

“Cracovia is a Jewish club,” runs a very popular slogan in Kraków. The anti-Semitic hate speech of Wisła supporters against Cracovia and its fans has been an inherent part of what is known as “holy war”, namely a derby competition between Kraków’s two largest football clubs: Wisła and Cracovia. People who live in Kraków find it difficult not to notice the hostility with which the fans of both teams refer to each other. Buildings in the city are covered with hateful graffiti that very often represents the Star of David or uses terms such as “Jews” or “Jude”. From time to time, the media report scandalous antisemitic excesses in the stadiums. The antisemitic behavior of Wisła supporters is not exceptional in Poland: it is a part of a countrywide phenomenon defined as “football antisemitism”. What is exceptional, however, is the way Cracovia fans react. To some extent they have accepted the Jewish image and embraced it as part of their fandom identity. Many of them use symbols and content which are clearly associated as Jewish in order to support their club. “Jude Gang”, the name of the Cracovia hooligan gang with the Star of David as its symbol, is just one such example. Very similar attitudes can be found among football fans in Western Europe. Two most famous examples of the clubs that are referred to as “Jewish” by both their fans and the fans of the opposing teams are Tottenham London and Ajax Amsterdam.

The main objective of this comparative research project is to describe and explain the phenomenon which I refer to as the “Jewish identity” of the fans. I clearly distinguish the phenomenon that occurs in Tottenham, Ajax and Cracovia football stadiums from the actual Jewish identity, which implies belonging to a nation or a religious community. The principal subjects of comparison are as follows: the motivations of the fans for developing this specific identity; the ways of celebrating it; the attitude of the fans towards the “real” Jews; and the antisemitic content used by the fans of their football opponents. Another important area of comparative analysis covers the socio-historical sources of the phenomenon (in particular, the history of the analyzed teams), the historical context of the relations between the ethnic majorities of London, Amsterdam and Kraków and their respective Jewish minorities. The present day characteristics of those relations will also be described.

In the project, I am planning to conduct sociological and anthropological fieldwork in three different cities: Kraków, Amsterdam and London. The research will be based on qualitative methods. The crucial research goal will be to carry out in-depth interviews with the fans of the analyzed teams in order to offer insights into the phenomenon from the perspective of the social actors involved; and examine the most important questions related to the fans’ motivations. It will also allow me to elucidate on the stereotypes and ideas about the Jews that this identification is based on. Is it a positive image or, perhaps to the contrary, full of pejorative meanings? Participant observation in the stadiums during Cracovia, Tottenham and Ajax football games will allow me to describe “what happens” when intergroup rivalry takes place. It will also be important to observe and collect photos of the urban landscape to present graffiti containing Jewish or anti-Jewish symbolism. A very important element of the research will also be to analyze the existing data (press articles, reports on xenophobia, racism and antisemitism among football fans, in fan forums and films about fandom, etc.)

The current project continues the study I carried out as part of my Master’s thesis, which concerned the phenomenon of football antisemitism. The reason to take up and continue this topic is above all my interest in football and Polish-Jewish relations. I am particularly interested in the social dimension of football fandom: what kind of content penetrates into football and why it becomes a part of the stadium spectacle. The fans’ behaviors are very often described as “ritual”. However, “ritual” does not mean “superficial”, it just denotes a phenomenon that requires no conscious belief and is not subject to verification. (Tokarska-Bakir, 2008). I assume that the football stadium works as a catalyst for some content, and it can reveal those aspects of society which are not present in the official culture, even if it does so in a very specific, that is, often vulgar and exaggerated, form (Czubaj, Drozda & Myszkorowski, 2012). In this context, through an insight into the world of football, antisemitism as such can be explored from an interesting and new perspective. An important reason for engaging in this topic is also little academic interest that has been given to the problem by researchers in social sciences. It is mainly noticeable in the Polish context, where no serious research has been undertaken in this field. The topic also remains particularly interesting for me as an inhabitant of Kraków, where both the proximity and the visibility of the problem contrast markedly with its social disregard.