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March '68 from the perspective of victims – approximations (Baral, Naszkowska, Grynberg)

Marzec '68 z perspektywy pokrzywdzonych – przybliżenia (Baral, Naszkowska, Grynberg)

Keywords: Jews, anti-Semitism, reportage, memories, identity

Abstract

The article deals with the issue of how to recognize the experience of March 1968 in non-fiction literature. The article analyses three publications – *Zapiski z wygnania* by Sabina Baral, *Księga wyjścia* by Mikołaj Grynberg and *Ani tu, ani tam. Marzec '68: powroty* by Krystyna Naszkowska. The author of the article has set herself the goal of describing the genre diversity of the discussed works and describing various mechanisms for shaping individual messages about March, through which the authors of texts give the events referred to different meanings. The analysis of the publication focuses on the issues of diverse images of Polish anti-Semitism, ways in which Jews perceive the social situation in March 1968, ways of discovering their own identity, and contemporary images of Poland and Poles.

Despite the fears expressed by Stefan Chwin regarding the apparent fading memory of difficult history (Chwin 2016), while observing the 50th-anniversary celebrations of the events of March 1968, it would be far-fetched to think that they are bound to slide into obscurity. In 2018, dozens of texts were published discussing the events and many theatre plays

were staged, exhibits and conferences were organised. In the context of the new publications, a need arises to refresh the scholarship on the subject, and especially to investigate a slightly marginalised area of historical discourse – the experiences of the individuals targeted by the “sentencing” of March ’68, documented in reportages and published memoirs. Analysing these kinds of materials, which constitute the bulk of current discourse on March ’68 (cf. Czaplński 2018), lets us fill a gap in the historical perspective which seeks to discern the causes of the tragedy. Personal recollections of the participants of those events may be a “counterbalance to academic texts” (cf. Grynberg 2018: 415), and are worthy of recognition in the theoretical reflections on March ’68 (cf. Czaplński, Molisak 2019: 12–18; Kowalska-Leder 2019).

The present study analyses three publications containing records of personal experiences linked to 1968 – *Zapiski z wygnania* by Sabina Baral, *Księga wyjścia* by Mikołaj Grynberg and *Ani tu, ani tam. Marzec ’68: powroty* by Krystyna Naszkowska¹. The first of these takes the form of a memoir (Czermińska 2009: 13–14) – thus, it is an autobiographical work, a record of the author’s personal experiences, while the other two publications are collections of interviews, whose structures are somewhat distinct. Both Grynberg and Naszkowska collate their conversations with the “witnesses” of March, but *Księga wyjścia* additionally contains fragments of the author’s dialogues with his father, marked with the intimacy of a family relationship and offered to the reader in small snippets, which renders them as stark metatextual commentary and reveals the author of the collection’s own disposition towards the subject he undertakes. These three publications are, of course, only a small sliver of non-fiction literature regarding March ’68 – the choice of material for analysis is dictated by the literary attractiveness of the texts, understood not so much as their aesthetic value, but as their utility in showing certain characteristic mechanisms of narrating March ’68 and the varied ways Jews experienced those events. The observations made in this sketch would, of course, gain a more profound import if they were confronted with the particular perspectives of other similar texts – however, this possibility exceeds the intended scope of the present work.

Setting aside the literary individualities of the three texts, I would like to treat them jointly, as a source of knowledge about the experiences and as a reference point for subsequent discussions on the topic. Reflection on

¹ The reception of these publications consists mainly of reviews and short articles, among which the following are noteworthy: Stabro 2016; Gutorow 2016 (Baral); Warnke 2018; Cielecki 2018; Grynberg 2018; Horubała 2018; Czarnecka 2018 (Grynberg); Kołodziejcki 2019 (Naszkowska).

the memorial texts and reportages concerning March leads most prominently to four thematic areas (cf. Molisak 2019: 267). The first of these is the texts' portrayal of Poles and their anti-Semitism. Second – the diversity of experiences among the reminiscing Jews. Third – the varied paths of identity discernible in the stories and reflections of the storytellers. Fourth – their post-March dispositions towards Poles and Poland. These four threads are closely intertwined, but let us attempt to isolate them to more clearly highlight the subtle differences between the analysed accounts.

Polish anti-Semitism

Polish anti-Semitism, as seen from the perspective of those recounting March '68, turns out to be deeply rooted in society's mentality. Its expressions are manifold. As indicated by numerous accounts, it is present already in Polish children, who use abusive language towards their Jewish peers (cf. Grynberg 2018: 234, 249, 263). The absurd and cruel nature of these behaviours is rendered more starkly by being shown to exist in Jewish children as well – those who are not aware of their roots. Anti-Semitic dispositions exist also among teachers (ibid.: 95), and in hospitals (ibid.: 235). Association with Jews is a stigmatization – of places, items and animals. As recounted by Nina Himmelstein: “Elderly women from our courtyard used to say to our dog: how pretty you are, too bad you're Jewish” (ibid.: 83). The deep-rootedness of anti-Semitism in Polish culture is illustrated by the comment by Grzegorz Himmelstein: “Do you know that it was a compliment in Poland to say to a girl that she doesn't look like a Jewess?” (ibid.: 101). At times, anti-Semitism becomes a problem inside the family, as exemplified by the family history of Krzysztof Zordec; the dislike of Jews harboured by his grandmother results in his heritage being concealed from him (Naszkowska 2018: 221).

The question of Polish anti-Semitism from the period of March '68 is, in fact, a question of whether the negative disposition towards Jews was exclusively the domain of the authorities, or whether it manifested in the behaviours of “ordinary people”, social stances and spontaneous personal interactions. In most of the analysed conversations, we do not encounter unequivocal statements ruling either way. However, some do contain harsh words on this issue, such as these by Michał Sobelman:

I fact, my family has done no less for Poland over the ages than most of those who caterwaul about Polish patriotism these days. But in spite of that, in 1968, we were

told we are not Poles. Not the party, not the government of the time, it was Polish society who said as much, or at least a part of it. One does not forget such things (ibid.: 245).

How alive in the daily experience of Poles were the anti-Semitic sentiments evidently present in the messaging of those in power is a question which cannot be (conclusively) answered. Piotr Osęka, in relating the mechanisms of eliminating university staff, observes:

Voices in defence of the attacked were rare. Most of the staff remained silent – not joining the attack, but not opposing it. It is difficult to determine after the years whether this was the passivity of people paralysed by fear, or secretly pleased with the turn of events. It seems, however, that those enthusiastic about the reckoning were relatively few. Whoever wanted to join in the persecution, did so without compunction. The rest did not speak up, presumably with the thought that protesting would help no one, and least of all themselves. This logic directed them to vote in favour of resolutions shattering their colleagues' lives (Osęka 2018: 405).

Conviction about the ubiquity of anti-Semitism can be found in the narrative of *Zapiski z wygnania*, whose author weaves various literary quotations into her text. The fragment of *Na przelomie dziejów* by Józef Górski is especially striking on this subject: “I watched the extermination of Jews in Poland from two different perspectives [...]: as a Christian and as a Pole. As a Christian, I could not help but feel compassion for my neighbours. [...] As a Pole, I viewed those events differently” (quoted after Baral 2015: 58).

Accounts gathered in the three analysed publications do not contain many mentions of the close acquaintances of Jews being complicit in their exile, or personal, “casual” support for the government narrative by the neighbours – in direct connection to the events of 1968. Still, there are some fragments which describe such experiences, like the following one from *Księga wyjścia*:

The events of March were painful, but the greatest pain came from the fact that people I thought were my friends suddenly started turning away from me. That's what the star is for. You don't have to be my close friend, you don't have to like me, but you have to know from the start that I'm Jewish. I can't take it a second time. Understand? So that there's no chance you eventually find out and start spitting in my face (Grynberg 2018: 153).

The question of anti-Semitism's authentic expression in public sentiment is differently portrayed by individual interviewees. In connection to the speech by Władysław Gomułka, one of them, the author's father, comments as follows:

“He [Gomułka – D. D.] repeated his life’s credo, and had to constantly silence the public because they were bursting with joy” (ibid.: 155). Olga Zambrowska, asked whether she felt anti-Semitism in Poland before 1968, answers: “No. My name was Olga Aszkenazy, and I went to school at the Sisters of Nazareth on Czerniakowska street. I was the only Ashkenazi there, the only who did not go to religion class, and there were no problems with that” (ibid.: 190).

In parallel, an evident manifestation of anti-Semitism, or at least conformity to its socio-political paradigm, was the reluctance to employ Jews or forcing them out of the positions they held (cf. ibid.: 136). Even if this was the result of top-down directives, those who enforced them did so (according to the accounts in the cited publications) faithfully, unquestioningly, ruthlessly. To some Jews, this experience was so harrowing that it led them to the brink of suicide (cf. ibid.: 12). Anti-Semitic propaganda was extensive, aggressively impacting interpersonal relations:

My colleague, Rysiek, comes up to me and says: Szymek, don’t be angry. Then I knew this would be a litany. They’re starting to pick on me, call me a Jew, we can’t talk with each other here. I felt very hurt, I must say, but he had to feed his family somehow too. I rather didn’t get unpleasantness from colleagues, while from above – from everywhere [...] I [feminine] had a colleague at work, who took good care of me in 1967 and was very compassionate. She had a kind heart and was outraged at the nasty political situation. Then they took her in for a talk and when she came back, she wouldn’t talk to me anymore (ibid.: 18).

It could be considered noteworthy that the protagonists of the reportages sometimes ascribe anti-Semitism to Poles as a result of certain gestures which were associated with attempts to protect them, e.g. in Pesa’s narrative it is felt as anti-Semitic when a teacher suggests the girl’s name should be changed to avoid harassment (cf. ibid.: 69). This indicates not so much an oversensitivity (of Jews) on the point of their heritage, as difficulty in gathering varied phenomena under one umbrella (of “anti-Semitism”) – those clearly antagonistic (e.g. shouting abuse) and those which, at least on the surface, were motivated by concern, empathy, etc. and who conceivably could be well-intentioned. The stories of Jews recounting their treatment by Poles are thus an invitation to attempt a delineation or definition of anti-Semitism. For some Poles, their Jewish friends’ decisions to leave the country were incomprehensible, they did not see a problem (ibid.: 36).

Anti-Semitism is felt as a great psychological burden for its “victims”, a source of tremendous fear (cf. ibid.: 213, 216) – so much, in fact, that life in the

war is described as giving a greater sense of security (than living in a society unfriendly towards Jews):

I came to a country which is constantly at war, and from time to time there is an even greater war. It's the biggest surprise of my life that I don't feel threatened here. I live just as everyone else does. I'm finally anonymous and I don't see my name in the newspaper every day. This has been very good for me. Plus, I feel that the rockets that fly around here are not just targeting me. They're targeting everyone. Back there I saw signs saying "Zionists go to Siam". And those were meant for me (ibid.: 198).

The spectre of anti-Semitism seems alive in the experiences of Jews irrespective of their fortunes in later, "post-March" lives. The contrast between personal career, financial success, and its accompanying state of mind is reflected in the words of Piotr Wiślicki:

People would earn three, four thousand dollars over the summer holidays. A dream come true for all of us. A flat in the neighbourhood *Za Żelazną Bramą* cost twelve hundred dollars, a Fiat 126p – six hundred. I had a yellow Fiat sport coupe, a down-payment on a flat, I bought a hi-fi system, a record collection, and I employed a bunch of people in Sweden. And I was afraid of the word "Jew" (ibid.: 213).

Diversity of experiences

The second set of issues I investigate is the diversity of experiences among the protagonists. One differing factor is to what degree the atmosphere of 1968 was felt as hostile by them. Baral's reminiscences offer an interesting answer on this front:

There I was, stirred by the play *Dziady* and the recent days' events at the University of Warsaw, ready to go on strike for the Polish cause at the University of Technology. I saw that moment as lofty, significant, not at all disgraceful. I did not notice that what was happening singled me out from others, isolated and branded me, drew a demarcation line between me, a Jewess, and everything Polish. I did not understand the political manoeuvre which this prelude announced. I did not notice that the insults directed at Israel are an anti-Semitic signal. I did not yet have an inkling that this was a modern-day recreation of a pogrom. Not a bloody one, but effective (Baral 2015: 28).

Soon after, comes Baral's sobering moment, which is in a way a reversal of the admission above:

Crossing – at that time irrevocably – the border, not by choice, but by lack of it, I don't think about my twenty years in Poland, or about the seven hundred since Casimir the Great. I think of nothing lofty or significant. I don't think that Jewishness in Poland ends with us, that we are the last chapter of this rich history. I don't think about the Hasidim of Lublin, or the Tzadikim of Galicja, or the fools of Chełm, nor the heroes of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. I don't think about magnificent Jewish Poles, I don't think about mystics, or communists, I don't wish to remember that Brzechwa, Leśmian, Słonimski, or Bruno Schulz were Jews... [...] I'm tired, I'm fed up, I want to leave this place, and if Polish literature by any Jew speaks to me today, it would be Tuwim. And not *We, Polish Jews*... – that wasn't on my mind – but *Everybody, kiss my ass*. I'm sick of you. You won. No, it's we who won. Rather, we all lost. Whatever (ibid.: 58).

Baral's use of the extended list (of traditions and names which are out of her perspective), and its conclusion with a reference to a vulgar poem's title to express disrespect and discouragement, become tools for the leading message of the manifesto – independence. This kind of commentary on March also strips it of its potential as a “historical event”, brings it down to earth, to the experience of an ordinary person, an experience which in its realness is distant from pathos, but filled with anger, irritation, and exhaustion.

Some Jews responded to the atmosphere of 1968 as a pretext for leaving the country, which they saw in itself as a chance to improve their living standard. The brother of Perła Kacman, when his director tried to convince him to remain, answered: “What if somebody told you that you could go to America tomorrow, what would you do, you wouldn't go?” (Grynberg 2018: 63). We find a similar stance in the reminiscences of Krzysztof Zorđe, who says, to the remark by Naszkowska that he left without being persecuted:

You're right. I wanted to start a new life. A different one, more interesting, with greater possibilities. I won't pretend I was an opposition member, or a freedom fighter – I wasn't. I am a lifetime opportunist. I was never interested in politics. I used my heritage to leave, because this chance appeared after March of 1968. To me, leaving Poland was not a traumatic experience. Just the opposite – it was a great adventure (Naszkowska 2018: 222).

However, to most Jews (whose accounts we learn from the analysed publications) the experiences of March '68 were difficult – also due to the forced parting with Poland, felt by many of them as their homeland – if not “ideological”,

then “private” (cf. Ossowski 1984). The words of Tadeusz Keshet may serve as an example of longing for the country: “I dreamt of Poland, I am Polish after all. [...] I knew I didn’t want to live in Poland, but, on the other hand, I could not escape from that. I can’t love, but I can’t get myself to hate” (Naszkowska 2018: 297). The weight of the events of March was different to many individuals because of the different reactions of their closest acquaintances. Many Jews experienced unfriendliness from Polish society, but some of them had reasons to clearly separate top-down anti-Semitism of the authorities from the behaviours of those nearest to them. The empathetic disposition of Poles is present in Perła’s narrative, who describes the solidarity towards the exiles from the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia community (Grynberg 2018: 66). She also tells the story of Krystyna Borowicz being seen off on her departure by a colleague from work who formerly declared nationalistic views:

Only one woman came to the station – an Endek [National Democrat], who hated Jews and never spoke a word to her at work. We’re standing on the platform, and suddenly I see Kryśka’s mum turn into a pillar of salt. I turn around, and there’s that Endek woman walking our way. She came closer and said: miss Franciszka, I am ashamed for my nation, I sincerely apologize and wish you good luck (ibid.: 66).

March, therefore, became an opportunity for some part of society, even if small, to review their opinions and behaviours. It forced people to directly confront the true cruelty of anti-Semitism, which could sometimes result in a change and reform in its former adherents and “users”.

The different experiences are also reflected in different reactions to the compulsory migrant life. For some protagonists, it becomes a beginning of positive change, an opportunity for professional development, financial success. An original take on March is presented by Marek Elbaum:

For me, this was an open door. Not only to me, really. To my whole family as well. I don’t like to listen about how March wronged somebody. Yes, this was a tragedy, but on what scale? You’re wimps, you feel sorry for yourselves, while a great majority of us got a chance for an interesting life (ibid.: 283).

A positive view of the emigration experience is also expressed by one of Naszkowska’s protagonists – Michał Foxenius:

Today I can say that what happened in 1968 and my leaving the country, which was the consequence of March, gave me a chance to extract myself from that

Szczecin swamp. I couldn't do it on my own, I wouldn't have got out. I am among those who are grateful to Gomułka for throwing us out of Poland. In March, of course, I took part in the student protests demanding freedom of speech, I was even beaten by the militia. And since I was a ZMS [Socialist Youth Union] member, I made a show of renouncing my membership. But this had nothing to do with my being a Jew, I didn't feel Jewish, I thought that the anti-Semitic campaign didn't concern me (Naszkowska 2018: 64–65).

The quoted fragment is interesting for two reasons. First, it shows that in “personal constellations” the expulsion could have had a positive character (in the case of Foxenius, it allowed liberation from “beer fog”, or alcoholic apathy). Second, it is a reminder that for many Poles, also those of Jewish heritage, the events of March had a universal dimension – they were primarily about fighting for freedom.

The experience of Sabina Baral is quite different; in her reminiscences, emigration is the most vivid “parameter of pain”. Living in Italy, and later the USA, meant linguistic isolation (Baral 2015: 70), inability to communicate, uncertainty about the future, no stable career perspective (ibid.: 81). Baral's family automatically switched to speaking Yiddish in their new home – it was obvious to them that they would not communicate in Polish (ibid.: 99). The author formulated an important observation on this occasion, one about a cultural significance of changing one's language: “My parents' world got dramatically curtailed. One day they would learn English enough to get by in a store or office, but a newspaper, book, or movie and, especially, jokes in conversation would always be a problem for them” (ibid.: 99). This pattern is confirmed in other accounts preserved in *Księga wyjścia* and *Ani tu, ani tam* – for the elderly, absorbing a new language to the degree allowing for merely functional communication would often pose an insurmountable challenge (cf. ibid.: 104). Even if language was not an issue, cultural adaptation poses its own problems. The new, civilisationally developed world is, on the one hand, an object of fascination and awe, on the other, however, it becomes a space of confusion:

Hundreds of jams. Once, I wanted to buy tomato sauce, because my aunt good-naturedly laughed at me when I wanted to make it like I learned in Italy [...]. But in spite of my good English, I couldn't spot the difference between tens of varieties of canned products. *Tomato sauce, tomato paste, stewed tomatoes, peeled tomatoes, chopped tomatoes...* Long rows of packages, cans, and jars of all sizes. It should make me laugh, but no, I am sad and embarrassed by my inadequacy (ibid.: 101).

Confrontation with a foreign culture abounds in experiences of this kind; Baral mentions, among others, the contrast between American complementing and Polish humility (ibid.: 123), the underwhelming local cuisine (the example of hot dogs – ibid.: 124). Emigration also involves a new sense of loyalty towards the “new homeland” – the obligation to participate in the war with Vietnam (ibid.: 125). Double loyalty, which, as Baral herself notes, is inherent in the Jewish experience, proves especially hard to accept in this instance.

Emigration also brings seemingly trivial problems, such as “what to do with the cat?”, which for Baral (as an observer of the dilemma) become a lesson in responsibility and trust (ibid.: 83). There are also problems of the utmost importance, for example, ones stemming from the need to transport a coffin with a body inside (ibid.: 83–84). Baral sees emigration as the end of youth and condemnation to a life infused with underlying trauma, while also recounting the appearances of “normal life”:

Sometimes, in moments of distraction, it seemed to me like I was living my old life. Together with a group of friends I learned the city and the language, I went to museums [...]. I slipped into the life *al'italiana* without effort, I enjoyed or was saddened by ordinary things, I tramped around the city window-shopping, because clothes like these were only seen in special shops in Poland, unattainable for me. [...] But the thoughts of the future awaiting my parents strangled and choked me at night. How would they ever manage? (ibid.: 89–90).

For Sabina, the price of exile is also the loss of love. After some time, she no longer writes to Jacek, although she is still fond of him (ibid.: 106). For many families, March means being forced to part from family members (cf. ibid.: 120). Emigration also brings a change in material status. All items brought from Poland prove to be unnecessary, inadequate (ibid.: 110–111), and former affluence becomes only a memory (ibid.: 116).

Ways to identity

The third question, to which the first two lead in some ways, is the issue of the identity models and types of identity experiences that emerge from the accounts. One of the most interesting tropes, shown most vividly in the reportages gathered by Mikołaj Grynberg in *Księga wyjścia*, presents March '68 as the moment crystallising identity. Many people of Jewish origin had no awareness of it before 1968. Viola Wein reminisces: “This was the conversation I had with

an acquaintance [on the train – D. D.]. What are you doing here, aren't you a Jew? – I ask. And he says: it turns out I am” (Grynberg 2018: 124). Michał Foxenius found out about his roots shortly before, in 1965. The trivial circumstances of this revelation show well the power and peculiarity of the experience:

[...] it happened back in Warsaw, before the trip to Wieliczka. He suddenly asked if I knew I was a Jew. I was astounded. Why would I?! Then, at that boozy dinner, he told me mine was a Jewish family with a long history [...]. After that conversation, I felt like somebody had switched my hat for another, I was terribly confused (Naszkowska 2018: 67).

And even more original was the way to self-awareness of Krzysztof Zorde, who was eager to leave Poland and – knowing nothing about his heritage – turned up at the militia headquarters in Mostowski Palace with a request to leave the country, claiming he was a Jew. After a week, he received permission: “[...] I heard that as a Jew I really had the right to emigrate. This was the best day of my life, a wonderful day!” (ibid.: 216).

Many Jews had the awareness of their ethnic identity, but it was hidden in a way, “subdued” by the intent to assimilate into the Polish society. For some people, Jewish heritage was a burden which they tried to shed by concealing it completely (Grynberg 2018: 69). Many identified partly with their roots, but first of all with Poland – to them, exile meant losing the “foundation of life” (ibid.: 27). There were, of course, those who treated Poland as an incidental place to live, but they too felt being forced to leave as a discomfort. For many, the experience of loss became a foundation of identity, which forever remained something negative, defined by that absence. For Sabina Baral, March became a lesson in identity as a free choice: “Who I am and where I belong depends on the point of view. Only people and systems which practice hate and ignorance decide other people’s identities for them and judge them for those identities” (Baral 2015: 85). An especially interesting case is that of Krzysztof from Warsaw, who knew he was a Jew, but felt a Pole. Jewishness was ascribed to him by others, against his will, as it were. This provoked his negative feelings towards that external labelling:

I could even say I adopted the anti-Semitic perspective: poor Poland, if not for the Jews squeezing her like a lemon, she would be prosperous. I kept hearing this and I allowed myself to be convinced. This is proof that a Jew can be an anti-Semite. I didn't want to be a Jew, and I thought I was not involved. When they trash-talked Jews, I didn't mind, but when they trash-talked Poles, I did (Grynberg 2018: 107).

An important identity trope appears in *Zapiski z wygnania*. Baral notes that the exiles of March were also survivors of Shoah, they had been victims before. Baral points out that they had stayed in Poland, although they had had the option to leave. In the light of that, the way they were treated strikes one as a barbaric, disloyal, asymmetrical response of their homeland to their faithfulness: “They wanted to live here, where their parents and children – we – were born. After the ordeal of war, years of suffering and fear, in spite of everything, they once again decided that Poland was their country. And in 1968, Poland threw these people out” (Baral 2015: 60–61). Baral’s testimony takes a clear tone of accusation, pain, defiance of the past. Many protagonists of the reportages – those who did not come back – remember Poland with sentiment and respect, for example, Józek Szpilman:

I feel I’m a Jew, although Polish culture is very close to me. Chopin is not just a name to me. But when I come to Poland, I look at things around me as an Israeli. Meanwhile, in Israel, I am annoyed by the lack of manners. They are completely rude and they don’t even feel how uncivil they are. When I chide my daughter at the table, I hear the same response: Polish upbringing (Grynberg 2018: 39).

Contemporary Poland

The reportages also contain remarks on Poland as it is now. In the story of the Chmielnickis, who visited their old home in Łódź after the years, Poles appear as greedy – they ripped the electric sockets out to check them for hidden Jewish dollars – and lazy – they didn’t bother to put the sockets back in (ibid.: 78). Grzegorz Himelstein recalls small displays of anti-Semitism from the present Piotrkowska street (a drunk claiming Lech Wałęsa is a Jew, and another passer-by suggesting the tourist guide is only lies because it was written by Jews), on which he comments:

Poland is a tough subject. Here, in Israel, there’s Jews come from Morocco, they teach their children and grandchildren songs in their language. Those who came from Russia hold to their cultural ghetto. The second and third generation speak Russian. Jews from Persia sing the songs of their grandparents. With Jews who came from Poland... you won’t see that. They don’t sing Polish campfire songs, their children don’t play traditional games... A Jew from Morocco has a lot of nostalgia, a lot of memories. You won’t hear that from a Jew from Poland (ibid.: 102–103).

The suggestion that the force of Polish anti-Semitism causes Polish Jews to feel disconnected from Poland is undoubtedly a generalisation, and many voices could be cited against its universal applicability. This, however, does not make this thought any less grave and representative in the experiences of some exiles. One of Grynberg's interviewees, Adam Gryniewicz, in pointing out the endemic nature of anti-Semitism in contemporary Poland, describes it as a typically Polish defect and stresses its absurdity in the face of no real contact between contemporary Poles and Jews (*ibid.*: 253). Lidia Zajde, in her observations on the pervasiveness of Polish anti-Semitism, also points out its impunity – even those aware of the impropriety of jokes about Jews do not dare to reproach the people who tell them (*ibid.*: 268). Those severe diagnoses could be tempered by the observation by Viola Wein:

There [at the Righteous Among the Nations Department of Yad Vashem – D. D.] I understood that Polish anti-Semitism is nothing exceptional. The Dutch were a lot worse. [...] And the French were complete bastards. I went to work there when I was 45. I read the information that there were about a thousand Poles who were Righteous Among the Nations. I went to my dad, a historian, and I asked him: in an honest tally, how many Poles saved Jews? And he tells me, about a hundred thousand. Ah – I think – better get to work (*ibid.*: 127).

Both Grynberg and Naszkowska describe the anti-Semitism of other nations apart from Poles (cf. Grynberg 2018: 336; Naszkowska 2018: 226–227), and even xenophobia among Jews (cf. Grynberg 2018: 37, 85). The experiences of the protagonists testify to the ubiquitous character of cultural inequality, mistreatment of migrants – also in Sweden, defined by many Jews as a safe haven (Naszkowska 2018: 83).

Returning to the image of contemporary Poland emerging from the publications, a different perspective on it is presented by statements of some migrants who returned to the country in the 1990s. They see it as engaging and full of life. In the conversation with Krzysztof Zorze we read: “[...] life in Poland at that time began to draw me in, I was fascinated by the political and economic atmosphere. I felt I was participating in something amazing. Nothing like this had ever happened after all” (*ibid.*: 239). Apart from the main drive to return to Poland – longing for the country and the past years lived there – cultural considerations could have had an impact, or, as illustrated by the example above, the paradoxical fact of low civilisational development (and the accompanying challenges and possibilities).

Summary

Summarising the present analysis of three different publications, treated here as “equivalent” sources with analogous contributions, I would like to point out some differences between them and their individual characters. *Zapiski z wygnania* is the most evidently different from the two other books based on genre (it is an account of a single author, formulating her individual message; it can be treated as “literature of testimony”, cf. Stabro 2016: 155), but also based on focusing on the “post-March” life. Baral describes the experience of emigration with all its encumbrances and challenges. She does not focus on the humiliation of exile, but mainly describes the alienation of life apart from home. Her detailed description of this difficult experience, in combination with the final manifesto, make *Zapiski z wygnania* a voice of accusation and sorrow.

Grynberg’s *Księga wyjścia* and Naszkowska’s *Ani tu, ani tam* are works which are very similar on the surface – collections of reportages about the experiences of March ’68, focused on the fates of individuals. Much is different between them at closer inspection. *Księga wyjścia* is composed of as many as twenty-seven interviews, intertwined with a conversation the author has with his father. The multiplicity of reminiscing subjects brings, by necessity, a multiplicity of stories, a variety of perspectives and value systems. One does get the impression, though, that the collection’s author attempted a sort of uniformity, subjecting the conversations included in the tome to the poetics of pain, loss and harm. Although the experiences described are varied, all ultimately strike these tones.

Naszkowska’s publication leaves a completely different overall impression. Although on the cover we see the quote “Anti-Semitism is a mental illness of Poles”, it would be hard to perceive this sentence as an apt summation of the book. Naszkowska’s reportages do, of course, speak of the hardships of life dominated by March ’68, but that issue is not the cause nor the objective of undertaking her conversations. The experience of leaving is treated as a starting point, from which discourses proceed in various directions. Their main themes are psychological reflections, confessions from family life, stories concerning work, fascinations. On the margins of these private stories, we see both traumatic themes, and those connected with national identity.

Despite differences in emphasis, the three publications remain variously formulated interpretations of real fates of Polish Jews, and can be treated as a valid point of reference in discussing them. Returning to the similarities between the texts, they share also the recurring theme that March is not part

of the past, it is still alive. One of the last fragments of *Księga wyjścia* is a short conversation with the author's father, who, asked when March ended, answers: “– Once I thought it ended around the mid-seventies.

– What do you think today? – That it's not over yet” (Grynberg 2018: 387). A similar tone is given to *Zapiski z wygnania* by the final chapter *The past never dies*, which is a transcript of a speech the author gave at an alumni reunion of the Szolem Alejchem High School on 8 September 2010. Baral's speech concludes with a quote from Faulkner: “The past is never dead. It's not even past”. The aliveness of March is not limited here merely to the experiences of the exiles – their still living wounds, or difficult memories. What is brought in as well is the broader context of the perpetrators, or of the “inheritors” of the wrongdoing, which Poles are considered to be. Addressing the president of Poland, Baral says:

Mister President, in your touching speech in the synagogue in May, you apologised to the exiles of '68. Important words, courageous, needed today perhaps more by Poland than us, because we have already settled those matters, while Poland is only starting. In the name of us all, I accept this apology, fully appreciating its weight (Baral 2015: 161).

In the context of the selected authors' texts analysed here (including Faulkner's words quoted by Baral: “The past is never dead. It's not even past”), it seems apparent that one of the dimensions in which March '68 remains relevant is this calling to work through the difficult lesson which the events of 1968 constitute – looking at them from the perspective of intervening years, realising their meaning, and confronting the emerging conclusions for our time. The tropes pointing to social pervasiveness of Polish anti-Semitism can be treated as good evidence that this challenge is worth undertaking.

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