Latkes or Placki Ziemniaczane?: the Culinary Conception of Jewishness in Poland’s National Imagination

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Latkes or Placki Ziemniaczane?:
the Culinary Conception of Jewishness in Poland's National Imagination

An honors thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the distinction of Honors in the International Studies Department in the College of Arts and Sciences

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT, KEYWORDS........................................................................................................2

INTRODUCTION......................................................................................................................3

LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................................................10

Jewish Sociocultural History through Cookbooks .........................................................10

Jewish Cultural Revival in Europe ....................................................................................17

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH AND METHODS ..............................................................20

FINDINGS ............................................................................................................................22

Elaboration of Categories .................................................................................................23

Further Discussion ............................................................................................................35

CONCLUSION .....................................................................................................................40

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................................................43

APPENDIX ..........................................................................................................................56
Abstract

Poland, a country ravaged by the events and memory of the Holocaust, has enjoyed a great deal of cultural and religious Jewish revival in the decades since the fall of the Iron Curtain—something never thought possible after World War II. It has also seen a proliferation of high-end restaurants and a robust gastronomic culture develop as it is incorporated into a modern European food landscape. At times their lives paradisiacal and at other times turbulent, Polish Jewry once constituted the largest Jewish community in the World, so what is its status now? And what do non-Jewish Poles think of Jewish Poland? Through menu and other content analysis of self-appellated “Jewish Restaurants” in Poland, this paper seeks to answer the question: How are Jews and Jewishness conceived in a contemporary Polish culinary context, in light of enforced ethnic homogeneity and mounting far-right nationalism in a historically diverse land?

Key Words

Poland, Food as Memory, Jewish Cultural Revival, Christian-Jewish Reconciliation, Nationalism, National Imagination, Polish Jewry
I. **Introduction**

There is a widely held but erroneous notion that Jewish life in Europe had come to an end at the hands of the Nazis with the Holocaust. As expressed in Małgorzata Niezabitowska’s *Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland* (1986), a compendium of text and photographs taken of the at-that-time only thousands-strong Jewish community in Poland, many believed that, from the vantage point of the 1980s, there would be no future for Jewish life on the European continent following the Nazi attempt at its systematic destruction. In 1800 three quarters of all the Jews in the world lived in Poland, and, for a thousand years, it was a “‘paradise for Jews,’ the world center of Jewish religion, thought, literature, art, and politics”¹, and was home to the most significant Jewish community in Europe. Yet, Polish Jewry was destroyed in less than five years and the country soon became hell. After Nazi occupation, only two percent of the original Jewish population of Poland remained, and Polish Jewish memory was eviscerated. Niezabitowska describes how at the time, “only very dramatic events like the Kielce pogrom² or the mass emigration of 1968³ have drawn the world’s attention to

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² In which over 40 Jews—Holocaust survivors—were murdered by local soldiers and civilians in the town of Kielce, just one year after the end of the war in 1946.

³ At the behest of the Gomulka administration, Jews were “removed from jobs in public service…[and] pressure was placed upon them to leave the country” (YIVO). From 1968 to 1970, around 25,000 Jews fled Poland, leaving the Jewish population at that time to hover somewhere around 5,000 to 10,000.
Polish Jews”⁴ while the rest is “covered in silence”⁵. Poles knew very little of the life of Polish Jews but much of their death:

Of course, I knew about the destruction. There were ghettos and then there were death camps. The Germans murdered Jews, but then they also murdered Poles. Is such an effective amputation possible, then, that of three and a half million people and their powerful, varied world, nothing at all remains? A black hole…⁶

Only through the memory of her grandmother did she learn of “the grain merchant Bergson, almost a member of the family; Zylberstein, in whose shop in a small border town one could buy all the confections of the East, southern fruits, and local delicacies throughout the year; Doctor Lewicki, who saved my father, a ten-year-old boy, from a violent attack of whooping cough; the village tailors, shoemakers, and tanners, and the friends among the Lwów intelligentsia: lawyers, professors, journalists”—the Jewish heroes of the so-called pre-War “good old times”⁷. Even while often seen as separate and exotic, the non-Jewish Niezabitowska knew that Jews constituted a part of Poland and its natural landscape, and yet they were absent almost entirely as every day, living, breathing people to be known in post-War Poland.

From the beginning of Poland’s establishment as a premodern state, Jews were afforded rights and liberties by Polish Catholic rulers which led to great peace and prosperity as they came to the area to trade and later settle. The 11th Century Crusades

⁴ Niezabitowska, 11.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Niezabitowska, 13.
⁷ Niezabitowska, 12.
marked a time of great terror for Jews in Western Europe, spurring further Jewish immigration to Eastern Europe. This only increased once statutes such as the Magdeburg rights enumerated protections for Jews and granted them communal autonomy and a parallel legal infrastructure alongside Christians. The Roman Catholic Church moved swiftly and severely against these statutes and the Jewish communities they protected but many Polish Catholic rulers pushed back against its threatening influence—whether it be in their own economic or even personal interest in Jewish livelihood. Starting in the 15th Century, as Jews expelled from lands in Western Europe came east, Poland cemented its status as a haven and later a cultural and spiritual center for all Jewish life; by the middle of the 16th Century, about three-quarters of all the world’s Jews lived in Poland. Around this time, in 1569, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth came into being with full support and tolerance for all religions being guaranteed. Jews enjoyed unparalleled autonomy and security, leading to the proliferation of the very intellectual, cultural, and religious institutions and movements that Polish Jewry had been famed for before the Second World War: notably, there was the Council of Four Lands, alternatively known as the Jewish Sejm or General

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8 The 14th Century King Casimir the Great is said to have had a Jewish mistress named Esterka. Jewish historian David Gans writes: "Casimir, the king of Poland, took for himself a concubine - a young Jewess named Esther. Of all the maidens of the land, none compared to her beauty. She was his wife for many years. For her sake, the king extended many privileges to the Jews of his kingdom. She persuaded the king to issue documents of freedom and beneficence." The Jewish quarter of Kazimierz in Kraków is named in the king’s honor.

Congress, the highly organized central body of authority governing the Jewish community of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; Sigismund I the Old, its founder, recognized the “great number of the Jewish population of Poland, its importance in the industrial life of the country, and the peculiarities of the political and class organization of the Polish commonwealth”¹⁰ and thus provided an external framework for Jewish self-governance to exist and thrive.

Even with this degree of autonomy in the administrative, judicial, religious, and charitable realms, there was comparatively little social isolation between Jew and Christian in the Commonwealth despite prescription from respective religious authorities¹¹. Definitive proof of this comes from the “thousands and thousands of words”¹² from Polish that entered the Yiddish language and the extreme similarities in dress. Beyond solely economic interactions, there are also abundant reports of “romances, drinking together in taverns, and of intellectual conversations”¹³ between


¹² Ibid. p. 51.

¹³ Ibid. p. 52. It is necessary to write further on Jewish tavern-keeping in Poland. As Glenn Dynner writes, “the Jewish-run tavern was often the center of leisure, hospitality, business, and even religious festivities”. Since Jews were generally not allowed to own land and also the only group believed by nobles to be sober enough to run taverns profitably, they were leased taverns and soon the Polish Jewish liquor trade
Jews and Christians at this time—even extending to a chronicled event of a wealthy Jewish business hosting Christian Polish noblemen for dinner at his home—which points also to a shared or, at least, mutually intelligible culinary language.

From the mid-18th Century onwards, Poland endured a number of partitions that decreased its territory and relegated its people elsewhere, placing at stake this atmosphere of peace and prosperity in some cases and rendering it void in others, depending on who their new rulers were. Many Polish Jews were forced by the Tsar to live in the Pale of Settlement, an economically bleak and dreary demarcated area on the Western frontier of the Russian Empire. Banned from agricultural communities, the brewing industry, and with many forced to live off charity, Jews suffered immensely. With the fall of Imperial Russia came the rise of the Second Polish Republic and a vibrant renewal of Polish Jewish culture, yet antisemitism swelled with unforeseen intensity.

In 1939, the occupation of Poland began and the extermination of the largest Jewish community in Europe came soon after. Led by the German Nazis, but not without the involvement of Polish citizens, the Holocaust devastated Polish Jewry as was booming. So strong was the connection between Jews and responsible tavern-keeping in Poland that the concept has become immortalized in the Polish national ethos: in Poland’s national epic poem, Pan Tadeusz, the tavern looks “like a Jew rocking in prayer…[with] carvings protruding like tzitzit down his body” (Mickiewicz 1834); and, as is referenced later in the name of several dishes found in Jewish restaurants in Poland, this tavern keeper’s name is Yankel. Soon, however, Jews were blamed for Polish peasant drunkenness and were banned from the industry. To avoid this official prohibition, many nobles helped Jewish tavern keepers by establishing Christians as fronts. These relationships speak to a relatively unexplored aspect of Jewish-Christian coexistence in 19th and 20th Century Poland.
millions were systematically rounded up, ghettoized, and murdered. Although ethnic Poles were also seen by the Nazis as subhuman, Jews were viewed in an even worse light, and treated as such. At the end of the war, an estimated 350,000 Polish Jews remained from the 1933 population of over three million. Post-war antisemitic pogroms spurred Jewish emigration further, as Poland grew to seem less and less hospitable. 

Following War World II and the Holocaust, Poland’s borders were redefined and its populations were further relocated so as to form it as an ethnically homogenous nationstate devoid of its notable historic cultural diversity—a recent and violent transformation which has been naturalized by nationalist political parties and the Catholic Church as an expression of the nation’s purported eternal Polish singularity. In reality, what is now Poland has been inhabited by non-Poles since its conception: just before the War, as recorded in the 1931 Census, ethnic minorities—including Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, and, importantly here, Jews—made up a third of the country’s population. Equally diverse it was religiously, with Eastern Rite Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Jews supplementing the approximately 60% Roman Catholic majority; it is also important to note that, at that point, a fifth of the world’s Jews lived in Poland and made up the second largest Jewish diaspora community. As of 2011 however, the demographics have shifted so drastically that out of the just over 38 million people living in Poland, nearly 37 million of them are identified as

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monoethnically Polish\textsuperscript{15}—marking a swift and harsh departure from the reality of the vast majority of Poland’s history.

With enforced ethnic homogeneity and the rise of nationalism in a historically diverse land comes questions of what constitutes national identity and as part of that, national cuisine. Jews are—as a historically numerous and significant group within Poland—one systematically destroyed and stifled, one with an inimitable and inalienable connection to food, and one marked with a reputation of eternal wandering. Through exploring the view of Jews and Jewishness in the Polish psyche as conceived culinarily and gustatorily, we can understand more broadly the experiences and narratives of national minorities (including those who, in number, are not truly minorities; rather, those who are “minoritized”) and paint a more rich and just picture of Polish-Jewish life today with the universal language of food.

Prior explorations of Polish Jewry have generally dealt with its past rather than its present, making its contemporaneity fertile ground for research. Polish Jewry should not be confined to tragic stories of yesteryear nor the extremely common wooden carved “Lucky Jew” figurines found in any and every souvenir shop nor even the plucky klezmer music heard being played so as to lure onlookers into whatever Jewish-themed entrepreneurial experience is being curated by the post-Communist Pole being faced with a crisis of national identity. I endeavor, with this paper, to examine Jewish life today in Poland as it exists in the nation’s food. With all this said, I hope that this paper acts as

a monument to Poland’s Jewish presence—both its present and future—and that its vibrancy, significance, and beauty will be carried on for generations to come.

II. Literature Review

This literature review aims to provide an overview of Central and Eastern European Jewish cookbooks as a means of transmitting social and cultural history; Jewish cultural revival in how it relates to the dominant and governing ideas of Virtual Jewishness and Jewish simulacra, especially as they exist in tourist sites and Jewish-themed businesses; and the role of minoritized groups in shaping national cuisine in largely monoethnic nation-states. The examination of these topics will provide context for my research and flesh out a theoretical framework through which it will be pursued.

Jewish Sociocultural History through Cookbooks

One could say that Jewishness in literature begins with the Torah and its interpretations, as can be said for Jewish food and its many biblical prescriptions seen in the laws of Kashrut. While Jews were originally only allowed to observe a vegetarian diet, moving through the Five Books of Moses, what is and what is not permissible, or kosher, is identified in great detail. These rules have been seen by some as restrictive and others as liberatory, but is it nonetheless true that Kashrut enacts certain borders which historically have served, at least in part, to differentiate and form the Jewish people.
More specifically, Jewish cookbooks have been identified with the dual function of giving "recipes for tasty and healthy dishes"\(^{16}\) and also providing “practical instructions for how to follow religious dietary prescriptions”\(^{17}\). As living conditions improved for Jews in Central Europe in the 19th Century, along came cookbooks such as *Kochbuch f. Israeliten, oder praktische Anweisung, wie man nach den jüdischen Religionsgründen alle Gattungen der feinstein Speisen kauscher bereitet* (Cookbook for Jews, or Practical Instruction in How to Prepare All Sorts of Fine Food in a Kosher Way after the Jewish Religion; 1815) or *Geprüftes Kochbuch für Israeliten: Nach vieljährigen Erfahrungen* (Certified Cookbook for Jews: After Many Years of Experience; 1835). In many of these, it was assumed that their readers were well aware of what made something kosher, and as such, the majority of kosher instruction is implicit in commentaries advising—for example, to replace dairy butter with goose fat if a stew is to be served alongside meat.

The Haskalah, or the Jewish Enlightenment, was well underway at this time, and this led many such as Rebekka Wolf in her highly influential and popular *Kochbuch für Israelitische Frauen* (Cookbook for Jewish women; first published 1851) to write that “religious practice was being neglected in many Jewish homes”\(^{18}\) and that her book was


\(^{17}\) Ibid.

for “young girls who had not learned the religious diet rules in their homes”\textsuperscript{19}. These were not just cookbooks full of recipes but also manuals to craft the Jewish woman as a methodical homemaker. This brings up the greatly important and interesting role of the Jewish woman in constituting Jewish identity and, by extension, the Jewish nation, especially as so many were moving away from traditional Jewish life in Europe at this time, seeking to bring Judaism more in line with contemporary European society and its values.

Although what made a cookbook Jewish thus far in Europe had been its adherence to Kashrut, Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the preeminent scholar in Polish Jewish culinary ethnography and memory, notes, “most [Jewish] cookbooks published in America before World War I were not kosher”\textsuperscript{20}. \textit{Aunt Babette’s Cook Book}, authored by the pseudonymous Bertha F. Kramer, puts forth a culinary reality for the well-off, secularized, and assimilated German Jew; there are nearly no explicit references to Judaism in the 1893 book, and the singular dish with a Hebrew name, \textit{charoset}, is classified as an Easter—rather than Passover—dish. Regarding its radical reinterpretation of formerly stringent laws of what is kosher and what is treyf, it claims

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} Notaker, 235.

\textsuperscript{20} Notaker, 241.
that "Nothing is Trefa [treyf; non-kosher] that is healthy and clean." It can be seen that there exists great tension in what Jewishness means in personhood and in food—tension exacerbated by the pushes and pulls of assimilationism and religious traditionalism. *The Settlement Cook Book*, first published in 1901, similarly is both a cookbook and guide to running a household, specifically intended for new, largely Reform Jewish arrivals to the United States (although it also was intended partially for other immigrant groups, such as Italians). These two books, among many others, provide depth into Jewish culinary, and thus cultural, assimilation in the United States that can be extrapolated to cases of other multiethnic, perhaps "melting-pot" states.

As for the Jewish cookbooks published around the time of World War II in Europe, there is much to be explored in terms of how Jews dealt with the growing precarity of being Jewish in Europe. The Jewish League of Women’s 1926 *Kochbuch für die jüdische Küche* (Cookbook for the Jewish Kitchen) abandoned the vagaries of previous Jewish cookbooks, choosing to thoroughly explain *kashrut* and detail its positive facets in a didactic way. A later edition includes a chapter on *Palästina-Rezepte*, or recipes for Jews migrating to Mandatory Palestine, and pays great attention to the regionally-specific Levantine ingredients that would be unknown for most European Jews, as does the 1936 *Wie kocht man in Erez-Izrael? (How to cook in Eretz-Israel?)*, published in Tel Aviv. These served to inculcate immigrants to the

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soon-to-be State of Israel with the expertise and knowledge to be able to survive, cook, and practice Judaism in this Middle Eastern environment.

A WWII-era Jewish cookbook of a completely different variety is that which was written in Theresienstadt, the Nazi’s “model” ghetto. Completely removed from ideological or political aims, what is now In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin was scrawled in Czech and German on scraps of stray paper as women attempted to cope with starvation and abuse, knowing so clearly in their hearts that the memories, cravings, and dreams of food they had been raised with and cooked innumerable times would always be with them. These women “dared to think of food, to dwell on what they were missing”22—this compilation is a “manifestation of defiance, of a spiritual revolt…an act of discipline that required them to suppress their current hunger…and to dare to dream of a world after the camps”23. These recipes are “markers of identity, reminders of relationships, and connection to community through ritual”24 that speak to the true nature of food as a cornerstone of human existence and a “forceful testimony to the power of food to sustain us”25.

When it comes specifically to Polish Jewish cuisine in cookbooks, one of its greatest portraits is Cuisine Juive, Ghettos Modernes, published in 1929 by Edouard de Pomiane. De Pomiane, a Frenchman of Polish origin, visited Jewish communities


23 Ibid. xvi.

24 Notaker, 244.

25 Berenbaum, xxvi.
throughout Poland, Lithuania, and France and wrote of the flavors and features of their cuisines. He described them as “rich in the aroma of nutmeg, cinnamon, vanilla, and lemon peel…characterized by a sweet and sour taste” and using a large amount of root vegetables. *Cuisine Juive* is one of the most unique, standalone studies of interwar European Jewish life and food, as it existed just a decade before the Holocaust began and promptly led to the extermination of two-thirds of Europe’s Jews. An 1877 translation of Rebekka Wolf’s aforementioned book in Polish as *Polska Kuchnia Koszerna, zawierająca najrozmaitsze potrawy i pieczywa, Konfitury i Soki, oraz szczegółowy przewodnik do urządzania koszernego gospodarstwa* ("Polish Kosher Cuisine, containing a variety of dishes and breads, jams and juices, and a detailed guide to the kosher farm") provides an even more complete portrait of Polish Jewish food with its inclusion of many dishes typical of Old Polish cuisine. Beyond De Pomiane and Wolf, many others recognize Jewish and non-Jewish Polish food as sharing many traits—as the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage says, “the fact that a few million Jews lived on the historic territory of Poland must have also influenced Polish cuisine. It would not be an exaggeration to say that both culinary cultures are intertwined. Dishes as popular in the every day as gołąbki and even potato pancakes likely have Jewish origins.”

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27 Ibid.
The question now is: is there a particular Jewish cuisine represented by these aforementioned Jewish cookbooks? A common thread? As Claudia Roden says, “Jews have been marked by the cuisine in all the countries they have lived in and ‘never developed a cuisine of their own except for a few traditional holiday favorites…it is the limitations necessary for the observance of the laws of Kashrut’ that have ‘stamped the food with Jewishness’”\(^\text{28}\). While it is certainly true that what is widely considered to be “Jewish food” does owe greatly to religious dietary laws, this is not its sole determiner—so can we even say that this is necessarily true?

There is a wealth of further literature on Jewish foodways despite its marginalization and relegation from academia as it is widely considered “low” culture. Beyond the work of omnipresent figures such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Claudia Roden, Alice Nakhimovsky has researched the attempts of Russian Jews to reestablish their Jewish identity through the writing and publishing of cookbooks and Soviet Jewish ways of grappling with the estrangement from religious and cultural practice\(^\text{29}\); she writes of how Jewishness in food was disguised during the Soviet Union as challah was “sold under the public name *pletentka* [braid]”\(^\text{30}\) and Jewish stuffed cabbage, recognized as such due to its sweet-and-sour flavor profile, was coded in a


\(^{30}\) Nakhimovsky, 67.
1973 cookbook as “Stuffed Cabbage, Oriental Style”\textsuperscript{31}. Similarly, Eve Jochnowitz has explored culinary tourism as a way Jews encounter and relate to contemporary Poland as a “site of abjection, both degraded and degrading, and a surrogate Holy Land”\textsuperscript{32}; the way in which her over-two-decade-old portrait of Kraków’s Jewish quarter shows its age speaks to how the neighborhood, and Jewish Poland in totality, has developed since the late 1990s, but still provides an interesting look into how tourists as well as domestic Poles, both Jewish and non-Jewish, engage in the nation’s Jewish past through taste.

\textbf{Jewish Cultural Revival in Europe}

As most work concerning the revival of Jewish life in Europe goes, the common narrative is as follows: since the Holocaust and its near extermination of European Jewry, there is little capacity for any “real” Jewish community and thus culture to reemerge. Thus, what does exist is mere simulacrum—a copy of a copy of a copy of a Jewish Europe that is no longer living\textsuperscript{33}. This so-called “virtual Jewishness,”\textsuperscript{34} as termed by Ruth Ellen Gruber, describes the phenomenon of elements of perceived Jewish culture entering the public domain as they are embraced and enacted overwhelmingly by non-Jews in Europe, through participation in Jewish festivals, restoration of synagogues and historic Jewish quarters, the opening of Jewish museums, and, as I

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Ibiv.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Jochnowitz, Eve. “Flavors of Memory: Jewish Food as Culinary Tourism in Poland.” Culinary Tourism, 2004, 97–113.
\end{itemize}
explore, patronage of Jewish restaurants. Gruber delves into the reasons behind this non-Jewish adoption and performance of Jewish culture and determines that motivations variably lie in historical reconciliation with a totalitarian past or Nazi destruction, and often also in the hopes of crafting the nation in question as a tolerant and cosmopolitan state.

Within Poland, the vast majority of what is written (in English) on the revival of Jewish life and culture through food comes from a select few publications and focuses chiefly on a handful of restaurants, festivals, and institutions found in major metropolitan centers. Beyond Warsaw's POLIN Museum or Krakow's Ariel, there is little to be said for the tens of millions of rural, non-institutionally-linked Poles working to reconcile with their nation's past and present.

As is elaborated above, there is a need for research into the role of the often ignored non-metropolitan centers of Poland and their culinary establishments in how Jewish identity is performed, transmitted, and conceived. In the era of “new” national cuisines, such as “New American,” what is crafted as “New Polish” as the country truly begins to grapple with the memory of Jewish destruction?—something that is made unavoidable by recent Jewish cultural renewal.

This thesis takes prior studies in the realms of food, memory, and Jewishness and places them in a post-War and post-independence Polish context to explore the culinary conception of Jewishness and Jews in the national consciousness and imagination of contemporary Poland, in light of its enforced ethnic homogeneity and mounting far-right nationalism in such a historically diverse land. It is a country whose
Jews have been massacred and made nonexistent by its own citizens yet one in which there is a spirited attempt to recover the over thousand-year history of Polish Jewry. With the recent rise of far-right political movements in Poland and across the world that threaten the lives of Jews and other marginalized groups, the question of Jews as belonging to or being excluded from the nation and national memory is once again being brought into a contested position. Poland is noteworthy in the stark destruction of its once-characteristic ethnoreligious diversity that has given way to a homogeneity byproduct of “relatively recent, and very violent, historical events and political processes”\(^35\). What is also noteworthy is how this homogeneity by violent means has been naturalized as supposedly intrinsic and inherent to the Polish nation, by both the state and the Catholic Church, thus restricting the definition of what it means to be Polish.

One realm that I have found to be particularly fertile in terms of exploring Jewish-gentile Polish relations is that of food. Although there is great similarity in Jewish and non-Jewish Polish food, often indistinguishable from each other except in name, I wish to explore how these cuisines shape Jewish and gentile perceptions of the Other and the implications that this relationship has on a contemporary Polish understanding of Jewishness. As food is “the most accessible threshold of culture,“\(^36\) how can we use it


to understand one which has been utterly decimated and yet shares so much history and memory with that of its host country as to be inseparable? What can be said of a cuisine of a people who supposedly no longer exists? How does the reconceptualization of Jewish food within Poland as an often necessarily foreign cuisine (both in its eastward/pseudo-Sephardic/Israeli shift by Polish food entrepreneurs and even state institutions and in its “old-country” shtetl exotification) redefine the role of Jews in Polish society in the past and today? How is national memory of the minoritized retroactively shaped and what implications does it have for them today?

III. Statement of Research and Methods

To begin with and as has been done already, this project will delve into the vast literature written so far on the history of Poland, Polish Jewry, and Jewish foodways, grounding my exploration of contemporary Polish attitudes in those of the past. Inextricably linked to 21st Century Polish Jewry is how the Holocaust and Polish involvement and complicity is conceptualized legally, so the state’s legal interactions with that will be analyzed as well. Its memory laws (notably the Amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance of 2018) have been used to alternatively combat and bulwark Holocaust denial but always, importantly here, serve to favor the Honorable Polish Nation.

Following this, I will utilize oral history from various academic experts (notably from the Yiddish Book Center and different Polish Jewish institutions, such as the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and its exhibit What’s Cooking?, on Jewish culinary culture) alongside occasional testimony from everyday
Poles and other Eastern Europeans, for the purpose of illuminating exactly what the common man thinks and shaping my direction for research.

Finally and chiefly, as this is a project based around food, I will examine the menus, packaging, and programming from restaurants and culinary enterprises within Poland describing themselves as serving Jewish food or as “Jewish restaurants”. I will then code and categorize each dish in context along axes of perceived or conceived Jewishness, delving into its history, etymology (especially important and interesting since most of these are translated from Polish to English, and often additionally from another language such as Yiddish, Hebrew, or Russian), and execution. This analysis and classification will comprise the bulk of my data-based research into the topic, as I use both strategies to extract Polish attitudes on Jewish food and thus Jewishness.

Some possible factors that could limit the scope and depth of my thesis are as follows: there is quite a severe time constraint, as I only have a month or so to collect my findings, and then little time after with which to analyze and then finalize them; I believe that much more information would be illuminated if I were to have time and resources ample enough to collect real ethnographic data rather than relying on that of others—it is extremely difficult to attempt to carry out a study of personal attitudes without any real contact with people and their opinions, instead having to glean them from restaurant menu items. There is also a language barrier leading to an unintelligibility of sources, since I am not fluent in Polish, Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew, nor in many of the other languages found in the literature, and, as a result, could possibly face difficulty in properly carrying out a study with such an intense regional focus; two
ways in which this is particularly tricky is that it limits the sort of oral testimony and history I am able to use, even with the help of translation software, and also that I am missing out on a great deal of the linguistic nuance of the way in which dishes are named—something that I believe is critical. Finally, since I was not raised in Poland and thus am lacking a high degree of knowledge surrounding its culture and history, my depth of understanding and familiarity with things as essential to one’s national-cultural identity as folklore is limited.

Thankfully, I do know many people who do speak these languages, including those who live in Eastern Europe, and thus could provide greater insight into the sociocultural environment I am seeking to explore. However, their own thoughts and feelings might either be out of date or irrelevant considering my limited scope of research; also, the vast majority of these people are non-Jewish, and I do not want that to color this paper as one of an orientalist outsider looking obtrusively in, especially while handling such a sensitive and precarious issue.

IV. Findings

Poland, once known as a “paradise for Jews”\(^\text{37}\), is thought of by many Jews today as a nightmarish home of genocidal atrocity. Visiting the country with this mindset while yearning for what is thought of as authenticity places one in an uncomfortable position. Do the Hebrew-styled store signs count as mockery? How should one feel about the countless menorot sold in antique shops? It is impossible to not feel a certain tension and it is so striking that it can not even be resolved by what should be the greatest

\(^{37}\)Niezabitowska.
human comfort—food. Here, Poland reveals itself as a culinary battleground in which narratives of the past are constantly being posed and renegotiated. It is impossible to escape this three-meal-a-day landscape and that is why I have devoted this paper to its exploration.

Through surveying the menus, promotional material, websites, reviews, and photos of 12 culinary establishments self-identifying as serving Jewish food in the cities of Warsaw, Kraków, Łódz, Kazimierz Dolny, Lublin, Wroclaw, and Będzin in Poland, I have developed a classification system for what is and what makes food Jewish in the eyes of everyday Poles. Since my research deals with non-Jewish, in addition to Jewish, attitudes towards Polish Jewish food, I am not focusing on certified kosher restaurants and catering services that do not serve a gentile public. The dishes I have collected and analyzed from these establishments fit roughly into one or more of the following categories: a) Known Polish Jewish foods; b) Judaized or “Jewish-style” foods; c) Foods with predominant use of techniques and/or ingredients thought of as Jewish; d) Foods referencing names, themes, holidays, places, and/or concepts thought of as Jewish; e) Russian, Ukrainian or otherwise non-Polish foods whose foreignness is synonymous with Jewishness; f) Explicitly non-European Israeli/Middle-Eastern foods.

**Elaboration of Categories**

As established above, I will now go in further detail into the six rough categories of dishes found from the surveyed culinary establishments serving Jewish food in Poland:
a) Known Polish Jewish foods: these are those dishes widely accepted within the historical culinary canon as Polish-Jewish, such as *gęsi pipek* (stuffed and baked goose neck skin or, in Galicia, stewed goose stomachs; goose was also roasted whole, its offal “used to make broth or sauce with garlic,” and its livers fried; goose fat served an analogous role to schmaltz in broader Ashkenazi cooking), gefilte fish, *czulent* (cholent), *chała* \(^{36}\) or *chałka* (challah), *macę* (matzo; it is quite intensely overrepresented in both Polish grocery stores relative to Jewish population and in restaurants relative to its nonexistence in American counterparts\(^{39}\)), *bajgieł* (bagel; the modern American bagel, brought over by Jewish immigrants in the 20th century, most likely draws the same origins as Kraków’s characteristic *obwarzanek*), *cebularz* (this onion and poppy seed bread distinguished by EU law with a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) “became a part of Polish cuisine thanks to Jews living in Lublin’s Old Town” and bears great similarity to the American bialy), *knyszes* (knishes; widespread in Ashkenazi cuisine and

\(^{36}\) There is also a widespread Eastern European Christian tradition of braided sweet breads similar to challah, most often for Christmas and Easter. Curiously, in Polish, the word *chała* can be used to mean “something that is manufactured to be of poor quality or form” (Wielki słownik języka polskiego).

\(^{39}\) Matzo is the “only food Jews are actually commanded to eat in the Tanakh” (Jochnowitz 1998, 104) and holds a very interesting place in the minds of non-Jewish Poles. The packaging of the two major matzo brands in Poland market it in two alternative ways; as a health food which “fits in perfectly with the widely held Polish view that specifically Jewish products are somehow purer, better, and safer than their non-Jewish analogues”; and with a “gorgeous Jewess made to look oriental” so as to frame the Passover specialty within a “different set of Polish perceptions of Jews—that they are a mysterious oriental other—a sprinkle of spice in the country’s otherwise bland broth” (Jochnowitz 1998, 105). This is ironic as matzo, the bread of affliction, is specifically intended to be bland.
distinguished here by its occasional description as a “Russian pierog pie”), holiszkes (holishkes, stuffed cabbage rolls; more often called goląbki when referring to an explicitly Polish Catholic usage), kugel (its savory iteration is closely related to babka\(^{40}\) ziemniaczana, a loafed potato cake often also containing sausage or bacon), cymes\(^{41}\) (tzimmes, but much different from the mainstream American Ashkenazi conception as its served mostly as a dessert), charoset (also curiously served as a dessert\(^{42}\)), żydowski kawior (Jewish caviar; “fried and chopped chicken livers with onions, with the addition of hard-boiled eggs and cumin”; also called on some menus, as in the United States, chopped liver), knejdlach (kneidlach or matzo balls), kreplach (notably written about by Edward Pożerski de Pomiane), p'tcha (once widespread throughout Jewish Eastern Europe, still in the former Western Soviet Union states as kholodets, but barely existent in most well-established Jewish communities in the US; it is one of the more reviled dishes in this list and has been maligned as “the Ashkenazi revenge”), śliwowica paschalna (traditional Southern Polish plum brandy; this certified kosher for Passover spirit was adopted by Polish Orthodox Jews because it did not risk being made in the

\(^{40}\) What is known as babka more generally, the sweet braided bread-cake, most likely draws its linguistic origin from the Polish word for grandmother, babcia.

\(^{41}\) While “tzimmes” in Yiddish is figuratively used to describe something complicated, intricate, or burdensome—a fuss—in Polish, it means something rare, one of a kind, and delicious. This divergence in meaning points to the likely instance of non-Jewish Poles not being aware of the labor behind tzimmes, only its wonderful taste and festive nature.

\(^{42}\) Nakhimovsky notes that, for Russian Jews, this loss of charoset’s ritual meaning “was often not even suspected, as can be seen in a recent cookbook and an unrelated website that both list haroset—a sweet food, but one with a strict a singular function at the start of the Passover seder—as a dessert” (2006, 68)
same facilities as grain-based and thus chametz-containing alcohols; today, though neither most of its producers nor consumers are Jewish, Slivovitz has Jewish history as the rights to distill such plum brandy were leased by certain notable Jewish families) and various desserts such as *makagiki* (a dish of poppy seeds and nuts fried in honey, traditionally made for Purim) and “the usual strudel”\(^4\).

b) Judaized or “Jewish-style” foods: these are either those simply referred to as “Jewish-style” without further explanation or those adopted by Jewish residents of some area and subsequently incorporated into their own local Jewish cuisine; this includes anything “po żydowsku”—be it carp, chicken broth, salmon, coffee, tea, “dumpling dough filled” (this dish, from Ariel in Kraków, looks exactly like a knish or the Russian *pirozhok*), or even the explicitly treyf *póldwica po żydowskiu z masłem czosnkowym* (Jewish sirloin with garlic butter, from the Łódz restaurant Anatewka, named for Sholem Aleichem’s archetypical shtetl and known for its habit of dressing waiters as imitations of Hasidim, with peyos and all)—as well as dishes labeled more specifically as “Sephardic style”; as for the second qualification, this includes the Viennese Kaiserschmarrn (German and Austrian Jews were much more assimilated than their Polish counterparts, and their cuisine reflected this; a sort of scrambled pancake dessert, Kaiserschmarrn was a favorite of the Austro-Hungarian Kaiser Franz Josef I and the Jews who pled allegiance to him for his bestowal upon them of full citizenship; it is found in both Jewish and non-Jewish Austrian cookbooks of the time and is a testament to the imperial belief that Jews were “the cement that kept all the different nations making up the

\(^4\) Kaspryzk-Chevriaux.
Austro-Hungarian empire…together⁴⁴ and Hungarian Leczo, among others.

c) Foods with a predominant use of techniques and/or ingredients thought of as Jewish, such as almonds or raisins; these dishes include: goose pate with cranberries; King’s style herring with cinnamon (This could reference the similarities between Polish-Jewish and Old Polish food as the latter is thought of now as that of the kings and nobles, similarly to how Old Russian cuisine is that of the tsars and how the predominant cuisine and culture of a time is shaped by its elites.); fried zucchini with almonds (Fried zucchini is an Italian Jewish staple and, in the eyes of the restaurateur, the presence of Jewish-coded almonds reinforces the perceived Jewishness and thus authenticity of the dish, despite being absent in the original.); stuffed goose leg with caramelized pear and gnocchi (Goose is a ‘known’ Polish-Jewish ingredient; the additions of pear and gnocchi are not traditional per se but could be seen as valuable in terms of culinary innovation); stuffed onion (stuffing as a technique is generally seen as Jewish; this could possibly, but not likely, be a reference to Sephardic seboyas reynados); chicken in honey and ginger sauce; beef casserole in garlic and cumin sauce (any spicing or sweet and sour treatment of meat, be it beef or chicken, is thought of as uniquely Jewish in the Polish culinary canon); salmon with almonds (along with the classic addition of almonds, the salmon is here because fish was and is often a simpler option for those keeping kosher, as no rules of slaughter apply and restrictions are generally less stringent); roasted salmon served with cucumber saffron salad (this is

perhaps a riff on the Polish *mizeria* and many other Eastern European cucumber salads, but saffron exists in neither Jewish nor non-Jewish cooking in Poland, so this points to a more orientalist and made foreign conception of Jewishness); chicken breast sautéed in plum and mushroom sauce; turkey filet with almond and raisin sauce; roast goose served with cherries (Both goose and sour cherries were and still are prized by Jewish and non-Jewish in Eastern Europe alike; for Jews, however, the sour cherry season coincides with Shavuos, leading it to become an important holiday ingredient; although I could not find anything specifically linking serving goose and cherries together as a tradition among Polish Jews, the sweet and sour meat thread continues.); sweet n’ sour salmon filet; flounder fish with almonds; and celery root schnitzel (schnitzel is a German and Austrian dish, originally made with veal or pork, adopted by Ashkenazi Jews and made kosher, and then brought to the State of Israel, where it has reached new heights as an omnipresent chicken-based street food; for those more stringent and wary of non-kosher-friendly Poland or those raised in the traditions of eating less or no meat out of either necessity or choice, the celery root schnitzel fulfills its purpose as a tasty meal and as an expression of the pathways of Jewish food).

d) Foods referencing names, themes, holidays, places, and/or concepts thought of as Jewish (e.g., the now Ukrainian town of Berdychiv, once an important center of Hasidism with a 80% Jewish population); these include things such as: Jerusalem fish soup; various types of “kosher” vodka (e.g.: Cymes, “wódka koszerna,” and “kosher Dwór Sieraków”); Moryc’s Jewish caviar (Moryc is the Polish spelling for the name Moritz, a surname assumed by those named Mordecai or Moses); Mrs. Golde’s Spicy
kidneys (Golde is a classic Yiddish name and conjures up the archetypical Jewish grandmother); Mrs. Fela’s cabbage rolls (Fela is a Polish-Jewish name, and this again brings up the rhetorical strength that attaching a female Jewish name to a food item has for the authenticity and veracity of said item); Jankiel’s wild mushroom soup (diminutive of Yaakov or Jacob and most likely also a reference to Mickiewicz’s Jankiel); Rothschild’s duck in cherries with gnocchi (referencing the famous Rothschild banking family who would, in this case, most definitely not be cooking or serving this dish); Herzl Street goose liver with almonds and raisins (noting the father of modern political Zionism or one of the many streets named after him, including one in Tel Aviv); rump steak with onion and champignons like in Ziner’s tavern (while I couldn’t find any clear historical reference for this Jewish last name, this does bring up the very important link between Jews and taverns in Poland); beetroot carpaccio with goat cheese a la Marks (Anglicization of Marx, i.e., the Germanized form of the Hebrew Mordechai); boiled beef with freshly grated horseradish and apple like at Szmulik’s tavern (a diminutive form of a typical Polish Yiddish name combined with the tavern keeper profession); pike perch just like in Kindermann’s Palace (a Łódź landmark); Shevah’s herring; Litvak style salad (referring to Lithuanian Jews); Yankiel the Innkeeper of Berdytchov’s Soup (an allusion to Adam Mickiewicz’s fictional Jewish innkeeper in Poland’s national epic Pan Tadeusz, who “plays Polish patriotic music on his hammered dulcimer, an instrument particularly associated with Jewish music”45); Berdytchov soup with beef, vegetables, honey, and

cinnamon; Purim cake (distinct from the traditional hamantaschen baked for Purim, the origin for this cake is unknown); Klezmer cake (in reference to the Ashkenazi Jewish music genre, which can often be heard being played by live bands in Jewish restaurants in Poland, mostly by non-Jewish klezmorim); Passover cheese (This is a dish that very oddly keeps cropping up on the menus of Jewish restaurants in Poland without much explanation; it seems to be an analog of or exactly the same as pascha, an Eastern Orthodox Christian dessert that draws its name from the word for Easter (the same word in Russian is used for Passover, which adds to this confusion); it is usually served alongside the leavened kulich, making it a prohibited item for Passover; however, its high dairy content could pair well for Shavuot); Purim coffee and tea; and Rachel’s special (“beef collar served with delicate sauce”). In an overwhelming amount of these cases, the holiday, personal name, or other descriptor attached often has very little to do with the dish itself—instead acting as a reinforcement of perceived Jewishness for those unaccustomed or, in the case of names, a way to make one’s food advertised feel more familiar and comfortable, even as they are sometimes simultaneously made foreign.

e) Russian, Ukrainian, or otherwise non-Polish foods whose foreignness is synonymous with Jewishness; these dishes are those whose non-Polishness is automatically slated into being Jewish, either by virtue of its difference or genuine Jewish influence from those regions (say from Jews coming from further East into Poland from Russia—thus, the two groups could come to be conflated in Polish eyes), and include three generations’ herring in sour cream; Shubach’s herring (this is a
Germanized abstraction of the Russian dish *selyodka pod shuboy*, also known as *shuba*, or herring under a fur coat; it has no specific necessarily Jewish connection and is known more as a Christmas or New Year’s food in the former Soviet territories; beetroot soup with beans (this is a uniquely Ukrainian way to prepare borscht or *barszcz* as it is in Polish); and, again, the knish as a “Russian pierog pie” (rather than as a generally Ashkenazi Jewish baked good).

f) Explicitly non-European Israeli/Middle-Eastern foods (e.g., shawarma or hummus). Now, we come to the most concrete and well-defined category. A good portion of Jewish restaurants in Poland are solely Israeli and serve nothing but dishes of clear Middle Eastern or North African origin, with nothing from the lands of Ashkenaz to be found. This includes things such as hummus; shakshuka (quite humorously and non-traditionally cooked in a paella pan, and topped with goat cheese and salmon); various kosher wines from Israel; stuffed grape leaves; kofta; kebab; shawarma; Yerushalmi kugel (there is in fact European origin to this one, but extant and removed from the rest of Polish Jewish cuisine as it existed just before the War); moussaka (a Balkan or Middle Eastern eggplant- or potato-based dish, now quite popular in Israel); bourekas (a Sephardic pastry with origins in Spain and the Ottoman Empire, sometimes called the “Israeli equivalent of Jewish-American bagel and cream cheese”46); falafel;

hard-boiled egg with zhug (a spicy Yemeni condiment, now popular in Israel); and the entirety of the menu from Cheder in Krakow’s Kazimierz, a cafe sponsored by the city’s Jewish Cultural Festival.

Something that is repeatedly noted in the literature and that I have found to be true is that the borders between Jewish and non-Jewish Polish cuisine are incredibly blurry. These groups have been intertwined since the beginning of Polishness and it is hard for the modern Polish chef or culinary ethnographer to attempt to untangle their gastronomical traditions. Overwhelmingly, any dish that was seen as or "known" to be Jewish had its exact replica or at least analog in Old Polish cuisine—both with “various roasts, including sour marinated fowl, veal, and beef offal…[boiled or fried] meatballs…[baked] meat or fish pies…[sweet and sour] vegetables…[onion and spices added to] fruits…[and] pickles”\textsuperscript{47}. Is Jewish food in Poland only seen as distinct because it was not allowed to develop itself into modernity? Are the somewhat odd ingredients and techniques only seen this way because they are frozen in time and were retroactively labeled as such? The more research I did into Jewish food in Poland, the harder it was to label it as something separate, markedly distinct, or foreign. Challah can be found in any Polish bakery, just as latkes can be in any bar mleczny, albeit under different names. A comment from a Warsaw bar mleczny patron echoes this sentiment, as she sits with cabbage rolls, latkes, blintzes, and challah beyond her: “we see Jewish dishes here…[that are] also dishes typical for a milk bar and for many houses…the truth

\textsuperscript{47} Kasprzyk-Chevriaux, Magdalena. “Gefilte Fish, Czulent, Kugel, Czyli Kuchnia Żydów Polskich.”
is, that in pre-war Poland, Jewish mums cooked exactly the same as non-Jewish mums. And the beautiful magic is, that the same dishes have two different names but are still the same, homey flavors⁴⁸.

However, there is still a degree of difference—whether it be inadvertent or deliberate and designed. Eve Jochnowitz comments on this, noting that the foods from the internationally-known, tourist-oriented restaurants in Kraków’s Kazimierz have “widely differing Jewish pedigrees”⁴⁹—with traditional Jewish dishes being served alongside fanciful creations not even in the Jewish culinary repertoire, such as Purim chicken, which is “chicken wrapped in a pastry crust and topped with a fried egg”⁵⁰. One might assume that the inclusion of such curious dishes speaks to cultural bastardization by non-Jews with the intention to perpetuate the all-too-common feeling of Jews as being fundamentally divorced from the Polish nation and its values, but this is not the case. Wojtek and Malgosia Ornat, the pioneers of Jewish cultural revival in Kraków, are part of the substantial portion of Poland’s population who have Jewish roots, whether they are aware of them or not. When they opened their first restaurant, Ariel, in 1992, and as they expanded with the café-hotel Klezmer Hois and the publishing-house-bookstore Austeria, they did so with the goal of reconnecting to the

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⁵⁰ Ibid.
heritage shared by themselves and others and the belief that “Jewish culture should be present in Kazimierz not only during a short period in summer”\textsuperscript{51} when the city’s Jewish cultural festivals take place.

The Ornats recognize that “the problem of Jewish culture without the Jews is a rather complicated one”\textsuperscript{52} and so have taken efforts to revive and cultivate it the best they can. Although some aspects of their entrepreneurial enterprises could be similarly criticized along these lines, they decry “ventures whose main interest is business…[operated without] the vaguest idea about Jewish culture or history…[serving] food they call Jewish even though it has nothing to do with traditional Jewish recipes, aside from the name ‘Jewish’”\textsuperscript{53}. The traditional Jewish recipes that they do use come from Roza Jakobowicz, the former matriarch of Jewish Kraków, while the not-so-authentic rest exist to fulfill their role within a properly functionally tourist attraction in which “food needs to fall sufficiently outside of the familiar, but sufficiently inside the circle of what is palatable”\textsuperscript{54}. And again, while claims of inauthenticity could be leveraged against the Ornats and many other proprietors of Jewish restaurants in Poland, I believe that their work does more good than harm, and often, it is impossible

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\textsuperscript{54} Jochnowitz, Eve. “Flavors of Memory: Jewish Food as Culinary Tourism in Poland.” Culinary Tourism, 2004, 104.
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to avoid culinary inaccuracies in a place so violently forced out of being Jewish in any way, shape, or form.

**Further Discussion**

While the menus of most Polish establishments claiming to serve Jewish food showed their dishes as similar enough to what would be seen in any other Polish or more broadly Eastern European restaurant, two notable standouts were those of Cheder and Kosher Delight—which instead opt for Middle-Eastern Israeli cuisine. Cheder, a derivative of Krakow’s Jewish Cultural Festival, acknowledges its location in the (former) Jewish quarter of Kazimierz but points to modern Israel as its main culinary and cultural inspiration. Ornate Persian rugs hang from the walls lined with bookshelves as strong, spiced coffee streams from copper vessels—despite the homage paid to the robust Jewish literary world in Poland that once was before the Shoah, it is a markedly non-European scene. As with many of the other Jewish restaurants surveyed, a point of historical pride is the renewal of Jewish practice and life it claims to bring to its physical location. Before the War, where Cheder now resides was Khevra Ner Tamid’s beit hamidrash, or house of prayer. For many Poles, there is a profound lack of education about living Jewishness in the country, and Cheder, through its culinary outreach, as well as its other cultural functions, hopes to serve its namesake to be a “place of basic Jewish education”. Cheder is incidentally kosher-style as its menu is entirely vegetarian, which is motivated by modern Israeli Haute veganism rather than for reasons of orthodox religious observance. On the other hand, Kosher Delight is rabbinically certified as kosher and seems to exist to dually serve the religiously observant Jewish
non-Polish tourist population and the Jewish community residing inside Poland. Both put forward, inadvertently or intentionally, an idea of Jewish food within Poland as necessarily and mostly Middle-Eastern, which goes against the millennium-long history of Eastern European Polish-Jewish food and culture. Cheder does indeed say that it gives a “chance to encounter contemporary Jewish culture from Israel and the entire Diaspora,” so it transparently and deliberately chooses not to highlight Polish-Jewish fare, but its complete exclusion is curious. This could be for reasons as mundane and practical as the very real similarities between Jewish and non-Jewish Polish cuisine, and thus it would not be financially advisable from a business perspective. However, as part of the Krakow Jewish Cultural Festival, one of the leading institutions that dictate to the Polish public what is “Jewish”, this consideration is important nonetheless.

A restaurant that aims to call upon the nostalgia of the past should be a profoundly multisensory experience—so as to transport the patron as fully as possible to their desired world of fantasy. In Jewish restaurants in Poland, a primary way in which this is evoked and enacted is through the extremely purposeful and, to some, overdone cultivation of a klezmer-filled, shtetl-esque, doily-covered, crowded, antique environment. At times, this borders on a trip to Disneyland, with certain locales choosing to dress their employees as phony Hasidim and give their patrons a not-in-their-eyes infamous “Lucky Jew” marzipan figure to either consume and finish off their meal or to take home as a souvenir.

Many critique the caricaturish approach to Jewish food reliably seen throughout Poland and use it as a justification to promote their own idea of a “true” Polish Jewish
cuisine—one that is Glatt Kosher\textsuperscript{55} and one without what they deem to be outside influence. Despite some of the very real inaccurate cultural leaps made by these restaurants seeking to reproduce and revitalize Polish Jewish cuisine, I believe that they are remarkably valuable. Alongside Jewish museums and cultural institutions in Poland, these places of culinary worship provide space for Jewish and non-Jewish Poles to interact, engage in dialogue, and ultimately work towards the renewal of a heritage which belongs to all within Poland. Although this approach does pose the possibility of such faux pas as the Christian Seder, I contend that those who are ostensibly non-Jewish cannot and should not be excluded from Jewish cultural revival in Poland for two reasons: one, this goes against efforts to affirm the Polish Jewish people as part of the Polish nation and two, it negates the reality that very many of these “non-Jews” are, in fact, Jewish and have only had their origins obscured or deliberately hidden, often for fear of persecution, such is the case with the Ornats.

What is truly amazing is the beauty and heimish atmosphere that emerged after countless hours of virtual exploration and analysis of Poland’s Jewish restaurants. While everyone knows of the Sunday brunch at the Warsaw JCC Boker Tov Cafe or Ariel in Krakow, you cannot say the same about Cafe Jerozolima in Będzin. A city just outside of Katowice in Lesser Poland, Będzin was one of the many with a historically vibrant and thriving Jewish community and is known nowadays for its infamous ghetto. Genealogist Adam Szydlowski birthed this cafe as the first Jewish business in “the

\textsuperscript{55} Although technically referring to the unblemished quality of an animal’s lungs, glatt Kosher has taken on a colloquial usage to mean Kosher food that is more stringently supervised and certified, similar to Kosher lemehadrin.
Jerusalem of Zagłębie” since the Holocaust. “Jewish business” here means an extremely low-maintenance cafe filled to the brim with all sorts of pieces of very real Jewish history, gifted to him or collected throughout the years. As troubling as that may sound to some ears, as Poland is the land of dusty old menorahs in antique shop windows instead of in a family’s home, and this stokes fears that whatever may be in that cafe arrived there at the expense of some very unfortunate people seventy years ago, Cafe Jerozolima is, in effect, a cultural center and heritage museum for many Jews who have come back to Poland to unravel their own history, as well as those even from the next town over. Szydlowski, who growing up felt haunted by the silence surrounding the Holocaust and only recently discovered his own Jewish heritage, wanted to offer “a chance to see what preceded the Shoah and feel the Jewish population of this town”56. Over rugelach and cups of coffee, visitors discuss how a city like Będzin, and much of Poland, is “defined by Jewish loss…but Café Jerozolima represents a desire to reconcile with the past and heal old wounds”57. Through the simple act of sharing a meal, the Jewish past and present of Poland are unraveled and encountered, with what seems to be no end in sight.

Another restaurant that particularly struck me was Mandragora Żydowska Restauracja in Lublin. Its website opens with this wall of text:

The heart of Jewish celebration is the home, and the kitchen plays an important role in it. The Haggadah read on Pesach invites: "Let those who are hungry come

56 Fox-Bevilacqua.

57 Ibid.
and eat with us." I invite you into my world—the world of modest, honest, home cooking. Filled with old photos, lace with Jewish music in the background. Here the most important thing is the kitchen and...you. We cook for you. Our card opens the door to an ordinary Jewish home. And in it, the kitchen plays a special role. Filled with tradition, history, and symbolism, it brings back the most beautiful memories. Here are dishes whose recipes have been passed down through generations. Jewish cuisine is a melting pot of flavors and culinary habits from around the world. Shalom!58

Along with this, every single dish is elaborated on at length, demystifying Jewish cuisine and culture (and sometimes remystifying it, with the mention of melachot, the 39 activities forbidden on Shabbat, described for their Shabbat menu) for the gentile guest. It still engages in some of the same tendencies as the other restaurants, such as serving “kosher" vodka—wine is the alcoholic beverage that needs such close supervision while vodka is de facto kosher (as long as it's unflavored or produced in very regulatory Poland)—but displays an extremely deep and well-researched understanding of Jewish thought and practice. Housed in a former tenement home historically owned by named Jewish families, Mandragora is extremely intentional in the respect it pays to Polish Jewish food, refusing to serve pork nor meat with milk and highlighting the specific roles certain dishes play in the Jewish calendar and ritual. As many other restaurants mentioned, its environment seeks to turn back time to a

nostalgic pre-war Poland replete with lace tablecloths and menorah-lined window ledges, while also still featuring carved Hasid figurines.

V. Conclusion

All in all, what does this mean for Polish Jewry and its connections to the rest of Poland and its cuisine? By those who are ostensibly non-Jewish, the adoption and enactment of certain facets of Jewish culture, especially when done “wrong” or with a profit incentive, can make many feel uneasy. It can feel akin to walking into a big-box department store in December and seeing a stuffed moose priced at $25.99 with blue candelabra antlers wishing you a “Merry Chanukah”. Although there certainly are many cases in which expressions of so-called Jewishness in Poland are done in bad faith and for purely commercial reasons, I believe that those earnest and genuine attempts by Poles today to reconcile with their past outweigh the negative, especially as it is near impossible to evade these cultural inaccuracies in a place so inhospitable to Jewishness for such a long time.

As Jewish identity, practice, and culture are revitalized and renewed in modern-day Poland and as many grapple with the past, we must keep in mind the ways in which many seek to distort the historical record for their own gain. I’d like to think it an aberration that in 2018, Poland’s right-wing populist Law and Justice Party passed an amendment banning any public speech acknowledging any Polish complicity or co-responsibility for the Holocaust. Unfortunately, this law forms part of a larger

historical memory policy campaign meant to punish those who cast the Polish nation in any negative light rather than one of unequivocal righteousness and heroism; this same policy forces the dual myth of Poland as being monoethnic and purely Catholic since its conception and, somewhat paradoxically, the Jews that did live in Poland, did so in complete harmony with their Christian neighbors. Under this campaign, history and the sanctity of fact are thrown into a whirlwind as even the recognition of antisemitism in Poland must be reinterpreted or ignored, lest it besmirches the name and reputation of the great Polish nation. With this in mind, illuminated by this research is the turbulent yet complexly intertwined relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles. Today, this curious relationship is marked by cultural involvement stemming from desires for historical reconciliation with a totalitarian or Nazi past, to connect with one’s own heritage, and interestingly, to craft the Polish nation as a tolerant and cosmopolitan state that is capable of supporting a Jewish future.

And not only must a Jewish future be supported, but also a Jewish past. Adam Szydlowski, the owner of Café Jerozolima, tells of his childhood in provincial Będzin: “Growing up here, I always felt a black cloud, like the skies were crying, the presence of ghosts”\textsuperscript{60}. Szydlowski encountered these ghosts in old Yiddish newspapers, in remnants of Torah scrolls, and in train platforms made from Jewish gravestones—but had no one to ask about the unknown script that marked these items; when he asked his

grandmother “what language it was…she told him she didn’t know…[and] that’s what other adults said”\textsuperscript{61}. These moments of haunting silence led Szydlowski to journey to uncover “other remnants of this strange culture that he learned was indigenous to his country”\textsuperscript{62} as he created an image of an alternate future in his own town.

When we sit in homey dining rooms so meticulously arranged to be purposefully cluttered with all sorts of antique Judaica and feast on gefilte fish made with centuries-old recipes, a new reality is revealed to us. The ghost of Jewish Poland is brought into the present day by the food that marks it. Through the many aforementioned culinary encounters with Jewishness, it inserts itself back into cultural and national memory and redefines, or rather, reaffirms what it means to be Polish. The shifted and non-linear temporality of Polish-Jewish culture and food directly contradicts and undermines the heavy-handed and hard-line historical ideology of Poland’s right-wing today—to be Polish cannot be defined in strictly ethnic nor religious terms, and it will not bow to the policy of any government official. Instead, Polishness is the renovation of \textit{matzevot}, the sharing of \textit{chałka}, and the retelling of tales of times past.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.

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### Appendix

Figure 1: Classification of menu items from U Fryzjera (Kazimierz Dolny), Anatewka (Łódź), Klezmer-Hois (Kraków), Ariel (Kraków), Cheder (Kraków), Kosher Delight (Kraków, Warsaw, Lublin, Łódź), WARSZE (Warsaw), Mandragora Żydowska Restauracja (Lublin), The Olive Restaurant (Lublin), Sarah (Wrocław), Restaurant Nadzieja (Poznan), and Cafe Jerozolima (Będzin)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Dish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Known Polish-Jewish foods</td>
<td>- Goose (necks/pipkes) (“goose tripes delicacy) (Gęsi pipek)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Goose liver in raspberries?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Chicken liver stuffed goose necks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Gefilte fish (“sweet medallions of carp fish with matza”)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- (Vegan) choulent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Also cholent described as “traditional Jewish stew”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Young New Zealand lamb cholent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Dvin Kvint Kosher Brandy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Fried kreplach — “fried ravioli with beef” (questionable using ravioli as relative culinary touchstone)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Poultry livers sautéed with onions, almonds, and raisins</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- “Charoset — apple salad with walnuts, raisins, cinnamon, and honey wine” (but as a dessert)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Makagigi (for Purim)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Chopped liver (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Pitche (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Cholent, parve or meat (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Tzimmes (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td>b) Judaized or “Jewish-style” foods</td>
<td>- Jewish style carp</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Jewish style chicken broth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Jewish style filet mignon with garlic butter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Jewish style fried salmon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Jewish style fried carp with baked potatoes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foods with predominant use of ingredients and/or techniques thought of as Jewish</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</table>
| - Jewish style coffee and tea  
  - Jewish dumpling dough filled  
  - Carp Sephardic way sautéed with onions and mushrooms  
  - Delicacy of Ariel — grilled steak served with spinach and spicy sauce  
  - Jewish roast beef with Lutenica sauce  
  - Tschorba/chorba with meatballs (Romanian Jewish?)  
  - Kaiserschmarrn  
  - Goulash meat (Kosher Delight)  
  - Lecthu/leczo (Kosher Delight)  
  - Slivovitz (śliwowica paschalna) |

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<tr>
<th>c) Foods with predominant use of ingredients and/or techniques thought of as Jewish</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| - Goose pate with cranberries  
  - King’s style herring with cinnamon  
  - Beetroot carpaccio with goat cheese a la Marks (also Jewish names)  
  - Fried zucchini with almonds  
  - Stuffed goose leg with caramelized pear and gnocchi  
  - Stuffed onion  
  - Chicken in honey and ginger sauce  
  - Beef casserole in garlic and cumin sauce  
  - Salmon with almonds  
  - Roasted salmon served with cucumber saffron salad  
  - Breast of chicken sautéed in plum and mushroom sauce  
  - Turkey filet with almonds and raisins sauce  
  - Roast goose served with cherries  
  - Salmon filet sweet n’ sour (Kosher Delight)  
  - Flounder fish with almonds (Kosher Delight)  
  - Celery root schnitzel (Kosher Delight) |

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<tr>
<th>d) Foods referencing names/themes/holidays/places/concepts thought of as Jewish</th>
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</thead>
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| - Jerusalem fish soup  
  - Kosher vodka  
  - Cymes ie tzimmes  
  - “Wódka koszerna”  
  - “Kosher Dwór Sieraków”  
  - “Moryc’s Jewish caviar”  
  - Mrs Golde’s Spicy kidneys  
  - Mrs Fela’s cabbage rolls  
  - Jankiel’s wild mushroom soup |
- Rothshild’s Duck in Cherries with gnocchi
- Hertzel street Goose Liver with almonds and raisins
- Rump steak with onion and champignons like in Ziner’s tavern
- Boiled beef with freshly grated horseradish and apple like at Szumlik’s tavern
- Sander just like in Kindermann’s Palace (?)
- Shevah’s herring
- Litvak style salad
- Sephardic style salad
- Yankiel the Innkeeper of Berdytchov’s Soup
  - Also, “Berdytchov soup with beef, vegetables, honey, and cinnamon"
- Purim cake
- Klezmer cake
- Passover/pascha cheese
- Purim coffee
- Purim tea
- Rachel’s special — beef collar served with delicate sauce

e) Russian/Ukrainian /non-Polish foods whose foreignness is synonymous with Jewishness

- Three generations’ herring in sour cream
- “Shubach’s” herring (ie Shuba/selyodka pod shuboy, made german, similar to german last names in poland as jewish)
- Beetroots soup with beans (ukrainian style borscht)
  - Also seen with croquette/meat ravioli
- Viennese schnitzel (?)
- Knish — Russian pierog pie

f) Explicitly non-European Israeli/Middle-Eastern foods

- Hummus (with olives)
- Shakshuka with goat cheese (cooked in paella pan with salmon)
- Wines from Israel (also bc kosher)
  - Yarden Gewurztraminer
  - Gamla Riesling
  - Teperburg-Kosher
  - Yarden Mount Hermon
  - Syrah
- Stuffed grape leaves
- “Kofta” - medallions of lamb served with lettuce and Cumberland sauce
- Skewered lamb with tzatziki sauce
- Hummus with tehina (Kosher Delight)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kebab (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td>Shawarma (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td>Yerushalmi kugel (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td>Moussaka (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td>Burekas (explicitly Sephardic) (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<td>Falafel (Kosher Delight)</td>
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<tr>
<td>All from Cheder</td>
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<td>- Finjan coffee</td>
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<td>- Israeli tea</td>
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<td>- Moroccan style tea</td>
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<td>- Cheder tea</td>
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<td>Jallab</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lemonana (also with rose water)</td>
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<td>Cocktails</td>
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<td>- Oriental history</td>
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<td>- Dybbuk</td>
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<td>- Red Sea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desserts</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Malabi</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Baklava</td>
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<tr>
<td>- “Homemade truffle with plum — chocolate truffle with plums marinated in sweet kiddish wine”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Shakshuka</td>
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<td>- Warm pita bread with Hummus</td>
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<td>- Labneh with roasted sweet pumpkin</td>
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<td>Sandwiches on challah</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sweet with labneh, roasted pearl with cardamom and vanilla and dried cranberries</td>
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<tr>
<td>- With hard boiled egg, tahini dip, roasted eggplant, pickled radish, parsley, and za’atar</td>
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<td>- With pumpkin spread, roasted leek, feta cheese, and thyme</td>
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<tr>
<td>- With baba ganoush, roasted sweet potato, pomegranate, and coriander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hummus</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Hummus klasyczny with tahini dip, olive oil, parsley, za’atar, sumac</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mezze set (Middle Eastern homemade tapas served with grilled pita bread)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hummus</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Tahini dip</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Labneh
- Baba ganoush
- Olive oil with za’atar
- Sun-dried tomato spread with parsley
- Pumpkin spread with coriander and ginger
- Roasted apples mousse with cardamom and cinnamon

- Veggies
  - Roasted sweet potatoes with rose water
  - Roasted cauliflower with tahini dip
  - Roasted leek with thyme
  - Roasted Jerusalem artichoke with chili and silan
  - Pickled radishes with garlic
  - Pickled cauliflower with turmeric

- Others
  - Hard boiled egg with zhug
  - Roasted sunflower seeds with chili and cinnamon
  - Roasted pearl with cardamom and vanilla