“‘A plague from the east?’:

The discursive construction of Jews in Polish and American dailies between 1945 and 1965”

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At the beginning of World War II Poland was home to a sizeable Ashkenazi Jewish community with an estimated 3.3 million members (Eberhardt 2006: 30), approximately a tenth of the then general population of the country. Poland was also where the six Nazi death camps instrumental in the Holocaust were established at Bełżec, Chełmno, Majdanek, Oświęcim-Brzezinka (Auschwitz-Birkenau), Sobibór and Treblinka as part of the “Final solution” (https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/fate-of-jews/poland.html). As a result of mass extermination close to three million Polish Jews died (Eberhardt 2006: 33) and the liberation did not necessarily provide a safety net. According to Yad Vashem, right after the war, in Poland alone 1,500 Jewish survivors were murdered in a series of violent anti-Jewish incidents (https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/end-of-war-aftermath.html).

The United States is home today to the largest Jewish diaspora in the world (DellaPergola 2022). Yet, at war’s end America denied Jewish refugees (Nasaw 2020) asylum for fear of the alleged Communist threat. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 prevented the entrance of those who entered a refugee camp after Dec 22, 1945, thereby targeting DPs fleeing, for example, pogroms in postwar Poland (Walker 2019). It was not until 1950 that Congress removed the said cutoff date.

“‘A plague from the east?’…” is a comparative study of the discursive construction of Jews in Polish and American dailies published over two decades after World War II. The questions the study seeks to answer concern (i) potential change over time in speakers’ attitudes and strategies used as well as (ii) apparent differences between the two source corpora, Polish vs. American, regarding the placement and distribution of stresses. Two research hypotheses are being tested, namely that Polish authors would have resorted more often than their American counterparts to the strategy of victimization (Reisigl – Wodak 2001) and that, with time, harbingers of the Polish 1968 political crisis (known as March 1968) would have appeared in the Polish data in the form of anti-Jewish sentiments.

The data for comparison have been sampled from two online corpora, namely the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) and the (Polish) Corpus of Press Texts (ChronoPress). For the time frame 1945-1965, the former returned 370 instances of the plural *Jews*, and the latter – 376 hits with various paradigmatic forms of the lexeme *Żyd* ‘Jew’. The data have been manually annotated for the period, literal vs. metaphorical usage, discursive strategy and speaker evaluation (attitude). Patterns and correlations in the data set have been determined by means of Multiple Correspondence Analysis, an exploratory technique for identifying associations in categorical data.

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