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Summary:The Lecture examines the Polonized Jews and those who believed that by Assimilating to the Polish Society, the "Jewish question" in independent Poland (1918 – 1939) will be solved. The Polonized Jews believed that Anti-Semitism would ultimately decline if the Jews were to integrate into Polish society and culture as some of the Western European Jewish communities. Several among them even claimed that the Jews must develop their patriotic sentiments and demonstrate their commitment to their homeland. They perceived the assimilation in Western European countries, as the ultimate process of assimilation. TheAssimilationists could not gain majority support among the Jews of Poland.

Key words: Assimilation, Polonization, Anti-Semitism

The image of the dark eastern Europeanreligious Jew - "the Ostjuden" – who wore the traditional darkcloths and spoke Yiddish was a threatening image to assimilated modern Jews of western European Jews during the second half of the 19th century and the interwar years.

Assimilated Jews resided before the second world war practically in all the European countries, Yet the most famous assimilated community resided in Germany, During the Weimar republic (1918 - 1933) Jews in Germany had reached their highest level of political and social integration, yet the German Jewish Symbiosis occurred not so much within the German society as it did with the hearts and mind of the Jews. The Jews were the proud bearers of the German liberal tradition on the one hand and on the other hand fulfilling their duties as citizens such as serving in the Army and fighting during the First World War

In his bookBeyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad¹, the Historian Steven Ascheimdiscussed the role of the 19 and 20 century myths about east European Jews in comparison with the self-definition of the Jews in Germany.In order to differentiate themselves - the newlymodernized and assimilated Jews from the traditional east European Jews especiallyPolish Jews they contrasted their way of life from the Polish Jews. This attitude toward the Polish Jews wasdeveloped whenthe east European Jews travelled through Germany and England ontheir way to America and thousands of them settled in Germany. German Jews feared that the EastEuropean Jews would be a threat to their process of assimilation and that they might encourageanti-Semitism. On the one hand GermanJews felt contempt and disgusted andon the other hand completion and helplessness.

The main question to be discussed in this lecture is: Did the modernized Assimilated polish Jews perceived their traditional brethren who became a symbol of backwardness in western Europe in the same manner and to what extent they identified with the western assimilated Jews and their attitude towards the traditional Jews.

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The Assimilationists in Poland which numbered about 200.000 out of 300.000 out of more then three million Jews²in the inter-war years, proposed a number of alternative means of bringing about the Jews' integration into the new Polish State, when established. They hoped that Polish Jews would become like the Western Assimilated Jewish communities. They aspired that the Jews' social, cultural and economic integration into the new state would take place if they were to learn Polish language and culture and come to identify with Polish nationalism.

After the establishment of the independent Polish State, the Assimilationists expressed hopes that the Polish authorities would also take measures to promote the Jews' integration into Polish society, thereby ending the "Jewish Separatism" and the traditional Jews would connect (zjednoczenie) "unify" (zespolenie) with the Poles.

MostAssimilationists in Poland believed that assimilation was a social and cultural process in which the Jews would learn to identify with Polish nationalism and demonstrate greater loyalty to Poland. To their way of thinking, Zionism did not sense a sensible solution to the "Jewish problem" though by the late 20's and the 30's they no longer objected to the establishment of Jewish State for those Jews who wished to live there.³

In addition to the activities in the "Assimilationists" camp – those members of organizations who openly stated their desire to promote the Jews integration into Polish society – there were Jews such as The famous Polish – Jewish Poet Julian Tuwim,⁴ (1894 – 1953) or the attorney Henryk Shtassman (1897 – 1940)⁵ and many others who considered themselves to be Poles in all respects. Some of them served in the Polish army and reached senior positions in Polish Government, academe and cultural and scientific institutes. Considering themselves Poles and alienated from their Jewish identities, they saw no need to declare themselves "Assimilationists". Nor did they share the doubts of the various organizations and groups that were considering the possible ways of promoting Jewish integration into Polish Society and thus felt no need to join them. .

The "Assimilationists' camp" also presented the Jew's contribution to Polish culture, economics and society. They stressed the Jews' and Poles' common history as a basis for their aspiration to bring about Polish Jewry's "unification" "connection" stressed the cooperation between the Poles and the Jews throughout the century and maintained that he had a dual historical memory, on the basis that they saw themselves as both a Jews and Poles.⁶

Stanislaw Kempner who served as the secretary of the Jewish community of Warsaw during the first world war, and frequently expressed his views on the "Jewish question" hoped that the process of assimilation would lead to a complete absorption of the Jewish people into Polish society. He did not specify however when the process would take place. He termed the process "interaction" between peoples, referring to inter-marriage. The interaction was explained as "shuffling racial elements" as occurred in England and France. The English are a mixture of Anglo Saxons and Normans, while the French have Celtic, Gallic, and Roman blood. He expected that one day the same process would take place between Jews and Poles in Poland "⁷The Poles have nothing to lose from the genius that Jews will bring through the process of assimilation..." On the other hand, he was aware of the difficulties involved in the process of the "interaction" in Poland: "...The Poles are not willing to accept the process, there are many Jews and they reveal too much individuality. Yet, with good will and shared hard work it is not impossible..."⁸

Kempner was in favor of total integration of Poles and Jews and the process of assimilation as practiced among the Jews in Western Europe. The assimilated Jews in the West were described as "Jews loyal to their homeland, without forgetting their commitment to Jewish communities around the world. "The assimilated Jew in the West is the best patriot of his country, yet, he does not cease to be Jewish. He is concerned not only with the fate of his brothers in his own country but also with the fate of Jews in other countries."⁹ Kempner viewed patriotism in addition to concern for the Jewish communities "as a desirable manifestation of assimilation. In fact, Kempner supported the Assimilationists' active involvement in Jewish Communal affairs combined with loyalty to Poland¹⁰.

Total assimilation on the one hand and the desire to resemble Western European Jewry on the other as described by Kempner, were contradictory. "Total assimilation" was perhaps a utopian situation. However, Western European assimilation was a more imminent and practical solution to the "Jewish question" in Poland. Western European Jews were perceived as living in harmony in two worlds, the Jewish world and the European one. The two suggestions nonetheless emphasized that the Kempner from the older generation was not decisive about a program that would solve the "Jewish problem".¹¹

During the Interwar Years, A group of students and Intellectuals entitled "Zjednoczenie" operated in the big Polish cities. The organization was active in the large Polish cities of Warsaw, Lvov, Krakow, and Vilna. Similar to the Assimilationists of western Europe and Germany, Zjednoczenie, argued that modern Jewish culture was actually the culture of the ghetto, a product of a closed and separatist attitude, making it incomparable to modern European culture. They did not actually use the term "Ostjuden", yet they emphasized the intellectual superiority of Zjednoczenie, aspired all the years of its existence to foster an image of an elite group. It presented itself as a group of outstanding intellectuals with unique spiritual abilities. Zjednoczenie members also preferred to perceive themselves as individuals who could distinguish between the inferior Jewish culture and the superior Polish one .

After the introduction of a numerous clauses quota in Polish universities, anti-Jewish riots broke out at the beginning of the 1931-1932 academic year on the campuses. These anti-Semitic incidents weakened the support in the ideological positions of Zjednoczenie among its members. The anti-Jewish riots caused its members to reconsider the organization's goals and doubts were raised as to whether there was any point in its existence as an organization aiming to promote assimilation. However, despite their disappointment that Polish society and the Jews did not consider assimilation as a solution to the Jewish Problem, members of Zjednoczenie were still encouraged by the success of assimilation in other European countries. According to Zjednoczenie, England was a country where the Jewish Problem had been satisfactorily solved. The Jewish community in England (according to Zjednoczenie) served as a role model because English Jews spoke English and did not know Hebrew or Yiddish. They neither demanded autonomy nor wanted to immigrate to Palestine. "They were English in heart and soul, spirit and culture" and felt equal to the English people. Nevertheless, they identified with the interests of the Jewish people throughout the world

and assisted with donations and philanthropy for persecuted Jews. The fact that the Jews of England even assisted the settlement efforts in Palestine did not contradict their being defined by *Zjednoczenie* as Assimilationists because they did not intend to leave their homeland.¹²

Following Pilsudski's (Poland's leader) death (1935), anti-Semitism and economic discrimination grew. The "National Unity camp" (*Oboz Zjednoczenia Narodowego* – OZON) established in 1937, caused deterioration in the authorities' attitude towards the Jews. Following the publication of OZON'S "Thirteen Principles" influenced by the Nuremberg laws the Jewish press in the Polish language emphasized that the Jews were inseparable from Poland and similar to the "Assimilationists", emphasized their contribution to Polish culture and economics for centuries. Proposals were also made calling for a deepening of the process of Polonization among the traditional Jews, who stood out in their singular life-style and form of dress. The reaction of the Polish Jewish Press and its readers to the Thirteen Points Plan against this plan was an attempt to clarify for themselves the reasons for the anti-Semitic atmosphere in Poland in the second half of the thirties. Some of the readers, in letters published in the newspapers, blamed the Jews for the hatred towards them because they were not polonized enough. These readers explained the reasons for anti-Semitism as being the eccentricity of the Jews in the Polish human surroundings, the antagonism and rejection the Jews aroused mainly because of the traditional groups that stood out in their traditional attire and appearance, and because of the use of the Yiddish language. One of the readers even suggested a similar program to that of the Assimilationists, namely to affiliate the Jews with Polish society. The reader called his plan "The Europization of the Hasidim (traditional Jews)" and offered in this plan to teach the Hasidim Polish. He even suggested encouraging them to change their traditional clothes by means of monetary payment.¹³

On the other hand, In the late thirties shortly before the outbreak of the second world war, Assimilationists' organizations reached the conclusion that Anti-Semitism was the primary reason for the failure of assimilation to resolve the "Jewish Problem" in Poland. Thus, the question posed by members of *Zjednoczenie* "whether there is a need for us", as well as the fears expressed by other organizations regarding the effects of the OZON government's anti-Semitic policy on the young generation, indicate that they had concluded that conditions were not suitable for the "unification" (*Zjednoczenie*) process in Poland. Even the radical among the Assimilationists, such as admitted that the Polish government's plans for the Jews during the second half of the 30's prevented the promotion of the assimilationists' idea. Thus the wish to be like the assimilationists in the west, faded. The events in Germany proved for the assimilated Polish Jews that Assimilation was not a practical solution to the "Jewish Problem" in Europe.

¹ Ascheim, S., *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

² Heller, C., "Assimilation, A Deviant Pattern among the Jews in Inter-War Poland," *J. S. S.* 15 (1973) p. 225 and p. 235.

³ Freilich, M., *Assimilation and Polonization in Interwar Poland (1918 – 1939)*, to be published by the Academic studies Press, Boston.

⁴ Julian Tuwim was a Polish poet born in Lodz to Jewish Parents. He was the leader of the *Skamander* group of leading Polish poets, he was also a major figure in his nation's literature. One of his important collections of poetry, *Slowa we krwi* [words bathed in blood] (1926).

⁵ Henryk Shtassman was an assimilated Warsaw lawyer who received a medal for his heroic acts in the first World War.

⁶ Freilich, M., *Assimilation and Polonization in Interwar Poland (1918 – 1939)*, To be published by Academic studies Press, Boston.

⁷ Kempner, S., "Asymilacja Polityczna i Polityczna", *Tygodnik dla Wszystkich*, May, 20th, 1915.

⁸ Idem. "Mowa asymilatora", *ibid*, June, 10th, 1915.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*.

¹¹ *ibid*.

¹² *Przegląd Prasy*, *Zjednoczenie*, June- July 1933.

"Czy jesteście my potrzebni", *ibid.*, October, 1931

"*Zjednoczenie* naprzelomie", *ibid*, April, 1932.

¹³ *Głos Gminy Żydowskiej*, 10 - 11 (1938)

"Czy warto się zastanowić", *Nasz Przegląd*, July, 8th 1937, 16.7.1937, 27.7.1937

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Research projects of Dr. Freilich are Polish Jewry in the first half of the twentieth century . especially groups of assimilated Jews in Poland between the two world wars. She published and edited a few books in Hebrew on Holocaust issues.