

# COUNTERACTING ANTISEMITIC HATE SPEECH IN POLAND



A Report by Oleksii Bondarev, Nina Gabryś, and Elliot Mamet  
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## I. Issue Overview

Antisemitism—hatred of Jews—is by no means a historical relic in Poland. Instead, negative stereotypes about Jewish people continue to persist. Lara Benteler, Michał Bilewicz, and Mikołaj Winiewski conducted a 2013 review of the relevant literature:

“Although Jews now represent only 0.1% of the Polish population, they are viewed as among the least desirable of minorities... More than 30% of the Polish population have an antipathy toward people of Jewish descent. This trend seems to have remained constant over the years. Recent surveys... revealed that 12% of the Poles would not accept Jewish co-workers, 12% would be opposed to living with Jewish neighbors, and about 24% would be opposed to having a close relative of theirs marry a person of Jewish descent.

Paradoxically, 90% of the Polish population do not know a single Jewish person... the Polish respondents in surveys such as these are thus thinking not only of Jews living in present-day Poland, but also of those who once lived there – that is, before, during, or after the War. They are thus projecting onto the void an imaginary, abstract ethnic category, the members of which share the same characteristics at any time and in any place.”<sup>1</sup>

Polish antisemitism is unique for a few reasons. First, what is perhaps most striking about the persistence of Polish antisemitism is its sheer absurdity. The Jewish population in Poland is almost statistically insignificant—in a country of 38.5 million people, there are perhaps around 6,000, 10,000, or 25,000 Jews.<sup>2</sup> Antisemitic beliefs about Jewish control of Polish society,

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<sup>1</sup> Benteler, Lara, Bilewicz, Michał, and Winiewski, Mikołaj, “Traditional and yet modern? On the increase in traditional antisemitism in Poland,” Proceedings of an International Conference on “Antisemitism in Europe Today” at the *Jewish Museum Berlin*, 8-9 November 2013, pg. 3. Internal citations omitted.

<sup>2</sup> “The Global Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life*, Published 18 December 2012, Accessed 22 June 2015, <<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>>; DellaPergola, Sergio, “World Jewish Population, 2012,” *Berman Institute, University of Connecticut*, Published 7 November 2012, Accessed 22 June 2015, <<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=16134>>, pg. 60. N.B. In 1933, there were three million Jews in Poland. See “Jewish Population of Europe in 1933: Population Data by Country,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia*, Published 20 June 2014, Accessed 22 June 2015, <<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005161>>; Hoare, Liam, “Poland’s

therefore, are not remotely close to the truth, staked instead within a purely imagined, almost non-existent Other.

Second, while some Polish antisemitism takes traditional forms (e.g., the belief that Jews killed Jesus Christ and the belief in a global Jewish financial elite), Polish antisemitism is colored in large part by what Michał Bilewicz (following Theodor Adorno) has identified as ‘secondary antisemitism’: a particular, post-1945 Jewish hatred which centers on the belief that Jews abuse notions of guilt from the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> This ‘secondary antisemitism’ has particular historical relevance in a country home to Nazi death camps such as Auschwitz and Treblinka. In 2013 survey, 62% of Polish respondents said that it was ‘probably true’ that Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> Third, perhaps for this reason, data suggests that antisemitism is more prevalent in Poland than in any other country in Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> At times, therefore, it seems antisemitism is embedded within Polish society.

## II. Campaign Design

We began our project by examining a few existing campaigns relevant to countering antisemitism in Poland:

1. I Miss You, Jew (*Tęsknię Za Tobą Żydzie*). Rafał Betlejewski, a Polish public artist, created this campaign in 2010, after reading Jan Tomasz Gross’ *Neighbors*.<sup>6</sup> The campaign aims to playfully evoke the memory of the Polish Jews no longer here, and to utilize public space to (re)shape collective longing.<sup>7</sup> According to Betlejewski, “Be radical. And if that doesn’t help, come up with some clever strategy to make others believe in your reality. Simplify your message, narrow it down to a slogan and sell it... it’s not about whose story is the most probable or morally justified, it’s whose story is

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Jewish Revival Marred by Anti-Semitism of All Stripes,” *The Forward*, Published 15 June 2015, Accessed 22 June 2015, <<http://forward.com/news/world/187138/poland-s-jewish-revival-marred-by-anti-semitism/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Bilewicz, Michał, et. al., “Harmful Ideas, The Structure and Consequences of Anti-Semitic Beliefs in Poland,” *Political Psychology* 34.6 (December 2013): 821-839, 824.

<sup>4</sup> “The ADL Global 100,” *Anti-Defamation League*, Phone Survey conducted Aug. and Sep. 2013, Published 13 May 2014, Accessed 15 June 2015, <<http://global100.adl.org/#country/poland>>. Note that some take issue with the ADL’s survey methodology. See, e.g., Winiewski, M. & Bilewicz, M., “Are survey and opinion polls always a valid tool to assess antisemitism? Methodological considerations”, in *Jewish Studies Yearbook*, Ed. A. Kovács (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 86.

<sup>5</sup> “The ADL Global 100.”

<sup>6</sup> Petrov, Mladen, “Poles Create Images That Say: ‘I Miss You, Jew,’” *The Forward*, Published 2 June 2010, Accessed 22 June 2015, <<http://forward.com/news/128507/poles-create-images-that-say-i-miss-you-jew/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Waligórska, Magdalena, “Stettin, Szczecin, and the ‘Third Space’: Urban Nostalgia in the German/Polish/Jewish Borderlands,” in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, Ed. Erica T. Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 90-114, 90.

better told.”<sup>8</sup> We especially were influenced by the direct, emotional nature of “I Miss You, Jew,” and attempted to emulate that simplicity in our own campaign.



Photo by Elliot Mamet

2. The Jewish Troll. This campaign was a product of the 2014 HIA Fellowship team, and aimed to combat antisemitic online hate speech. The page utilized a variety of memes to demonstrate the folly of antisemitism. Our team took inspiration from the innovative and comprehensive message from this group, with the aim to brainstorm a simple and direct campaign.

With these examples in mind, our campaign goal was to reduce the amount of antisemitic online hate speech in Poland by promoting the correct usage of the word ‘Jew,’ or ‘Żyd.’ We selected this goal because it was *topical*—instead of focusing on the histories of Polish Jewry, we could address the real problem of Polish antisemitism today, and because it was *feasible*—we could raise awareness of online antisemitic hate speech in a short amount of time with limited resources.

Our target audience was Polish youth, students ages 18 to 25, who carry a negative perception of the word “Jew.” We thought this audience was the most important to target for a few reasons. First, according to forthcoming research from Michał Bilewicz, 59% of Polish young people are exposed to antisemitic hate speech on the Internet, compared with 29% of Polish adults.<sup>9</sup> It

<sup>8</sup> Betlejewski, Rafał, “I Miss You Jew!,” *Open Arts Journal* 3 (Summer 2014): <[https://openartsjournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/betlejewski\\_v3\\_p165-172.pdf](https://openartsjournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/betlejewski_v3_p165-172.pdf)>, pgs. 165-172, 170-172.

<sup>9</sup> Bilewicz, Michał, “Stereotypes and Prejudice: From basic intergroup biases to hate speech,” Presentation to HIA Poland, 8 June 2015, slide 20 (on file with authors).

follows from this data that young people represented the most strategic group for us to select. Second, young people are heavily represented within our own social networks, making them perhaps the easiest group for us to target directly. Third, the best hope to fight antisemitism in Poland is to target young people, as they are the future of Polish society.

With these reflections, we created the following campaign theme:

UŻYWAJ "ŻYDA" POPRAWNIE—NIGDY JAK OBELGI.  
USE "JEW" CORRECTLY—NEVER AS AN INSULT.

Our aim with this slogan is simplicity—to push forward our message as clearly and directly as possible. We matched the simplicity of this slogan with clear, straightforward memes that correct the wrong use of the word ‘Jew’ in common phrases, like to crook, to cheat, and to save money (these graphic are included in Part VI of this report).

### III. Campaign Implementation

Facebook page: <http://tinyurl.com/HIA-UZP-1>

Website: <http://tinyurl.com/HIA-UZP-2>

We intentionally implemented our campaign on a step-by-step basis. As a team, we decided to finalize memes and graphics before launching a Facebook page, so that the page would be the most effective as possible. This turned out to be a successful strategy—within a few hours after launching the page, we already had nearly 200 likes.

We shot and edited our films at POLIN: the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, with the generous help of filmmakers Ewa and Piotr Bogusz. Our concepts for the films were developed with the help of Creative Director Marek Dorobisz. Marek urged us to think innovatively about antisemitism and create a thoughtful video that would appeal to our target audience, rather than feel too preachy or stale. Our aim was to demonstrate situations where ‘Jew’ was used to signify weakness, and then to demonstrate the absurdity of those situations. Consider the following dialogue, part of our scene filmed at Besamim (the restaurant at POLIN) with actresses Marta Siwka and Hanna Pieńczykowska:

- Hey, Hanna, sorry to be so late, the traffic was terrible.
- Not a problem, I ordered cappuccino for you.
- Oh great, thanks (she is searching for something in her bag). Oh Jew! I forgot my phone.
- You can use mine; however, Jew is not working sometimes. [gives her phone]
- You’re a lifesaver. I need to call my boss and tell him not to read the report I send, it is full of Jews.

- Oh damn Jew! Call him, ASAP...!

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- Sounds ridiculous?
- Use "Jew" correctly—never as an insult.

We began our rollout of the page through friends and family, but were pleased with the organic growth of the page outside of our own circles. (As of this writing, the page has garnered over 620 total likes.) We also attempted to project a professional brand by creating a webpage for our campaign, hosted by *Wix*, which reiterates our main points, complementing our Facebook brand.

In terms of reaching our target audience, our page and video have received negative comments opposed to our theme. Consider the following comments on our YouTube video:



**Maciej Małpison** 1 hour ago  
co to za gówno XDDD zabijcie się, plox xDD  
Reply · 9 likes · 1 dislike



**flakerumia** 7 minutes ago  
To znaczy jak? Jako podpałki?  
Reply · 1 like · 1 dislike



**Kazimierz Lux** 23 minutes ago  
co to kurwa jest? Znowu jakieś żydostwo. A ten ostatni nawet nie polak xDDD  
Reply · 1 like · 1 dislike



**AbsolutnyLiberalizm** 58 minutes ago  
wykurwiac  
Reply · 2 likes · 1 dislike



**jarek** 25 minutes ago  
O CHUJ XDDDDD  
Reply · 1 like · 1 dislike



**Rico Kurfirst** 1 hour ago  
dobre, ale troche dzwiek nie do konca wyrazny!  
Reply · 1 like · 1 dislike

We also reached a more sympathetic audience. Our page has been shared by (i) Paint it off: Against Antisemitism in Kraków [page](#), (ii) the Jewish Student Club GIMEL [page](#), (iii) the Jewish Community in Krakow [page](#), and (iv) the Hejtstop [page](#). Additionally, to increase our reach, we sent press releases to relevant online websites that focus on Jewish heritage in Poland.

As of this writing, we have received press from two websites about our project. First, the “Virtual Shtetl” page, a project of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, ran a very nice story about our project:

“[They] launched a new campaign fighting against antisemitic phrases rooted in Polish. The action, organized with the support of the Foundation for Humanity in Action Poland, aims to shape public awareness and oppose antisemitism. The campaign was created as part of the ‘Incubator of Ideas: transformation, democracy and human rights.’ Use ‘Jew’ Correctly’ gives a new dimension to this battle - begins with the words, which often gives rise to any behavior.:<sup>10</sup>

Second, the ‘Jewish.org.pl’ page posted a nice write-up of our new campaign:

“‘Use ‘Jew’ correctly. Never as an insult’ is a new social campaign fights with anti-Semitic returns in Polish and discriminatory stereotypes operating in different environments. Campaign has only created, but now we encourage you to familiarize yourself with the content published on the FB. The action is organized with the support of the Foundation for Humanity in Action Poland.”<sup>11</sup>

In short, we have been pleased with the implementation of our campaign, and believe that our targeted focus on the misuse of the word ‘Jew’ in language was a successful strategic approach.

#### **IV. Lessons Learned & Ideas for the Future**

We learned a number of lessons from this project. First, *think before you act*. We were successful in our campaign because we had many days of brainstorming, honing in on a single, simple idea to unify our campaign. The thought put in on the front end helped unify and render effective a campaign later on. Second, *feed the trolls*. We were pleased that anti-Semites found our page because it showed that our campaign had, at least, reached some of our target audience. Third, *simplicity is the best campaign*. We were pleased to have one unifying idea that tied our campaign together. Content carries a campaign. Fourth, *beware unintended consequences*. For example, the foreign accent of our actor Elliot Mamet in the video angered some Polish commentators. It was a negative reaction, and not a negative reaction we expected to promote.

Going forward, as Nina Gabryś is the only Polish speaker in our group, and as the campaign targets Polish-speaking young people, she will be taking responsibility for managing the campaign in the future, with input from Oleksii Bondarev and Elliot Mamet. We hope to

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<sup>10</sup> “Use the ‘Jew’ Correctly!,” *Virtual Shtetl*, Published 22 June 2015, Accessed 22 June 2015, <<http://www.sztetl.org.pl/pl/cms/aktualnosci/4703,uzywaj-zyda-poprawnie-/>>.

<sup>11</sup> “The New Social Campaign,” *Jewish.Org.Pl*, Published 22 June 2015, Accessed 22 June 2015, <<http://www.jewish.org.pl>>.

continue to share relevant content on our page as well as post relevant memes and information. Long-term, the initiative would most likely become more sustainable if it garnered institutional support, e.g., through POLIN, but for now, we will continue to manage the project.

As a medium-term goal, we hope to collaborate on this project with thought-leaders in Polish society, like politicians, Church leaders, and public intellectuals. Our idea is to photograph these individuals holding a sign that says “I Use ‘Jew’ Correctly—Never As An Insult.” Effective marketing tools like this idea can help build public support for our campaign.

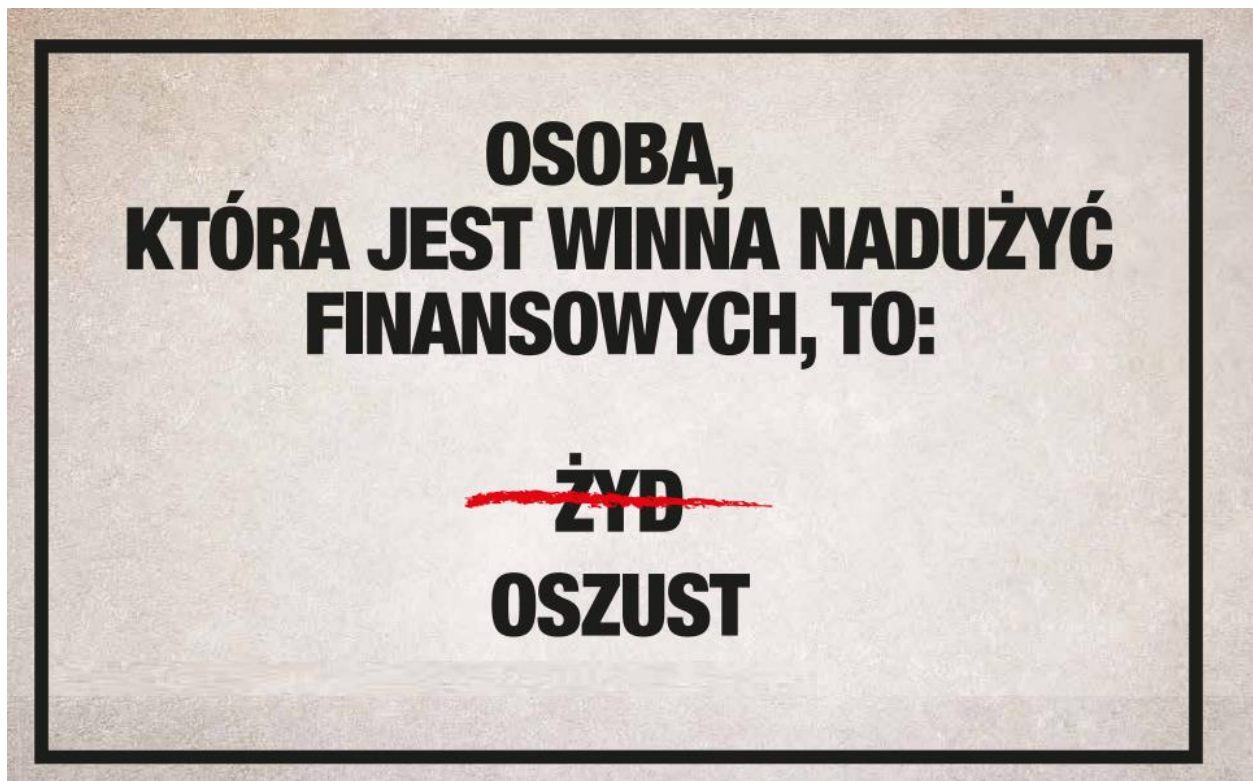
## **V. Acknowledgments**

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Appendix I—Graphics and Memes

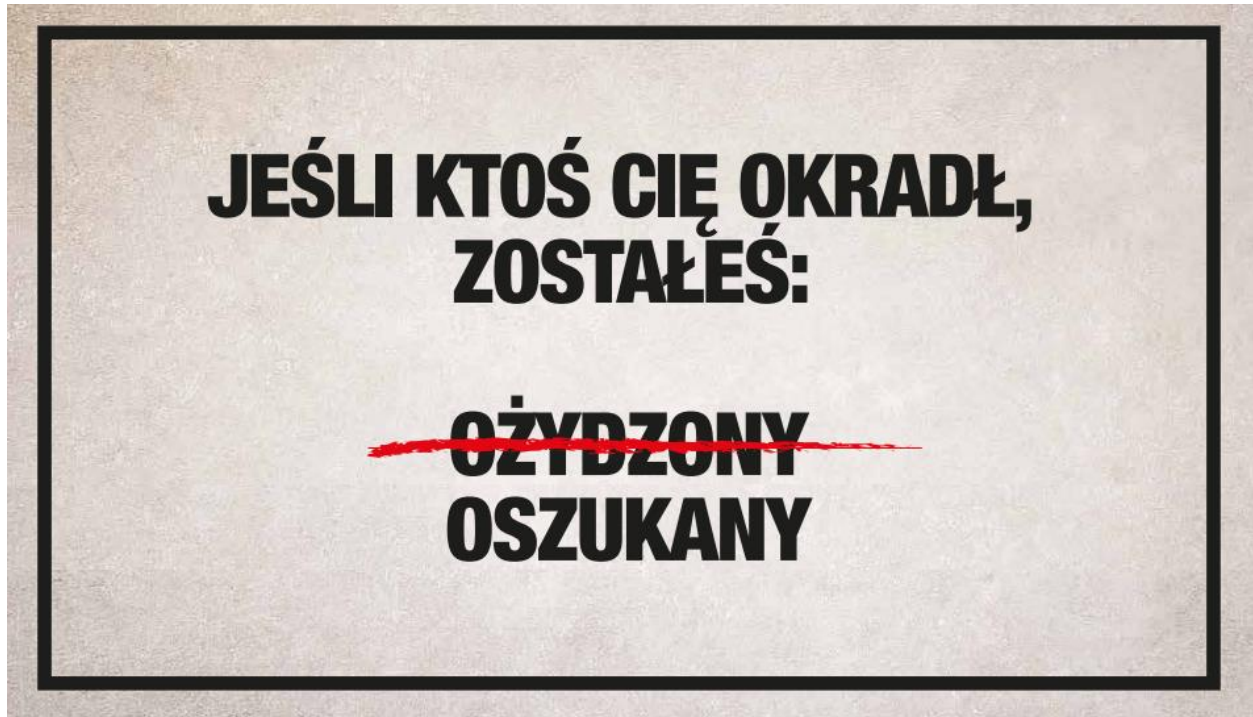
**Żyd / ~~żyd~~**

Graphic 1: Campaign Logo

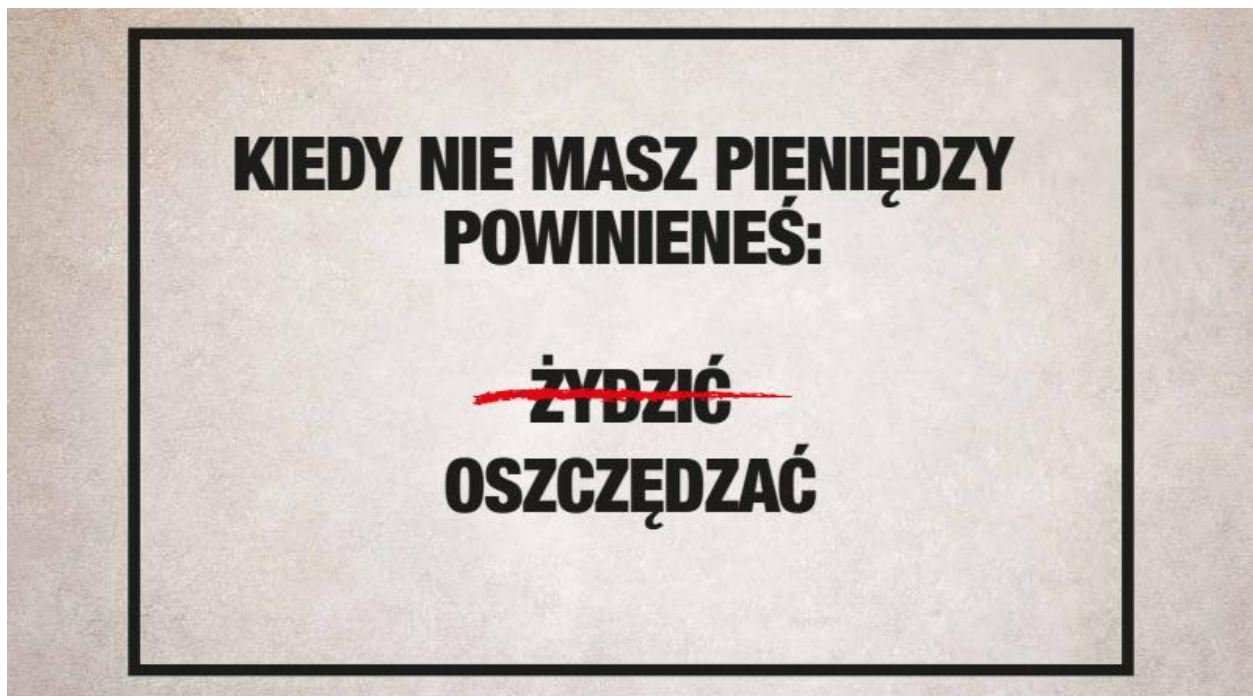


Graphic 2: Crook vs. Jew





Graphic 3: Cheated vs. Jewed



Graphic 4: Saved Money vs. Jewed



Graphic 5: English Version

## Appendix II—Bibliography

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