Making Space for Jewish Culture in Polish Folk and Ethnographic Museums

Curating Social Diversity after Ethnic Cleansing

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ABSTRACT: Looking beyond Poland's internationally lauded new Jewish museums, this article asks how Jews are represented in longer-standing folk and ethnographic museums whose mandates have been to represent the historical culture of the Polish nation. How have such museums navigated growing internal pressures to incorporate Jews and reconsider the boundaries of "Polishness" alongside external pressures to rethink the function and approach of ethnographic museology? Based on three museums that have taken three different approaches to Jewishness—what we call *cabinet of Jewish curiosities*, *two solitudes*, and *ambivalent externalization*—we assess the roles played by inherited discourses and structures as well as human agents within and beyond the museum. We illuminate how social debate about the character of the nation (and Jews' place in it) plays out in museums at a moment in their transition from nineteenth- to twenty-first-century paradigms and how a distinctively Polish path toward a "new museology" is emerging in conversation with and resistance to its Western counterparts.

KEYWORDS: critical curating, ethnographic exhibitions, heritage, Jews, multiculturalism, Poland

Postsocialist Poland has seen a boom in new museum activity—including the opening of new institutions and the renovation and expansion of existing ones—in a trend particularly visible since the accession of the country to the European Union (EU) in 2004 (Jagodzińska 2019).[1] This moment of growth in the Polish museum sector is taking place at a time when new museological paradigms are developing internationally. A pluralistic trend emanating from the West emphasizes the "European" values of supranational integration and minority inclusion, as well as deeply critical postcolonial rethinkings of museums' fundamental *raison d'ètre*. In Poland we see the confrontation of two political tendencies that map onto two divergent conceptions of national heritage: one that celebrates Polish ethno-nationalism and attempts to reclaim heroic Polish history, and another favouring discourses of pluralism and multiculturalism (and addressing darker historical chapters); both formulations were in different ways and at different times marginalized and appropriated by the postwar communist state.

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Ethnographic museology, one thread of which was taken up in Poland in the late nineteenth century as part of broader ethnonational consolidation projects that were also influenced by developing "scientific" disciplinary categories, tends toward the first narrative (Linkiewicz 2016). Though the state's territory had been at most 60% ethnically Polish before World War II, and though Jews constituted 10% of the population, ethnographers largely held "the Jewish question" aside from the question of ethnic Polish cultural autonomy, whose territorial aspirations they rooted in ideas of a distinct Slavic peasantry (Stauter-Halstead 2001). The postwar socialist state with its class-conscious mandate repurposed and refreshed the earlier tradition of celebrating the national peasantry in the context of the prewar museum institutions and collections they inherited. Poland's historical multiethnicity was further obscured by the Holocaust and the postwar redrawing of Polish borders along with associated, sometimes violent, population transfers. These events almost completely destroyed the historically integral, almost thousand-year-old Jewish presence. Indeed, it was during the period of the postwar Polish People's Republic that the country first existed as an almost entirely monoethnic polity, a condition largely maintained in its post-1989 "Third Republic" (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006; Porter-Szücs 2014).[2] Yet despite a wide range of important efforts by activists—including a few significant institutions like those described below—the country's amnesia regarding its prior cultural heterogeneity is profound, extending across both public and private domains (Nowak et al. 2018). This is particularly true in terms of the more critical recognition of complex relations between ethnic Poles and their historically multiethnic neighbors. Given the significance of Jews to the social fabric of the Polish countryside, prominent sociologist Jan Gross observed with consternation in 2016 that "[o]n the whole, you don't know, *even if you look at the local ethnographic museums* . . . that there had been a Jewish population" in Poland's towns and villages (Aderet 2016; our italics).

Gross and other scholars (e.g. Engelking 2016; Tokarska-Bakir 2004) have brought challenging historical and cultural revelations to light, contributing to a two-decades-long public debate regarding the ability of the country to embrace Jewishness as part of the imagined national "we." The treatment of Jewish subject matter in public museums can be seen as a barometer of attendant social and political changes. And there has indeed been a clear increase in the visibility of Jews as a component of Poland's heritage landscape, including in important, purpose-built new Jewish museums, which serve as diplomatic gestures on the national and international stage.[3] Today this country of perhaps 20,000 Jews is home to no fewer than seven Jewish-themed museums (with two more under construction), from modest but significant projects in Chmielnik, Płock, Kraków, and Lublin,[4] to the world-class multimillion-dollar POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, which was heralded in the Polish and international press as a watershed moment for Poland's version of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and Polish–Jewish reconciliation when it opened in 2014. *The Economist* (2014) predicted that this new institution—born of both local and international impulses, with North American folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett at its curatorial helm—would "intensify the debate about how museums should think about depicting issues of national identity," which indeed it has.

But museums are diverse in their histories, epistemologies, audiences, social roles and values, and organizational and funding structures. A recent paper notes that "[a]lthough public opinion concentrates [on] the less than 20 'most important' Polish museums, the whole sector consists of almost 1000 institutions, whose activities are often discursively ignored, but are appreciated by visitors" (Bukowiecki 2019). A 2011 survey of Polish museums posits over 220 institutions with Judaica collections or exhibitions that include Jewish content (Folga-Januszewska 2011).[5] Thus, it is worth considering the much broader range of *non-Jewish* museums where Polish and other visitors may encounter Jewish materials, beyond the relatively few specifically Jewish ones that have been celebrated. The present article focuses on three Polish museums—two of the country's

largest ethnographic museums, and one much more marginal folk museum—asking how these types of institutions are responding to the country's broader recent trends of integrating Jewish subject matter into Polish national heritage.

Little attention has been paid to the transformation of such *pre-existing* museum institutions, those not distinctly focused on Jewish heritage, as they begin to include, or increase their integration of, Jewish themes in their displays. These more "universal" civic cultural institutions—with their more deeply entrenched local audiences, collections, infrastructures, museum staff, and museological paradigms—better reflect, we argue, the structural and political challenges, shifting disciplinary formations, cultural inertia, and human anxieties that accompany attempts to embrace Jewishness in its diverse expressions as an integral part of Polish heritage. Their evolving approaches to the incorporation and framing of Jewish materials offer a new perspective on navigating the *transition* from past and status quo paradigms to a range of newly unfolding national self-conceptions.[6]

Jews in Poland's Ethnographic Museums

In Central and Eastern Europe, ethnographic museums have traditionally been understood as the keepers of national culture and tools of nation-building, bound up as they were with the rise of nineteenth-century nations and the delineation of the cultural groups ("ethnos" or "folk") that justified them (Linkiewicz 2016).[7] In multi-cultural cities like Lviv/Lwów, Vilnus, Kraków, and Warsaw under the Russian and Austrio-Hungarian empires, such museums were founded as a part of a Polish nation-building process. Carried out during a period of foreign rule when Poland did not exist as a sovereign state, they were thus grassroots citizens' rather than state-sponsored initiatives, and were under increased pressure to "carry the torch" of the imagined and aspired-to territorial Polish ethnonation.

Polish Jews—in an attempt to constitute themselves as a legitimate, "normal," nation within the dominant paradigm of the day—created their own traditions of ethnographic documentation and collection, whether they were pursuing a vision of parallel national sovereignty or an integral place in a pluralistic Polish collectivity (Kilcher and Safran 2016; Veidlinger 2016). They were occasionally supported by and at least in dialogue with their "ethnic" Polish colleagues in the broader development of ethnographic museology. But the aspirations embodied in their traditions died along with the majority of Jews in Europe in the war. Their collections were scattered: some were stolen or destroyed by the Nazis, some were nationalized by local postwar regimes, and some were reappropriated by the new State of Israel or the United States in the name of a distinct Jewish ethnonational communal patrimony. Today's fragmentary Jewish collections in ethnographic museums speak to a truncated earlier history of (re)imagining Jews' place in Poland.

In museums in the postwar Polish People's Republic, pressure for an ethnonational Polish imaginary continued in line with general state politics stressing the uniform, monocultural character of the Polish state. These politics were expressed in discourses and practices of a Polish national brand of communism that was developed to domesticate and legitimize what might otherwise be resisted as a foreign, Soviet imposition. In museums in the postwar period, national minorities were occasionally visible for strategic purposes, but exhibits mentioning them were curated to reflect these politics (see, e.g., Woleńska 1960).[8]

Today's Polish ethnographic museums, then, are fundamentally tied to ideologized disciplines that at least between 1945 and 1989 saw Jews, along with other "national minorities," as either largely external to their concerns or as problematic obstacles to overcome in their quest for ideal (ethnic) nationhood. The "Jewish question" that troubled the division of Europe into

ethnonational states is reflected in such institutions in a still largely romantically constituted museum ethnography that continues to define national collectivities monoethnically. Attempts to add Jewish subject matter to these museums today must thus go hand in hand with broader redefinitions of nation, culture, and ethnography. Ethnographic museums in the West, whose existence was closely linked with nineteenth-century attempts to define culture and link it to human groups for purposes of colonial expansion, have in recent years been fundamentally thrown into question as legitimate keepers of and authorities on culture, and they have been pushed to redefine their approaches to presenting it (Boursiquot 2014; Durrans 1993; Harris and O'Hanlon 2013; Modest et al. 2019; Thomas 2009).

Yet if ethnographic museums elsewhere may be losing the kind of authority they once had as definitive, scientifically constituted containers of identity in today's diversified representational landscape, they still play a significant social role in Poland. That lasting relevance may be attributed to several factors: (1) their dedication not to elite culture but to the lifeways of so-called "common people" and thus their popular perception as representing democratic culture; (2) their function as attractive destinations for school groups, with afterschool or weekend "informal education" events for Polish children and families; and (3) the renaissance of interest they are experiencing due to the fashion for reinterpreted "folk," "ethno-design," and "do-it-yourself" aesthetics (which was somewhat dampened during the 1990s due to the association of these themes with the ideology of the former communist regime but which has been strongly present since the nineteenth century in Polish art and design) (Brzezińska 2014; Klekot 2010).

For this reason, our inquiry addresses the representation of Jews in non–Jewish-specific museums in Poland by focusing on three ethnographic or "folk" museums: the National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw (Państwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne w Warszawie); the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków (Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie); and the Przedbórz Regional Folk Museum (Muzeum Ludowe Ziemi Przedborskiej). New "critical" or "decolonial" approaches have been the primary analytical tools for assessing, as well as the major catalysts of change in, ethnographic museums in the West. But there has been little public discussion regarding the practical application—and indeed the applicability—of such approaches to ethnographic (or any) museology in Poland (for exceptions, see Bukowiecki 2019; Bukowiecki and Wawrzyniak 2019; Murawska-Muthesius and Piotrowski 2012, 2017; Piotrowski 2011), despite the broadly shared epistemological and curatorial foundations of Polish ethnographic museums and their Western counterparts.[9] These debates have just begun to touch Polish soil via the travels and exchanges of Polish and foreign scholars, artists, curators, and community activists—ourselves included. In what follows, we ask what challenges these imported new approaches confront and which preexisting, local paradigms and sources of innovation they may find themselves in creative tension with. We are interested in understanding the drivers of and constraints on progressive change in Polish ethnographic museums, as well as the interplay among "external" and "internal" sources as they confront the weight and complexity of Polish history.

"Cabinet of Jewish Curiosities": Przedbórz Regional Folk Museum

The Przedbórz Regional Folk Museum is in many ways an outlier among our three selected museums. It is not a "registered" museum,[10] but a labor of love by a single individual in a deeply provincial locale, and it functions largely outside of current trends in global museological discourse. In its status as largely unmediated by disciplinarily norms, it illustrates a common "vernacular" approach to the display of Jewish culture in Polish contexts. It also points to the broader commodification of "picturesque," "folkloric" Jewish culture for the purpose of tourist

Figure 1. *Top:* Jewish tombstones and wooden figures in museum courtyard. *Bottom:* Inside the "Jewish Inn" room. Photos courtesy of Erica Lehrer.

consumption in private-sector contexts, and as such is a window onto popular ideas about Jews that underlie this trend.[11]

Przedbórz is a small municipality in the current Łódź region, with 7,300 inhabitants in 2015, of which 3,600 resided in the town proper. A typical former *shtetl*, it has had city rights since the fourteenth century and a Jewish community existing there since the end of the sixteenth century. The first mention of a synagogue in Przedbórz was in 1638, a structure considered to be one of the most beautiful wooden synagogues in Poland (Piechotka and Piechotka 2004). Prior to World War II, almost two-thirds of the town's 7,000 residents were Jewish, most living in the central, oldest part of the town and on adjacent streets. The town suffered major destruction during the first days of the war in September 1939, including the burning down of the synagogue by the German Nazi occupiers. In January 1940, a ghetto was established for Jewish residents of the area. It was liquidated in October 1942, when the Jews were moved to the ghetto in Radomsko and later to the Treblinka extermination camp. After the war, at the turn of 1945–1946, nine local Jews returned to Przedbórz; all were killed in the forest of Radoszyce by underground right-wing Polish partisans.[12]

The museum is the only public representation of Jews in the town. The project was initiated by Tadeusz Michalski, a teacher at the local secondary vocational agricultural school (*technikum rolnicze*), who began collecting artifacts in the region in the 1970s and organized an initial dis-

Figure 2. Entrance to the "Jewish Inn" room. Photo courtesy of Erica Lehrer.

play of them in one of the rooms of the local school—a so-called "folk room" (*izba ludowa*)—in 1983.[13] From 1986 to 1997, the museum continued to function as a private initiative that grew with Michalski's travels in the surrounding countryside, though it was renamed the Civic Folk Museum (Społeczne Muzeum Ludowe) and moved to the Przedbórz market square. In 1998, it became a municipal institution, and in the following year it was moved to the building of a former (presumably Jewish) inn at 9 Kielecka Street, one of 19 such inns that had existed in Przedbórz in the prewar era.[14] At that time, ownership of the museum was officially taken over by the municipality and renamed the Przedbórz Regional Folk Museum (Muzeum Ludowe Ziemi Przedborskiej). The museum's founder became its director, who continues to function as its sole curator.[15] Michalski is also a locally known poet, writer of collections of *szmonces* ("Jewish-style" jokes, or jokes making references to Jewish culture), and a *znachor* or traditional village healer. He identifies fully with the institution he built: "The museum is me and I am the museum."[16]

According to its founder, the Przedbórz Regional Folk Museum collection comprises over 8,000 artifacts (the museum's report to the national Office of Statistics in 2016 listed 1,638 inventory entries), and boasts approximately 2,700 visitors per year (per 2016 to 2018 data). Most of these are locals (half of them schoolchildren from the region), some are Polish tourists (there is some online chatter about the museum), and a few are foreign Jews. The museum has a yearly budget of 132,000 zlotys (ca. 31,000 euros), which is relatively large for the small municipality

but tiny in comparison to the major urban institutions we describe below. The museum has three employees, each working part time.

The museum's overall curatorial strategy is that of a typical *skansen*,[17] with individual rooms curated in naturalistic-style displays of conventional local domestic settings (kitchen, sitting room, bedroom) and those of village craft production (blacksmith's shop, cooper's workshop, weaving and spinning, pottery-making, fishnet-making), as well as with rooms devoted to specific themes (World War II partisan bunker, Christian religious art, locally prominent persons). The domestic spaces are presented as normatively Catholic. In places, however, the self-taught curator has put side by side "similar" religious ritual objects from Jewish and Catholic traditions, for example a *mezuzah* and a font for holy water—both of which were traditionally found at the entrances to local Przedbórz homes—without explanation.

The visibly Jewish portions of the museum, while clearly demarcated as "other," are relatively prominent, as they are situated at the beginning and end of the museum's visitor path. Upon entering the museum's courtyard, one encounters a display of locally salvaged tombstones propped against one wall (Figure 1, *top*), which is accompanied by a large interpretive plaque describing "The history and annihilation of Przedbórz Jews" ("Historia i zagłada Żydów przedborskich"). Interspersed among the stones are carved wooden figurines depicting Hasidic Jews, a popular object in the Polish postwar (and particularly postcommunist) folk art industry.[18] Boards on the wall above the display of objects provide basic information on the rituals, holidays, and history of Jews in Przedbórz, including the symbolism of Jewish tombstones and the destruction of the Przedbórz synagogue during World War II. Elsewhere in the courtyard are boards titled, for example, "From the atmosphere of old Przedbórz" ("Z klimatu dawnego Przedborza"), which include photographs of prewar Jews and quotations from Michalski's own poems, which refer to Jewish themes.[19]

After progressing through the museum's other rooms (described above), visitors end at the "Jewish inn" (Figure 2), a room marked with a sign stating "Judaica" ("Judaika"), the term used for all material things (artifacts, documents, etc.) relating to Jews and Jewish culture in Poland. Curated in quasi-diorama style to give the feeling of entering an actual inn, from outside the small room one can already see a life-sized mannequin of a religious Jew with cap and beard standing behind the counter—a historic wooden *szynkwas* typical for Jewish taverns and, according to Michalski, salvaged from a real historic inn. One of the few mannequins in the museum, it is a metonym for the absent Jewish population. Yet it also reinforces the popular yet ambivalent Polish stereotype of the Jew as tavern-keeper with his ledger book and abacus to keep track of debts and his jugs to serve alcohol; his religious and cultural difference is further underlined by way of a Sabbath *challah* on the counter and bulbs of garlic and dried herring hanging above. It is an image repeated in major works of Polish national literature, cinema, and theater (as well as folk sayings), thus interrupting any direct reference to history.

The Jewish-tended "inn" also functions as an undifferentiated repository of all "things Jewish" from Michalski's collection. The rest of the room contains a veritable jumble of "Jewish" objects of widely varying time periods, functions, and aesthetic qualities, which is devoid of interpretive context (Figure 1, *bottom*). These include more carved wooden figurines of Jews and tombstone fragments, historical photographs, prayer books left by recent Hasidic Jewish pilgrims to the area, pennants left by Israeli school groups visiting nearby heritage sites, a promotional folder of the Berkeley California Jewish congregation that had unrealized plans to rebuild Przedbórz's famous synagogue in Berkeley, an academic article about the Holocaust, and a scrap of parchment from a Torah scroll, inscribed with Hebrew lettering, irreverently pinned to the wall.

Seemingly selected less for any link to a coherent historical cultural formation and more for a combination of visual impact and as a mode of open storage (all surfaces were used, including floor, walls, tables, and even the ceiling), it recalls a renaissance "cabinet of curiosities" suggesting

the exploratory reach of its owner. Michalski himself seems unaware of the meaning(s) of all of the objects he has collected; his own, idiosyncratic sense of "Jewishness" seems to be the criterion for inclusion in this motley display.

Adjacent to the Jewish "inn" are two rooms that contain displays that further break the otherwise typical, "timeless" cultural tableaux that characterize traditional ethnographic curatorial strategies. The first is the inclusion in a flat glass case of a page of the local newspaper *Głos Przedborska* (*The Przedbórz Voice*) from May 1930 describing the unscrupulous ways of the local *Hasidim* in their attempts to influence municipal elections. The second is the presence of an underground "bunker" featuring mannequins representing local World War II Polish Home Army partisan fighters.

While not an ethnographic museum in a strict sense, the Przedbórz museum represents a significant trend visible in Poland's provinces in the last 30 years, in which orphaned Jewish cultural materials are preserved and brought to public attention in specific locales due to the visionary, countercultural, and often heroic efforts of a single person (Forum for Dialogue 2019; Marzynski 1996). Michalski fits the profile: "I did it for the needs of heart," he said. In Michalski's case, the presentation of Jewish heritage was part of his broader efforts as a local schoolteacher to preserve the memory of old Przedbórz. His father was an apprentice in a local Jewish shoemaker's workshop prior to World War II and had recounted good memories of the experience, and Michalski's discovery of numerous objects linked to the former local Jewish community (including fragments of tombstones and Torah scrolls) made clear to him the importance of including the Jewish presence in his museum. Michalski took it upon himself to collect and preserve vestiges of local Jewish heritage, and he feels it is his "moral duty" to remind others of this past.

This museum thus represents, in part, an ethical impulse to preserve Jewish heritage. It claims Jews as integral to the regional "national imaginary" constructed by the museum. And, however accidentally, it links past and present in its "undisciplined" curatorial strategy. The objects left by contemporary American and Israeli travelers, the presence of Holocaust scholarship, the Torah fragment—even the anti-Semitic newspaper article—point to multiple historical moments and forces and a range of past and ongoing Jewish lives, making it more difficult to "hive off" Jews as only an "object of ethnography" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991) and part of Poland's oft-invoked nostalgic, colorful, and peacefully coexisting neighbors.

Yet given the prevailing cultural and political climate, Michalski seems to realize that he is taking a risk, which sets unspoken, perhaps unconscious, parameters on what and how he curates. He was, for example, disinclined to discuss difficult issues (Where were the tombstones from? How did he get the pieces of Torah scroll?). Indeed, he did not seem to think there were, on the whole, difficult issues to discuss in any broad historical sense ("Polish–Jewish relations? What relations? They complemented each other and were condemned to each other, to a symbiotic life."). Yet it was clear that he understood his own perspective as different from, and more tolerant than, the norm. "I always strive to include the Jewish element," he said, "not [as] blood-suckers but [as] normal people."

Further, for Michalski, Jewish heritage functions—rather than any established research or pedagogical project—as a personal inspiration that supports his own idiosyncratic artistic vision and worldview ("thank goodness I am not an ethnographer, I had talent and sensitivity"). Animated by a cosmology filled with *dybbuks* who inform him about the past, during our tour he repeated a litany of anti-Semitic jokes and superstitions that perpetuate romanticized and magical ideas about Jews and Jewish objects common to Polish folk culture (Cała 1995). The Jew as innkeeper, while denoting a certain social reality, also reproduces the most mythic of Polish images, including the idea that Jews inebriated an innocent Catholic peasant population (Dynner 2013; Goldberg 1989, 1993; Opalski 1986).

While Michalski described some minimal "consultations" with Jews regarding the information listed on the courtyard plaques, the exhibition as a whole is rather an expression of a highly fetishized though culturally widespread vision of Jews and Jewish culture, completely out of touch with any "insider" Jewish view of their own lifeways or any professional scholarly understanding, whether Polish or foreign.

"Two Solitudes": The State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw

Established in 1888, the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw (PME) is the oldest institution of its type in Poland.[20] Most of its original collection was destroyed during World War II and was developed anew in the postwar period. After the war, the museum was initially housed in a palace outside of Warsaw, and since 1973 the collection has been housed in a reconstructed former building of a credit society in the heart of Warsaw at the corner of Kredytowa and Mazowiecka Streets, across from the famous Zachęta National Gallery of Art. Plans for the basic galleries and their thematic configurations, which were devised by art historian and ethnographer Ksawery Piwocki in 1961, were very innovative for the time as they were organized to highlight the links among cultural, historical, and political processes—including the "former ethnic situation" and the "historic misfortunes" of the country (Czyżewski 2013a; Piwocki 2013). But due to a lack of renovations, growing collections, and financial problems, by the 1990s the museum was largely invisible among the city's cultural offerings. Major changes began to be implemented in the early 2000s and especially from 2008, when a new director was appointed.[21] These involved renovation of the building, new exhibitions, and the opening of the Museum of Children (2013), a small separate section of the museum focused on providing workshops for young people. The museum contains over 80,000 objects including 2,300 custodial deposits. It has 72 employees (2015) and a yearly budget of over 8.8 million zlotys (2,062,500 euros) (2015), including 6.1 million zlotys (1,429,700 euros) from the Mazovian regional government. It saw 76,300 visitors in 2015.

In 2013, the museum completed a major renovation of the building involving over 60 percent of its usable surface. In December 2013, an entirely new installation of the museum's main permanent gallery was unveiled under the title "Celebration Time" ("Czas Świętowania w kulturach ludowych Polski i Europy"), spanning over 850 square meters. Based on Director Adam Czyżewski's comprehensive new vision, he explained that it "fulfills one of the basic methodological proposals of contemporary cultural anthropology and museology," building its narration so as to achieve

> a balance between textual and performative understanding . . . of culture. It enriches the attendee's knowledge but at the same time stimulates his sensitivity, emotions, [and] becomes an object of aesthetic experience. It uses words as a commentary but the message is effective most of all thanks to images, objects, scenography and architecture. It is not a lecture, which would describe in a linear, finished, closed and *de facto* way only one of the possible visions of reality. It is thus a tale about folk cultures [in the plural] and not about folk culture [in the singular]. It shows these through a multiplicity of accounts [and] narratives, which are ever changing in time. (2013b: 11)

The result is an attractive, gleaming two-story display of Polish village rituals and costumes (Figure 3). More of a "mall" than a cabinet of curiosities, the objects are supplemented by videos that connect past practices to the ongoing present. The updated, "postmodern" theoretical underpinnings of the new installation can be seen, for example, in the inclusion of a section on the state-run folk arts commission Cepelia—which is announced by the presence of a neon sign from one of its shops, which had been ubiquitous in communist Poland since the 1950s.

Figure 3. "Celebration Time" gallery. Photo courtesy of Monika Murzyn-Kupisz.

Figure 4. "Jewish Annex." Photo courtesy of Erica Lehrer.

The PME website billed the new display as "the biggest and most important exhibition in the 125-year history of the Warsaw State Ethnographic Museum. It is a colorful, multi-vocal story showing the rituals, customs, and various holiday accessories of different religious rites and traditions in Poland" (Państwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne w Warszawie 2016).[22] Followers of the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Greek Catholic Church, Armenians, and, other, smaller Polish minority communities are included in the main gallery, although in a separate section, and their distinctiveness—displayed in the form of a single holy book to represent each group—is limited to religious beliefs and customs.

Jewish cultural content has been included in a different, highly visible way, though separated entirely from the main space (Figure 4). Just outside the entrance to the main "Celebration Time" exhibit is a second entrance to the right leading to an exhibit listed as "Jewish Festivities in Poland" (Figure 5), but which Czyżewski affectionately calls "the Annex" (Bielawski and Stankowski 2014). In stark contrast to the spacious bright-white main hall (Figure 6), the walls of the cave-like Jewish annex—which covers only 36 square meters, or 4 percent of the floorspace

Figure 5. Gallery descriptions. Photo courtesy of Erica Lehrer

Figure 6. Left: Entrance to "Celebration Time" gallery. Right: Entrance to "Jewish Annex" (before Sukkah door was installed). Photo courtesy of Erica Lehrer.

used by "Celebration Time"—are painted flat black. Glass display cases flank the gallery, containing an array of Jewish ritual objects, both historical and contemporary, donated or on loan from Warsaw's present-day Jewish community, including Chanukah *menorahs* and *dreidels*, Passover *seder* plates, *tefillin*, and prayer books. Also present are a series of paintings by Polish Jewish artists from the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, such as Artur Markowicz, Henryk Lewensztadt, Max Haneman, Henryk Gotlib, and Artur Szyk, as well as a few contemporary creations, such as contemporary local artist Monika Krajewska's papercuts (*wycinanki*). A video loop in the gallery screens prewar black-and-white Yiddish films—including the famous *The Dybbuk* (Michal Waszynski, 1937)—illustrating various Jewish holiday rituals.

While "the Annex," according to the director, was intended to accompany the main exhibition from its conception in 2010, it was modified after opening to include a wooden scale model of the main, wooden synagogue from the town of Gąbin (Yiddish: Gombin) and a documentary film about it. From 2015 onward, one has to enter "the Annex" by walking through the entryway of a *sukkah* from the town of Szydłowiec (Zbiory 2015).[23]

The PME has made a quantum leap forward with this new exhibition. The simple move to include Jews in Poland's flagship ethnographic museum is a clear statement that Jewish culture is part of Polish national heritage. The contemporary objects in the display cases and the scale

model and *sukkah* reconstruction further communicate that ethnography is not only about either the past or an abstracted, idealized culture, but about taking a newer approach that is particularist and historically contextualized.

The question of whether Jews should be seen as "similarly different" to other national minorities in Poland or "differently different" from them, however, is a subject of ongoing scholarly debate (Avrutin et al. 2009; Gottesman 2003; Zarrow 2017).[24] By segregating Jews entirely from "Celebration Time," the PME places itself in the latter camp. According to the PME director, Adam Czyżewski, the Jewish exhibition is displayed separately because it reflects an actual historical separation of communal cultures. He also refers to an asymmetry reflecting how Jews, as the "subaltern" minority group, were exposed to and familiar with Polish culture far more than Catholic Poles vis-à-vis Jewish culture and particularly Jewish religion, which thus remained obscured for the former. In embracing this perspective, the museum automatically positions visitors as normative, Catholic Poles. Finally, Czyżewski suggests that the stark distinction suits both Polish Catholic and perhaps even more so Jewish communal sensitivities regarding their own mutual distinctness; if he had chosen to integrate the two groups, he anticipated receiving complaints from both sides.

Yet the downsides of the new configuration are clear: the separate space gives Jewishness a feeling of clear "otherness" that is distinguished from what is hard not to read as "real," normative Polishness. While perhaps an understandable sign of mourning for a tragically lost community, the choice of black paint, contrasting with the core exhibit's bright white, echoes long-standing associations in Polish folk culture (and European Christianity more generally) of Jewishness as obscurantist and associated with dark forces, and the gallery itself can produce a haunting sensation. The strict division also reinforces retrograde anthropological ideas of cultural boundedness and homogeneity, falling short of both contemporary historiography and cultural theory that could help illuminate the interpenetration and mutual cultural influences among Polish Catholics and Polish Jews.

The rather static, staid, traditional display of Jewish heritage contrasts not only with the bright, animated tone of "Celebration Time," but also with a number of the PME's other new exhibitions, for example *Granice* (*Borders*) (2008–2009), a provocative show of photographs of people of color dressed in Polish folk costume, which was created by two Poles living in New York (Czyżewska 2010).[25] In a 2014 interview, Czyżewski discussed bolder displays that he had considered, in particular the idea to include a 1979 documentary film depicting the hanging, beating, burning, and drowning of the Jewish effigy of Judas from the southern Polish town of Pruchnik, a ritual that was stopped due to protests in recent years, but which has seen a subsequent resurgence (Kazimierczuk 2019; Tokarska-Bakir 2011). Czyżewski had envisioned placing this film as a kind of "doorway" connecting the main "Polish" section with the Jewish "Annex" (Bielawski and Stankowski 2014). But visionary museum directors are limited in their influence, particularly on controversial topics.

The city's broader, shifting museumscape also bears consideration. The opening of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in 2014 may have both catalyzed and troubled Czyżewski's move to create the Jewish "Annex" at the PME. To some museum employees and casual observers, the emergence of a specialized institution nearby dealing with Jewish issues relieved the PME of any obligation to treat what appeared to be clearly demarcated as "someone else's" history and culture. As Czyżewski notes, "[p]eople [still] don't connect Jewish culture with ethnography," a discipline strongly associated with ethnonational culture (Bielawski and Stankowski 2014).

A 2015 exhibit of Warsaw Jewish community member Monika Krajewska's contemporary Jewish paper cuts, and a conference in the same year on Jewish folklore, further signal the museum's commitment to Jewish themes. But they also suggest (perhaps self-imposed) constraints

on what approaches to Jewishness are palatable to audiences, government funders, and museum staff.[26] Czyżewski's choice to move ahead with the particular curatorial approach of "the Annex" reflects both the significance as well as the limitations of this attempt to embrace Jews as an integral, if parallel part of broader Polish (folk) culture.

"Ambivalent Externalizing": The Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków

Kraków's Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum (MEK) was established as a separate, private museum run by the Society for the Ethnographic Museum in 1911. Converted into a public, state-owned institution in 1945, it has since 1948 been housed in the former town hall of Kazimierz in the heart of Kraków's historically Jewish quarter. In 2015, the museum had 53 employees and a 4.1 million zloty (960,775 euro) budget, most of which was supplied by the Małopolska regional authority, which is its supervising body. Over 74,000 people per year make use of the museum's diverse offerings (Departament Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego 2016). Of the three museums we surveyed, the MEK is the only one whose vast collection (over 80,000 objects) was inherited from the prewar era; it is thus the largest, oldest, and best-preserved collection in Poland. With the exception of the ground floor's cottage interiors (1951), one completely renovated gallery of springtime customs (2011), and the addition of an entirely new exhibition of folk art on the second floor (*Unattainable Earth*, 2015), the basic structure and curatorial approach of today's core "permanent" exhibition on folklife and culture (*The Rhythm of Life and Human Objects*) was curated in the late 1960s (Dolińska 2003), with piecemeal changes introduced in the early 2000s, 2015, and 2019 (Szczurek 2011). Recent changes are linked to the hiring of a new director in 2008, since which time the museum has been engaged in a process of halting transformation (Bartosz 2010, 2012, 2013).

Despite numerous progressive changes, Jews are notably absent as agents in the nation imagined by the core exhibition (Lehrer 2013, 2016). While they are not entirely missing from the permanent exhibit, out of more than 40 thematic sections regarding Polish folklife Jews appear as subjects in a single photograph in the larger display in only six of them, a presence introduced in the late 1980s or early 1990s (Dolińska 2003; Dolińska and Gruszka 2011).[27] Displays on tavern-keeping, folk music (Waligórska 2013), and papercutting seem conspicuously lacking, as these were domains in which Jews were widespread and influential, and in which they retain a strong presence in popular cultural memory. In arrangements of photos and artifacts illustrating village social and economic life, in a long display case of Polish regional costume, and most clearly in the content of the large second-floor galleries dedicated to daily life and seasonal rituals, the Poland envisioned by the museum is fundamentally a Slavic, Catholic one. Jews appear most visibly in the museum through the gaze of their ethnic Polish neighbors as costumes and masks donned for seasonal caroling and carnival and as puppets in Christmas crèches or Jewish figurines sold at an Easter Fair.

Prior to 2011, the museum's curatorial approach was traditionally "scientific," offering brief, general overviews of galleries with diverse materials, providing largely symbolic interpretations of the cultural practices and products presented. Costumes depicting Jews were framed solely in terms of their magical, mediating role in peasant cosmologies, with no reference to Jewish experience or intergroup conflict. The texts were also almost exclusively in Polish, and their tone and content suggested that the imagined audience was Catholic and presumed to be uncritical of the materials on display. As recently as the late 1990s, a mannequin wearing a cloak and a caricatured mask of an orthodox Jewish man was labeled simply *Żyd* ("Jew").

Since 2008, when the MEK brought in a new director, Antoni Bartosz (accompanied by the hiring of a number of new, young museum workers), the museum's discursive and aesthetic approach to ethnographic museology saw a leap forward in both curatorial strategies and user-friendliness evident in the museum's adding of a gift shop, public outdoor furniture and displays, and façade decoration. The museum's new slogan, "My museum, a museum about me," seemed a clear response to growing calls for relevance, participation, and democratization in the museum world in the West (and to critiques of ethnographic museums in particular) as well as to internal Polish debates about the repression of the peasant roots of Polish post-1945 society (Leder, 2014). On their website and in other promotional materials, the museum has begun to frame itself in progressive terms, highlighting a number of unorthodox, experimental initiatives aimed at engaging the local population, particularly children, in marginalized city heritage, including Jewish heritage (Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek 2014; Piszczkiewicz 2018).[28]

There has been a significant material change to the core exhibition as well: the complete revision of the gallery of springtime customs under the banner of the "Re-newal" (*Od-nowa*) project, which took a radical turn away from a traditional, "scientific" curatorial approach. Emphasis was placed instead on aesthetic experience, with a colorful "total environment" replacing dull specimen cases. The room today offers visitors a *sense* of Polish village spring, with bright wooden walls and an enormous tree trunk that grows up into the ceiling painted in rainbow motif suggesting Polish folk crafts and surrounded by comfortable, foliage-green couches. The number of objects on display was drastically cut, with individual highlights curated in whimsical, custom-shaped vitrines embedded in the walls, for example a lightning bolt suggesting a spring storm. A few related archival images and quotes from ethnographic reports and village memoires are engraved in the surrounding walls. The row of delicate hand-painted Easter eggs is fitted with an antique-looking magnifying glass on metal tracks that visitors can slide along to inspect each egg. Wall panels covering two recessed display cases of wooden toy figurines from Kraków's age-old annual "Emaus" Eastertime fair—including ever-popular Jews—are movable, so visitors may uncover hidden sections. Mirrors and magnifying glasses are also used in these cases, enhancing the playful feel of the display.

But this aesthetic evolution, while representing a form of progress, has created new problems, especially as regards Jewish themes. The changes in the springtime customs gallery arguably leave Jews *more* rather than less obfuscated. The decrease in explanatory texts here leaves the objects on display at the mercy of whatever ambient, preexisting interpretations visitors bring with them, further limiting access to new perspectives. Additionally, while the playful participatory choice of providing a loupe to examine an object is fine for a painted egg, but a Jew under a magnifying glass (Figure 7) raises exoticizing, even racist resonances.

Given the museum's progressive discourse and its responsiveness to popular themes, and the significance and popularity that Jewish culture has come to garner in Poland and in Kraków in recent years, one might expect the MEK to have a dedicated Judaica section, if not a more challenging integrated embrace of Jewish culture in its presentation of the "Polish folk" (Wasilewska-Prędki 2017).[29] This would align not only with reference to broader, postcolonial critiques of ethnographic museology that the museum seems, in broad terms, to be responding to, with its calls for dismantling cultural hierarchies and privileging multivocality, but also with reference to the MEK's local conditions: as an institution situated directly in Kraków's historical Jewish quarter, in a building that once served as a Jewish school, with a plaque on its exterior wall showing King Kazimierz the Great's medieval welcome of the Jews to Poland, and with a prominent postwar director—Tadeusz Seweryn—having been recognized as "righteous among the nations" for his work to save Jews during the World War II Nazi occupation of Poland.[30]

Figure 7. Springtime customs room with Jewish figurine behind peephole. Photos courtesy of Erica Lehrer and Jason Francisco.

It is worth noting that since Bartosz's tenure began, Jewish themes—even a few emotionally and politically challenging ones—have been featured almost annually in *temporary* exhibitions at the MEK. These were, with one recent exception, developed in response to external impulses and partnerships and prepared by external artists and curators, with the MEK offering gallery space in the museum's annex, a block away from the main seat.[31] The MEK has also agreed to a series of critical "interventions" addressing their curation of Jewish materials, which was also initiated by outsiders (Lehrer 2014, 2016; Lehrer and Sendyka 2019). These latter projects and events both give evidence of and increase the staff's and especially the director's growing sensitivity to the museum's representation (and lack) of Jewish culture. Yet when left to their own devices—and particularly when engaging their own core collections and displays—MEK curators have often seemed ambivalent and inhibited, occasionally gesturing toward more critical engagement with Jewish subject matter, but tentative, muffled, or abortive in their attempts to manifest these as enduring changes in their permanent galleries.[32]

The 2011 exhibit *Passages and Repassages* was a radical curatorial departure for the MEK and in clear conversation with critical Western audience expectations.[33] The exhibition (and its bi- and trilingual catalogs in Polish-German and Polish-French-English) was made at the invitation of La Maison de l'Artisanat et des Métiers d'art in Marseilles and traveled to Berlin after its Kraków premiere (Szczurek 2010, 2013).[34] Curated by a team of 40 MEK ethnographers, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, art historians, and writers, the approach was to start from the objects' personal resonances and the memories they evoke, and then to "dig out subjects and themes that remain relevant and contemporary, sometimes disturbing, even scandalous"

(Culture.pl. 2011). Yet it was silent on the contested nature of Jewish materials that it prominently featured. The aesthetic innovations—a curtain of keys visitors had to pass through and a street made of figural beehives—evoked folk culture's magical sensibilities, including those regarding otherness. But ideas about magic when applied to outsiders in the Polish folk context contain unexamined prejudices and violence (Cała 2014, Tokarska-Bakir 2004). The image selected for the exhibit's promotional poster (in both Polish and French iterations) was one of the show's two figural beehives depicting orthodox Jews. Yet the catalogue text made no mention at all of the variety of contemporary debates raging at the time about Poland's Jewish past or about the difficult emotions that the object itself—a wooden Jew made by Polish peasants to produce a wealth of honey—might evoke (Culture.pl. 2011).[35]

Equally ambiguous is the incremental disappearance of Jewish-related materials, particularly those that might be seen as more contentious, from the MEK's permanent exhibition over the past decade. First to vanish was a framed photograph of an effigy of an orthodox Jew hanging from a tree. Taken in the village of Pruchnik, it documented the 1979 iteration of the annual ritual involving the torture of the biblical Judas rendered as a prewar Polish Jew. Mentioned above as a tradition that has seen a resurgence, it has also become politicized in relation to anti-immigrant sentiment (JTA 2015) and Jewish property restitution claims (Mikrut-Majeranek 2019).[36] Leading up to the 2011 transformation of the springtime customs gallery, a number of mannequins dressed in ritual garb representing social "others" were removed, including the above-mentioned Jewish male mannequin and a "Gypsy" (Roma) woman. Further updates to the wintertime customs gallery have included the removal of the caroling group in 2017 (among them a Jewish character with stereotypical mask and long cloak) and the sets of Christmas crèche puppets that typically included one or more Jewish characters. Some of the accompanying documentary photographs, including one featuring Polish villagers laughing at a man dressed as a Jew riding on a puppet *turoń* (a kind of ram), are also no longer on display.[37]

The ambivalence surrounding Jewish themes must be understood with reference to multiple, entangled anxieties, gaps, and stumbling blocks, some invoked in conversation with members of the museum staff, others intuited by the present authors. These include (1) Jewish content is the purview of other local museums (Museum of Kraków – Old Synagogue and Schindler Factory branches; National Museum; Galicia Jewish Museum); (2) the MEK's very modest number of relevant objects; (3) MEK curators feeling underequipped in this particular subject domain;[38] (4) passive or active disinterest in Jewish subject matter on the part of some museum staff; (5) the museum's sense that highlighting and/or integrating Jewish subject matter would not be welcomed by their usual audience; (6) lack of local Jewish communal interest in the ethnographic museum and thus a lack of political will to push for Jewish cultural inclusion there; and (7) political anxieties surrounding Jewish subject matter, which have increased since the fall of 2015 with the return to power of the conservative, right-wing Law and Justice Party. Though Bartosz has publicly stated his belonging to the ranks of Poland's "philosemites,"[39] it is impossible to fully ascertain the MEK leadership's deep motivations, fears, and strategies. What is clear is that even were the museum committed to taking on this topic, the changing cultural and political context in which it operates make engaging Jewishness increasingly risky, and indeed the most obvious challenge (and the one most consistently invoked by the museum) remains funding.[40]

The disappearance of Jewish-related material from MEK's permanent galleries might be seen negatively. It could suggest that, as such material has come to be understood as contentious due to the more demanding gaze of new audiences and critics and to shifting museum norms, it is being swept under the rug rather than openly confronted with a critical curatorial approach. Yet the MEK's halting, piecemeal efforts to both acknowledge and contain the potency of Jewish materials and themes surely points to delicate negotiations of personal, disciplinary, and political

opinions and commitments among both museum staff and funders. Welcoming external partners to initiate periodic, boundary-pushing projects on the margins of the institution may be less an abrogation of responsibility than a shrewd navigation of treacherous political waters.

Conclusion

Museums and their practitioners are important *loci* of both activism and conservatism. Through them, ambient cultural, political, and disciplinary discourses—and resistance to these—find curatorial expression. Ethnographic museums in particular offer a unique perspective on the opportunities and limitations presented by such symbolically and materially dense institutions in efforts to shift from a more exclusive, ethnonational model of the (Polish) nation to one that accommodates both past and present civic-national diversity. Our main concern is understanding the challenges that stand in the way of progressive change.

The two more standard "disciplinary" museums suffer from the lack of a robust model for multiethnic integration in a museological tradition of *Volkskunde* that has, across Europe, been almost exclusively ethnonational in its approach to ethnographic classification. In "Austrian" Poland in particular—where Kraków was located—Polish elites used developing cultural sciences to focus on regional rural peasantries, whom they attempted to mobilize and integrate to help articulate an essential Polish culture and 'national spirit' and claim deep ties to particular territories (Stauter-Halstead 2001). Jews were primarily "urban" (town-dwellers) involved in crafts and commerce as opposed to the more "rural" Slavic peasants who lived near their fields, and as a diaspora Jews were transregional rather than regional. They thus defy, for example, the common curatorial logic seen in the MEK's corridor of "regional peasant costume" and are thus absent there despite the iconic status of Jewish ritual costume in Poland. But nor do Jews fit comfortably in the parallel tradition of *Völkerkunde*, the ethnography of the "exotic other" encountered on foreign expeditions; while Jews were conspicuously different, they were also local and familiar.

The present-day struggle to invent a language for the display of Jewish culture in ethnographic museums requires that Jews be newly constituted as an ethnographic subject. This is, of course, taking place in parallel with the postsocialist reinvention of something called "Polish culture" at a moment in time when anthropologists and cultural critics have dismissed the very idea of unitary, homogeneous "cultures" as outmoded and oppressive. Attempts to curate Polish Jews in Polish ethnographic museums after the Holocaust raise a host of additional practical, political, and emotional issues. The range of approaches to (and frequently the lack of) inclusion of Jews in such museums mirrors their uncertain, and sometimes outright unwanted, place in dominant visions of the Polish nation—a community itself embattled and periodically suppressed or attacked.

Analogous Western European and North American museums are broadly if unevenly responding to demands for pluralization that have accompanied demographic shifts and associated political expectations on the part of minority communities and their allies. But in today's largely monoethnic Poland, the discourse of multiculturalism is new and has shaky foundations, inasmuch as it is rooted in an unevenly emerging social imaginary that takes recourse at turns to a historical situation of cultural diversity, a Europeanizing identity, and the need to address a traumatic wartime history. Powerful forces—conservative and regressive—also obfuscate or oppose these claims.

New discourses promulgated by progressive directors (e.g., "a museum about me") are difficult to operationalize in a truly critical way in a society in which the constitution of the collective

Figure 8. Winter customs room with missing masks, September 2019. Photo courtesy of Erica Lehrer.

"me" is in heated dispute. The issue of museums' approaches to ethnic minorities is broader than only the Jewish issue, and points to the representation of other "others" who lived in historically Polish lands (Roma, Ukrainians, Belarussians, Germans) (Kapusta and Kapusta 2018).[41] With the growing number of Ukrainian immigrants in Poland, for example, we anticipate that fraught issues relating to expressions of Ukrainian history and culture may come to the fore. At the very moment that ICOM (the International Council of Museums) is debating a radically progressive new definition of what a "museum" is for, Poland's Law and Justice government is aggressively promoting celebratory, patriotic expressions of heritage and censuring anything less. In such a climate, pro-pluralist directors and curatorial staff in Polish museums have an unenviable task.

Art critic and curator Magdalena Ujma praised the MEK's bold post-2008 changes but noted the limitations in Bartosz's embrace of a "general humanistic approach," which hearkens back to museum founder Seweryn Udziela's turn-of-the-century discourse of "curiosity" and "respect." By reaching backward and inward, instead of forward and outward, to newer and more diverse sources of museum theory and critique, the MEK forgoes the opportunity, perhaps the responsibility, to take "a sharper look at itself" and the more transformative potential that such self-criticism would unlock (Ujma 2012). She calls the MEK's approach "therapeutic" rather than "critical," as it encourages individual ("me") rather than social reflection, which requires truly encountering "the other."

But new social forces may be catalyzing this reflection. In September 2019, the display of carolers' masks at the MEK—including the most negatively caricatured depictions of Jews—was taken down from the wall (see Figure 8). The removal took place in the wake of an open discussion with the museum's director initiated that summer by the local organization FestivALT: New Currents in Contemporary Jewish Art as part of a series of critical events in Kraków titled "Re-Jewing Polish Folk Culture."[42] Based on Bartosz's response to the pain and anger expressed by the mostly Jewish audience at this event, it seems clear that he was led to the conclusion that the masks are simply too volatile to display as they are.

It is here that we will see how far the museum is prepared to go in honoring its new mandate of multivocality, dialogue, self-questioning, and respect for others (Bartosz 2012), particularly in relation to those social groups personally impacted by the materials on display. While temporary

exhibitions with challenging perspectives are important, they come and go. But the meanings attributed to objects in the permanent collection via truly critical curatorial approaches are "stickier," disrupting the museums' inherited taxonomies and display traditions in ways that bring uneasy politics deeper into the museums' interior, on their gallery walls, but "backstage" as well, where human and material agents may be animated in new, unruly ways.

Whether or not Polish ethnographic museums embrace the demands of a critical, decolonial museological avant-garde, a shift in their approach seems overdue, moving from what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991:19–23) calls "in situ" curating, where objects are presented as parts of putative, often utopian cultural wholes, to "in context" curating, which creates a pedagogical frame for the viewer via historical background, questions, comparisons, and circumstances of collecting, and which "rescu[es them] from triviality." Such a shift would require a *highlighting* of the contested nature of Jewish material culture rather than its ignoring, containment, or removal, making its historical and political specificity, as well as the social violence surrounding it, inescapable.

Given the deep ambivalence toward Jewish heritage and history in Poland, the sometimes awkward curatorial approaches to Jewish topics in ethnographic museums that we describe cannot but point to an understandable lack of confidence on the part of museum directors and staff around these issues in an atmosphere of great social, structural, and political change. In today's Poland, where the government deploys a celebratory politics of history with a heavy hand, dismisses directors, and forcibly re-curates museums whose narratives they find insufficiently supportive of Polish national pride[43]—and trafficks in sanitized forms of Jewish heritage for their own, cynical ends—both Jewish presence and Jewish absence are topics of anxious significance.

Postscript

Just as this article was going to print, Erica Lehrer, on her way to the next in a series of critical interventions in The Kraków Ethnographic Museum undertaken in partnership with MEK curator Magdalena Zych, received images of the brand new (November 2019) installation that has replaced the empty space (see Figure 8) where the caricatured Jewish masks had long hung. They include a new, personal text written and signed by Zych. Printed on a sheet of laminated yellow paper affixed to the wall with metal binder rings, this supplement to the gallery's larger, main interpretive text (which appears on the gallery's standard, poster-sized blackboard), is written in a new kind of voice. It questions the innocence of the masks and the larger traditions they belong to; it describes the historical anti-Semitism they continue today to support. The new display has also replaced the masks themselves—and their visceral ability to hurt—with a larger number of small-scale archival photographs of similar masks in use, spanning the years 1938–1987. The new text asks, self-reflexively, whether the museum cared about the feelings of Jewish and Roma visitors who received ironically MEK's "my museum" slogan. This outcome speaks to the necessity and potential for museum–community dialogue and the progressive change that only listening, over time, will bring.

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NOTES

1. Many are history museums on themes censored under communism (e.g., interwar achievements, World War II's Home Army, and the Warsaw Uprising).
2. Some 69.2% of residents of Poland in 1921 declared their nationality as Polish, and 68.9% declared Polish as a native language in 1931 (Ukrainian and Yiddish being the most important other native languages). Religious identification in 1931 was: Roman Catholic—64.8%, Orthodox—11.8%, Greek Catholic—10.4%, and Jewish—9.8%.
3. With the loosening of the late socialist government's grip on culture in the 1980s, a few extraordinary museum projects on Jewish topics came to fruition. Two exhibitions in the months surrounding the 1989–90 political transformation, *Polish Jews* (December 1989 to February 1990) in Krakow's National Museum and *The Jews of Wrocław 1850–1944*, which opened in March 1989 in Wrocław's Museum of Architecture, both drew significant crowds and attention to the issue of the historical presence of Jews in Poland (Kretschman 2017).
4. These include the Świętokrzyski Shtetl Education and Museum Centre in Chmielnik, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, the Grodzka Gate NN Theatre Centre in Lublin, and the new branch of the Gliwice Museum focused on the history of Jews in Silesia. References to the presence of Jews in Poland are common in new regional history museums such as the spectacular Silesian Museum in Katowice (opened 2015) or more modest sites like the Pieniny Museum in Szlachtowa (reopened 2014), which includes Jewish residents and visitors in their exhibit on the history and culture of the Pieniny Mountains and the Szczawnica spa resort.

5. For comparison, a 1979 source indicates the presence of objects of Jewish art in over 60 Polish museums (Rejduch-Samkowa 2011), and a list compiled in cooperation with the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Kryciński et al. 2011) included over 60 museums and exhibitions worth visiting for tourists interested in Jewish culture.
6. The organizational structure of museums in Polish society has also undergone significant change since 1989, and particularly in the last 15 years. A new administrative division of the country and the introduction of new territorial governance levels (municipal, county, and regional) in 1999 means that few museums are still financed directly by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The majority of museums—including the three we discuss—are currently supervised and financed by a regional, county, or municipal government. New EU co-funding programs also prioritize regional identity.
7. This approach flowed from a nineteenth-century Herderian romantic notion of essential singular ethnonational identities.
8. In April 1960, "an exhibition on the folk art of Belarussians, Lithuanians, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians and Jews who live in Poland," containing about 500 "folk art" objects, was curated at the Kraków Ethnographic Museum by Maria Woleńska from the National Museum in Kraków. It was initiated by the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art to celebrate the millennium of the Polish state. Whether intended to rival the Catholic Church's celebration of 1,000 years of Polish Christianity in the same year or to be part of the post-Stalinist thaw, a few years later Jews would be vilified again in the events of 1967–1968.
9. For a discussion of the complexities of applying postcolonial analysis to the Polish case, including a reference to the broader European "colonial mind" shared by Warsaw National Ethnographic Museum founder Stefan Szolc-Rogoziński, see Grzechnik 2019.
10. According to the Polish Museum Law of 21 November 1996, a *muzeum rejestrowane* is a museum with a significant, valuable collection, adhering to the highest museum management standards, having a statute or regulations document formally approved by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage and included in the Ministry's National Register of Museums. In 2019, only 128 Polish museums were listed, including the Warsaw and Krakow ethnographic museums (Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego 2019).
11. The Przedbórz museum is not entirely isolated, however, as the director has contracted some work with a professionally trained art historian, and the local municipal tourism office promotes the museum on their website.
12. According to the museum's director, Tadeusz Michalski, local lore holds that they were killed because they collaborated with the hated Communist Party Security Services, the Urząd Bezpieczeństwa (UB). Anthropologist Joanna Tokarska Bakir's 2018 study *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego* [Under a curse: A social portrait of the Kielce pogrom] debunks these myths, which were frequently used as a justification for such murders.
13. Such small-scale "folk rooms" were a common approach to displaying local artifacts in Poland in lieu of a self-standing museum.
14. Michalski described it as a Jewish inn from the eighteenth century, which was reconstructed in 1898, and claims it was frequented by Nobel-Prize-winning Polish author Władysław Reymont, who was born in nearby Kobiele Wielkie. Since 1994, the building has been listed on the National Register of Museums as "an inn from the sixteenth–seventeenth century."
15. The museum is presently financed from the municipal budget, but the director has a relatively free hand in designing the exhibition and associated activities. Apart from minor renovations and repairs done with the help of student volunteers, no major investments have ever been made in the building.
16. Personal communication with the authors while visiting the museum in Przedbórz, 21 July 2014.
17. A *skansen* is an (originally Swedish) open-air museum consisting of collections of historic structures, particularly popular in Central and Eastern Europe. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skansen.
18. These particular figures are the product of Polish-Jewish-themed woodcarving competitions that were run by the museum for several years.
19. For example: "Small windows with a side glance / into the gist of street hassle / (. . .) where every Jew had his own little corner / Just as in the cinnamon-like Berdichev / cherishing the love of small-town simplicity."

20. Referring to the title of this section, the expression "Two Solitudes" originally referred (and still does refer) to a perceived lack of communication, and a lack of will to communicate, between Anglophone and Francophone people in Canada. The term was popularized by Hugh MacLennan's 1945 novel *Two Solitudes*. We use it here as an evocative metaphor rather than as a strict parallel.
21. Since 1999, the museum has been overseen by the regional government.
22. Currently the PME webpage states that the display is closed for renovations.
23. Until recently the only object of this kind in a Polish museum collection, it is on loan from the nearby POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. According to Czyżewski, it did not fit in POLIN's exhibition.
24. We thank Sarah Zarrow for this distinction. Zarrow holds the former stance, while Itzik Gottesman holds the latter stance.
25. A catalogue produced for a traveling version of the show contains the images along with a short essay by Elżbieta Czyżewska.
26. Krajewska's exhibit was titled "Seeking Paradise"/ "Szukam raju." The proceedings of the conference "Jewish Ethnography and Folklore in Poland until 1945" ("Etnografia i folklorystyka żydowska w Polsce do roku 1945) were published in *Etnografia Nowa/The New Ethnography* 7 (2015) and 8 (2016).
27. In 1985, the decision was made to "modernize" the exhibition and remove explicit communist content from it.
28. Temporary exhibitions have treated topics that may be seen as boundary-pushing in the local context, like Islam, refugees, or including a gay couple in an exhibit about weddings. They have also used new approaches like long-term field research with denizens of the city's communist-era garden allotments, or an exhibition with object selection and interpretation based on memories of a range of MEK employees.
29. While there was no systematic Judaica acquisition, the MEK owns ten Judaica items (clothing and flags) and hundreds of photographs and archival documents, including postcards.
30. There is also some evidence that Jews may have been hidden in the building that is now the museum's annex (Ester's House) during the Nazi occupation.
31. Robert Gądek, personal communication with the authors, 12 August 2019. Gądek is Associate Director of the Kraków Jewish Culture Festival. Exhibits initiated and organized by the Festival include Wojciech Wilczyk's *There Is No Such Thing as an Innocent Eye* (2009); *Becoming Acquainted with Jerusalem: Photographs 1857–1900* (2010); Roger Bennett, David Katznelson, and Josh Kun's *Jews on Vinyl* (2011) (the only exhibit to take place in the main building, in the educational activities room); Łukasz Baksik's *Mazevot for Everyday Use* (2012); and Erica Lehrer's *Souvenir, Talisman, Toy: Poland's Jewish Figurines* (2013). In 2018–2019, the MEK formally partnered with Erica Lehrer, Roma Sendyka, Wojciech Wilczyk, and the MEK curator Magdalena Zych on the exhibition *Terribly Close: Polish Vernacular Artists Face the Holocaust*, which was one outcome of these curators' international research project, TRACES, sponsored by the EU Horizon 2020 program (https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en).
32. The International Council of Museums' (ICOM) 2017 theme "Museums and Contested Histories: Saying the Unspeakable in Museums" was taken up by young MEK curators during Kraków's 2017 "Night of Museums" (*Noc Muzeów*) festival in a set of posters and postcards highlighting "difficult issues" in the MEK's galleries. One of the posters came and went, but finally returned and remained near the carolers' masks, and though somewhat buried in a few paragraphs of text, it did contain the museum's first ever mention of anti-Semitism as a relevant interpretive framework for these materials. The MEK also recently experimented with multiethnic integration offsite in *Kto To Wie(ś)—Na Własną Rękę, Na Własną Miarę*, an intervention on the grounds of the Szymbark skansen, two hours from Kraków, where photographs of former ethnically and religiously diverse local inhabitants were to "remind us of the close and interdependent existence upon which the rural sense of community was based—not free from crises and tensions" (Muzeum Dwory Karwacjanów i Gładyszów 2019).
33. The catalogue stated the "idea to create an exhibition that would show the Museum's collection to foreign audiences in a fresh and original way" (Szczurek 2010: 11).
34. It opened in Marseilles in 2011 and in Berlin's Museum Europäischer Kulturen (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) in 2013.

35. Indeed, nor are the keys' suggestion of dispossession, forced migrations, loss of homes, and the Polish appropriation of Jewish and German property alluded to (Dariusz Libionka and colleagues' pioneering 2018 study on dispossession of Jews is titled *The Keys and the Cash Box* [*Klucze i kasa*]).
36. The climax of an anti-(Muslim) immigrant rally in the Polish city of Wrocław in November 2015 involved the burning of an effigy of a Hasidic Jew—virtually the same as the "Judas" mentioned above—holding the flag of the EU while the crowd chanted "God, Honor and Fatherland." And on Good Friday of Easter 2019, inhabitants of Pruchnik revived the "hanging of Judas" tradition, with members of the crowd (which included many children) shouting to deliver the straw Jewish effigy an extra five lashes for "reparations" (referring to contemporary debates over Jewish reparations for expropriated World War II property).
37. Also worth mentioning is the clear, if brief, description of (unflattering) images of and ideas about Jews in a discussion of Polish Christian rituals in a 1995 edition of The Kraków Ethnographic Museum's annual scholarly journal, but the museum's lack of any mention or image relating to such Christian folk depiction of Jews fifteen years later in their more public sesquicentennial anniversary volume *A Hundred and a Half: Stories from the Kraków Ethnographic Museum* (Dolińska and Gruszka 2011).
38. Although since 2009 MEK has had an archivist on staff, Kamila Wasilewska-Prędki, who has a Master's degree in Jewish studies from the Jagiellonian University.
39. "Every Museum Is a Story: A Conversation with the Museum Director, Antoni Bartosz." Open meeting, 26 June 2019. Kraków: The Ethnographic Museum Seweryna Udziela in Kraków.
40. Higher government powers—which are increasingly conservative and nationalist—determine the museum's opportunities and resources, and the MEK has recently struggled with the stalling of a major EU co-funded renovation and refurbishment project (see Kursa 2017).
41. The MEK has not organized any exhibitions on Roma people, who have been present in Kraków since the fifteenth century, despite holding more than 70 photographs, postcards, and engravings documenting Roma everyday life in their collection.
42. "Every Museum Is a Story: A Conversation with the Museum Director, Antoni Bartosz." Open meeting, 26 June 2019. Kraków: The Ethnographic Museum Seweryna Udziela in Kraków. www.festivalt.com/event/every-museum-is-a-story-a-conversation-with-the-museum-director/
43. On such dismissals, replacements, and recurations, see Gessen 2019; Machcewicz 2017; and Polska 2019.

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