

## Two Decades Passed Over in Silence. Polish Jews in the 1970s and 1980s

The Jewish community living in post-war Poland had, due to the emigration caused by the antisemitic campaign of 1968, shrunk to just a few thousand and was largely atomized. It seemed at the time that the final disintegration of Jewish communal life was taking place. Among those who left were not only assimilated Jews, co-creators of Polish culture and intellectual life, but also those who were involved for many years in Yiddish culture, filling the ranks of various Jewish institutions and organizations and remaining active despite several waves of emigration. “1968 is the year of the expulsion of Jews from Poland; the year in which the phenomenon known as the Polish Jewry ended, and we need to be aware of it. [...] The end of the Polish *yishuv* [settlement] and the culture of Polish Jewry lay in the repression of 1967-8, not Nazism or Stalinism...” wrote Henryk Grynberg in the Paris-based *Kultura* journal. Institutional, public Jewish life was disappearing, and Polish Jews post-March 1968 increasingly became “individual” Jews. And yet, something began to change... An atomized, small community in which feelings of decline dominated after March 1968 began to revive in the 1980s, breathing new life into existing institutions or (over time) creating new ones.

The aim of this project is to gather the widest and most diverse resource base describing Jewish life in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s, and use it to reconstruct the fullest possible picture of Polish Jewry during this period. Undoubtedly, portraying Jews in Poland in the Seventies and Eighties is no easy task. However, preliminary research has shown that thanks to the use of an interdisciplinary approach drawing on historical studies, social sciences, memory studies and literary studies research, and utilizing a combination of archival and press materials and, chiefly, personal sources (Jewish literary personal accounts, testimonies, and interviews), it is possible to reconstruct an image of Jewish life in Poland during this period that includes the history and activities of particular Jewish institutions, and the experiences of individual Polish Jews, both those connected with institutions and those living outside their structures, but who consider themselves Jewish. The gathering and analysis of the diverse source material will also allow for an examination of meetings between Jews living in Poland and those visiting from abroad during this time period, tracing the processes occurring inside the Jewish community in Poland, and identifying watershed moments shaping its functioning.

The research planned for this project has been divided into the following tasks:

- In the circle of Jewish institutions — the activities of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce, TSKŻ), Jewish Religious Union (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego, ZRWM), State Yiddish Theatre (Państwowy Teatr Żydowski, PTŻ) and the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, ŻIH)
- “Individual Jews” — the fates of Polish Jews through the lens of personal sources
- Meetings — Jews living in Poland and Jews visiting Poland
- From decline to rebirth — watershed moments in the life of the Jewish community in Poland.

In order to carry out these tasks, it is necessary to conduct research in Polish, American and Israeli libraries and archives, as well as to conduct interviews with Polish Jews, to whom I will reach out e.g. through Jewish institutions or personal contacts. The collected sources (files created by institutions and offices, press materials, personal sources), written and/or recorded in various languages (mainly in Polish, Yiddish and English, but also Hebrew), will be analyzed in the broader context of literary studies, memory studies, social sciences, and historical research.

In the existing scholarly literature, no work has thus far attempted to comprehensively describe Jewish life in Poland after March 1968 until the fall of communism, and answer the question about the Jewish community’s path from decline and disintegration to rebirth, which is why I have decided to take on the task of filling this gap. The conclusions of the research carried out during this project will be presented in a monograph, articles and presentations at international conferences.