but they are also murderers, and they are bystanders. The second thing is that many Jews, have also no true vision of Polish history of the War. For example, many of them never heard about the Warsaw uprising, and about the fact that Poles were actually fighting with Germans, that so many Poles – non-Jewish Poles – were

⁴¹“Polish Theatre of Holocaust”

killed. These two narrations about the war (Polish and Jewish) are so different, and neither of them is not entirely true. I think the truth is very complex, it's not at all black and white. Poles want to see themselves as total heroes, total purified, people who only helped Jews. Jews often think that Poles didn't help them, that they were perpetrators. I think the truth is somewhere in between, but somehow people prefer to have a clear image. And why people simplify the truth? That's a philosophical question, it's very interesting. Psychologists say that ambivalence is the most difficult feeling/state of mind. We prefer clarity.

I can say from the perspective of a teacher that in Polish education there is still not enough time to teach about everything in detail. So, if you only got several hours to devote on the Holocaust, you would prefer to talk about 'good Poles', not about 'bad ones'. Probably, that's why students are not well educated about the bad sides of Poles. Do you agree that it might get uncomfortable for teachers because of the lack of time and the comfort?

Sonia Ruszłowska: I don't really agree, it's an excuse. I think it's just difficult topic. Teachers maybe do not feel really prepared to teach about it because they would have to really think about it personally, make peace with it in themselves. It took me many years to really dig in and to really feel acceptance with this topic. It's difficult topic and teachers also need education for them about it. In the Museum we make a lot of workshops for teachers also about the Holocaust. If you have only one hour to teach about the Holocaust and you say that Poles were so great and in fact, they weren't... Maybe you could change it and devote half an hour to tell about Polish heroism, and half an hour to tell about Poles murdering Jews.

As you said, it's a good excuse. I wouldn't like to do it. I would avoid being accused by parents of my students that I said something about bad Polish people during the War.

Sonia Ruszłowska: Yes, of course. We in the Museum are in a privileged position in this aspect because we don't have contact with children's parents but sometimes teachers also say that we show too much of Poles' 'bad side'. So, we always try to say that it's only one perspective and that there is also different one. But I think that children will hear about this positive side of Poles anyway — about the righteous among the nations, it's a hundred percent certain. So, I would prefer to say other things which they might not know of.

What would you say about the development of anti-Semitism? Would you say that maybe it gets less because people become more educated, or maybe it gets stronger because, well, the Holocaust, has happened seventy years ago? Are people becoming more patriotic and nationalist against other groups?

Sonia Ruszłowska: I think there is a possibility that anti-Semitism will grow

because if there is more Islamophobia and Homophobia and all this kind of attitudes, it is always connected with anti-Semitism. I don't know why, but it happens. I think it will grow. And besides, anti-Semitism is now mixed with anti-Israeli reactions, and this is also very complex topic. And I think the situation in Israel will not be very calm in the near future, I fear, so it will also not be the element that can help. I don't see anything in the big scale that would really help.

I had a discussion with a roommate, and he told me that he doesn't like it that little kids learn about the Holocaust, and he thinks that it will do some harm to them. At what age, do you think, can we tell a child about the Holocaust, and how can you start telling these things?

Sonia Ruszkowska: In the Museum, we start these workshops in fourth class, so the kids are around ten years old, and we do it with literature, not with images. I think it's more about the question of how to teach, not if we teach it. But I also had an interesting discussion about this with friends from Israel, and they said, "We teach about Holocaust very early, very little children." But in Israel there are a lot of days during the school year when there are some institutionally organised days about the Holocaust, so these children will hear about it anyway. So, it's only the question if they do it in appropriate way, to prepare them for it, or they will just imagine things. I think in Poland it's a bit the same, that, if you walk around in Warsaw, for example, each few metres there's a plaque saying, like, "Here, fifteen people were shot by Germans" etc. So you cannot really avoid it, the memory of war, it's really everywhere. Children know it very early – probably earlier than in other countries, and so, I think it's okay to teach them, but in a wise way, not with images of naked corpses or other horror things. Even if they say they want to see it. In fact whenever we go to the Interwar Period Gallery with small children, they say: "Oh, we want to go to the war, we want to go to the war!", and we say: "No, you will do it when you're older", and they react: "No, we want now, we want to see it!" and it's like a computer war game for them – of course, they don't understand what it really was — the Second World War. So, I think it should be the process, that first you talk about values, you tell children about individual stories, and then there is more and more details. But I think, for example, to take people to Auschwitz – you should do it at end of high school. For me, it shouldn't be too early, to talk about gas chambers and the mass death. It's so horrible that people should be prepared for to really understand it.

Dr Katrin Stoll

Katrin Stoll is a Holocaust scholar from Germany who has lived and worked in Warsaw for many years. From 2015 to 2018 she worked at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw (in the research group "‘Functionality of History in Late Modernity’"). She is a member of the German-French research group "‘Early Modes of Writing the Shoah: Practices of Knowledge and Textual Practices of Jewish Survivors in Europe’" (1942–1965). As a member of this group she retrieved and safeguarded the Nachman Blumental Collection at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in 2018 and ensured that 32 boxes containing Holocaust-related material were shipped to YIVO in New York.

Her research interests include anti-Semitism; Holocaust historiography and testimonies; Täterforschung; criminal prosecution of Nazi crimes in the Federal Republic of Germany; representations of the Holocaust in Germany and Poland. We met Katrin at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw on the 30th of January 2018.

Katrin Stoll: Can I maybe start with the following: On Friday, a new law was passed by the Polish Sejm, by the parliament. It states: "Whoever accuses, publicly and against the facts, the Polish nation, or the Polish state, of being responsible or complicit in the Nazi crimes committed by the Third German Reich... shall be subject to a fine or a penalty of imprisonment of up to three years." What we are witnessing at the moment is an attempt to regulate history from above, through legal measures. What is at stake for the Polish government is the so-called good name of Poland and the Poles. This law was passed on Friday, one day before International Holocaust Memorial Day, the day of the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January. It's an interesting development: the fact that the crimes were committed in the first place are not the cause of outrage. I mean, I think that everybody knows that it was the SS who established the concentration and extermination camps, and that the Holocaust was a German Nazi state crime, that's pretty obvious, but the very fact that these crimes were committed does not produce outrage. What evokes outrage and fear among high-ranking bureaucrats of the Polish state is that they might be falsely ascribed any responsibility for the crime. This is their fear: That they, before the world, appear as the ones who committed this crime. It's an attempt to regulate history from above. The experience of the Jews is of no importance whatsoever in this kind of history politics. It is very disturbing. I mean, the first priority should be to reflect of what happened at Auschwitz instead of thinking of one's own narcissistic feelings.

Do you feel that this fear is substantiated in any way, for example when articles regularly refer to Polish concentration camps, will it lead people to believe that these were connected to the Polish nation?

Katrin Stoll: As I said, only people who are completely ignorant could come to the conclusion that Poles established the Nazi concentration camps. The Nazis established Auschwitz for Polish political prisoners. Auschwitz is the symbol of the murder of the European Jews. The real issue here is to regulate public discourse and to suppress a free discussion about the whole dimension of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was not only a German state crime, not only a confrontation between Germans and Jews. It was also a confrontation between the non-Jewish majority communities and the Jews, in the case of Poland under German occupation: between the Christian Poles and the Jewish population living in this country. One third of the population in Warsaw was Jewish, the largest ghetto was in Warsaw, 350,000 Jews were deported to Treblinka by the Germans in the summer of 1942. However, the majority of Polish Jews lived in small cities and shtetls. The Germans carried out the deportations of the ghettos in a very cruel manner and shot many Jews on the spot in front of the eyes of non-Jewish Poles who largely accepted the genocidal project of the German occupiers. It was a visible, public crime, visible to the Polish population, to Polish society, so the question is, how did they respond to that? And the real issue is the involvement in the crimes and the role of the “participating observers” (Elżbieta Janicka). This is what the advocates of Polish nationalist history politics are trying to regulate: the discourse. They don’t want to speak about certain things. We have certain avoidance discourses like the Righteous discourse, it’s like a fig leaf. Jan Grabowski speaks of ‘Righteous defence’. The nationalists always talk about the Polish Righteous in order not to talk about difficult subjects, like anti-Semitism, for example, and the participation of sections of Polish society in the Holocaust. no sane person would ascribe responsibility to the Polish nation as a whole because it’s always individuals who act. We’re talking about individuals, individual participation or individuals acting as part of an organization. Sometimes several individuals got together to act, like for example in Jedwabne where Polish neighbours murdered the entire Jewish population – men, women, children of the town – in 1941, burning them alive in a barn. Since 2015, when PiS came to power, the highest leaders of the Polish state have openly negated the fact that Polish citizens murdered the Jews of Jedwabne. I think this is the direction of this Holocaust-speech law, it is directed against Holocaust recognition, i.e. the active and passive participation of parts of Polish society in the Holocaust. The ‘Polish camp’ issue is not the real issue, because, as I said everybody knows that the SS established the Nazi death camps.

Don’t you think that there are a lot of journalists and influential people all over the world – as you said, ignorant people – the ones who spread the idea of Polish, so-called Polish concentration camps, for example in Italy. So probably, it’s maybe not the main, but an [important] idea of this law, that we should stop it, because this mistake is spread over the world. And there are many people [who] have no clue about Poland, about what happened during the War, and if they listen to or read journalists who say ‘Polish concentration

camps', they create a kind of idea of Polish nation at the time. So, probably, it's still necessary to say 'not Polish, but Nazi concentration camps', I don't think it's just a minor issue.

Katrin Stoll: I didn't say that it was a minor issue, I said that the real issue is evaded. The real issue is to ask ourselves: Why were these crimes committed? How was Auschwitz possible? Why was there no solidarity with the Jews? Apparently, it's no big deal that we have 'a little Auschwitz', 'a little Holocaust'?! Why are we not talking about what happened at Auschwitz, why are we not talking about what happened in the Warsaw Ghetto, in Treblinka? For people, the 'Polish camp' subject is an issue because they want to avoid a confrontation with the reality of what happened during the Holocaust, this is what I'm saying. And I think it's an obsession: [For example], the Polish foreign ministry has established the term 'false code of memory'. "Polish concentration camps", according to them, fall into this category. Of course, it's false, but what matters to them is that their good name is kept clean. I think the real issue is avoided.

But do you think that in this law, the Polish government wants to negate what happened in Auschwitz?

Katrin Stoll: No, of course, nobody negates it, nobody would negate Auschwitz. But it's rather: 'I don't want to be connected with these crimes in any way', and there is the issue of Jedwabne, and of the attitude of Polish majority society to the persecution and murder of Jews. The Poles were forced to become eyewitnesses and co-presenters of the Holocaust carried out by the German occupiers and they benefitted from the crimes. "The lie of Jedwabne" has become official state doctrine, the head of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) has publicly propagated the idea that the Germans murdered the Jews of Jedwabne, not the Poles. Again, we are talking here about avoidance and defence mechanisms.

Would you say that it's completely avoided? In history politics, are there some political measures that deal with the victims and take responsibility for them?

Katrin Stoll: Yes, I mentioned the Centre for Holocaust Research in Poland, they have done a lot, published a lot, also testimonies that actually focus on the experience of the victims, Jewish victims, and the difficulties of surviving on the so-called Aryan side. We have to get the facts straight. Now, what are the facts? The Germans murdered 90% of the Polish Jews – 3.5 million. Out of the 3.5 million Jews, only 30,000 to 50,000 Jews managed to survive in the German-occupied territory. It is a very small number. And after the Germans had liquidated all the ghettos and murdered most of the Jews in the Nazi extermination camps – in Belżec, Treblinka, and Sobibór – there were approximately 200,000 Jews still alive – out of them, only 30,000 to 50,000

Survived. So, the question is – what happened to them? And, the Polish Holocaust researchers – Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski and others – have studied what happened during this so-called third phase of the Holocaust. Of course, nobody negates that the Nazis were the main perpetrators. But in order to make the Holocaust so terribly effective, the Germans depended on parts of the Polish population. Take, for example, the Blue Police under German command: the police participated in the deportations of Jews, Jan Grabowski has written about the so-called Blue Police. This is what the Polish Holocaust researchers have studied. In my view, the Polish government attempts to block this self-critical and analytical Holocaust discourse and to marginalize the Polish school of Holocaust research.

Is there a connection between such a, well, let's call it one-sided view on the history of the Holocaust, and the topic of anti-Semitism? How is it connected?

Katrin Stoll: This is an interesting question. Yesterday, the Polish president, Andrzej Duda said that Jews have the right to fight anti-Semitism, and that Poles have the right to fight the slandering of the Polish nation and the good name of Poland. You can see that a false symmetry is being created here, as if anti-Semitism and anti-Polishness were the same thing. Anti-Polishness is a trope that appeared in Polish discourse after the anti-Semitic violence against Jews after World War I. People who condemned the pogroms was reproached with being “anti-Polish”. Maria Janion and others have pointed out that in the history of anti-Semitism, the ‘Jew’ has been portrayed as the intruder, as a state within the state, as the one who is not part of the German nation, the Polish nation any nation in Europe. This is an integral notion of European anti-Semitism: the Jew as the intruder, and, in the Polish case, very often, the Jew as the non-Pole: There is a concept of the Pole that says that a Polish person is only a Catholic person (polak-katolik). But anti-Semitism, as I understand it – there are different definitions – is based on false projections, it's something that happens in your mind, it's a phantasmatic concept. Perpetrators of anti-Semitic violence respond to a certain image that has been created and has circulated in their cultural tradition. [And there are different variations:] For example, Nazi-anti-Semitism was a redemptive anti-Semitism, the Nazis wanted to redeem the world of the Jews. In Polish anti-Semitism, we have a strong tradition of Christian anti-Semitism. German anti-Semitism led to Auschwitz, Polish anti-Semitism to pogroms. But we have a certain mental structure that we always find in anti-Semitism. And this is, I think, the conspiracy aspect. In the anti-Semitic worldview an endless power is ascribed to Jews, the power to rule the world, to undermine things, in Christian anti-Semitism, the power to kill God, in modern anti-Semitism the power to rule the world by means of capitalism, socialism, communism, liberalism. We have to understand that it is a mental concept that functions relatively independent of what Jews do or don't do. Anti-Semitic images can be activated in certain situations. You have probably heard about the nationalist march, last year, on

the 11th of November in Warsaw. This manifestation was organised by the so-called Radical Nationalist Camp, ONR, an organization that refers to pre-war fascism. 60,000 people marched behind nationalist, racist banners like “White Europe” and so on, and one person – he was on TV – was asked “Why are you participating in this manifestation?”, and he replied, “In order to remove Jews from power”. This is a classic example of an anti-Semitic worldview, the idea that it is the Jews who rule the world – it doesn’t matter if there are real Jews in the government or not, the anti-Semite reacts to an imagined Jew.

It’s interesting to see then how this was discussed afterwards: A lot of people argued that we cannot say that all these people who participated in this manifestation were fascists. But the very fact is that by marching behind these banners they agreed to that, and they knew that it was the ONR who organised this manifestation. I have noticed – I’ve been living in Poland for nine years now – that there has always been an attempt to differentiate between patriotism and nationalism [a case in point is Adam Michnik in his book “Kościół, lewica, dialog” , 1977]. It’s the idea that aggressive nationalism is bad, and that patriotism is good. But sometimes you can see that these things intermingle. And there is an article – I think, 256 of the Polish penal code – which makes hate speech a criminal offence, but the problem is that this article is hardly ever applied, even though the Polish president officially condemns these racist statements. We have an official distancing, but if we look a bit closer, we can see that, for example when it comes to criminal persecution, cases have been closed. For example, there was one case against Justyna Helcyk, she’s an ONR leading figure in Silesia, and this case was closed, she intervened and the Minister of Justice, who is the chief public persecutor at the same time, made sure that the case was closed. And we have several of those cases, maybe you have heard of the case of Piotr Rybak, who publicly burnt an effigy symbolizing a religious Jew. He was sentenced, but later on, the sentence was reduced. So, we have a double-bind situation: Officially, the Polish government distances itself from right-wing extremism, but when it comes to the legislation and the prosecution of these crimes, they are lenient. They don’t see a connection between their policies and the rise of right-wing extremism. A survey demonstrated recently that 30% of Polish men support this fascist organisation ONR. For me the puzzling question is – all of this is happening after the Holocaust – that the ONR, an openly fascist organization, is not outlawed in Poland, that they have freedom of speech.

But on the other hand, there are criminal cases against Jan Gross, the Polish Holocaust historian. He was interrogated five hours, and there is still a criminal case.

Katrin Stoll: Yes, the criminal code contains an article whereby those who slander the good name of Poland can be prosecuted. What was his ‘crime’? Gross wrote an article in which he said that Polish people had killed more Jews than they had killed Germans during the German occupation of Poland. He argued that the present-day stance of Polish society towards the refugees has

its roots in the fact that Polish society has not dealt with its own role during the Holocaust and the murder of Jews. Jan Gross seeks to take Poland, the self-declared Christ of nations, from the cross. This is the real reason why he is being prosecuted and portrayed as a vampire.

You mentioned this article by Maria Janion, and she writes about these intellectuals who seem to spend their time fantasising about Jews, demonising them, reading anti-Semitic pamphlets and writing them anew. I was wondering if that kind of activity was only done by intellectuals, or if writings also had an impact on general society? Or was there like a two-layered transmission of anti-Semitism – you have a kind of intellectual anti-Semitism and you have this general population anti-Semitism?

And how are these writings perceived today?

Katrin Stoll: I think we have to look at the Polish Catholic Church here because anti-Semitism was an integral part of Catholic Church teaching. So, when we ask, “what ideas did the Polish peasants have?”, we can say that their idea of the Jews was not shaped by what the intellectual elite wrote. I don’t know how many of them were able to read. Their idea of “the Jews” was shaped by the Polish Catholic Church. For example, that the Jews were the Christ-killers, this anti-Semitic idea. I think that you can say that the population in the 18th and 19th century was more influenced by religious anti-Semitic teachings, not so much by what intellectuals wrote, like Krasiński and others. And, regarding your second question, I think there has not been enough distancing from these people and their writings. Take Staszic, for example, the Polish Academy of Science is named after him. I think, when it comes to that, a lot has still to be done. The deconstruction of, let’s say, the negative side of Polish culture. This is what Maria Janion¹ analyses, she wants to understand what the characteristic features of Polish culture and anti-Semitism are. According to her, anti-Semitism is an integral part of Polish culture. She wants to understand why people need the anti-Semitic figure of the ‘Jew’ for the construction of their own identity.

And were the clergy of the Polish Catholic church in turn influenced by these intellectuals or did they just always transmit their idea of Jews as the Christ-killers and that’s it? Or did they also fantasise?

Katrin Stoll: I haven’t studied this period, it’s not my field of expertise, the end of the 19th century, so I cannot say anything about that, but I can give you an example of a more recent case, the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland in 1968 for example. It was an official state campaign; the highest officials of the party unleashed this campaign. And the consequence was that approximately 14,000 Jews or those considered as Jews by the authorities left Poland. And the

Catholic Church in Poland did not condemn this campaign thereby approving of it. And there are cases where anti-Semitism functions in political discourse, for example in the presidential elections in 1990, when there were the candidates Wałęsa and Mazowiecki, and Wałęsa suggested that Mazowiecki had Jewish roots. And what did the Mazowiecki campaign do? Instead of naming this as anti-Semitism they propagated that way back to previous centuries Mazowiecki's family was of ethnically Polish origin, that there was no Jew in their family. It is very disturbing that they did that. I think that the subject of the Catholic Church as well as anti-Semitism within the Catholic Church is a great taboo in Polish discourse. I am convinced that if the Catholic clergy who in the countryside were the main authority during World War II and the German occupation, in 1941, when the pogroms happened, I think that if the Catholic clergy had intervened and said "We are not going to kill the Jews" that people would have listened to them. I think that this subject – the stance of the Catholic Church towards anti-Semitism and the Holocaust – has not been dealt with enough.

But let us not forget about hundreds of Poles who helped Jews, and children, babies, who stayed alive, and the whole villages saving Jews. You cannot forget that, can you?

Katrin Stoll: Nobody is forgetting about that. To the contrary.

I mean, the role of the Church is not only negative, there is also some positive aspect of their acting and they also helped thousands of people – Jewish people.

Katrin Stoll: Nobody denies that. I'm just saying that anti-Semitism has been an integral part of Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular.

One Polish historian told me that Polish people were very extremist: They were very extremist in collaborating with the Nazis, and they were very extremist in helping the Jews.

But what is discussed about widely is the bad extremism. What I think is that the bad extremes are mostly shown. And those who helped, we don't talk about them...

Katrin Stoll: Can I maybe say something about this issue of help. The official Polish state discourse – for example during the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968 – portrays the entire Polish nation as rescuers of Jews. But we have to understand that those few people who rescued Jews were an absolute minority, they were exceptions, complete exceptions, and afterwards people blow this out of proportion and say these people were representative of the Polish nation. They were not! They were not representative, they represented only themselves, they acted against the norm, the societal norm. Under the German occupation, rescuing and helping Jews was not considered an act of resistance against the German

occupiers. The helpers also had to hide Jews from their own neighbours, not only from the German occupiers. We have to differentiate between real people who helped and between the discursive figure of the Polish Righteous in public discourse. This discursive figure, which is detached from real people, always appears in public discourse in Poland when there is anti-Semitic violence. The Polish Righteous were brought up in 1946, after the Kielce pogrom, they were brought up in 1968, they were brought after the Jedwabne debate in order to cover up the anti-Semitic acts. Irena Sendler for example said that after the Jedwabne debate a hero was needed. We have to ask ourselves: What is the function of the discursive figure of the so-called Polish Righteous which portrays Poland as a nation of rescuers of Jews?

Another problem is that there are Polish Catholics who saved and hid some Jews, but they were not able to state it or to publish it. They were shamed by the mainstream after 1945.

Katrin Stoll: Yes, they were considered outlaws and they were persecuted in the immediate aftermath of the events. After liberation from German occupation they were in mortal danger. These people did not want to reveal [what they did], and this testifies to the fact that the majority disapproved of their behaviour. I have to say that I was a bit shocked when Morawiecki, the Polish Prime Minister, mentioned the Righteous in the context of Auschwitz. What do the Righteous have to do with of Auschwitz? Nothing, nothing at all, we are talking about a German Nazi concentration and extermination camp where so many Jews from all countries in Europe were murdered – the Germans deported Jews from Corfu in Greece to Auschwitz, and the only thing that this man can think of is the Polish Righteous? This is so absurd, so grotesque because they were no Righteous at Auschwitz. It was the site of mass murder of the European Jews. The Jewish victims don't really matter in Polish discourse. Hanna Krall once said, when the Poles speak about the Holocaust, they always speak about themselves.

Why do you think that people always take this so personal? I mean, in Germany and Poland, when we talk about crimes of Poles, Germans, Latvians people take it personally even if it was so many years ago.

Katrin Stoll: I think it's an inability to face up to reality. I think that you can only bear reality if you can face it, and you cannot uphold a Polish identity of Christ among the nations, of Poles as the eternal victims, if you acknowledge that there were people in Polish society who murdered Jews, right? So, it's not possible to create an unspoiled, clean identity. I think, this is why there is this strong reaction.

But this idea of the Christ among the nations doesn't exist, does it?

Katrin Stoll: I would say that is what differentiates, let's say, Polish nationalism from Hungarian nationalism, or Latvian nationalism, or Lithuanian

nationalism etc. The characteristic feature of Polish nationalism is that Poland, in the Polish literary canon, has been portrayed as the Christ among the nations. It's undeniable, and it has shaped people's perception of reality and their behaviour, it has shaped the way people look at the world. I mean why is it so hard to get rid of nationalism? According to Pierre Bourdieu, the sociologist, it's so hard to get rid of nationalism because we are talking here about dispositions, which are internalised, like bodily dispositions. You grow up with your education at school, you read specific texts, you build a certain understanding of the world based on ethnically homogeneous groups². You can see how this works in Poland: During the so-called refugee crisis for example the head of the party PiS, Kaczyński, made openly racist statements. He said that refugees were carriers of diseases and so on, thereby winning the election. And if we look at this, we can see again that we are talking about phantasmatic concepts. There is no single refugee in Poland. But what he tried to do was to stimulate this fear of imagined refugees who undermine the religiously homogeneous nation. This was the enemy portrayal by Kaczyński. Again, if we want to understand how concepts like nationalism and anti-Semitism function, we have to look at the phantasmatic conceptions.

I didn't want to negate that there is the anti-Semitic picture in Polish literature. But they asked one million Polish students whether they liked the poems and the drama, and they hate it. They do not identify with this idea of being a Christ of nations, not at all, not today.

Katrin Stoll: I would say that the concept of the nation is still the main reference: that people don't necessarily define themselves as human beings or as Europeans, but as Poles. And of course, you are right, there are different variations, but I think it's still the main frame of reference in talking about so many issues in Poland, all kinds of problems are discussed under the heading of the nation.

Maybe, it's again this thing that intellectuals read this kind of literature and they maybe identify with this idea of Christ among the nations, but regular people do not do this, they never ever read 19th century literature unless they are forced to at school, but still they are nationalist. But it's transmitted in another way.

Katrin Stoll: Okay, I'll tell you one thing. Poland has been part of the European Union since 2004. There has been a free Poland since 1989, general elections and so on and afterwards a liberal democracy in Poland. So, explain this to me: Why has there never been another narrative? A narrative based on an understanding of a nation based on citizenship, not ethnicity. It has not happened! And this is something that people in the so-called West do not understand, that when we talk about, let's say, PO and PiS, the main political parties: they are both right-wing conservative political parties. For both parties the nation is the main frame of reference. There has been no other narrative

of what it means to be Polish, or I haven't come across that. The question is: Why? Why is there no narrative of Poland in the European context, or of what it means to be a European Pole, a Polish European?

So, do you think that Poland is a dangerous place for Jews? Cause you're saying it like that.

Katrin Stoll: I'm not saying that. I think I would say it like this: It's a dangerous place for anybody who does not fit a certain image of what it means to be Polish. It could also [be dangerous] if you're a homosexual and do not fit into the idea of what it means to belong to a good Polish family. It's a dangerous place for people who do not correspond to a certain idea of Polishness. I was extremely frightened, I have to say, [on] the 11th of November 2017 when, in Warsaw, which was completely destroyed by the Germans, where the Germans killed so many Poles and Jews, 60,000 people were marching under the heading of "white power", marching through the city. During this fascist manifestation I had to hide in my flat because I felt that I could not go outside. You could say, "Okay, these are extreme people" but what is dangerous is the fact that the right-wing discourse has become hegemonic. The right-wing nationalist discourse has become the dominant discourse. I would always say that in Germany it is worse, you have Nazis in the Bundestag, we have attacks on asylum homes and so on, we have the National Socialist underground, we have the legacy of National Socialism, but the important, the dangerous thing is that the right-wing discourse is the dominant discourse, not only in Poland, in other countries as well.

In Poland, there was a very strong anti-Semitic movement, for example, in the 1930s, they wanted to expel all the Jews to Madagascar, in 1946, there was the Kielce pogrom. Is there a political historical discussion about this anti-Semitic past?

Katrin Stoll: Yes, among outsiders. It's not mainstream Polish historiography which focuses on these issues. Cultural anthropologists have studied these questions, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir³ for example has written on the Kielce pogrom. I think the problem is not that studies do not exist or that the subject is not being studied. The problem is that these subjects have not entered official mainstream historical discourse and historiography. It's not that knowledge doesn't exist. The problem is that it does not circulate.

So – how could it trickle down?

Katrin Stoll: It can only be achieved by means of education, as I said, you have to understand how anti-Semitism functions: it has nothing to do with reality, it is something that is made up and used for specific purposes. You have to make anti-Semitism morally, politically, socially unacceptable. This is the disturbing thing: That history is repeating itself. Are we again at the end of the 1920s, when democracies collapsed in Europe and there was the rise of

fascism and National Socialism, are we witnessing this again? Why is it okay to be an anti-Semite after Auschwitz; what it means to be an anti-Semite after Auschwitz is to approve of Auschwitz, it's to approve of the murder, the mass murder of Jews, an anti-Semite wants Jews to be dead.

How can we fight such an expression of anti-Semitism, justifying anti-Semitism and especially the Holocaust? Because for example in Latvia, there is [this myth, [it's in the] media, that Jews were those who betrayed the state of Latvia, who supported the Soviet occupation How can I deal with this problem? Because when I try to tell people "It is a disgusting lie", people think that I don't know history, that I'm a Jew sympathiser...

Katrin Stoll: Very important question it is also a problem in Poland, this anti-Semitic stereotype and a myth of *żydokomuna*, the merging of Jews and communists. in Nazi anti-Semitism this was also very important element, this notion of a Jewish-Bolshevik world conspiracy. So, how to dismantle that? Again, you have to ask: what function does this myth fulfil in your country's public discourse, who disseminates it, propagates it, which purposes does it serve? So, what would you?

Well, mainly, this myth is not officially supported, of course, you can not officially support it, but it exists between people, just ordinary people. The majority of Latvians think that Jews were traitors.

Katrin Stoll: So, we have another element here which is very important in the anti-Semitic world view, namely the notion of Jewish aggression: The idea that Jews do something against your nation, the Latvian nation in this case. The only thing you can do is to say that this is a myth, and to say that it is a phantasmatic construct. For the construction of this phantasma it doesn't matter if there were real Jews who were communists and part of the Soviet authorities. The problem is that people imagine Jews in a certain way and imagine Jews doing things in a certain way. So, then we have to ask: Why? So, why is this particular notion so important for the Latvian identity?

Maybe people just don't want to see themselves as murderers. Because when it comes to the Holocaust, we can just say "Okay, Jews got what they deserved. We had the right to revenge".

Katrin Stoll: This is a very important point: the anti-Semitic construct is used to justify one's own crimes against the Jews. In the case of Lithuania and Latvia, we have certain groups and organisations actively helping the German Nazis murder the Jews shooting, murdering the Jews in the forest and elsewhere. In order not to admit to the crime itself, people simply say "We took revenge. Because the Jews were the first who did something bad to us, and we just took revenge and penalised them because they were supporters of communism." We see here the false notion of double genocide theory, the notion of a 'red

Holocaust’ and a ‘brown Holocaust’, amounting to an equalization of Soviet policies or with the unprecedented Nazi persecution and extermination policy.

In the case of Latvia and Lithuania, Germans helped Latvians and Lithuanians to kill Jews, because mainly, neighbours killed Jews in the forest.

Katrin Stoll: Yes. In September, I was travelling through Belarus and Latvia. I visited a lot of Holocaust burial sites and sites of mass execution in the forests, and it occurred to me that without local people, the Germans would have never found these spots and places. They needed collaborators. But this is an important point: The notion of “Jewish Communism” served as a justification for anti-Semitic crimes. The same happened in Jedwabne, there it was also used as a justification for the murder of Jews. The perpetrators make use of an anti-Semitic idea in order to retrospectively justify their own acts of murder. We can name several crimes and study the mechanisms. And afterwards we have to deconstruct these mechanisms.

Would that work? I mean, if you deconstruct it, you show to people the false things they believe, you present them the historical reality. Will they listen or will they just continue to ignore it? Would it be an alternative to speak about the positive role that Jews did always have for the country, how they worked.

Katrin Stoll: No, that’s completely wrong, because again: We are not talking about real people, we are talking about a certain notion of what a Jew is, what a Jew does, what a Jew thinks, what a Jew looks like, of a certain idea of being. You have to destroy the concept, the narrative. And you can only do that if you are aware of the fact that it is a mental construct with the element of a conspiracy at its core. I mean, there are a lot of anti-Semites who have never seen a real Jewish person. I’m completely against this idea that you can fight any form of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, by having a real meeting with the people who are stigmatized because this is not how it works.

So, we were talking to the leader of the education programme at the Polin museum yesterday. And she said – especially when she goes to rural villages, she often meets children who have no idea what Jews actually are, but they just get an impression because of how the adults talk about Jews – for example, a greedy person who doesn’t want to share. And she said that it is really helpful for them to meet with Jews so that they can learn that these are all just stereotypes.

Katrin Stoll: This just shows that we have a completely different understanding of how anti-Semitism functions. Because, I believe, in agreement with Slavoj Žižek, that anti-Semites react to a certain image of ‘the Jew’ that has been circulated in their tradition⁴. The idea of the greedy Jew for example has circulated for centuries, and people have internalised this idea. And you have to destroy

the idea. I mean maybe you are lucky, and, in this case, the person meets somebody and thinks “Oh, it’s a nice person” – but what happens if she meets another person and thinks – “This is a representation of the greedy type.” This is not how you are able to get rid of anti-Semitic concepts.

So, in your opinion, is there anything we can do about these anti-Semitic projections, in order to fight them?

Katrin Stoll: We can fight them by demonstrating that they are false projections. The Holocaust perpetrators projected all kinds of thing onto the Jews calling them traitors, aggressors, dishonest, greedy people. The perpetrators projected these notions onto a whole group, and this is also something that we have to understand about anti-Semitism and other forms of racism: The Nazis persecuted Jews as a group, they were persecuted independent of their social status. It did not matter if they had green eyes, blue eyes, if they were religious, non-religious Jews, if they were involved in a political party or not. For the Nazis ‘the Jews’ constituted a homogeneous group. Every individual was put in a certain group constructed by a Nazi mindset. If we want to fight these things, we have to start with language. Everybody has only one life and is an individual. And we have to teach critical thinking.

According to my personal experience, education can sometimes help against anti-Semitism. For example, I was socialised anti-Semitic in the kindergarten, and until I was 14 or 15, I was an anti-Semite. And afterwards, I read some books about the Holocaust, and I changed my mind.

Katrin Stoll: Yes, in Germany, people discussion the question of whether it makes a difference if people visit memorial sites and learn about the Holocaust, if a visit to a memorial site is a way of protection against all kinds of bad things like racism, anti-Semitism and so on. I have my doubts because either you know that you don’t murder a human being or you don’t, and if you don’t know that, you won’t learn it by visiting a memorial site. It’s a decision that you make: in my view you need to become aware of the indoctrinations you have been exposed to so that you have the chance to distance yourself from them. I think, it’s a matter of awareness, of critical reflection, critical thinking. . .

For me, it was a matter of education, of information.

Katrin Stoll: Okay. But generally speaking, I don’t think that information helps. Let’s take the example of the Holocaust deniers. These people are obsessed with details. Real Holocaust deniers know an awful lot about the facts themselves. For example, they argue that it’s not possible to kill so many people in the gas chambers and so on. You cannot fight Holocaust denial on the level of facts, this is impossible. You have to ask: Why do they make these statements in the first place? This is how you confront Holocaust deniers. What is their agenda, what are they up to?

In Latvia, every time when there is some news about a Holocaust memorial site or some commemoration ceremonies, all those people write in the commentary sections things like “Jews were not the only people killed, Roma were killed, or other groups...” Do you think it’s an expression of anti-Semitism?

Katrin Stoll: No, I think it’s more an expression of this competition for victimhood, maybe, and the inability to comprehend the nature of the German Nazi Holocaust. Why was the murder of the European Jews different from the Nazi persecution of other groups? It was different because the Nazis attempted to murder every Jew on this planet, this was unprecedented, because they tried to erase what they called “the Jewish spirit” – the Jewish spirit they imagined to be in all kinds of things – in language, in literature – in everything, so everything had to be erased completely – complete extermination. It’s an inability, I think, to face the real nature of the events, an inability to confront reality.

Now, this also comes from a lack of education.

Katrin Stoll: No, I think it’s not a lack of education because in Latvia for example the Jews were not murdered in extermination camps but on the spot: with non-Jewish people watching, observing, benefiting from the murder. So, I think, it’s maybe also the fear of being in any way connected with this event and held responsible for one’s actions.

I think, at least in the Silesian history, the comparisons and relativizations of the victims are an expression of anti-Semitism. For example, my parents said “Okay, we killed six million Jews. But we also were victims. We were expelled.”

Katrin Stoll: This is a very typical German way of talking about the past, this Aufrechnungsdiskurs and Schuldabwehrdiskurs, which is aimed at negating the perpetration of the crime itself, minimizing its magnitude and negating that the Germans were the main perpetrators.

My hero is Beate Klarsfeld, an anti-fascist who gave Nazi *Bundeskanzler*⁴² Kiesinger a slap in the face saying, “*Nazi Kiesinger, abtreten!*” – “Step down!”, in November 1968 at a Bundesparteitag of the CDU. Why? Because Kiesinger was chancellor of the new Federal Republic which defined itself as the anti-Nazi state. How was it possible that the Nazi Kiesinger, member of the NSDAP from 1933 onwards, a high figure in the Nazi state, a propagandist, was elected by the Germans as a chancellor? I think, she achieved a lot by this symbolic gesture demonstrating that certain things are unacceptable. She was charged with one year in prison for this supposed act of violence and she said, “It’s an act of violence to have a Nazi chancellor as *Bundeskanzler*”. So, we have to analyse reality and don’t be fooled by propagandists.

⁴²chancellor

Maria Fornal

*Maria Fornal (*1960) works as an expert on historic buildings and monuments in the Province Office in Zamość.*

She studied ethnography at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She is passionate about Jewish culture, especially cares about protecting cultural heritage, also as a tour guide around Zamość and the Roztocze regions. In 2003-2011 she organised 'Zamość Meetings of Cultures', presenting the history and heritage of the minorities living in Zamość in 16-20th centuries. She wrote many articles about Jews and Jewish culture, monuments and cultural heritage of the Zamość, Lublin and Roztocze regions. She is also an author of numerous radio and TV programmes on preserving and spreading cultural heritage and on national minorities in the region of Zamość. In 2010, she was cooperating in collecting documents to a Polish and Jewish documentary "Tam był kiedyś nasz dom" ("There used to be our home there"), showing the lives of Jews in Zamość before the Second World War. For her activity, she was awarded by the Polish President (in 2000) and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage (in 1998 and 2006).

The interview took place on February 1st, 2018 in Zamość.

Wiemy, że interesuje się Pani zajmuje historią i kulturą Żydów.

Maria Fornal: Zajmuję się już trochę mniej. Studiowałam etnografię na UJ w Krakowie. Ponieważ każdy student w tamtych czasach szukał miejsc, gdzie można było dorobić, więc ja też trafiłam do takiego miejsca i jak się okazało, było to u osoby, która miała kontakty z Żydami. Nie wiedziałam wtedy, że te osoby, które do niej przychodzą, to Żydzi. Poznawaliśmy się, rozmawialiśmy, stopniowo poznawałam ich coraz bliżej. Krakowski Kazimierz wyglądał wtedy diametralnie różnie od tego, jak wygląda teraz. Codziennie przechodziłam obok tego żydowskiego Kazimierza i tak naprawdę poza tym, czego dowiadywałam się w trakcie zajęć – a miałam zajęcia z historii, z historii sztuki, z historii różnych nacji – słabo znałam historię Żydów krakowskich. Kazimierz wtedy to w zasadzie był jeden piękny budynek, czyli dawna synagoga na placu Wolnica, gdzie jest muzeum etnograficzne i tam miałam czasem zajęcia. Pozostałe budynki były w złym stanie i pamiętam do dzisiaj, było mnóstwo komórek, takich małych pomieszczeń, myśmy nazywali to „kibelkami”, dlatego że było tam dosyć dużo osób, które załatwiałały swoje potrzeby i strasznie był zaniedbany ten Kazimierz. Były to czasy, kiedy społeczność żydowska chyba nie bardzo odnajdywała się. Pod koniec lat osiemdziesiątych, lata dziewięćdziesiąte, jak jeździłam już po studiach do Krakowa, ta dzielnica zaczęła zupełnie inaczej wyglądać. Teraz na Kazimierzu właśnie w tych dawnych „kibelkach”, komórkach są małe kawiarenki i piękne sklepiki z pamiątkami. Kiedy jadę do Krakowa, staram się odwiedzać moich dawnych znajomych, ale też zawsze biegnę i patrzę, co nowego jest w tych miejscach, które zupełnie inaczej wtedy wyglądały. Wśród moich

znajomych w Krakowie znalazł się pan Tadeusz Jakubowicz, on jest obecnie przewodniczącym gminy żydowskiej w Krakowie (wtedy jeszcze gmina żydowska nie funkcjonowała jako jednostka). Często spotykaliśmy się, zabierał mnie do synagogi Remuh, na cmentarz Remuh, na którym te najcenniejsze nagrobki jeszcze były pod warstwą ziemi. Od niego dowiedziałam się pierwszych rzeczy o Żydach, o kulturze żydowskiej. Po skończonych studiach musiałam wyjechać z Krakowa, przyjechałam do Zamościa i zaczęłam pracować w Biurze Badań Dokumentacji Zabytków, była to wówczas instytucja przy Wojewódzkim Konserwatorze Zabytków. No i właśnie jutro zacznę trzydziesty drugi rok pracy w tej instytucji. Przyszłam do pracy jako etnograf, żeby wykonywać przede wszystkim dokumentację dla budownictwa drewnianego. Zaczęłam też trochę czytać o historii Zamościa. Od razu zrobiłam kurs przewodnicki. I okazało się, że historia Żydów Zamościa i Zamojszczyzny jest tak bogata i nie do końca odkryta i tyle jest w niej rozbieżności, że pomyślałam, że skoro mam już jakieś podstawy, że mam możliwość dostępu do pewnych materiałów, pytania, wyjaśniania rzeczy, które dla mnie jeszcze były niezrozumiałe, to może tak po trochę zajmę się tym. No i tak się zaczęło. Z czasem troszkę więcej interesowały mnie te sprawy, dostałam propozycję pisania artykułów do Zamojskiego Kwartalnika Kulturalnego, miałam swoją rubrykę Judaika. Pisałam i zachęcałam do pisania swoich znajomych, którzy też mieli wiedzę o Żydach. Kilka lat to funkcjonowało. Później musiałam zostawić tę rubrykę Judaika. Ale kiedy w Hrubieszowie odkopano macewy na cmentarzu żydowskim, powstał pomnik upamiętniający Żydów hrubieszowskich, była uroczystość, na którą przyjechali Żydzi i dawni mieszkańcy Hrubieszowa i ich potomkowie, wydany Kwartalnik cały poświęcony właśnie Hrubieszowowi. I napisałam do niego artykuł o żydowskim Hrubieszowie. Wtedy zaczęłam głębiej wchodzić w historię sztetli, czyli miasteczek żydowskich, gdzie czasami kilka różnych narodowości mieszkało koło siebie. Dla mnie jako dla etnografa, badacza kultury była to najciekawsza historia. Goście, którzy przyjechali z Izraela, zabrali ze sobą kilka egzemplarzy Kwartalników. I po jakimś czasie zadzwoniła do mnie pani, powiedziała, że przeczytała mój artykuł i prosi o zgodę o przetłumaczenie i zamieszczenie w periodyku w Izraelu. Oczywiście, zgodziłam się. Tak się zaczęła moja znajomość z ziomkostwem zamojskim. Później okazało się, że ta pani, Ewa Bar-Zeev była szefową Związku Żydów Zamojskich, pochodziła z Zamościa, z rodziny Szperów. Wtedy zaczęła się między nami wymiana informacji: ja ją pytałam o różne rzeczy w związku z tym, że ona miała kontakt z dawnymi Żydami zamojskimi, z tymi, którzy przeżyli wojnę, wyjechali do Izraela, z ich dziećmi, a ja jej pomagałam tutaj odnajdywać miejsca, ludzi, historie. Zżyłyśmy się dosyć mocno. Korespondowałyśmy przez kilkanaście lat, do 2008 roku. Była w Zamościu chyba trzy razy. Raz przyjechała z ekipą filmową, która kręciła film o Żydach zamojskich. Dzięki niej poznawałam kolejne osoby z tego ziomkostwa żydowskiego i w 2000 roku pojechałam do Izraela na zaproszenie tych osób. Oczywiście z wiedziałam wszystkie te miejsca, które dla nas jako katolików są istotne, ale dla mnie najważniejsze i najcenniejsze było to, że jeździłam od domu do domu, czasami wożona przez nich, czasami autobusem, stopem i poznawałam wewnętrzne życie rodzin żydowskich. Każda rodzina starała się pokazać mi jak najwięcej

ciekawych rzeczy, ale też spędzaliśmy dużo czasu przy stole, siedząc, opowiadając sobie różne historie. Kiedy w małej miejscowości kawałek za Galileą byłam gościem u pewnego młodego człowieka, którego zresztą przez przypadek poznałam w Zamościu i pomogłam mu znaleźć historię jego rodziny. Jego rodzina zaprosiła mnie do siebie. Jego babcia mieszkała w Zamościu na Nowym Mieście, na ulicy Ogrodowej. Przeżyła Holocaust jako jedyna z całej rodziny, tylko dlatego, że uciekła w trzydziestym dziewiątym roku na teren Związku Radzieckiego. Bardzo smutna historia, a dla mnie było ważne to, że mogłam pojechać tam i z nią porozmawiać, posłuchać jej wspomnień o tym wszystkim, co się działo w Zamościu, to, co ona zapamiętała. Przyjmowano mnie tam bardzo ciepło, nie czułam się gojką, nie czułam się osobą obcą, po prostu wchodziłam do domu i byłam członkiem każdej z tych rodzin, u której gościłam. Ta podróż jeszcze bardziej scementowała nasze kontakty, a nawet przyjaźń z kilkoma rodzinami. Myślę, że mam wyjątkowe szczęście, że poznałam tych ludzi. Później oni przyjeżdżali do Zamościa, zapraszałam ich do siebie do domu i też starałam się robić wszystko, żeby im się przypomniały albo czasy dzieciństwa, albo też, jeśli byli to młodszy ludzie, to żeby poczuli, jakie smaki towarzyszyły ich rodzicom czy dziadkom. Tę atmosferę i moje kolacje potem wspominali w listach. Zawsze też każdy, z kim się spotykałam, na drogę dostawał de mnie woreczek grzybków suszonych, konfiturę z jeżyn leśnych. Te historie są w zasadzie może nic nieznaczące, ale jak patrzę z perspektywy na to wszystko, to dopiero teraz wiem, jak to było ważne dla tych osób, ważniejsze niż zwiedzanie miasta. Chociaż duże znaczenie miało również chodzenie do miejsc, które były związane z ich młodością, tam, gdzie była szkoła, kino, opowiadanie o historiach, o randkach między Żydami a katolikami, a Polakami. Ostatni człowiek, z którym utrzymywałam bliskie kontakty, często bywał w Zamościu. Nazywał się Yoram Goran, był szefem kinematografii Izraela, a w Zamościu mieszkał w domu Pereca. Był ostatnim strażnikiem upamiętniania Żydów i tego, co się działo w Zamościu. Zaczęło do mnie docierać, jak ci ludzie stali się ważni również dla mnie. Wciągnęłam się bardzo mocno w tę tematykę, zaczęłam badać kolejne miejscowości wokół Zamościa, poznawać więcej z historii Żydów zamojskich. Tutaj kiedyś była biblioteka w synagodze, a w 2004 roku wyprowadziła się do nowej siedziby. Synagoga pozostała pusta, nikt nie miał pomysłu, co z nią zrobić. Wtedy wspólnie z kolegą poprosiliśmy Fundację Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego, która była właścicielem synagogi, o udostępnienie nam jej nieodpłatnie. Przez dwa lata organizowaliśmy tam spotkania, koncerty, spektakle i ta synagoga żyła niesamowicie. Mimo że warunki były straszne, udostępnialiśmy ją do zwiedzania. Urządziliśmy ją, część mebli zdobyliśmy i ustawiliśmy tak, żeby jak najbardziej przypominała wnętrze przedwojennej synagogi. Oczywiście była też muzyka. I naprawdę wtedy okazało się, że mnóstwo Żydów tu przyjeżdżało, o których myśmy w ogóle nie wiedzieli. Poznawaliśmy ich historie. Zdarzało się, że ktoś w ławce siedział przez kilka godzin i pewnie coś sobie wspominał, w tle grała muzyka. To były dobre chwile. Trwało to do 2006 roku. Potem ludzie wspominali koncerty przy świecach, atmosferę, często mówili, że przywróciliśmy ducha w tym budynku i mimo że jest pusto, nie ma wyposażenia, które tam wcześniej było, że nie odprawiają się nabożeństwa, że nie ma Żydów, to kiedy tam wchodzi, jakby

cofali się do czasów przedwojennych. Później znalazły się pieniądze na remont, ale ja już nie utrzymywałam kontaktu z synagogą. Teraz wygląda pięknie, tylko że nie ma tam ducha...

W tej chwili w zasadzie poza kontaktami, które mam, od czasu do czasu dzielę się swoimi materiałami. Dostałam od Żydów około tysiąca zdjęć ich, ich rodzin, większość z nich niestety zginęła w Holokauście. Trochę zdjęć udało mi się kupić. I zostały mi te zdjęcia. Ale cieszę się, że od czasu do czasu jeszcze w jakiś tam sposób mogę się podzielić z kimś czy swoimi doświadczeniami, czy wiedzą. Kiedyś wygrzebywałam materiały z każdego zakątka, skąd się tylko dało. Dostęp do archiwów nie był taki łatwy, jak jest teraz... No, ale mam satysfakcję. Udało mi się też być swego rodzaju konsultantem przy powstawaniu niektórych książek, na przykład Szebreszin Philipa Bibla, wspomnienia szczerbrzeszyńskiego Żyda, dzięki niej można poznać ten prawdziwy świat żydowski, przedwojenny. Robiłam też dokumentację do filmu dokumentalnego Tam był kiedyś nasz dom. To jest film, który powstał właśnie dzięki Yoramowi, ze strony polskiej Mirosław Chojecki uczestniczył w zdobywaniu pieniędzy w zasadzie na cały ten projekt, i Ewa Szprynger, która pisała scenariusz, reżyserowała. Zresztą też zaprzyjaźniłyśmy się przy, przy tym filmie. Ja robiłam dokumentację, robiłam takie rozpoznanie plus materiały ikonograficzne. Minęło trochę czasu, trochę inaczej to wszystko wygląda. Coraz więcej ludzi zajmuje się problematyką, tematami żydowskimi. Natomiast chcę wam powiedzieć, że jednej rzeczy się trzymam: nie uczestniczę w żadnych projektach, które dotyczą Holokaustu. Obiecałam sobie, że będę mówiła o tym, jak powstawała historia i kultura żydowska, o stosunkach międzyludzkich, bo to jest mi bliskie jako etnografowi. Wolę poznawać, spisywać, wysłuchiwać historii obyczajowych. I wolę też uczyć się o historii, która się tworzyła, a nie o tej, która była niszczona.

A czy są wśród tych historii takie, które dotyczą antysemityzmu? Czy ktoś z tych osób go doświadczył?

Maria Fornal: A jak wy interpretujecie antysemityzm?

Właśnie od tygodnia próbujemy znaleźć definicję.

Maria Fornal: Opowiem wam historię. Kiedyś w czasie spaceru z moimi gośćmi natknęliśmy się na młodych ludzi, którzy rysowali szubienicę i gwiazdy Dawida. Podeszłam, zapytałam jednego z tych chłopaków: „Co ty, synu, rysujesz?” On odpowiedział: „Śmierć Żydom”. Ja mówię: „Dlaczego? O co ci chodzi?” „Bo ich nie powinno być.” Ja mówię: „A podnieś koszulkę. Masz na sobie Levi-Straussy. Przecież to są spodnie Żyda, on je wymyślił”, mówię. „A jakiej muzyki słuchasz? Powiedz mi, jakich zespołów słuchasz, to ja ci powiem, ile w tych zespołach jest muzyków żydowskich.” I on zrobił się bordowy, powiedział brzydkie słowo i zwał. Więc dlatego pytam was, jak wy interpretujecie antysemityzm. W filmie, o którym mówiłam, Yoram Golan, który jest w nim przewodnikiem, opowiada historie, które się działy przed wojną: o gettach

ławkowych, o odsuwaniu młodzieży żydowskiej od wspólnych projektów typu spektakle teatralne, czy wspólnej zabawy. Ale też mówi tam bardzo ważne zdanie, że tak naprawdę wszyscy byli tutaj jedną rodziną, że różne rzeczy się działy, że Polacy podglądali Żydów, Żydzi podglądali Polaków i jedni od drugich czerpali pewne rzeczy i przenosili do swoich domów. Mimo że dochodziło do bójek w szkołach, bo czasami jacyś chłopcy uważali, że trzeba dać łupnia Żydom, to kilka dni później razem szli już do kina albo zastanawiali się razem i patrzyli, komu by tu można dosunąć. Już wtedy w grupie, bez podziału, że tu Żydzi, a tu Polacy. Ja nie chcę nazywać tego antysemityzmem, nie chcę tego w ogóle nazywać, bo by można to nazywać różnie. W filmie są też wspomnienia pani, która wróciła do Zamościa po wojnie, jej się ten Zamość cały czas śnił, wiedziała, że musi tutaj wrócić, bo w ogóle nie mogła spać, to było coś potwornego. W końcu wybrała się i kiedy zobaczyła, że mieszkanie było zajęte, a ludzie w nim mieszkający byli przestraszeni, bo obawiali się tego, że przyjechała zabrać im to mieszkanie, natychmiast wiedziała, że musi wrócić do Izraela, że to już nie jest jej miejsce. To na pewno wywoływało przykre sytuacje. Ja sama spotkałam się kiedyś z dwiema kobietami, których matka była ukrywana przez polską rodzinę niedaleko Tarnawatki. Pojechaliśmy to tego miejsca. Ci ludzie, którzy ukrywali tę matkę, już nie żyją, syn, czy córka tej osoby żyje do tej pory. W każdym bądź razie ta dziewczyna przeżyła. Potem była ukrywana w Zamościu, później po wojnie przez pewien czas tu mieszkała. Przeżyła wojnę, wróciła tam, do tej rodziny i powiedziała, że wszystko to, co było ich majątkiem, czyli dom jakiś stary i sporo gruntu, ona tej rodzinie zostawia za to, że uratowali ją w czasie wojny. (A kiedy córki tej pani przyjechały i szukały historii swojego wuja, przez przypadek trafiliśmy do pana, który był w oddziale Batalionów Chłopskich razem z tym wujem. Od niego dowiedziały się, że pod Adamowem w czasie jakiejś potyczki on niestety wpadł w ręce Niemców, przez tydzień było torturowany na Rotundzie, po czym rozstrzelany też na Rotundzie. Ponieważ w ogóle nie wiedziały, co się z nim stało, z jednej strony wiadomość o śmierci kolejnej osoby z ich rodziny była bolesna, ale z drugiej strony były szczęśliwe i tak wdzięczne, że poznały tę historię. I dla nich było ważne, że ten człowiek z taką dumą mówił, że był w oddziale właśnie z tym ich wujem, Żydem.) I udałam się z tymi kobietami do tej rodziny jako tłumacz, weszłyśmy, powiedziałam, kim one są i po co przyjechały. Trzeba było zobaczyć twarze tych ludzi, ich przerażenie, bo byli przekonani, że właśnie ktoś przyjechał zabrać im wszystko, co mieli, bo przecież oni sobie pobudowali już nowy dom na tych gruntach. Te kobiety powiedziały mi: „Maria, powiedz im od razu, że my niczego nie chcemy. My tylko chcieliśmy przyjechać, zobaczyć to miejsce, gdzie nasza matka była chroniona.” Specjalnie dla niej była wykopana jama taka, na której postawiono komórkę ze składem drewna. Potem, gdy miejscowi dowiadawali się, podejrzewali tę rodzinę, że ukrywali Żydówkę, to ta rodzina zabrała ją z tej jamy, a miejscowi spalili tę komórkę, przekonani, że była tam Żydówka. A ona była już ukryta na strychu. I tam kiedyś wpadli, by wyciągnąć tę ukrywaną Żydówkę, a ona siedziała w takim wielkim pojemniku pełnym zboża. Na pewno miała problem z oddychaniem, nie wiem, ale zrobili tam jakąś rurkę, żeby odrobina powietrza docierała. I nie znaleźli jej, poszli gdzieś tam dalej, przeszukali całe

gospodarstwo. I ta dziewczyna przeżyła, przeżyła wojnę, urodziła później dzieci. Widać więc, jakie było nastawienie.

Miałam kiedyś gości tutaj, przyjechali do rodziny niedaleko za Zamość. Ci ludzie znali adres, doskonale wiedzieli, że tam jest ktoś z ich rodziny, dziadkowie byli braćmi. Jeden przeżył, wyjechał, trafił do Palestyny, a drugi tutaj przeszedł na wiarę katolicką. Rodzina nie wiedziała o tym, że mają korzenie żydowskie. Aż tu nagle przyjeżdża bliscy krewni, bo ze strony brata ich dziadka, więc oni szczęśliwi, zadowoleni, stół zastawiony, herbatka, przyjęcie, rozmowy o wszystkim. I nagle pada pytanie: „A skąd wy przyjechaliście?” Oni mówią: „Z Izraela.” I cisza. Popatrzyli po sobie przestraszeni. „Jak to z Izraela? No bo nasz dziadek tak się nazywał. A wasz dziadek jak się nazywał?” „Tak.” „No to bracia byli przecież.” I przerażenie, żeby nie wyszło na jaw, że mają korzenie żydowskie. Nie wiem, co to jest, nie chcę definiować antysemityzmu, bo nie wiem, czy my możemy mówić o takim ogólnym, globalnym określeniu tego słowa. Dla jednego antysemityzmem będzie to, że ktoś napisze coś paskudnego na ścianie, tak jak mieliśmy niedawno przykład na synagodze, kiedy dzieciaki w ogóle niemające nawet pojęcia o tym, co to jest, napisały, już nie pamiętam, jakieś słowa o Żydach i Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego rozpętała wielką aferę, że antysemickie działania. Ja mówię, to napisało dziecko może ośmio- dziesięcioletnie, które gdzieś usłyszało, że ktoś coś powiedział i poszło sobie i tam napisało. Dla mnie to są działania, które wynikają z niewiedzy, z głupoty ludzkiej, ze złośliwości.

Ale nie słyszałam nigdy, żeby ci, którzy przeżyli wojnę i przyjeżdżali tutaj, nawet wiedząc, że nie mogą wrócić do swojego domu, widząc miejsca, gdzie stał kiedyś ich dom, oskarżali tych, którym się udało, że przyszli, zabrali. Nie wiem, może trafiałam na takich ludzi.

Może dlatego, jak Pani mówiła, że było bardzo dobre współżycie tych dwóch społeczności, polskiej i żydowskiej, prawda? Że było podglądanie, o którym Pani wspomniała, czerpanie od siebie, a nie rywalizacja, zawiść. Może to coś zostawiło?

Maria Fornal: No właśnie. W miejscu, gdzie jest parking koło hotelu „Renesans”, kiedyś było kino „Jutrzenka”, drewniany budynek. Przyjechali kiedyś tutaj dwaj bracia, którzy nie wiedzieli o tym, że obydwa przeżyli, bo w trzydziestym dziewiątym roku obydwa pojechali z transportem z Armią Czerwoną na teren Związku Radzieckiego. Potem ich drogi rozeszły się, nie wiedzieli o sobie. I po wojnie spotkali się zupełnie przypadkowo w Lublinie. Szukali tutaj śladów swojej rodziny. Opowiadali przeróżne historie, między innymi, że to kino „Jutrzenka” tak bardzo zapamiętali, dlatego że to było jedyne miejsce, gdzie mogli z polskimi dziewczynami chodzić na randki. Mówi: „Przecież wie pani, po co się chodzi do kina. . .” Babcia mojego przyjaciela opowiadała mi historię z lat trzydziestych, gdy był już nacisk na odsuwanie Żydów, niekupowanie w żydowskich sklepach, niekorzystanie z usług żydowskich rzemieślników. Estera była z

dosyć ubogiej rodziny, jej ojciec był dekarzem, wszystkie dachy robił. Trudno mu było o pracę, bo po sąsiedzku były polskie warsztaty dekarzy i przede wszystkim oni byli brani do roboty. Opowiadała, że Janek, jej najbliższy przyjaciel (podejrzewam, że wielka miłość, chociaż nigdy tego słowa od niej nie usłyszałam, ale tak ciepło o nim mówiła i tak jej oczy błyszczały, jak wspominała tę historię), jak się dowiedział, że nie mają pieniędzy na jedzenie, że jest im ciężko, któregoś dnia wziął kamień, biegał i tłukł dachy po to, żeby zrobić dziurę, żeby jej ojciec miał robotę. I wiecie, można słuchać różnych historii, które zostały gdzieś opowiedziane, są zapisane. Ale ja zawsze obserwowałam tych ludzi, gdy o tym mówili. Widziałam, jak zamieniali się w szczeniaków, w młode dziewczyny z tamtego czasu, te oczy jak pięknie błyszczały i buzia uśmiechnięta... Miałam wrażenie, że gdy opowiadali, wracali na tę ulicę, na swoje podwórko, do tej gromadki, gdzie takie dobre rzeczy się zdarzały...

Maria Fornal: Serdecznie Pani dziękujemy poświęcony nam czas.

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