

# **When writing turns savage: Contextualizing anti-Semitic graffiti on the streets of Krakow and Budapest**

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## Abstract

In order to interpret the meaning of graffiti as well as their place within urban dynamics and social imaginings of cityscapes, it is of crucial importance to acknowledge the site-specificity and context-sensitivity of graffiti as general social phenomena. Apart from “taking place” in the urban landscape, graffiti also “take position”, which is governed by a particular discourse. Racist graffiti, too, provide “an unrestrained social commentary”. The places of my research enquiry, Krakow and Budapest propose a number of intriguing parallels worthy of attentive investigation. Both cities were forced to undergo fundamental changes in urban planning as well as to renegotiate the symbolic meanings of several urban areas. The increasing rapidity of changes, combined with the emphasis on the restoration of neglected and problematic areas in the framework of new regeneration schemes often leads to hasty decisions and arbitrary interpretations of space in urban arena. Similarly, it also brings about challenges for redefinition of individual and collective memory. Such processes of reidentification generate, in turn, the new forms of contestation. The phenomenon of anti-Semitic graffiti epitomizes one of these forms and its complex nature deserves a proper and comprehensive analysis. This thesis endeavor to contextualize the inscribed anti-Semitism as a global social phenomenon that takes on various forms and accounts for different consequences in different localities. By showing graffiti in its hooligan form, as a way of voicing one's opinion in a heated political debate that spilt over to the streets of contemporary cities or using it as a term of abuse or contempt, it highlights the ambiguity of such racist statements as well as the deeply engrained preconceptions that continue to inform the anti-Semitic discourse nowadays.

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## 1. Introduction

Looking at contemporary cities offers a vast array of fascinating social phenomena that the student of social sciences might like to put their hands on. The graffiti subculture is one of those that quickly grab the attention because, simply put, it seems like a lot of fun. Yes, it is dynamic, it promises an adventurous ride and it is emblematic of independent spirit and rebellious youth. However, the practice of writing graffiti is also fairly problematic to contemplate since it constantly balances on the line between the two opposing conceptual frames that both fundamentally de-essentialize the roles that graffiti fulfill for those who get engaged in the graffiti subculture as well as devalue the very foundations from which the graffiti's existence is stemming from. In addition, graffiti, that is a myriad of feelings and messages in a range of forms that get inscribed onto the urban scenery. In my thesis I decided to cope with the form, which shows that graffiti making does not always reflect the ways in which many continue to idealize it. On the contrary, during my wanderings around the streets of Krakow and Budapest, I encountered graffiti that were rude, explicitly violent and so loaded with hate that it made me feel startled at times. Drawing upon the rising resentment toward the Jewish communities in the Central European region, I sharpened my research focus on both textual and visual expressions of anti-Semitic sentiments in Krakow and Budapest. My inquiry was informed and motivated by the hypothesis that could elucidate the case that such a worldly phenomenon as anti-Semitic graffiti is articulated distinctively in different local contexts.

In the following pages I aspire to present a coherent account of my probe into the sociopolitical circumstances under which anti-Semitic graffiti find their route onto the urban

landscapes of both cities. Before elaborating on my findings, I will first ground my approach to graffiti as a matter of interest for scholarly investigation in the wider overview of the academic literature on graffiti practices. I will also provide a brief outline of research methods that I used during my field work. Then I will consider anti-Semitic inscriptions in three separate clusters that transpired in the process of analysis. I will identify the ambiguity inherent in the anti-Semitic hooligan graffiti, examine how graffiti get utilized to voice the individual as well as the collective opinion in public debate, and interpret the rationale behind the routine referring to Jews and Jewish symbols in an abusive and contemptuous manner. I will not omit a detailed evaluation of various strategies of resistance to anti-Semitic graffiti, including both the top-down influence of local authorities and the acts of resistance coming from the subcultural background. In the final part of the thesis, I will expand on the issues of visibility and indifference and apply Fleming's concept of Europeanization to the political efforts for eradication of graffiti from urban environment.

## **2. What has been done on graffiti or graffiti's imprint on academic literature**

The study of graffiti as the visual representation of urban sentiments has proliferated in the social scientific research, and namely in the field of cultural studies, of the previous decade. The various projects of urban regeneration as well as the practices of privatization of urban spaces has resulted in, or at least greatly contributed towards the resistance of urban dwellers to a forced renegotiation of cityscapes. Graffiti as a paradoxical social phenomenon reflects several dimensions of these urban contentions. Graffiti's essence has proved hard to capture. Nonetheless, it continues to be framed and categorized in binary terms, either as an aesthetic presentation of

self or a criminal activity defacing the urban fabric (Halsey & Young 2006: 275; Rowe & Hutton 2012: 82; Holmes 2010: 872). Moreover, what makes graffiti problematic to rationalize is its fuzzy and imperfect taxonomy as well as the hierarchization of the distinctive forms of graffiti expressions within the graffiti subculture (Rowe & Hutton 2012: 73). Rowe and Hutton emphasize that graffiti represent one amongst many forms of finding a connection to the city and as one of the mediums of alternative communication in the urban landscape, they deserve to be treated as “culturally meaningful activity” (2012: 67, 70).

The work of another social theorist, Brighenti (2010), contemplates the limitations that result from considering graffiti in a dichotomous outlook. She suggests, instead, to conceive graffiti as “an interstitial practice” that is in constant interaction and interference with the boundaries of varying, already established social fields, such as art or vandalism, however, it cannot be easily reduced to any single one of those. This porous character of graffiti as an interstitial practice accounts for its liminal position in public discourse and causes difficulties with identification of its boundaries (2010: 316-317). In addition, Brughenti's contribution sets up a firm link between walls as governmental objects that determine and control the movement in urban arena and graffiti as “tactical interventions on walls”, in order to bring them to the foreground in the struggle for visibility and public attention (2010: 322-323).

In order to interpret the meaning of graffiti as well as their place within urban dynamics and social imaginings of cityscapes, it is of crucial importance to acknowledge site-specificity and context-sensitivity of graffiti as general social phenomena. Chmielewska (2007) in her visual analysis of textual practices suggests to account for inseparability of graffiti from the urban

surface upon which they are inscribed. Seeing them in the first place as “inscriptions”, she seeks to emphasize the importance of both surface and language deployed in these “semiotic aggregates” (2007: 149, 155). Additionally, Chmielewska realizes temporality and spatial context of graffiti texts and deems crucial to understand them *in situ*. With regard to reading both the visual and literary urban intervention in as accurate context as possible, locality comes to serve as a frame of considerable significance. Not only does it help clarify the complexity of contexts and thus possible multilayering of meanings but it also contributes to render a somehow familiar textual pollution exceptional by adding place-specific nuance to it (2007: 150, 151). However, the positionality of graffiti as a medium of communication is not constrained only to its spatial, material dimension. Apart from “taking place” in the urban landscape, graffiti also “take position”, which is governed by a particular discourse (2007: 161). The substance of a communicative act or an expressive indication essentialized in a graffiti sign reveals only with its accommodation in discursive practices (Wolf 1999: 6).

Similarly, Lynn and Lea recognize the interconnectedness of textual, spatial and temporal contexts for understanding the meaning of what they call a piece of “unauthorized writing” (2005: 40). Nevertheless, the core of their academic inquiry adds several important aspects to the above mentioned characteristics of graffiti. The authors regard graffiti as tangible utterances, which, as long as they sustain their presence in the urban landscape, become heteroglot as they live beyond the moment (2005: 43). Inspired by the work of Iedema, Lynn and Lea utilize graffiti to demonstrate the importance of “multimodality” of expression by showing that “language is not at all at the centre of communication” (Iedema in Lynn & Lea 2005: 45). Contrarily, the accentuation of materiality can prove beneficial in understanding the expression of historical and

cultural qualities of social structures (ibid.).

Nonetheless, what makes graffiti an effective means of communication for writers and their audiences is the use of coding; more specifically, the deployment of a local code, which might limit the number of those who can read and interpret the bits and pieces of the “urban speech” in the right context (Lynn & Lea 2005: 53). The question of coding and decoding is particularly quintessential with regard to graffiti as nonverbal representations.

Furthermore, Carrington proposes to treat graffiti as autobiographical writings, which, scattered here and there along the urban landscape, reveal often somewhat hidden but sometimes substantial fragments of one's subjective experience (2009: 410, 420). The construction and elaboration of these textual narratives that Carrington named “do-it-yourself biographies” might be quite frequently deployed within the field of larger strategic action (2009: 420), which aims at creating alternative social worlds in times of field crisis and the search for “the shared sense of order and existential integrity” (Fliegstein and McAdam 2012: 17, 22).

In the light of the general overview of academic literature dealing with graffiti practices, I will now move on to elucidate the concepts applied in the research of specific aspects of graffiti writing. In the following three subsections I will concentrate on graffiti as art, graffiti as an act of vandalism, and racist graffiti.



## 2.1 *Graffiti as art*

The review of graffiti literature shows that the membership in “a graffiti crew” (as opposed to “a graffiti gang”) can bring about positive forms of self-affirmation through performance of a perceivably artistic activity (Rowe & Hutton 2012: 68-69). The recognition of an individual's street art piece within the wider community bolsters the writer's feeling of self-esteem and justifies the lengthy process of training and developing of skills necessitated for the production of an artwork under physically arduous conditions (Halsey & Young 2006: 280, 283). In their analyses of graffiti writing practices in urban space, several authors bring evidence that for those writers that engage in creating refined and complex graffiti paintings, doing graffiti is part of their lifestyle rather than “a childish pastime”, and that their motivation lies in the enjoyment of the graffiti performance and the aesthetic appeal of their work upon completion (Brighenti 2010: 217; Halsey & Young 2006: 279; Rowe & Hutton 2012: 81).

Halsey and Young argue that the writers have a distinct “ocular orientation” in urban space and they understand the city as a field of competing marking practices, each of which manifests differing aesthetic qualities. Street art for them is about bringing life to “lifeless places”, enlightening boring, “negative” gaps in the visual imagery by adding signification and meaning (2006: 286-288). This distinctive gaze at the city allows them to see different layers of the material space, the one that provides “a canvas that they can walk and live on” and in which they recognize an array of creative possibilities (Kótun & Ruszty 2009: 3). Halsey and Young also try to understand graffiti as “an affective process” that precipitates the connection of a writer's body to its surrounding environment and which, through its intensity, enhances the individual's feeling of embeddedness in the world as well as induces “a heightened sense of belonging, with other

people and to other places” (2006: 276-277).

Rowe and Hutton reason that graffiti as street art pose challenge to the established conceptualizations of what form of art can be legitimately represented and appreciated in the public. Furthermore, by using public walls as canvas for projecting their imagination, graffiti writers make their own contribution to the contestation of commercialization processes evident in the contemporary urban setting (2012: 82). Nevertheless, they also attest to the dangers resulting from the appropriation of graffiti's “subcultural elements” by mainstream culture and warn that increasing commercialization of graffiti would be an efficient way of questioning their legitimacy, and could eventually lead to “the death of graffiti” as an alternative form of subcultural expression (2012: 67-68; 83).

## ***2.2 Graffiti as vandalism***

The criminology narrative leans towards the other pole of understanding graffiti and their role in urban environment. Most of the policy makers consider graffiti as an indicator of anti-social behavior and correlate graffiti with other, more violent forms of criminal activity (Halsey & Young 2006: 276). Apart from being seen as a signal crime that leads to a downward spiral of drug use and delinquency, graffiti are also regarded as “enviro crime” that adds up to the city's pollution and deaestheticize its visual landscape (Carrington 2009: 418; Halsey & Young 2006: 289).

Although municipalities frown upon graffiti writers and tend to demonize their work as a destructive act made out of boredom and lack of respect for other people's property, Rowe and

Hutton refer to their findings, which demonstrate that the writers, despite their inclination to conceptualize property in terms of use rather than ownership, do impose limits on the scope of their activity and recognize a series of taboo places unsuitable for graffiti inscriptions (e.g. schools, care homes for the elderly) (2012: 80). In addition to imposing limits on themselves, graffiti writers exhibit a strategic ways of thinking in terms of planning, cooperation and deliberate efforts to improve their skills, thus counter fierce criticism from the advocates of hegemonic discourse that they are immersed in a meaningless, highly irrational practice (Halsey & Young 2006: 287, 294).

Halsey and Young assert that people who are actively involved in the graffiti subculture are exposed to the normative practice of othering. They are seen as different and problematic to authorities because they breach “the orthodox sense of urbanity”, the one that relies on the already delineated categories of order, cleanliness and integrity of public space (2006: 295-296). On that account, the State has a considerable interest to put graffiti related practices under more stringent control since the ways in which they politicize the landscape and make their own ideological and territorial claims present a subversive threat to the government's legitimacy (Holmes 2010: 873; Halsey & Young 2006: 295).

Drawing on their rebellious capacity, graffiti need to be studied also “within the framework of participatory culture” and the expression of individual agency vis-à-vis structural constraints (Carrington 410). Ten Eyck and Fischer argue that graffiti might prove to be of huge significance for the youth living in an urban jungle when it comes to reaching out their voice to the public, making a statement about their own private feelings or fears, or disputing mainstream,

middle-class values that keep them cut off in the position of diminished power (2012: 835). Such being the case, graffiti has potential to become “a marker of both the self and individual existence within larger social structures” (Ten Eyck and Fischer 2012: 839).

### ***2.3 Racist graffiti***

In pursuance of the racist thread in graffiti literature, the account provided by Lynn and Lea revolves around the concept of territoriality, which I find greatly suitable for the topic of my research investigation. They are in fact among few social scientists, who have attempted to deploy the concept of territoriality and territorial demarcation with reference to hate graffiti (2005). Ten Eyck and Fischer, likewise, perceive racist versions of graffiti as the emotive work of marking territory and the tool for oppression (2012: 832). Nevertheless, it is Lynn and Lea who pay more attention to definition of racist graffiti, which they classify as “imbued with hatred and prejudice” (2005: 40). They also recognize deficiency of its argumentative line and its often definitive tone, which implies a resolute threat and the strict division between “us” and “them”, the gang and the unwanted, the natives and a common archenemy (2005: 42, 51).

Furthermore, taking the example of anti-Semitic graffiti into consideration, Lynn and Lea found out that the most efficient way of passing an intimidating message to ethnic groups and foreign communities is to communicate it in an implicit manner, as restraining from the expression of obvious hatred helps the agenda of the perpetrators to go unnoticed by local authorities (2005: 57). Besides, Holmes maintains that graffiti become meaningful in their repetition and the intimidating message inscribed on an urban wall grows in power with its reproduction (2010: 873).

Brighenti, as well, elaborates upon the notion of territoriality and, likewise Holmes, she views reiteration as one of the prerequisites for production and stabilization of territory making. For her, territoriality entails “claiming of space” and is inherently linked to boundary construction (2010: 325). Territories thus exist “at the point of convergence – which is of course also a point of tension – between relationships and spaces” (Brighenti 2010: 324). The anti-Semitic tag is in this respect a territorial marker, which is supposed to play its role in the search for identity as well as space defined by the renegotiated boundaries (Brighenti 2010: 326-327).

Similarly to other types of graffiti expression, racist graffiti, too, provide “an unrestrained social commentary” (Lynn & Lea 2005: 42). Nevertheless, they differ in the lack of aesthetic quality, they miss the refinement and attention to detail, which we can observe in the street art graffiti forms, and they are not associated with, or founded on a particular artistic tradition. In this regard, they seem to aim for a straightforward insult without any “disturbing” artistic value added to it (Chmielewska 2007:149; Lynn & Lea 2005: 42).

### **3. Why Krakow and Budapest?**

The choice of the places of my research inquiry turned up somehow naturally as I had an opportunity to study in Krakow due to the Erasmus exchange program for almost a year, and I ended up studying in Budapest for about the same period of time later on. Both cities, therefore, were not unknown to me prior to start of my field work, and I could draw on the ties I had made in the past to obtain insight into the questions related to my research focus. I could also easily say

that I have developed a solid attachment to both cities and feel identified with several aspects of the urban experience they have got on offer.

Taking into account the difference in the cities' population size<sup>1</sup>, Krakow and Budapest, however, propose a number of intriguing parallels worthy of attentive investigation, more so with reference to the topic of anti-Semitic graffiti. Apart from the fact that both cities had significantly large Jewish populations in the period before the Second World war<sup>2</sup>, Krakow and Budapest have also become the loci of contemporary Jewish revival in the recent years, with Kazimierz and the seventh district of Erzsébetváros respectively, developing into “pulsating cultural centers” and “hip meeting points” for local and international youth together (Saxonberg & Waligorska in Murzyn-Kupisz 2009: 388; Karasz 2013). Nevertheless, what comes as a striking distinction between the two cases is the current size of their Jewish communities, with Krakow's Jewish congregation registering less than 180 members in 2009 (Murzyn-Kupisz 2009: 373). To the contrary, Budapest, though according to older data but still a decade after the beginning of the transformation period, had 85 000 Jewish residents, which comprised 4.5 per cent of the city total population in 1999 (Keresztély 2009: 169). In the light of this obvious disparity in numbers, the case of Krakow stands out and represents a rather unique example when both the intense Jewish revival and anti-Semitism shake hands in one place.

Another point of departure for my research is the fact that both cities were forced to undergo fundamental changes in urban planning as well as renegotiation of symbolic meanings

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1 While Krakow has 758, 334 residents, Budapest's population amounts to 1 740 041.

2 Before the Second World War the Jewish population of Budapest was 184 000 and made up 16% of the total population. The numbers were high in Krakow as well where one fourth of the pre-war population adhered to Judaism. (Keresztély 2009: 169; Szulc 2014)

acquired in various urban areas, though in dissimilar national contexts, that ensued the times of political transformation after the collapse of socialist regimes (Szmygin 2007: 130; Murzyn 2006: 81; Kovács 2006: 39). The increasing rapidity of changes, combined with the emphasis on the restoration of neglected and problematic areas in the framework of new regeneration schemes often led to hasty decisions and arbitrary interpretations of space in urban arena (Murzyn 2007: 153-154). Both cities experienced a major decrease in public housing and the former Jewish quarters like Kazimierz in Krakow and Erszébetváros in Budapest<sup>3</sup> started to lose its residential character at the expense of revitalization projects that realized the potential of these centrally located districts for urban renewal (Kovács 2006: 51; Keresztély 2009: 163). Kazimierz and Erszébetváros had indeed similar fate in history as the houses of the previous Jewish residents, abandoned after the War, provided a big source of tenement housing for the groups of the marginalized poor. After decades of neglect and disdain from municipal authorities, which led to extensive dilapidation of the buildings, the functions of these residential areas has been reconsidered to be more service-oriented and welcome to commercialization. Nowadays, both districts constitute a valuable commercial asset for the cities and make a significant contribution to the overall revenue (Murzyn 2006; Kovács 2006).

The renegotiated identity,<sup>4</sup> and the role that these places started to play after the recognition and increase in the Jewish heritage tourism in the cityscapes of Krakow and Budapest, become closely linked with the challenges to redefinition of individual and collective

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3 I would like to note that I am well aware that VII. district of Erszébetváros is not the only former Jewish quarter in Budapest. Nevertheless, with the landmarks like the Dohanyi Street Synagogue as well as many Jewish-styled cafes and restaurants placed along its narrow street, Erszébetváros is viewed to represent the Jewish core of Budapest.

4 Due to the prolonged neglect of the quarters and the poverty of their residents, both Kazimierz and Erszébetváros did not enjoy good reputation during socialism and early nineties. More notably. Kazimierz used to be avoided by the Krakowians who looked down on it as a scene of danger and crime.

memory. Not only does the delayed redevelopment urge revaluation processes with regard to these urban areas and their heritage but, through the acknowledgment of the Jewish presence, it also calls for the renegotiation of one's own identity within, and their relation to, the city (Murzyn-Kupisz 2009: 388). Of course, such processes of reidentification generate new forms of contestation, and I believe that the phenomenon of anti-Semitic graffiti epitomizes one of these forms.

#### **4. Methodology**

The field work for my research project, which provided me with the qualitative data I draw on in this thesis, took place in April and the beginning of May in Krakow, Poland and Budapest, Hungary. The great share of the academic literature required for the elaboration of theoretical background had been perused beforehand. Nevertheless, the shortage of the literature on Krakow compelled me to visit the library of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, which supplemented my list of academic sources. I also called on the museums and galleries of contemporary art to gather more information on street art and conceivably establish rapport with graffiti artists. However, such stopovers did not bring much success to my work, although I managed to receive some contacts or recommendations on where to find local graffiti writers. I spent a considerable amount of time “graffiti-hunting”, moving around different areas of both Krakow and Budapest, to take photos of textual and visual inscriptions that could be relevant to my analysis. In addition to my own collection, I was given photo documentation compiled by two of my informants in Budapest. The Internet is obviously, too, an abundant resource of graffiti photos but I decided to use only the photos, which were attached to the newspapers articles that I



refer to in the empirical part of the thesis. The photos you find in appendix present a combination of all three sources of my visual material.

In order to add ethnographic quality to my research, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews (five in Krakow and five in Budapest), although I engaged in several shorter informal conversations in the course of my field work in both cities. The majority of interviews were recorded but in a few cases the circumstances required me to use my notebook and rewrite the content in detail after their completion. The profiles of the interviewees assembled a rather diverse sample, consisting of people who were born and raised in Krakow and Budapest or moved to these cities in their teenage years to pursue their studies. All of the persons interviewed were holders of Polish or Hungarian citizenship, except for one expat in the Krakow sample that was Finnish. In terms of occupation, six were students at varying levels of university education, while the four others had full-time jobs, mostly of a professional character. Four were acquainted with graffiti subculture or participated actively in graffiti making at a certain point in their lives. The age of the interviewees fell into the range from twenty-one to fifty-six years, with the mean of thirty and the median age of twenty-seven years. Three of my informants were females.

Regarding the limitations of my research, I have to admit that I found it hard to position myself within the field at times. As a complete novice in the graffiti subculture, it was rather difficult to gain trust of the graffiti writers and develop our encounters into prolonged conversations. Understandably, the people who do graffiti almost always balance on the verge of illegality, and for that reason tend to be suspicious of the unverified newcomers. I also detected that many of my interviewees felt quite uncomfortable to speak about the issue of anti-Semitism

and football hooliganism, most notably in Krakow. In the majority of cases, they tried to consciously distance themselves from the expressions of racist and anti-Semitic sentiments by stating that “they do not know much details about it”. Despite such attitudes, the conversations we had, showed very fruitful for that matter and their accounts supplied a large contribution to my empirical analysis. The last thing I would like to account for and that could have limited my field work in Budapest, was the fact that I neither read nor speak Hungarian. The language barrier proved the most problematic in the process of “graffiti-hunting” as it could have happened that I had passed by many implicitly anti-Semitic inscriptions, which I could not decipher. Nonetheless, all Hungarian interviewees spoke fluent English and the network of my Hungarian friends helped with the translation of all the relevant materials.

## **5. Anti-Semitic graffiti in Krakow and Budapest**

Anti-Semitic graffiti represent only one of the several forms of urban inscriptions that can be found in both Krakow and Budapest. However, drawing on my own observations in the field, anti-Semitic “throw-ups” are much easier to find in Krakow than in Budapest; the fact, which could be attributed to an ongoing war between the Krakow's football hooligan gangs. Furthermore, despite Krakow's image of cultural and intellectual center of Poland, the city's graffiti scene lacks the diversity or urban interventions that can be seen in Budapest, thus making it seemingly much more anti-Semitic for a lay visitor. For all my informants, anti-Semitic sentiments were manifested in the style of scribbles or tags, which were deficient in any form of artistic quality, and were often perceived as “primitive outbursts” tied with the activity of lower-educated strata of society. The written form of anti-Semitism projected on the urban landscape in

both cities was also regarded in purely negative terms by graffiti artists, who conceived of such acts as abusive of their efforts and hacking the “real” street art.

The distribution of anti-Semitic graffiti over the different parts of the city was not proportionate, coming across this type of graffiti more often as moving out of the inner-city districts towards the residential areas on the outskirts of the historical centers. In spite of both apparent and expected spatial differentiation, the phenomenon of anti-Semitic graffiti was not completely limited to urban suburbs, with a surprisingly high rate of such graffiti and politically charged messages found in the former Jewish districts of both Krakow and Budapest. As a matter of fact, a variety of urban surfaces were used and overscribbling was rather common in both instances.

I believe that the complex nature of anti-Semitic inscriptions deserves a proper and comprehensive analysis, which will be developed in the following subsections that elaborate upon the three distinct types of anti-Semitic graffiti found in the places of my research inquiry.

### ***5.1 Hooligan graffiti***

Hooligan graffiti make up one of the aspects I could not omit in the evaluation of inscribed anti-Semitism. The scope of the fight between the hooligan gangs in Krakow, and the ways in which it is invested in the urban landscape, creates a considerable imbalance when compared to such activity in Budapest. That is not to say that Budapest has been spared of the various expressions of football hooliganism, which is present also in its graffiti form in the places

nearby the football stadiums (see appendix 1). Nevertheless, the extent to which is Krakow's cityscape smothered with graffiti representing the hardcore hooligan bases of the greatest football teams in the city, Wisla<sup>5</sup> and Cracovia<sup>6</sup>, is incomparable to Budapest, which lacks the intensity of historical polarization between the Polish and the formerly Jewish team. Apart from the brutality of clashes between the ultra wings of both teams prior and after their local derbies<sup>7</sup>, the violence, which they resort to in order to fight "the Holy war"<sup>8</sup> spills over to the material landscape of the city in its written and symbolic form (Bleacher Report 2008).

Although it is not possible to state that particular neighborhoods are exclusively pro-Wisla or pro-Cracovia, and as one of my informants said, "it can change if you go from one block of flats to another", the power relations between Wisla Sharks and Cracovia's Jude Gang were clearly visible for me as an observer in the amount of team related graffiti in different districts of the city. Therefore, while in Bronowice, Azory and Nowa Huta, the Wisla's Anty Jude graffiti, in most cases accompanied with the Star of David crossed over, would prevail (see appendices 2 & 3), Kazimierz and the large part of Podgórze<sup>9</sup> (which, in my opinion, denotes the most contested area in terms of territoriality) would demonstrate the predominance of anti-Wisla graffiti as well as Jude Gang writings and scrawls (see appendices 4 & 5). The hooligan graffiti play a major role in the strategy of territorial demarcations of power for both Wisla and Cracovia fans and such

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5 Wisla Krakow is one of the oldest and most successful Polish football clubs. It was founded in 1906.

6 KS Cracovia is the oldest Polish football club still in existence. It was founded in 1906 and it is seen as "the Jewish" team of the city.

7 Wisla's and Cracovia's ultras are the only football hooligans in Poland that did not sign the so-called "Poznan Agreement", which binds all the other football gangs nationwide not to use weapons during fights. The fights between the two gangs are infamous for their brutality and often include lethal weapons like machetes.

8 The term that was allegedly used first to describe the rivalry between the two Jewish teams, Makkabi Krakow and Jutrzenka Krakow. After one of the Jutrzenka players joined Cracovia, the term started to be used to portray the derby between Wisla and Cracovia.

9 Podgórze is an old residential district, situated on the southern bank of the Vistula River. It served as a site for the Jewish ghetto during World War II, when Krakow belonged under administration of the General Government territory constituted and controlled by the Nazis.

delineation of boundaries does not go unnoticed by either of the teams. As suggested by one of my interviewees, Gosia, the potency that these graffiti messages represent in the narrative of territorialization for both gangs often leads to intensive overscribbling and further deaestheticization of Krakow's visual landscape (see appendix 6).

“They might do it because they want to show the power. For example, when somebody writes something connected to Wisla, the next day somebody from Cracovia comes and they just erase it or write Cracovia on it. So I think it's just showing the power.”  
(Gosia)

The violence inherent in the communication between the hooligans raised also a series of issues connected to the feeling of personal safety. For instance, several of my informants, all of them expats or people who were born outside of Krakow and moved to the city for studies or work, stated that they would think twice before renting a flat in the vicinity of Wisla and Cracovia stadiums<sup>10</sup> due to a greater potentiality of getting enmeshed in the hooligan conflict or being assaulted in the course of the violent spree initiated by one of the gangs in the period coming into the match between the traditional rivals or immediately afterwards. Moreover, the amount of hooligan graffiti provides a risk indicator of some sort, informs the residents about how to navigate the city in a safe manner, positions particular areas of the city on the spectrum of potential dangerousness and puts them in an unfavorable position on the scale of livability and attractiveness for residential dwelling.

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10 The stadiums of the two teams are only 500 meters from each other, divided by the Jordan Park.

“When I lived in Azory, the graffiti I saw there was one of the reasons why I never wanted to live there. It is very scary. Like in a place when it’s dark and there is no one to be seen except for this group of some bald guys drinking beer on the corner. Yeah, fine, it’s scary in itself but it’s even scarier if you know that these people are Wisla hooligans and they are really anti-Semitic probably and they are painting these Anty Jude graffiti.” (Noora)

“Basically when you see a lot of graffiti you can infer that if they were able to write it, it means it’s not so heavily protected. It would be much more difficult to put graffiti in the Old Town cause there’s much more police and cameras and stuff. So I think there is a correlation between how much graffiti you see and how dangerous a certain place can be potentially.” (Jarek)

However, what came as striking to me during the course of my interviews was the lack of attention with which the anti-Semitic graffiti written by Wisla supporters were read and interpreted by many Krakowians. It is true that the word “Jew” has been hijacked by both Wisla and Cracovia fans in the process of identification with either of the teams. The fact that the hooligan graffiti in Krakow are imbued with anti-Semitism and appropriate the symbols of Judaism often in opposing and contradictory terms, is embedded in the historical frame, which went on to live beyond valid ideological justifications. Although there has not been a Jewish player on Cracovia team for decades, the Jewishness of the team, which was set in the past, continues to be exploited in several ways by people standing on the both sides of the rivalry conflict<sup>11</sup>. By adding this football dimension to the rich and multifaceted narrative of anti-

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11 Whereas Cracovia fans call themselves “Żydi” (Jews) and the group of their ultras is referred to as “Jude Gang”,

Semitism in Poland, the inscriptions such as “Anty Jude” or “AJ”, which would be normally read as anti-Semitic, become ambiguous and fairly confusing, as it becomes unclear and contingent on individual interpretation whether it is addressed only to Cracovia supporters or it, by all means, targets the local Jewish community. The excerpts from my interviews demonstrate the confusion, and in many cases inability, to tell the two apart, which might explain the low levels of alertness and concern among the Krakowians.

“I think it’s hard to split these two things, the hooligan graffiti and anti-Semitic graffiti in general, since it’s so deeply rooted in the football community.” (Szymon)

“When I see a hooligan tag with a crossed-out Star of David next to it, I know that they have this connection in their mind that it’s not about the Jews, it’s about the team. But when I see only the Star of David and something anti-Semitic, then I don’t know; is it about the team or not? You never know.” (Gosia)

In comparison, Budapest, despite the existence of some football ultras<sup>12</sup> who operate within the hooligan subculture, does not show the characteristics of the emotional charge harbored in the football rivalry that would be similar to that in Krakow, which is based on the constant reproduction of the Polish-Jewish dichotomy. Nonetheless, MTK Budapest is also framed as a historically Jewish team, and one of my interviewees, Zoltán, expressed certainty that if Fradi played MTK, the Fradi ultras would not miss a chance to chant insulting anti-Jewish

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Wisla hooligans use abbreviations of anti-Semitic terms, such as “Jebać Żydów Skurwysynów” (Fuck the Jews, sons of bitches) or “Anty Jude”.

12 The hardcore supporters of Ferencváros or Fradi, as it has been nicknamed, are considered to be among the most active ones in Budapest.

remarks at their opponents. One of the reasons why such antagonism did not develop to the scale of the Wisla-Cracovia one might be that the previous tensions have been substituted and fully diverted into Ferencváros's rivalry with Újpest FC.

## ***5.2 Anti-Semitic graffiti as a political statement***

Moving away from the hooligan subculture, I will now provide a closer look at the anti-Semitic graffiti as a form of political expression. To understand graffiti in its various forms, whether it be racist or non-racist, one has to acknowledge graffiti's quality to act as a reference point to contemporary political climate. A particular discursive dimension, which presents a frame for understanding and interpretation of individual graffiti aggregates, derives its meaning from wider sociopolitical circumstances (Chmielewska 2007: 146, 151). The political discourse of anti-Semitism, fueled by the recollection of past experiences and invoking of the nationalist agenda, is still apparent in both countries, although to a different degree and kind, and continues to be reflected in the high level of tolerance by both Polish and Hungarian population to anti-Semitic communication (Gebert & Maryniak 2009: 92; Molnár 2010).

Another problem that deepens the roots of finding false justifications for failures and misfortunes on both individual as well as more abstract national level, is the unwillingness to penalize any form of anti-Semitic behavior in both societies. Gebert argues, that under such conditions, anti-Semitism has become “a convenient venue for the expression of frustration” (In Gebert & Maryniak 2009: 90). In addition, there are trends that show the link between the rising rates of anti-Semitic sentiments all over the continent and recent financial crisis, which paralyzed



the growth of the European economies (Foxman 2008; Clavane: 2014; Waterfield 2013). Similarly, Peter, a young student, who is active in the Hungarian branch of Hanoar Hatzioni<sup>13</sup>, perceived the unsanctioned anti-Semitic discourse and the reluctance of the authorities to apply measures that would lead to its reduction.

“Also, celebrities or other public figures like politicians, people in the media, they can openly say anti-Semitic stuff and nobody cares. I mean, people from the government or the courts. And if they do something, they will not call us Jews but they will call us people with big noses. And you know who we are talking about...” (Peter)

In recent years, there have been several cases when the Jewish memorials were violated in Budapest and the tombstones in Jewish cemeteries destroyed in the smaller towns surrounding the Budapest metropolitan area (The Coordination Forum for Countering Antisemitism 2012) (see appendices 7 & 8). In a likewise manner, one can find overtly anti-Semitic messages, which do not fall under the category of hooligan graffiti, in Krakow as well (see appendix 9). Evaluating the violent language used in the examples above, it complies with the anti-Semitic and nationalist rhetoric used by both Hungarian and Polish far-right. The larger narratives of scapegoating, the Holocaust denial, economic and political anti-Semitism, being voiced by the political actors in Hungary and Poland contribute to accommodate such graffiti inscriptions and understand timing of their (re)appearance on the visual landscape of Krakow and Budapest. As for Hungary, the symbols deployed in racist graffiti do not consist only of the traditional neo-Nazi swastika or different variations of the Celtic cross but take inspiration from the country's past and come to

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13 The Zionist Youth, an international youth movement that regards Judaism as the pillar of national, social and moral values that contribute to the preservation of integrity and continuity of the Jewish people.

resemble the visual of the Hungarian Nazi insignia from the thirties and forties of the previous century (e.g. the Arrow Cross, *Nyilaskereszt*, in appendix 8). Besides, writing in the old Hungarian script<sup>14</sup> has also become closely associated with the nationalist subculture and the proponents of xenophobic attitudes (see appendix 10).

In order to contextualize these anti-Jewish textual inscriptions and visual representations with relation to the reappearance of notions that stereotype Jews and their economic behavior (see appendix 11), as well as attempt to legitimize conspiracy theories about the Jews holding the abundance of power and running the world, it is crucial to realize that such forms of anti-Semitic thinking only reemerged in the immediate years after the collapse of Communism. Having been artificially fed and amplified by the nationalist demagogues, nowadays we witness the long held fear and distrust of Jews coming back to the surface, and “taking position” in the public discourse in a gradually increasing institutionalized manner (Anti-Defamation League 2007; Molnár 2010). With a feeling of uncertainty brought about by the economic crisis, the old fear of the Jews coming back for what's “theirs” has materialized, mainly in the minds of those that reside in the former Jewish properties<sup>15</sup> (Szulc 2014). Similar issue was brought up by one of my interviewees in Krakow.

“There are some Jewish people, who come from time to time and try to reclaim the buildings. That might be, in fact, one of the reasons for anti-Semitism nowadays. For example, there were some Jews owning a house in Kazimierz before WWII and now,

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14 The old Hungarian alphabet used by the Hungarians in the Middle Ages. In the modern Hungarian, it is also known as *székely írás* (Szekler's script).

15 After World War II the abandoned Jewish houses provided the substantial source of public housing and were given predominantly to the poor.

sometimes, their great grandchildren are coming and saying: 'Well, my great grandmother lived here' and sometimes they have it back. Of course, it's very difficult to get it back but sometimes it happens. It happened to my cousin, who lived in Kazimierz. They paid him, of course, to move to another district. But his attitude was like 'OK, they're coming now and taking their things back. Yeah, they're paying me to move out but still. They're taking things back, they're taking over Krakow.'" (Pawel)

Additionally, what makes the efforts to decipher the real motivations behind the anti-Semitic depictions ever more onerous is a very thin line between the anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic rhetoric, or complete confusion of the two. The fact that the two categories are commonly used in a rather liberal, interchangeable fashion renders certain political statements more ambivalent, while at the same time, offers a viable cover-up for the actual anti-Semites. In fact, one of my Hungarian interviewees, Zsafia, considered that it was necessary to bring attention to the mess around usage and interpretation of the anti-Semitic language at the very beginning of our conversation.

"Most of the non-Jewish people or people who are not really involved and don't really know anything about the Jewish community, cannot differentiate between Israel and Judaism. So basically, for them, everyone who's a Jew is an Israeli and vice versa." (Zsafia)

The controversy around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict provides a series of possibilities for the far-right nationalist forces to distort the real image of the Hungarian Jewry and bolster the

effect of their anti-Semitic account. Moreover, the anti-Zionist rhetoric has been extended and features as a foundation for “the Palestinization motif”, which recounts the similar lot of Hungarians and Palestinians under the oppression of “invading pan-Judaism” (Molnár 2010) (see appendix 12). Peter pointed out what nonsensical constructions can derive from such way of reasoning.

“In Kuruc.info<sup>16</sup>, there was one article, but it was some years ago, that the place where we organize the international camp in the summer is right in the middle of the historical Hungary. So they told that the Israelis do this camps for kids to train them to become soldiers in the middle of the historical Hungary, to catch somehow the energy of the historical Hungary. I know but seriously. We are laughing at it but some people take it dead serious.” (Peter)

### 5.3 “Jew” as a term of abuse

The stereotypes about the Jews resume to be stored in “the backstage” of the everyday discourse, ready to be seized upon and performed in an array of ways that fit the argumentative line of individual actors. The discursive baggage around the term “Jew” that has been accumulated in the historical experience of the Central Europe did not cease to show on the cityscapes of both Krakow and Budapest and contributed largely to my collection of anti-Semitic visual interventions. The misappropriation of the Jewish symbols by majority populations has turned such representations into marking indices that are meant to enliven the memories of

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<sup>16</sup> The website that serves as an unofficial news portal of the Jobbik party. The domain is hosted on the US servers so it is not liable to the Hungarian authorities.

stigmatization and inscribe shame on the places affiliated with the Jewish identity (see appendix 13). According to Maryniak, thoroughly essentialized, the word “Jew” continues to serve as “a term of abuse” in Polish society and includes a range of morally reprehensible, negative behavioral traits (Gebert & Maryniak 2009: 90). Starting from the usual “you act like a Jew!” which implies stinginess in financial terms, my informants reflected upon other forms of referring to Jews in the colloquial language.

“Also in Hungarian, it's a bad word for somebody, when you say something like 'You Jew!' There is also an expression that says: 'Zsidó van a pakliban', which means that there is a Jew in a deck of cards, that one card is upside down in a deck, so something is not kosher with it. It's a nice example of how such stereotypes come into the language. [...] But 'Stinky Jew' is the most obvious expression or the most commonly used to insult Jewish people.”  
(Zoltán)

Following the similar manner, many Poles have not abandoned the worries and suspicion in their relations to Jews, and the familiarity of the phrase “good man, despite being a Jew” has not depreciated much in its validity, especially not for an older generation of the Polish society (Szulc 2014).

As I have outlined above, relieving one's emotional tensions framed in the normatively anti-Semitic sense is still highly tolerated in both Poland and Hungary. The conscious comparison of such outbursts with the militant anti-Semitic discourse asserted by the nationalist radicals allows for the prolonged existence of the latent forms of anti-Semitic sentiments. These often

resurface and come to the fore in the events related to political competition, when they tend to be distorted in order to smear the reputation or bluntly delegitimize one's political opponent. In the framework of political contest, the word “Jew” translates into “a term of contempt” and aims at disqualification of a former or contemporary public figure from acceptable political conduct (Cummins 2012a). Such verbal or textual attacks are often targeted at the politicians representing the Left side of the political spectrum, who are, due to an enduring bipolar understanding of politics in the Central European countries, more easily accommodated in the conspiracy theories akin to Judeo-Bolshevism<sup>17</sup> (Molnár 2010). In Hungary, the former Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsany, has been an object of such accusations (see appendix 14), although it's common to label any other politician or a public personality “a Jew” to dismiss them or account for their perceived failures.

Looking at the Polish case, using a word “Jew” with regard to political representatives has not been an exception either. When I asked my Polish informants about the politician, whose name, accompanied by the scribble “Jude” and the Star of David, I found by chance on the toilet door in the main library of the Jagiellonian University (see appendix 15), they could not come with a reasonable explanation for such an act than simply linking two unfavored categories – an unpopular politician and the Jews.

“Referring to somebody as Lepper<sup>18</sup> was basically intended to

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17 A belief and an anti-Semitic stereotype that Communism is a Jewish conspiracy that serves Jewish interests. It has been used as a label to equate Jews with communists.

18 Andrzej Lepper was a leader of Samoobrona RP (Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland) political party, who also served as the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the two short periods between 2006 and 2007. He faced charges over corruption and sexual harassment and was also condemned by the Anti-Defamation League for accepting the honorary diploma from the Interregional Academy

offend this person. If I was called 'Lepper', I would consider it an offense. And if somebody said 'Lepper Jude', it would be like a double insult.” (Jarek)

Before I move to the evaluation of approaches adopted by the local authorities to fight with the profusion of anti-Semitic graffiti, I find it rather fitting to mention that the two local councilors in Krakow's municipality<sup>19</sup> were also stamped Jewish as a result of their initiatives to cleanse their districts of anti-Semitic “pseudograffiti” (Maciejowski 2012; Szulc 2014).

## **6. Resistance to anti-Semitic graffiti**

The efforts to eradicate anti-Semitic graffiti constitute a part of larger local projects that are supposed to tackle and control the phenomenon of graffiti overload. It is estimated that globally, around \$6.8 billion is spent each year for graffiti removal (Halsey & Young 2006: 292). The tendencies to come up and adhere to more strategic measures in the struggle with unauthorized visual pollution have been slowly reaching the desks of municipalities and local decision-makers in Central European cities too. In this chapter, I will concentrate on two levels of resistance to anti-Semitic graffiti. After I outline the approaches adopted by local councils as well as the input of local initiatives, I will examine the forms of resistance coming from within the graffiti subculture.

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of Personnel Management in Kiev, which is considered an anti-Semitic institution.

19 When the two local councilors Dominik Galas and Lukasz Wantuch started to paint out the anti-Semitic graffiti in their districts in order to point out to the scope of the problem, they received insulting mail, in which they were told, amongst other things, to “fuck off to Israel” and to stop “licking Jewish asses” (Szulc 2014).

## 6.1 Municipal policies and local initiatives

In 2010, a local initiative *Interkulturalni PL* stirred up the stagnating, and in its focus limited, strategy of Krakow's authorities to combat the abundance of racist and hooligan graffiti. Along the line with their mission statement promoting support for the development of “open and multicultural society in Poland”, the group of young lawyers, psychologists and cultural theory graduates determined to bring light to the long neglected problem of defacement of the city's visual landscape by anti-Semitic writings (Interkulturalni PL's website<sup>20</sup>). The abundance of hooligan tags and exclusionary scribbles constitutes indeed an overwhelming problem for the municipality, despite the fact that it claims to spend €35 000 annually on removing racist and anti-Semitic graffiti (Cummins 2012a). Moreover, for an attentive visitor that walks out of the commercialized and tourist friendly historical center, the seemingly unrestrained coverage of the built-in environment with graffiti inscriptions can result in a dissonant impression of the city, since it fails to correspond with the Krakow's image of intellectual and cultural heart of Poland. Iga Machalewska, an anti-racist activist and one of the founders of *Interkultralni PL*, says that there has been a growing need to fight against this “passive acceptance” of the phenomenon by the city's residents (In Cummins 2012a). The group believes that “the local community does not react properly to this problem. It does not actively oppose the incidents that happen, that's why they are so visible” (Bulandra in TheNews.pl 2012). In the previous chapter, I referred to the lack of clarity encountered by some of my interviewees while trying to distinguish between the hooligan and the explicitly anti-Semitic graffiti. Machalewska explains the acceptance of this ambiguity in the frame of missing information: “Most people seeing the graffiti, will just see two football teams, they don't even think of it as anti-Semitic.[...] What we are struggling against here

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20 <http://www.interkulturalni.pl/-34.html>



is indifference and lack of awareness” (In Cummins 2012b). On their website, they offer an online form, which they encourage to fill in in case someone experienced mistreatment on the basis of their race, ethnicity or religious affiliation. The residents can also upload the photos of offensive inscriptions, which they came across in the city and which get published in the special subsection of the website named “the Shame Alley” (Interkulturalni PL n.d.).

With municipality joining the initiative, Krakow became the first city in Poland to launch an official campaign to combat racist graffiti, which is being implemented as a component of a larger, multidimensional scheme called “Against racism and xenophobia: development of a city prevention and response strategy” (Casey 2011; Interkulturalni PL n.d.). The cooperation with Krakow's police is claimed to bring about a considerable contribution as well, most notably in monitoring the activity of graffiti writers, designing the map of graffiti hotspots and profiling particular areas of the city to increase the likelihood of success in future interventions. In addition, the police website provides the interactive map of Krakow's graffiti, pinpointing their exact location and updating information on their removal status<sup>21</sup> (Casey 2011; Maciejowski 2012) (see appendix 16). Since seventy-five per cent of graffiti end up on the walls of private buildings, another goal of this joint action is to entice people to be active in catching the taggers red-handed to bolster up their chances for reimbursement of the pricy removal costs (Maciejowski 2012).

It is interesting though, that the city's authorities joined the initiative in the period of extensive coverage of the racist hooligan subculture in foreign media prior to a kick-off of the

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21 <http://www.strazmiejska.krakow.pl/smmk/pl/czysty-krakow.html>

EURO 2012 football championship. Many of the reports that were highly critical of the degree of racist sentiments in Poland caused controversy<sup>22</sup> but, on the other hand, spurred a public debate over the issue of racism and anti-Semitism on both local and national level (Cummins 2012a; 2012b).

In Budapest, the local authorities steered the wheel towards more radical measures. The anti-graffiti legislation passed in 2011 defines graffiti as a criminal offense that breaches the right of the public for healthy and aesthetic environment (§ 324 Hungarian Penal Code). Additionally, the municipality has initiated a crackdown on graffiti pollution in the city, setting up a special division within the Police Department to deal with the issue (Tenczer 2010). During one of my interviews, Sándor, a professor at one of the Budapest universities, suddenly lost his calm composure when I turned the focus of our conversation to the anti-graffiti regulation. He maintained that it was “a fascist law” that does not differentiate between the street art and mere “lettering”, regards both as dangerous to society, and in that sense, echoes the Nazi concept of *entartete Kunst*<sup>23</sup> or degenerate art. In his opinion, by adopting the legislation “street art became subsumed into territoriality of the law where it does not belong”.

In terms of local initiatives, *Szeretem Budapestet* (“I Love Budapest”), a non-profit organization, which has been around since 2004, is engaged in several activities that aim at beautifying the urban environment and their group of volunteers get regularly involved in

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22 The most controversial was the BBC documentary “Euro 2012: Stadiums of hate”, which included the footage of fans chanting anti-Semitic slogans and displaying white power symbols in Polish stadiums. It became widely known because of the appearance of Sol Campbell, a former England defender, who, after seeing the footage, warned about going to the Championship unless one wanted to risk “coming home in a coffin” (Cummins 2012a).

23 A term adopted by the Nazi regime in Germany to characterize practically all modern art. Such artistic expression was deemed unsuitable as it was affiliated with the Judeo-Bolshevists and, therefore, banned.

removing graffiti from public buildings (Nitsche 2009). Nevertheless, the organization operates along the lines of the discourse, which considers graffiti “a pre-eminent signal crime” (Rowe & Hutton 2012: 67) and supports the apprehension of perpetrators, as illustrated in of the articles on their official website<sup>24</sup>.

“If a window is broken and nobody repairs it, passers-by will think that no one cares for the house. More and more windows are broken and the concept of anarchy sneaks into the streets: signaling that nothing is prohibited. Reasonably small problems in a city – graffiti, public disorder, turmoil, aggressive begging – can be linked with the broken window, these are all beacons for more serious crimes. [...] This type of crime can be mitigated by keeping places clean of graffiti, derelict properties renovated and arresting offenders” (Translation found in Kótun & Ruszty 2009).

## ***6.2 Anti anti-Semitic graffiti***

The walls of both Krakow and Budapest manifest also more implicit forms of resistance to anti-Semitic graffiti in particular, and the racist ideologies of intolerance in general. The urbanites can witness “a dialogical process” of views and counterviews projected on the visual landscape of urban environment (Lynn & Lea 2005: 44). Different lines of argumentation are presented and in the ambivalent act of expression, imposition and persuasion, “speech becomes writing” and certain worldviews get materialized and tangible in a variety of scripts and images (Lefebvre in Carrington 2009: 409). The graffiti writers as well as some other informants that were in touch

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<sup>24</sup> <http://szeretembudapestet.hu/>

with graffiti subculture, and that I had an opportunity to speak with, distanced themselves from these forms of anti-Semitic depictions. As Roland told me: “For writers, racist graffiti is like a poster. They don't care.” Nevertheless, such a statement does not necessarily correspond with the visual outcome observed on the city walls.

Reflecting on their life personal beliefs, many writers get engaged in a more or less active resistance to Nazi iconography. Apart from the classic forms that include crossing out or overwriting the Nazi symbols, one of the common ways of denazifying urban space is to reshape the visual of these signs (see appendix 17). Of course, one has to differentiate between those who call themselves graffiti writers and mess with Nazi emblems on occasion and the members of Antifa resistance movement, who are much more involved in the street war of symbols with their neo-Nazi adversaries. The work of Antifa followers is often characterized by massive stenciling (see appendix 18) and aims at demarcation of the territory *vis-à-vis* the space colonized by the neo-Nazi insignia. The drawings of the hangman's scaffolds with the Celtic cross appeared to be a recurrent theme in Krakow's streets (see appendix 19). Equally, the use of a binman pictogram portraying the disposal of swastikas and other symbolic references to neo-Nazi subculture belong to the repertoire of Antifa members (see appendix 20).

Among all these types of resistance to anti-Semitic projections inscribed on the faces of urban panorama in both Krakow and Budapest, stickers, in Roland's opinion, serve as a very efficient medium in the communication strategies employed by graffiti gangs. Although they can be removed more easily than paintings and scribbles, they are becoming more and more popular as a verbalization technique of the groups' interests. The stickers are not only a cheaper

alternative to spray paint but they also require almost no time and effort to be applied on the outward appearance of the city. Stencils are alike getting trendier in distinctive urban settings and enable to transmit a visually more complex and fine-tuned messages in a short time (see appendix 21).

Contrary to the utilization of the Jewish representations in a negative, stigmatizing manner, some writers reappropriate the symbols like the Star of David in a novel way. Capitalizing on the emotive charge accumulated in the Jewish imagery, the authors of such graffiti attempt to do away with the stigmatizing connotations ascribed to Jewish motifs and frame them, in an opposing tone, as ones of the leading emblems of anti anti-Semitic discourse (see appendix 22). Nevertheless, they maintain a dismissive, possibly violent attitude and in a sense stand for an antagonistic response to symbolic violence demonstrated and disseminated by the supporters of the neo-Nazi discourse.

In recent years there have been occurrences of urban inscriptions, which managed to defuse the load of hatred intrinsic to anti-Semitic messages (see appendix 23). The aim of such interventions is often to subvert the internal links of anti-Semitic communication or completely divert the meaning of such communicative acts by moving from the one extreme of the love-and-hate continuum towards its more inclusive end. Besides altering the meaning of originally anti-Semitic mural voice, one of my informants, Noora, who also worked as an intern in the Galicia Jewish Museum<sup>25</sup>, directed my attention to some pieces that appeared mostly in Kazimierz and which could be interpreted as implicitly pro-Jewish (see appendix 24).

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25 <http://www.en.galiciajewishmuseum.org/>

## 7. Discussion

The comparison of graffiti scenes, and most notably, the scope of urban coverage with anti-Semitic inscriptions, in Krakow and Budapest, along with the field work in both cities, have proved to bring about several differences and parallels worth a more detailed inquiry. Budapest seems to have a stronger and more diverse graffiti scene than Krakow and has been established as “a place to be” for many Western writers within the subculture. On the other hand, the scale of hooligan tags related to Wisla-Cracovia rivalry is truly enormous and sometimes it leaves an impression of overwhelming the tidy, commercialized image that the city is trying to sell to its visitors. None of my Polish interviewees would connect Krakow with graffiti art in their minds, although many of them expressed an opinion that it occupies a meaningful place in urban environment.

Nevertheless, what I found exceptionally significant was the degree of indifference to hooligan graffiti adopted by the Krakowians, who appeared to have acquired certain “practices of looking” (or better said not looking?) that help them cope with the repetitive and highly patterned visual overstimulation (Holmes 2010: 874). Thus, this indifferent attitude can be understood as “a mode of seeing which thinks it knows in advance what is worth looking at and what is not” (Hall in Holmes 2010: 874). The lack of attention to the phenomenon as well as the propensity to get accustomed to its presence in the urban field could be easily identifiable in the accounts of my informants.

“For me, I don't pay attention to this. But there is some. At least there used to be. For example, in Kazimierz there used to be quite a

lot of graffiti but with time it started to disappear, though there still is something. Right now I just don't pay much attention but I also don't see much of it.” (Jarek)

“When I see graffiti in Krakow...I'm *so* used to it. Now, I don't pay that much attention to it but I know there is a problem with it.”  
(Gosia)

In comparison, the people that I had a chance to encounter in Budapest, which has a considerably bigger Jewish population than Krakow, framed the matter of showing disregard to anti-Semitic violations in a more political manner and several of them blamed the government for taking an ignorant stand to the issue.

In fact, the differences in perception of the political situation in both countries was rather easy to spot after conducting a first couple of interviews. While my young Polish informants did not feel the need to comment on the politics and even admitted to be fairly content with the country's political representation at the moment, their Hungarian counterparts showed an inclination to politicize the topic of our conversation and almost all voiced substantial criticism and dissatisfaction with the political elites that ruled the country. Furthermore, Peter, reflecting upon his own role in the struggle with anti-Semitic graffiti, explored another dimension of the indifference, the one at the level of a young Jewish community in Budapest.

“I know it's bad and I'm sad about it. But not about the sign but about the stupidity behind it. So it's another dimension. And also it's very bad from my side that actually I don't act against this way of

thinking. So I'm not going there to remove it or wash it off, which is bad, because you have to be Jewish in your acts and not only in your mind. It's not enough to be a Jew just in your mind.” (Peter)

Dedicating a closer look at the generational aspect, the narratives of my interviewees often varied. “Doing” graffiti was, no wonder, associated with the youth, although Roland told me that, surprisingly, many old people get engaged in marking the urban space too. However, when it came to individual perceptions of the extent and the role that anti-Semitism played for different generations, the people seemed to use distinct lenses to evaluate the current situation, which, in turn, resulted in providing not always matching explanations. The Krakowians I talked to had a sincere impression that the things were changing for the better. They also appreciated new opportunities to travel more freely and get to know new cultures more easily, that came with the accession to the European Union, and attributed them with a positive influence on the openness levels in the young Polish generation. For some, anti-Semitism belonged to and was deeply engrained in the conservative worldview of an older generation.

“I would say it's kind of a traditional, conservative country [Poland] with a really huge, new, modern and open-minded generation. I mean the old people are still conservative but there is this new feeling coming to it. I think it's changing.” (Noora)

“Definitely, I would say that older people are much more anti-Semitic than the younger ones. Among the younger ones, you can find it only among the people who are nationalistically oriented.” (Pawel)



People in Budapest also concurred with some positive elements brought about by the process of European integration. Nevertheless, they were not so optimistic about the notion of generational variation and pointed out to the fact that the increasingly powerful political subjects such as Jobbik, which is tainted with the anti-Semitic agenda, win the support from a respectable amount of young voters.

“Divided by age, you can see that a lot of young people now vote for Jobbik because they show something strong, something that might be good for Hungary or it seems to be good for Hungary. That's the one thing. Also, they want to accept and believe in something, they are accepting anti-Semitism which comes with Jobbik. It is the most popular party among the youth.” (Zsolia)

Combined with the potential release of the long suppressed but deeply rooted anti-Semitic sentiments existent in the older strata of the Hungarian society, current sociopolitical situation in the country seems to provide fertile ground for the expression of anti-Semitism, if not even strengthening of the tensions between the majority population and the Jewish minority (Hurd 2014). However, it is of crucial importance to recognize that the Jews do not make up the only minority group that is made to feel unwelcome in Hungary. Contrary to Poland, Hungary scores a sizable Roma population and the country has been a witness to waves of anti-Roma outbursts in recent years (Cain 2012).

Despite the escalation of violence between hooligan gangs in Krakow as well as the rise of verbal and symbolic anti-Semitism in the Hungarian politics, the residents of both Krakow and Budapest did not have an impression that the amount of racist graffiti has increased in the last

decade. Roland attributed such development to the shift made by radical groups that started to use Internet forums and blogs more to spread their ideas. Similarly, Szymon did not think that the problem has worsened. In his opinion, the violence connected with the Wisla-Cracovia fights and hooligan graffiti have only received more media attention in the past couple of years, thus become more visible in public discourse.

“For sure it got more intense in media. I've told I didn't have any serious problems personally. On the other hand, in the media you can see the CCTV camera recordings of the fights between the two hooligan gangs. Like a lot of guys running after one guy with machetes. [...] Definitely, in the media recently, it was on the rise.”  
(Szymon)

Fleming (2012) argues that the heightened visibility of the issues of intolerance nowadays can be closely related to the implementation of the Europeanization discourse attempted by the Central European cities. The efforts made by municipalities to revitalize their urban areas in the image of their Western European neighbors, and by large supported through the EU funding schemes, caused them to acknowledge the problems that might stand in the way. The upsurge of anti-Semitic graffiti comprises only one of the forms of intolerance and generalized anger that challenges the endorsed plans for the construction of a new city image (2012: 254-255; 269). The fact that adherence to this neo-liberal discourse, accompanied by measures that are meant to rid cities of their “primitive” Eastern past, is more prominent in Poland than in Hungary could be imputed to the present Hungarian government that shows the signs of Eurosceptic rhetoric (Fleming 2012: 254; Novak 2014). Notwithstanding the differences between the two, cities in both countries have adopted more restrictive patterns of dealing with graffiti; Hungary even went

for the way of increasing criminalization. Moreover, stigmatization of groups doing graffiti, whether it be in its racist or more artistic form, and deliberate efforts to tie the phenomenon of graffiti with “uneducated and backward segments of society” reinforces marginalization of the gangs and crews engaged in this urban activity (Fleming 2012: 258). The local authorities started to adopt ways of “representational violence” towards all groups that undermine or contest the hegemonic discourse of urban beautification.

Nonetheless, the fetishization of selected urban heritage as well as prioritization of particular historical narratives over others, contributes to the creation of new sites of contestation, which do not go unnoticed by the members of delegitimized graffiti subculture (Fleming 2012: 259, 267). It is ironical that the attempts by authorities to put tight restrictions on graffiti writing often result in a strong opposing reaction from the writers and bring about the conflicting outcome of graffiti overproduction, usually in its less sophisticated ways and using more offensive language (Ferrell & Weide in Rowe & Hutton 2012: 82). On that account, the municipal actions galvanize writers into developing novel, more efficient forms of urban interventions (e.g. stickers and stenciling) so that they could keep graffiti's function true to its original intent. In this sense, graffiti continue to entail “a playful and pleasurable resistance to authority where those normally excluded from the discourse of power celebrate their anger at their exclusion” (Presdee in Halsey & Young 2006: 293).

Also, it is rather obscure to recognize who exactly decides what is racist or anti-Semitic and what is not. What about the implicit anti-Semitic messages? Can local authorities read them and identify them as threatening to the Jewish minority? Since the municipalities have a limited

budget allocated to graffiti removal, they can set a more lenient benchmark for addressing and fulfilling the removal agenda, thus allow for the continuation of symbolic violence perpetrated on minority communities (Lynn & Lea 2005: 58, 60). In addition, my informants highlighted that the coordination of anti-graffiti policies with the police is likely to turn out unsuccessful as many policemen actually sympathize with the opinions of the far-right groups and are often unenthusiastic, if not reluctant, to act against them.

## **8. Conclusion**

In my thesis, I endeavored to contextualize the inscribed anti-Semitism as a global social phenomenon that takes on various forms and accounts for different consequences in different localities. I believe that the places of my research inquiry, Krakow and Budapest, supplied the diversity of forms that the producers of anti-Semitic graffiti seize upon in order to communicate their narratives of hate, insecurity and distrust, as well as insinuated the tacit resemblance of histories that both cities continue to negotiate at the start of the twenty-first century. I hope that my original intent to embed the textual and visual representations of anti-Semitism in contemporary sociopolitical situation of both Poland and Hungary could be traced throughout the whole piece and substantiated my approach to the writing practices of anti-Semitic graffiti. By showing graffiti in its hooligan form, as a way of voicing one's opinion in a heated political debate that spilt over to the streets of contemporary cities or using it as a term of abuse or contempt, I highlighted the ambiguity of such racist statements as well as the deeply engrained preconceptions that continue to inform the anti-Semitic discourse nowadays.

Although the notion of graffiti as a phenomenon belonging to the urban setting has been slightly eroded by the Internet, and the anti-Semitic sentiments come in abundance on virtual forums and blogs compared to urban surfaces, graffiti, in any of their form, strictly speaking, become the platform for contesting status quo and rendering the often unspoken, assumed or invisible, visible in the inscribed materiality of a public wall (Ten Eyck & Fischer 2012: 833). Anti-Semitic graffiti, seen by all but targeted at only a selected group of urban dwellers, force us to renegotiate or reinforce our way of thinking about particular groups of people and places we relate to (Halsey & Young 2006: 278; 298). Such processes were discernible in the interviews I conducted when the locals from Krakow and Budapest reflected upon graffiti as meaning-laden urban interventions and positioned themselves with reference to the various levels of significance that graffiti both carry and are ascribed to by external actors. While graffiti add to the fluidity of urban landscape, they also have to adjust to and navigate the constant “process of constitution and dissolution” they are enmeshed in to remain “living, layered documents of events and peoples, vigorous flailings, moments of politicized enactments” (Holmes 2010: 880).

Despite the strengthening desire of municipal and governmental agencies to do away with graffiti, it is hard to imagine that graffiti will ever be fully eliminated. One way or another, graffiti writers have familiarized with the changes introduced in the field by political actors, and they appear to enjoy the leverage over their opponents. During one of my interviews, Iwona articulated the angle which municipalities fail to understand; or even if they do, they choose not to consider it.

“I think the amount of graffiti is not decreasing, it's pretty much the same. But they're trying to erase it, mainly in the city center. But it's impossible, they will still do it even if it gets removed. It's like a mental thing. It needs to be changed in some peoples' heads.”  
(Iwona)

However, we should also ask ourselves if it is at all desirable to evict graffiti from the urban scenery of a post-modern world. Whether they hate, criticize, insult or love in their message, we should recognize and appreciate graffiti's propensity to dispute our sense of the familiar and direct our attention to the covert aspects of marginalized realities (Halsey & Young 2006: 297).

## Appendices



Appendix 1. – Hooligan graffiti in the Népliget city park, nearby Albert Flórián Stadion, a home stadium of Ferencvárosi (FTC) football club. April 2014 (Author's photo).

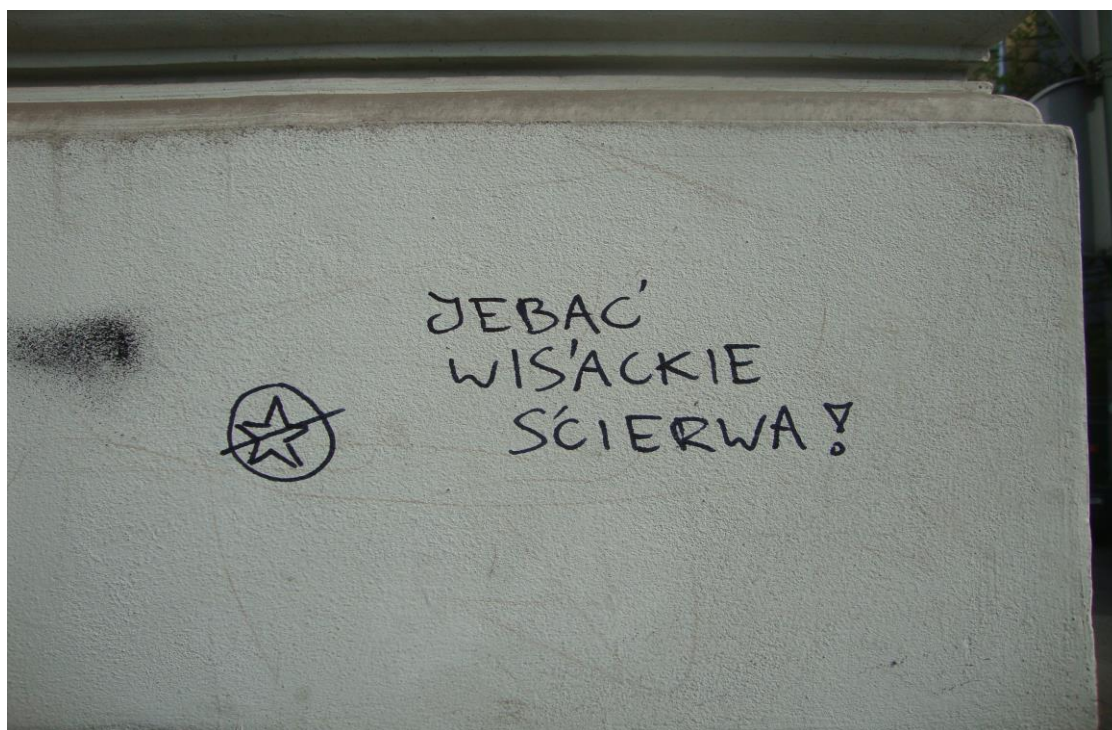


Appendix 2. – Graffiti written by the Wisla hooligans, who call themselves “Wisla Sharks”. The letters “A” and “J” on the both sides of the Star of David stand for “Anty Jude”. Królewska Street, Krakow. May 2014 (Author's photo).





Appendix 3. – Wisla graffiti on the sidewall of a block of flats in the Krakow's fifth district of Krowordza. It depicts Wisla's coat of arms with the white star standing out on the red background. It explains why the club is also referred to as “White Star” (Biała Gwiazda). May 2014 (Author's photo).



Appendix 4. – *Fuck Wisla carcasses* - anti-Wisla graffiti in Podgórze, Krakow. May 2014 (Author's photo).





Appendix 5. – “Jude Gang” graffiti at the entrance hall to a residential building, Kazimierz, Krakow. May 2014 (Author’s photo).



Appendix 6. – Example of overscribbling. The “JZS” abbreviation for “Jeść Żydów Skurwysynów” (Fuck the Jews, sons of bitches) used by the Wisła hooligans was overwritten with “KSC”, a contracted version of KS Cracovia. Królewska Street, Krakow. May 2014 (Author’s photo).



Appendix 7. – *This is not your country, filthy Jews.* Graffiti on the Martyrs Memorial in Budapest. May 2012. Photo by G. Lazók (Source: index.hu).



Appendix 8. – *There was no Holocaust, but there will be!!!* Graffiti on a memorial plate dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. Located on the wall of the Jewish cemetery in Tatabánya, a smaller town 50 kilometers from Budapest. March 2014. Photo by avk.hu (Source: index.hu).





Appendix 9. – *Jews to gas*. Inscription on the gas box in Podgórze, Krakow. May 2014 (Author's photo).



Appendix 10. – Example of the graffiti written in the old Hungarian script. Haller Street, Budapest. March 2011 (Source: belvaros.blogspot.hu).





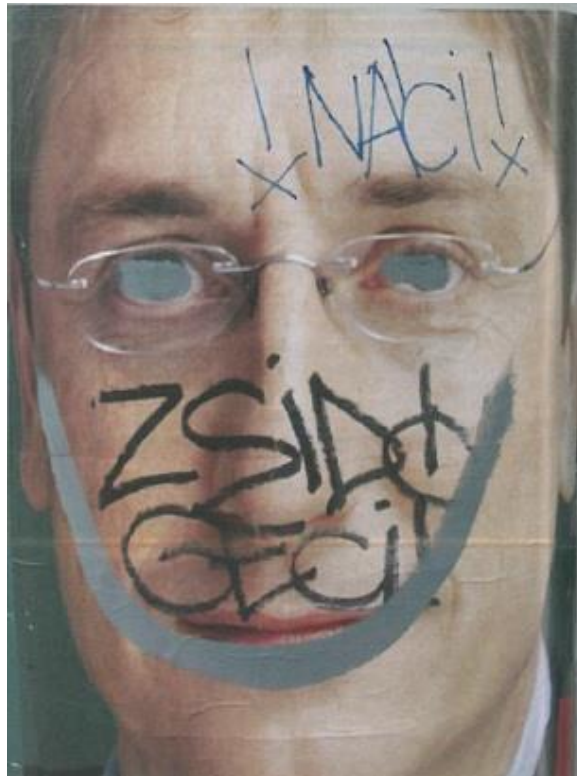
Appendix 11. - *Never trust a Jew*. Népliget city park. June 2013 (Source: belvaros.blogspot.hu).



Appendix 12. – Erszébetváros, Budapest. April 2014 (Author's photo).



Appendix 13. – The Star of David on the wall of the New Jewish cemetery. Miodowa Street, Krakow. Photo by T. Jakubowicz (Source: Polska Newsweek).

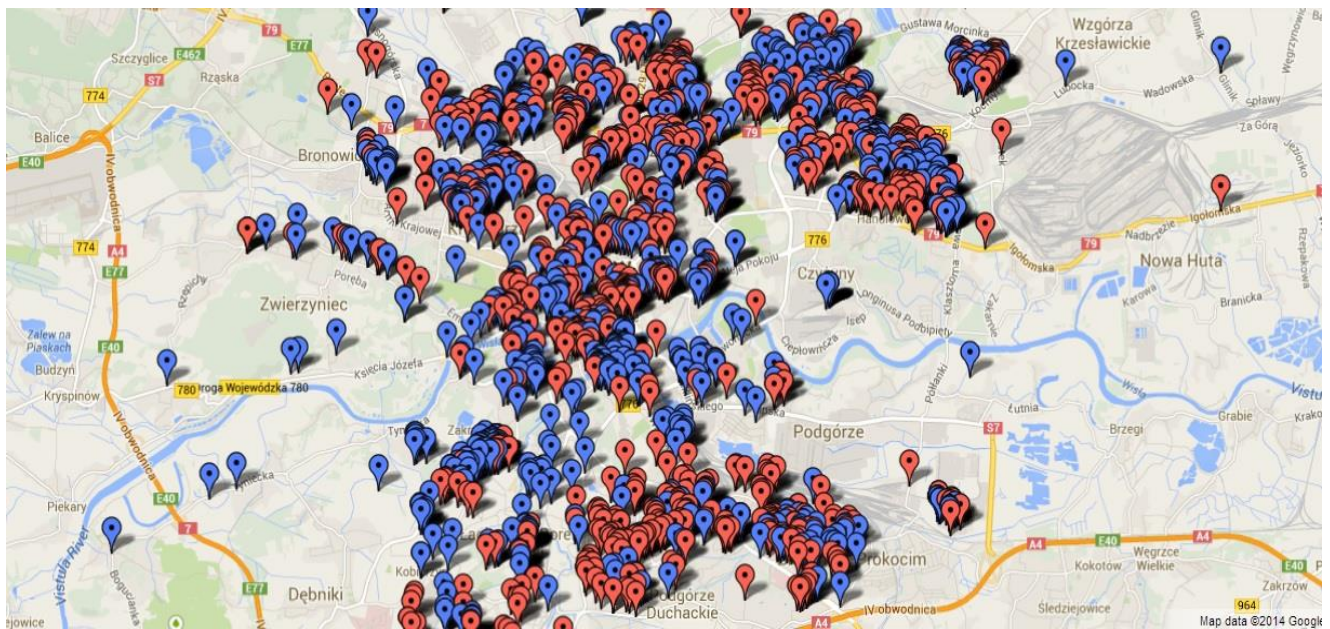


Appendix 14. – *Nazi vs. Jewish scum*. Written on the poster of Ferenc Gyurcsány, a former Hungarian Prime Minister, in Budapest (Source: Kótun & Ruszty: Street marking in Budapest).



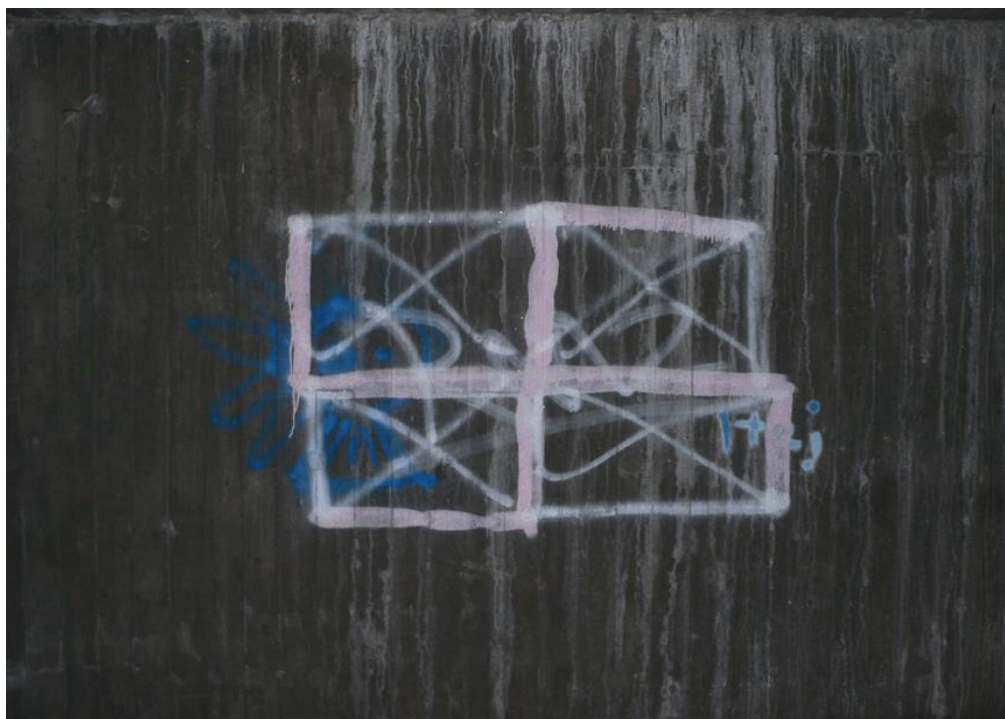


Appendix 15. – *Lepper Jude*. Scribble on the toilet door in the main building of the Jagiellonian Library. May 2014 (Author's photo).



Appendix 16. – Graffiti map on the website of the Kraków's police. May 2014 (Screenshot made by author).





Appendix 17. – Redrawn swastika – an example of anti anti-Semitic graffiti. Budapest. (Photo from Roland's collection).



Appendix 18. – *Fight Facsism \* Eat Nazis \* Hate Nazi Live Stencils*. Antifa stencil in Podgórze, Krakow. May 2014 (Author's photo).



Appendix 19. – Graffiti depicting the Celtic cross on the hangman's scaffold. Kazimierz, Krakow. May 2014 (Author's photo).



Appendix 20. – Binman pictogram. Budapest. (Photo from Roland's collection).





Appendix 21. – Anti-Nazi stencil. Budapest. (Source: nacijobbik.com)



Appendix 22. – *Fuck Nazis*. (Photo from Roland's collection).



Appendix 23. – *I love the Jews! And you?* Budapest. April 2010 (Photo from Sándor's collection).



Appendix 24. – Mural of the Lion of Judah in Kazimierz, Krakow. (Source: witness.theguardian.com)



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