

Helena Datner, *Ta i tamta strona. Żydowska inteligencja Warszawy drugiej połowy XIX wieku* [This and the Other Side: The Jewish Intelligentsia of Warsaw in the Second Half of the 19th Century], Warszawa 2007, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 341 pp.

The work of Helena Datner, a researcher attached to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, is one of a series in the recently revived field of studies of the intelligentsia as a social and cultural group. The work falls into two parts. The first documents the material, social and cultural determinants of the group that emerged in the second half of the 19th century which is defined by the author as the Jewish intelligentsia. The factors she takes into account are: demographic data, the cultural surroundings, social position and education as well as values, norms and the world outlook characteristic of the group. The second part presents a more extensive, multi-aspectual analysis of the chosen groups of the professional intelligentsia, that is lawyers, physicians, teachers, engineers, men of letters, but also artists, students and schoolchildren, though the consideration of the two latter groups may arouse some methodological doubt. The work ends with an extensive summary.

Datner's monograph represents several domains of knowledge. It is above all an insightful study in historical sociology, history of ideas and social history, and here its first section is especially noteworthy. There are also some extensive parts of the text devoted to the analysis of readership among the Jewish intelligentsia. The author does not avoid quantitative analyses, the results of which are often very interesting, frequently contradicting the accepted opinion. Whether such research, given the imperfect computing techniques of the era, is verifiable and sound, is another matter. A similar objection may be aroused by treating the 'Jewish' names that appear in the sources of those times as attributes of Jewishness. These objections are, however, of a secondary nature.

It should be stressed at the very beginning that this multi-layer and multi-aspectual interpretation, based on a investigation of sources in a number of languages has produced very valuable results. Moreover, the book offers much more than it suggests at the beginning.

The structural pivot of the work is the road to acquiring a social identity by the groups of the professional Jewish intelligentsia. This process started on a massive scale with the lifting of the institutional barriers to assimilation by Margrave Aleksander Wielopolski in the 1860s. The author's exposition rather inclines us to somewhat pessimistic conclusions. Apart from the generation of the Polish intelligentsia who entered the public scene before the January 1863 Uprising and who were most open to the integration of other social spheres, all the remaining social groups were ill-disposed to the assimilation of the Jews. Later it was even worse. Significantly, the moment characterizing the barring of the Jewish road to advancement coincided with the birth of the so-called 'defiant generation'.¹ Datner's work shows a few such moments where the attitudes of the Poles of Jewish descent became more radical. Some of them, such as the impact of the anti-Jewish reaction in Russia in the 1880s, are generally known and have been examined. Many other reasons for the early politicization of young people of Jewish descent, their accession to radical milieus and groupings, and their later connections with the revolutionary movement appear more clearly in the light of the material she presents.

Like any original work, Datner's monograph also raises some controversial questions. We will point out some of them for clarity. The author uses the term 'assimilation', without distinguishing the more superficial processes of cultural adaptation that are generally regarded as acculturation; this is an important assumption of her work that is hard to overlook. Another problem is the national status of the group under analysis. Does the author treat the Jewish intelligentsia as some part of Polish society, differing by its origins and religion from the larger group, or are they a nucleus of a group that was only just rising and can be defined as a modern Jewish society in the Polish lands? She does not resolve this dilemma with enough clarity, though it is crucial to her whole work. In the first sense the so-called Jewish intelligentsia is a part of a larger, heterogeneous collectivity, made up by the Polish intelligentsia, in the second sense it is the spiritual elite of a modern Jewish nation.

This alternative entails further doubts. Is the Jewishness of the group defined in this manner a kind of negative consciousness that is not always fully articulated? Is it a reaction to the lack of acceptance and rejection by the majority of society? And finally, did this first generation of Poles of Jewish descent give birth to the future representatives of the 'national' Jewish intelligentsia? The work does not always give clear answers to these questions. Perhaps it is not easy to give them, or the answers would be equivocal. Datner says that the history of the Jewish intelligentsia is undeniably a part of the history of the Jewish community (p. 13), but it was also an integral part of the history of Polish society, even if other groups strongly questioned such a thesis. The author recalls the original concept of the Polish sociologist Antonina Kłosowska — that of a multi-aspect national identity; not only dual, but sometimes even triple national identity of individuals. This may certainly be a point of departure for further studies.

¹ After Bohdan Cywiński, the term 'the defiant generation' is used to denote the generation of the creators of modern Polish political movements. Cf. *idem*, *Rodowody niepokornych* (Warszawa, 1996).

Datner's deliberations may contribute significantly to the clarification of these nebulous matters.

A shortcoming of the work is that it makes no broader reference to the situation of Jews in Russian Empire as a whole. A careful reader will find here a lot of information relating to the political situation, especially in the second half of the 19th century in Russia, sometimes, however, it is this 'Jewish' background which is missing. A wider perspective would perhaps show on the one hand some more general tendencies affecting also the Polish Jewish community, and on the other it could bring out some autonomous phenomena and problems of the Polish Jews. What has escaped the author's attention, and certainly has not been examined by her well enough, is the problem of the emigration of the Jews from the East and its influence on what she calls the empowerment of the Jewish nation.

A great asset of the work is the suggestive reconstruction of the anti-Jewish climate that arose at the end of the 1880s and foretold (and as it later turned out, created the cultural background for) the widespread political anti-Semitism of the first decade of the 20th century in Congress Poland.² Certainly, we cannot go along with all the opinions of the author. Datner, for example, upholds the view that the Russian authorities actively fuelled the antagonisms between the national groups, while new monographs based on fresh archival research (among others by Leonid Gorizontov, François Guesnet, Aleksei Miller or Theodor R. Weeks) convince us that the administration rather tried to take advantage of social tensions in order to strengthen and legitimize its own power.

The author explains the massive rush of people of Jewish descent into specific professions (law, medicine) as the result of the conjunction of several social processes and mechanisms. This is one of more suggestive parts of her dissertation. Usually the apparent Jewish 'over-representation' in these professional groups, a subject treated in a sensationalist manner in the press of the period, was nothing else than filling the social vacancies, while other possibilities of social advancement were barred or restricted to this group in the post-feudal society. The rich material gathered by Datner abounds in spectacular examples of this phenomenon.

The researcher leaves us with no illusions. The Jewish community in the second half of the 19th century had a cultural potential with promise that it could become a modern nationality. On the other hand, even among the most enlightened Polish elite, the standards that would allow the assimilation of the 'foreign elements' were from the very beginning set very high. In this context some questions seem quite obvious. Was the conflict between the two nationalities unavoidable and its later intensity irreversible? There is much to show that in the light of the ideas of the era, there was not much basis for the peaceful co-existence of the two groups. In one place in her text, she states specifically that Polishness and Jewishness remained separate.

Her reconstruction of the formation and a kind of ethos of a 'Pole of the Judaic religion', along with the classic studies of Alina Cala will certainly become regarded as one of the most thorough attempts at addressing this socio-cultural

² After 1863, the Congress Kingdom of Poland became a province of the Russian Empire.

phenomenon in the Polish literature. Her study is a serious contribution to the research on the ethnic entrenchment of Polish society, and its spiritual elite, including the intelligentsia, as well as on the arising anti-Semitic rhetoric. Her description and reconstruction of 'paternalistic democratism' is a valuable contribution to the deliberations on the role of the positivist programme in the history of Polish culture. Datner, like almost no other Polish researcher so far, brings out of the large and many-sided documentary material a number of the processes and mechanisms of the national exclusion of the 'aliens' — from the dispersed impulses of social resentment up to the first *quasi*-institutional attempts at restricting the access of the Jews to the public sphere. The monograph's significant value is that it points to the factors that influenced the crystallization of the views on assimilation, both among the Polish Jews and the 'ethnic' Poles. These factors came to the surface with full impetus only after 1905 — the actual period of the national empowerment of both groups in Poland under Russian rule.

Another unquestionable value of the book is the large amount of insightful observations and intuitions offered by this specialist in social science, who presents a wealth of sociological knowledge, so important, vital and until now inadequately used in Polish historiography, not only of the 19th century. Given its respect for historic detail, and transparent conceptualization of material, side by side with the above-mentioned authors Cała, Guesnet and Weeks, and also with Corrsin, Datner's monograph is one of the most insightful analyses of the Polish-Jewish contacts in Poland under Russian rule in the second half of the 19th century.

(transl. Agnieszka Kreczmar)

Grzegorz Krzywiec