

They beat, cough and spit. Racist incidents are on the rise during the epidemic

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THERE IS NO FREEDOM WITHOUT SOLIDARITY

For the first time in Poland we are dealing with such a wave of hatred towards people of Asian origin. But not only towards them.

A wedding dress salon in the centre of Warsaw. Saleswomen refused to serve two clients from Indonesia because they thought that Asian women could infect them with coronavirus. The owner of the salon took the side of his female employees. The head of the dormitory in Gdansk placed a student of Japanese origin under forced quarantine without a proper justification. The only reason: the student met with his father, a professor at the University of Tokyo, in the city centre.

In Warsaw, an Uber driver told a couple of Vietnamese students that if they came from China, he wouldn't let them get in the car. The police were called to the train going from Kołobrzeg to Krakow because one of the passengers had Asian facial features - somebody thought he might be a threat to the others.

From discrimination to aggression

Cases of discrimination were collected by "Never Again", an NGO which combats hate speech. All the aforementioned examples can be found in their new report "Virus of Hate: the Brown Book of the Time of Epidemic" published on Wednesday. But the report focuses not only on discrimination. It also documents assaults on representatives of minorities accused of spreading coronavirus.

A Pole of Chinese origin was beaten unconscious in Wrocław. In Poznań, unknown perpetrators broke the windows of a Filipino citizen with stones. TVN24 reported on this story. A few hours after the broadcast of the reportage, again at night, another attack took place.

In Łuków, three elementary school students (aged between 10 and 14) attacked a woman of Vietnamese origin who had lived in Poland for 20 years. They shouted: "F**k off!", "Get the f**k out of here you Chinese c**t". They threw stones and garbage at her, spat at her, and one of them pushed her.

In Warsaw, a group of young people shouted "Coronavirus" at Vietnamese students, the passers-by did not react. In Sosnowiec, three men threw insults at a Chinese female scientist from the University of Silesia. A Chinese woman living in Poznań was picked on by three teenagers - they rode their bikes around her and pretended to cough. Later, an unknown man spit on her on the street.

Hatred is also all over the Internet. "Wólka Kosowska (where a the largest Asian market is located) should be bombed and ploughed" is one of the milder Twitter posts. Less gentle: "Chink... To be disposed of!, "We're not gonna have Chinks or Pakis in Poland!", "They are like animals. Chinks aren't human."

Dominik Tarczynski, a Law and Justice Party MEP, attacked Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a U. S. congresswoman , for showing support to Chinese and Asian restaurants.

Refugees and LGBT people also a target

-For the first time in our history we have to deal with such a wave of hatred towards people of Asian origin," emphasizes Prof. Rafał Pankowski from the Never Again Association, a lecturer at Collegium Civitas. - But hostility and contempt also affect other groups: Jews, Ukrainians, Muslims, refugees, LGBT people.

In April, "Wiadomości" TVP aired a news piece blaming refugees for spreading coronavirus. "In the Greek refugee camp, Coronavirus was detected. As many as 20 immigrants from the Middle East are infected. The residents are full of fear,

because there is no shortage of escapes." - said the creator of the material Maciej Sawicki. The Berlin correspondent of TVP Cezary Gmyz, in turn, reposted on Twitter a comment by the far-right AfD party accusing Muslims in Berlin of deliberately spreading coronavirus (because they were supposed to gather in front of the mosque).

In Wrocław, Salesian priest Leonard Wilczyński stated in his sermon that the coronavirus epidemic is "God's punishment for living in sin: for homosexuality". Warsaw priest Sławomir Abramowski wrote on Facebook that "the biological bomb that spread the plague in Madrid was a demonstration by many thousands of genderists".

Coronavirus and the Chinese laboratory

- A pandemic is also a global crisis of social trust and values, disorientation, anxiety. In these conditions not only xenophobia but also conspiracy theories are developing dangerously - notes Professor Pankowski.

Internet users and some media are leading the way. The extreme right-wing Internet television, Idz Pod Prąd (Go Against the Current), regularly calls coronavirus "the Chinese plague". One of the Twitter users wrote: "WHO is not executing the dictates of China, but the dictates of Jews." Right-wing publicist Jerzy Targalski argued on Polish Radio that "Chinese people are more susceptible to coronavirus than representatives of the white race".

Michał Rachoń invited guests to his programme on TVP Info who questioned the findings of scientists - they suggested that the coronavirus was created in a Chinese laboratory. The Chinese were also accused by the Poznań rapper Ganda Ganda (Piotr Mięzał) of intentionally causing the pandemic.

45% of those surveyed believe that "some foreign forces or states deliberately contribute to the spread of the coronavirus". - The results of the research conducted in April by the Centre for Democracy Studies at the University of SWPS.

The views of Poles were also checked by BCMM Marketing Research. According to its report, only 27% of respondents believe in a scientifically confirmed version that the virus has spread to humans from animals. Nearly one in three respondents believes that the virus was intentionally created in a Chinese laboratory.

Coronavirus is like a fuse

- The coronavirus is an excuse for, rather than a cause of, hateful behaviour - It is a fuse that activates pre-existing prejudices and stereotypes. Many people have decided that they can now manifest them with impunity. Before our eyes, the social norms are changing - what is allowed, what is acceptable - notes Prof. Rafał Pankowski.

- In recent weeks, when we were locked in our homes, aggression and hatred moved mainly to the Internet. Internet portals, which should react to this, have completely ceased to cope - says Prof. Pankowski. - Extreme right-wing websites are growing, which for many people are now becoming the main source of information about the coronavirus. Nobody reacts to it. The Church is a sad example - the upper hierarchy did not react to bizarre and hateful statements of some priests. The current situation calls for the bishops to make an appeal asking the believers to use this time to show respect and care for the other person.

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