



Review of the publication: Anna Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni. Polska i Polacy w polskojęzycznej prasie żydowskiej II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny 2015, ISBN 978-83-61850-51-9

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Date of publication: 18.04.2016

DOI: 10.11584/opus4-1101

Anna Landau-Czajka's "Polska to nie oni. Polska i Polacy w polskojęzycznej prasie żydowskiej II Rzeczypospolitej" presents a very interesting approach to Jewish-Polish relations in interwar Poland. The book looks at the issues of Polish antisemitism, Jewish patriotism and assimilation by analysing Jewish newspapers published in Polish, making the issue of language the most important element of the study. Landau-Czajka is fully aware of the nuances of Jewish interwar press, understanding the difficulties of her own work and presenting a collection of different case studies that should be treated more as a catalogue of questions than as a list of clear answers (p. 11). She is also aware of the tricky issue of public opinion and the fact that Jewish press published in Polish, though read mostly by acculturated (not assimilated) Jews, cannot be considered as an expression of any universal Jewish perceptions of Poles and Poland (pp. 42-3). It cannot even be considered as an expression of acculturated Jews' opinions, partly because different newspapers presented different opinions, partly because these opinions changed over time.

The book analyses such issues as Jewish approaches to Poland and Poles (Chapters 2 and 5), Jewish patriotism (Chapter 3), Jewish perception of Marshall Józef Piłsudski (Chapter 4), antisemitism (Chapter 6) and assimilation (Chapter 7). Chapter 1 serves as a longer introduction to the subject of Jewish newspapers in Poland, presenting numerous difficulties faced by the author during her research on this subject. This explanatory character of the first chapter helps Landau-Czajka to present various complexities and problems of her research, offering, at the same time, answers to many questions and doubts the reader may have with the presented methods that include the analysis of only certain press titles from the point of view of the most significant, from the author's point of view, as well as problems of interwar Jewish life. The author states clearly that writing a comprehensive and detailed study of the Jewish press in Polish has never been her aim and, while reading this book, we should have that in mind.

The second chapter of the book takes a closer look at Jewish attitudes to Poland in the first two years of existence of the Second Polish Republic (1918-1920). With shifting boundaries in the east and west, and with Poles involved in numerous military struggles, the Jewish communities were often accused of anti-Polish feelings. That was what led to various anti-Jewish attacks and pogroms, making Jewish newspapers particularly careful in what they wrote about Poland, very often expressing not happiness and support, but fear of persecutions (p. 73). The period was full of ambiguities: on the one hand, Jews congratulated Poles on their independence, but on the other hand, the Jewish community did not always feel welcome in the new Poland. That was particularly visible in the west, when Jews living in Wielkopolska emigrated to Germany, as well as in the east, where local Jews did everything to avoid involvement in the Polish-Ukrainian conflict, yet their lack of support was often interpreted as hostility (pp. 82-3).

An uneasy approach to Poland was coupled with the Jewish perception of Poles themselves (analysed in Chapter 5). Very rarely, the Jewish press generalised and referred to the whole Polish nation when writing about Poles. Neither a single stereotype of a Pole, nor a single stereotype of an anti-Semite existed in Jewish newspapers. Instead of generalising, the press referred to particular groups of Polish society. There was also no agreement to what extent Poles should be considered as 'they' or as 'we' and, depending on the subject of various articles and editorials, Jewish newspapers tended to use both forms. Naturally, the Jewish press could not feel any national bond with people involved in anti-Semitic excesses, but, at the same time, it did not hesitate to write about 'our' successes in international politics or sport (pp. 219-223).

Another interesting subject discussed by Landau-Czajka is patriotism that, according to the Jewish press, was much stronger than that expressed by other national minorities living in Poland. Moreover, in their analysis of Polish-Jewish relations, both contemporary and historical, Jewish press tended to stress the peaceful co-existence of both nations. Historical references were often used to convince readers that the difficult situation in the Second Republic, including pogroms and other anti-Semitic excesses, was an exception rather than the rule (p. 112). Jews, who had lived in Poland for many centuries, were also presented as an integral part of the country, leading some newspapers to the argument that antisemitism was seriously undermining the democratic principles of the Republic, becoming more harmful for the Poles themselves than for the Jews (p. 138).

The unique and, from 1926, central position of Józef Piłsudski in the history of interwar Poland found its expression in the Jewish press as well. By presenting him as the greatest national hero and a friend of the Jews, the newspapers contrasted his actions with those of the National Democrats (p. 172). The positive view of the Marshall was, therefore, a way of supporting his post-1926 politics and criticising right wing parties. This did, however, change after 1935. After Piłsudski's death, changes in the Polish political climate made the situation for Jews very difficult. The Jewish press of the late 1930s, through holding up the positive view of Piłsudski and his politics, became more critical towards his successors, accusing them of abandoning the ideals and principles of the Marshall and moving closer to the despised National Democracy (pp. 176-183).

The two last chapters of the book discuss matters of antisemitism and assimilation. As the second chapter on the Jewish approach to Poland showed, the majority of Jewish newspapers adopted a positive view of Polish-Jewish relations, treating contemporary antisemitism as an exception in the long history of coexistence of both nations. In Chapter 6, Landau-Czajka takes this analysis a step further by showing that in many cases, even when writing about antisemitism, Jewish newspapers tried to look for positive aspects and carefully avoided accusing the whole Polish nation for similar tendencies. It remains unclear nevertheless, to what extent this positive approach to Poland and the future of the Polish Jews was a real expression of Jewish sentiments or just wishful thinking (p. 312).

The final chapter on what may appear slightly out of place, but it illustrates the uneasy relations between acculturated and assimilated Jews. While the former created the majority of readers of Jewish newspapers published in Polish, the latter, through abandonment of their Jewish roots, were widely perceived as traitors. What's more, even complete assimilation (that included conversion to Christianity) could not change Polish approach to the converts who were still perceived as Jews. Assimilated, christened, but Jews nonetheless.

The title of Anna Landau-Czajka's book can be misleading. The title quote 'They are not Poland' was originally used by one of the Jewish newspapers to refer to Polish anti-Semites (p. 312). By stressing the fact that these Poles did not represent Poland or the Polish society, the newspaper suggested that Polish Jews should not perceive antisemitism as a characteristic element of Polish interwar reality. However, by using this particular quote Landau-Czajka seems to present an ambiguity of Jewish-Polish relations at that time. On the one hand, Jews were highly critical of assimilation, condemning those who decided to take an assimilatory route. On the other hand, despite their often positive view of the Polish society, Polish Jews did not always feel as being part of it (p. 346). These ambiguities present important elements of all case studies analysed in the book.

Overall "Polska to nie oni" is a very valuable contribution to the history of Jewish-Polish relations in interwar Poland, offering a unique approach and a number of interesting conclusions. It is particularly enlightening to see how the reactions of the Jewish press differed when it described events taking place in Poland, from a critical approach towards Polish anti-Semitism, to much more sympathetic views of Polish culture, sport or politics. The occasional patriotism presented in the analysed titles illustrated that at least certain groups of Polish Jews felt at home in the Second Polish Republic. One can only wonder if Landau-Czajka's book is a step towards a more detailed study of Jewish public opinion (however broadly or narrowly defined) in interwar Poland.

This review was originally published on www.pol-int.org.